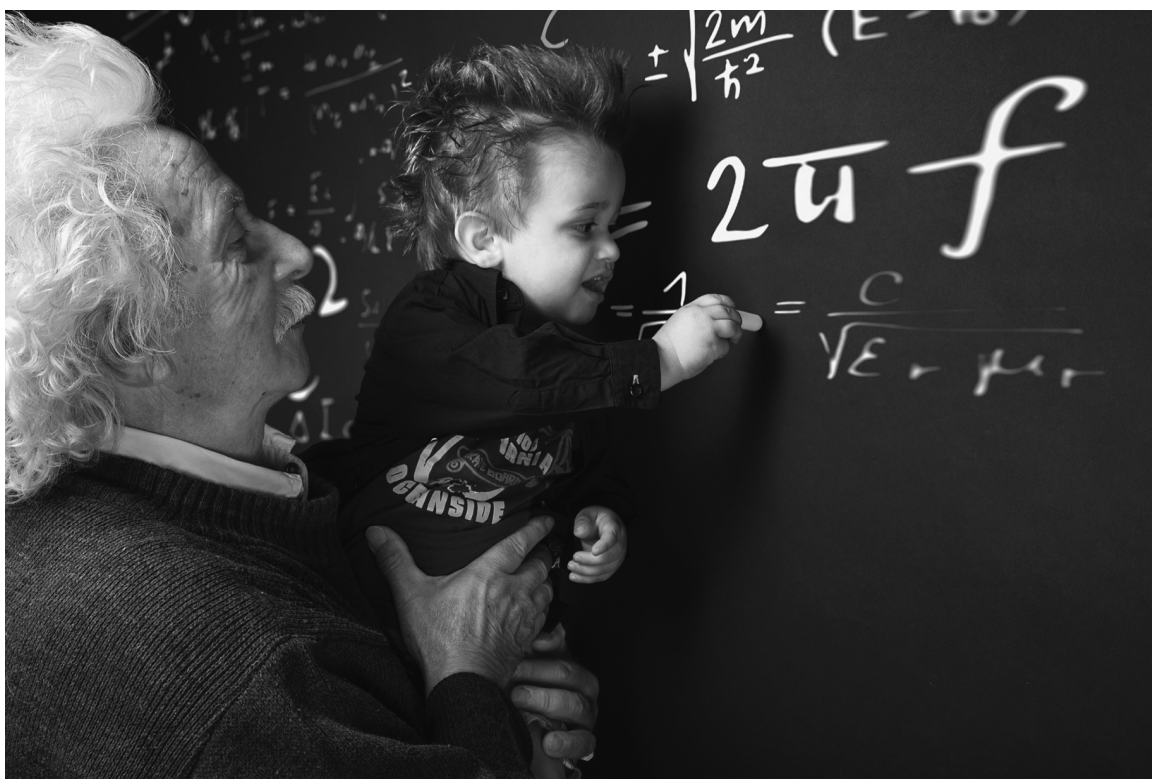


There's no escaping competitive parents

adapted from a column by Fiona Gibson



- 1 A primary class has been asked to make models out of jam-jar lids. When I run into a mother at a local get-together, she tells me her son has made his lid into a functioning clock. Another parent reveals that her child's creation incorporates a concealed engine and can perform a three-point turn. She finishes with a roll of her eyes, as if to say, 'I know, genius ... but what can you do?'
- 2 Nothing parents like to boast more about than their children and how they have raised them. 'Are your children early readers?', a woman once barked at me, clearly meaning, 'Mine are! My 9-year-old insisted on reading *Animal Farm*.' Cue small pause to be filled with gasps of awe. 'Sorry Kate wasn't at your drinks do,' a neighbour bellowed across our busy high street recently. 'She was in St Andrews taking Max back to *university*.' The last word was belted out loud enough to pierce the eardrum of every shopkeeper and person driving past. I wanted to yell back, 'I know Max got into St Andrews. Anyway, must dash as I'm helping my kids pack for *prison*.'
- 3 I'm not saying we should put down our offspring. Yet this perpetual bigging up of their achievements is especially irksome, as it's not really about these fabulous young people at all. It's about the wonderful job the parents have done raising them. 17 you can't even escape it in the safety of your own home. These days, it's impossible to log on to Facebook without

glimpsing little Tabitha being presented with a trophy by a member of the royal family, or Sebastian's exam results being trumpeted for all to see (175 'likes').

4 If this sounds like sour grapes, I don't mean it to be. I was delighted when a close friend's son performed his own songs for the first time and thrilled for another friend's daughter when she won the chance to study in the States. That's because I've known these kids for years and, more importantly, the information was delivered in a non-bragging way, rather than blasted into my ear at the chemist's.

5 Still, there's a glimmer of hope that all is not 19: when I popped into school to view the jam-jar lid creations, the delicate workmanship led me to suspect that many a parent had been up all night, cursing over tiny engines, clock hands and congealing tubes of Evo-stik.

6 The one exception was the work of Thomas, my friend Laura's 10-year-old son. He had merely scrawled on his lid with a fat felt tip and, when asked what it was, replied, 'A beer mat'. As Laura and I surveyed the gallery, she remarked, 'At least Thomas made the beer mat all by himself.' I stared at it and tried to think of something positive to say. 'It's still rubbish,' she said.

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