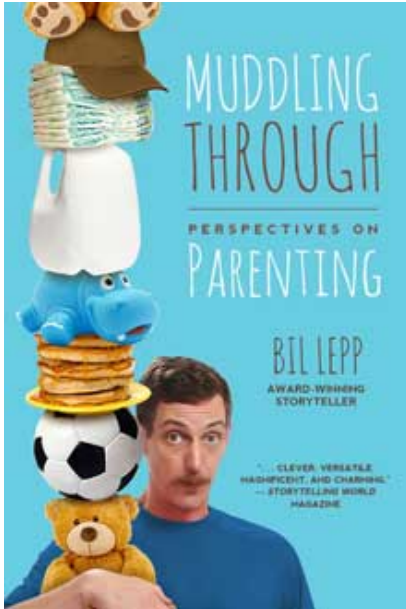


Storyteller Bil Lepp headlines the BIG Story Fest at ARTworks.



Bil Lepp is the headliner of the BIG Story Fest, April 11-14 at ARTworks in Beaufort Town Center. He's an internationally-known storyteller and humorist whose style has been described as a satisfying blend of Bill Cosby and Jeff Foxworthy.

A five-time champion of the West Virginia Liars' Contest, his outrageous tall-tales and witty stories have earned the appreciation of listeners of all ages. And, he'll be judging and MC-ing the Liars Competition too— that's your chance to tell a story during the festival. He's got a new book out, "Muddling Through: Perspectives on Parenting."

Here's an excerpt:

Everyone has an idea and opinion on how you should raise your child. You and your spouse, partner, co-parent or you alone if you're a single parent, need to decide on your approach and stick to it. That's not to say you shouldn't be open to advice (I mean, here you are reading a book full of advice), but you need to stick to your guns. I've had to tell my own mother that while I appreciated her advice, I was also going to ignore it. I live with my kids every day and I know the methods I am employing.

Our son was born premature and the muscles he needed to suckle weren't developed. He had a hard time eating. He was born at just over five pounds and stayed tiny for a long time. People constantly told my wife, "You need to feed that baby," as if she hadn't thought of that herself. There were two guys at church we called Biscuit and Gravy because each Sunday that is what

they said we should be feeding our newborn. We understood our son's condition. We were in communication with the doctor. We knew what we were doing. A woman at a store said to my wife, "Your child looks sickly. You should feed him more." At the end of her rope, my generally sweet wife replied, "I think he's doing pretty well for a child born without an esophagus." It wasn't the kindest thing my wife could have said, but it was doggone funny.

So, be it your child or an unsolicited counselor, stick to your guns. Momma knows best. Start teaching your children from day one what is a need and what is a want. Then help them attach the proper value to things. In other words, don't get too attached to balloons. Balloons were never meant to be keepsakes. We need to tell our kids what things they can expect to stay around forever, and what things are fleeting. This helps them develop realistic expectations. . . . One weekend we hit the road for a three day trip. I'm a professional storyteller and tour often. When they can, my wife and kids join me. At one show a friendly old lady gave my daughter a handful of helium balloons. As we were getting into the van one of the balloons escaped. I watched the balloon head toward the clouds, and then I looked back at my daughter. Her face was locked into that silent, bitter, heartbreaking sob that only four-year-olds can manufacture. I thought she'd been stung by a wasp. Or bitten by a snake. Or that she had just seen her mother carried off by rabid camels. "What's wrong?" I asked.

She gasped, pointed at the balloon disappearing into the sky, and managed to say, "Oh, Daddy, that... that... that was your favorite balloon!"

Up to that point I hadn't realized that I had a favorite balloon. I thought I hated all balloons equally. I try not to get too attached to balloons. I thought fast. "No. No," I said, "this is my favorite balloon." I snatched a balloon from her remaining handful. "See?" I explained. "Mine has a white ribbon." I pointed at the balloon now barely visible above the distant tree line. "That one has a blue ribbon."

"Are you sure?" my daughter asked doubtfully.

"Sure I'm sure."

The BIG Story Fest is April 11-14 at ARTworks in Beaufort Town Center. It honors the deeply fun tradition of storytelling and storylistening with performances, family activities, and diverse voices, including Bil Lepp, Doug Elliott, Natalie Daise and Judy Sima (from WVA, NC, SC and MI, respectively.) For more information: Artworksinbeaufort.org , 843-379-2787, @artseensc.

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