

# Food for Thought from 400 Moms

By Cathy Dausman



Lamorinda resident, registered dietitian and author of "400 Moms," Jill West. Photo Cathy Dausman

highlight nutrition ideas. Chapters cover breakfast, lunch and dinner, snacks (snack bars good and bad), dessert, portion control and fast food and restaurant choices. Much of the book's input may surprise you. Of the registered dietitians surveyed, most (85 percent) feed their children a breakfast of ready-to-eat-cereal, and pasta is the quick go-to dinner meal for more than half (62 percent).

West further fine tunes the information by suggesting the tastiest (for kids) nutritional choices. She notes Lamorinda's rate of childhood overweight and obesity (ages 2-19) is less than half that of western Contra Costa County (15 percent vs. 42 percent), attributing that data to many factors, including the area's economic well-being and opportunities for physical activity.

West hopes to see families modeling good behavior, but knows that "reading [nutritional] labels" can be both a blessing and a curse. Although aimed at parents, West says her book is also "a useful guide for grandparents and the truly childless." She offered a Cliffs Notes summary of her book, citing:

- Breakfast every day;
- Encourage five fruits and vegetable servings daily;
- Stop serving sweet drinks;
- Trim down fast foods.

West admitted, tongue in cheek, that while the book has reached its target audience, it opened to somewhat mixed reviews, if the grocery shopping family she witnessed carting her book around is to be believed: "Oh mom," wailed the child in tow, "don't read that book!"

"400 Moms" (www.400moms.com) is available at Amazon, Orinda Books and Rakestraw Books in Danville. West is scheduled to speak on the subject at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Jill West is convinced that mothers are the solution to reversing childhood obesity, especially since they often act as "gatekeepers" for the food their family keeps at home. West might know – as a registered dietitian, she compiled responses from over 400 other registered dietitians, mothers themselves, in her aptly titled book, "400 Moms."

A Lamorinda resident for the past five years, West is the mother of three sons aged 14 to 20. The author's inspiration came as she stood on the sidelines watching her sons play sports. When it came time for post-game snacks, West remembers thinking "all this junk for a 30 minute game?"

Children today are the first generation predicted to live shorter lives than their parents, mostly due to obesity and its complications, West said.

And carbonated drinks, those West labels "liquid candy," become a "big diet villain" by leeching away the body's calcium, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.

Soft drink consumption has increased fourfold since the 1970s, while milk consumption has dropped in half. Although there is some controversy related to cow's milk consumption, there are healthy alternatives available like rice, soy and almond milk.

Don't get West started on sports drinks either. "400 Moms" reads more like a "Nutrition for Dummies" manual than a preachy laundry list of unattainable New Year's resolutions, with bite-sized chapters and oversized type, peppered with a healthy serving of charts, graphs and illustrations.

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## "Instructions Not Included" – A Family Movie

By Sophie Braccini



"Instructions Not Included" Loreto Peralta and Eugenio Derbez

Photo provided

The movie "Instructions Not Included," directed by Mexican actor, producer and TV host Eugenio Derbez, who plays the film's lead role, Valentin, will kick off the 2014 International Film Showcase at the Orinda Theatre.

Like the 1987 movie "Three Men and a Baby," the sweet story of three men who one morning find a baby girl on their doorstep and whose selfish ways are changed forever as the little girl takes hold of their hearts, "Instructions Not Included" is similar, with a few twists, including a "Kramer vs. Kramer"-like judicial battle.

The general idea of the movie is that to become a man, one has to start taking responsibility. In the case of Valentin, the selfish bachelor takes this premise to the extreme through self-sacrifice that borders on heroism. In order to keep the child he has learned to love, he gives up his own

country and pursues a professional career that takes him, literally, to dangerous heights. Then in order to protect the girl's happiness he risks losing her forever.

The film has many elements that are worthy of attention. The generational link between the hardboiled bachelor and the daughter who one morning falls in his lap, but also how Valentin's relationship with his own father shaped him, is well explored.

Derbez' years acting and directing a TV series show in the way minor characters over-act with an in-your-face caricature of their roles, which might be better suited for television than on the silver screen. But Derbez and Loreto Peralta, the little girl who plays Maggie, form a very charming and credible father/daughter duo. Although Derbez is not very believable at the beginning of the movie when he impersonates a Latin lover – which could be attributed to bad makeup –

his portrayal as a father who is tender, imaginative and totally unconventional has a lot of charm. The precocious little girl is definitely the more mature of the two and is very much in control of her performance.

There is nothing unexpected when the abandoning mother comes back and reclaims her daughter. The difficulties that erupt, the child's heartbreaking emotional pulls in different directions, are explored with sensitivity. The mother and her lover, portrayed as villains, are less well developed. But the movie picks up pace at that point and a series of unexpected turns allow for continuous entertainment.

"Instructions Not Included" is a sweet movie for the whole family, offering moments that will illicit both laughter and tears. It also offers a limited but interesting glimpse into southern California's Latino culture.

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