



Photograph by Jean Berlfein

Docia Shares a Story

WHO SHOULD DECIDE WHAT A CHILD EATS?

A six year old boy, asked what he had learned this past year, replied, "I've learned that you can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk."

Most of us remember being encouraged or being told to eat something low on our priority list. For Jimmy, it was liver and, unfortunately for Jimmy, it was a time when liver was in. To be "nutritionally appropriate," his center served liver once every week. This posed a problem for Jimmy. If he didn't eat the liver, he wouldn't get dessert. Dessert was high on Jimmy's priority list. He didn't try to hide the liver in a glass of milk; and he might even have been successful in what he did, IF his mother hadn't told his teacher that when she did the wash, she found a wad of liver in one of Jimmy's jeans pockets. To this day, Jimmy the adult dislikes liver and loves desserts.

Children tell me that their favorite foods include pasta, spaghetti, tacos, hot dogs, hamburgers, beans, rice, cookies, bananas, raw carrots, chips, and ice cream. Parents usually put more emphasis on fruit and vegetables.

It raises the question "Who should decide what a child eats?" If eating for health and enjoyment is the goal, there is a middle-of-the-road solution: Set overall parameters that are healthy and let children choose within those parameters. Set a good example by following these yourself. Be flexible; remember that children, like adults, vary in what they like and dislike.

This might even cut down on all the "You can't leave the table until you have finished everything on your plate." "Think of all the starving children in . . ." "Stop stuffing food in your cheeks. You look like a squirrel." "Stop talking with your mouth full." "Don't you want to grow up and be as strong as . . . ?" "It's good for you." "Stop fussing and eat."

BON APPETIT!

Docia Zavitkovsky has furthered the cause of young children as a practitioner in the field for over 50 years and as past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Known far and wide for her storytelling, she has traveled extensively as an early childhood consultant, lecturer, and adventurer.
