

Forget about the Joneses

Hand-me-downs make for happy babies.

BY DONALD FRASER

Clara got tissue paper for her birthday. She got even more of it for Christmas. We're really looking forward to Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter so she can get even more to add to her collection. We may even start a Family Day tradition!

Oh, it's not like she doesn't get real gifts – she does, and some nice ones. It's more that at the tender age of just over a year old, she finds the tissue wrap from the gift bag far more exciting than any toy inside.

It's a pretty good indicator that Clara has no desire for the latest fads. Babies, you see, are often amused by the simpler things in life. We don't try to keep up with the Joneses because Clara has absolutely no clue as to who they are.

As for new toys, it's always interesting to watch which ones she'll gravitate to in the long run. While flashing lights and electronic songs will capture her attention in the short term, toys that require thought, exploration, and imagination are ones that she'll keep returning to.

Her current favourite toy? That's a toss-up between a dozen or so mega blocks that came free with a walker or a second-hand miniature kitchen that Krista bought for \$15.

Her fascination with the kitchen is particularly fun to watch. She runs food and dishes under the make-believe faucet to clean

them, and then follows it up by "washing" her hands in the sink. She also takes great pleasure in sorting and placing the various pantry foodstuffs and dishes.

When it comes to the mega blocks, she's managed the extraordinary feat of stacking them five-high – an accomplishment that babies aren't expected to hit until they're a good six months older.

There's something to be said for replacing flashing lights with imagination. Ann Douglas, author of *The Mother of All Baby Books*, has a reason why.

"Some toys can only be used in one particular way," she explains. "You push a button and the toy makes a beeping sound. That gets pretty boring pretty quickly. Your child will get a lot more enjoyment out of a toy that can be used in all kinds of ways – a toy like a puppet, a set of building blocks, or a set of art supplies, for example. And because your child is in charge of deciding how the toy will be used, she will enjoy it more and will have greater opportunities to learn and grow through play."

And unlike electronic toys, most traditional ones will last for generations.

We've noticed a similar pattern when it comes to clothes. While Clara has been given some very precious and special outfits during her short life, the biggest compliments usually come when she's wearing old, woolly hand-



Photo: Donald Fraser

me-down sweaters and second-hand jeans.

Holding out that she'll be somewhat of a tomboy, I tend to say it is because they're more her style. The truth of the matter is that they're probably a whole lot more comfortable than new dresses or fussy outfits. Babies like soft things. Comfort keeps smiles on their faces. And there is nothing cuter than a smiling, happy baby.

Of course the best reason for not keeping up with the latest and greatest baby trends is because kids grow out of them so darned fast. In our group of friends, the same clothes and playthings have been circulated through countless newborns and toddlers – often being returned to the same family for multiple children. I've seen many of Clara's outfits on a good four or five different babies before her. And there's still not much wear or tear to them.

The same can't be said for the tissue paper her newest outfit came wrapped in. That got destroyed when she tried to wear it as a hat. Some toys, I suppose, just don't last forever.

Donald Fraser writes for television, radio, print, and web publications. He and his daughter wear matching jeans.



Di Farquhar
Sales Representative

ARE YOU THINKING OF BUYING OR SELLING?

"contact me to help make your dream home a reality"



Bowes & Cocks
Limited Brokerage

Direct: 705-957-2256 • Toll Free: 1-888-742-4234

dfarquhar@bowesandcocks.com

www.BowesAndCocks.com

Not intended to solicit buyers or sellers under contract.