

THE ORIGINAL 'SPOCK BABY,' DR. BENJAMIN'S SON MICHAEL, RUNS THE COUNTRY'S BEST MUSEUM FOR KIDS

We don't spend a lot of time and energy on child development theories," admits Michael Spock, 48, director of the internationally acclaimed Boston Children's Museum. "We just try to see what works for kids and what doesn't. That's the way my father would approach something."

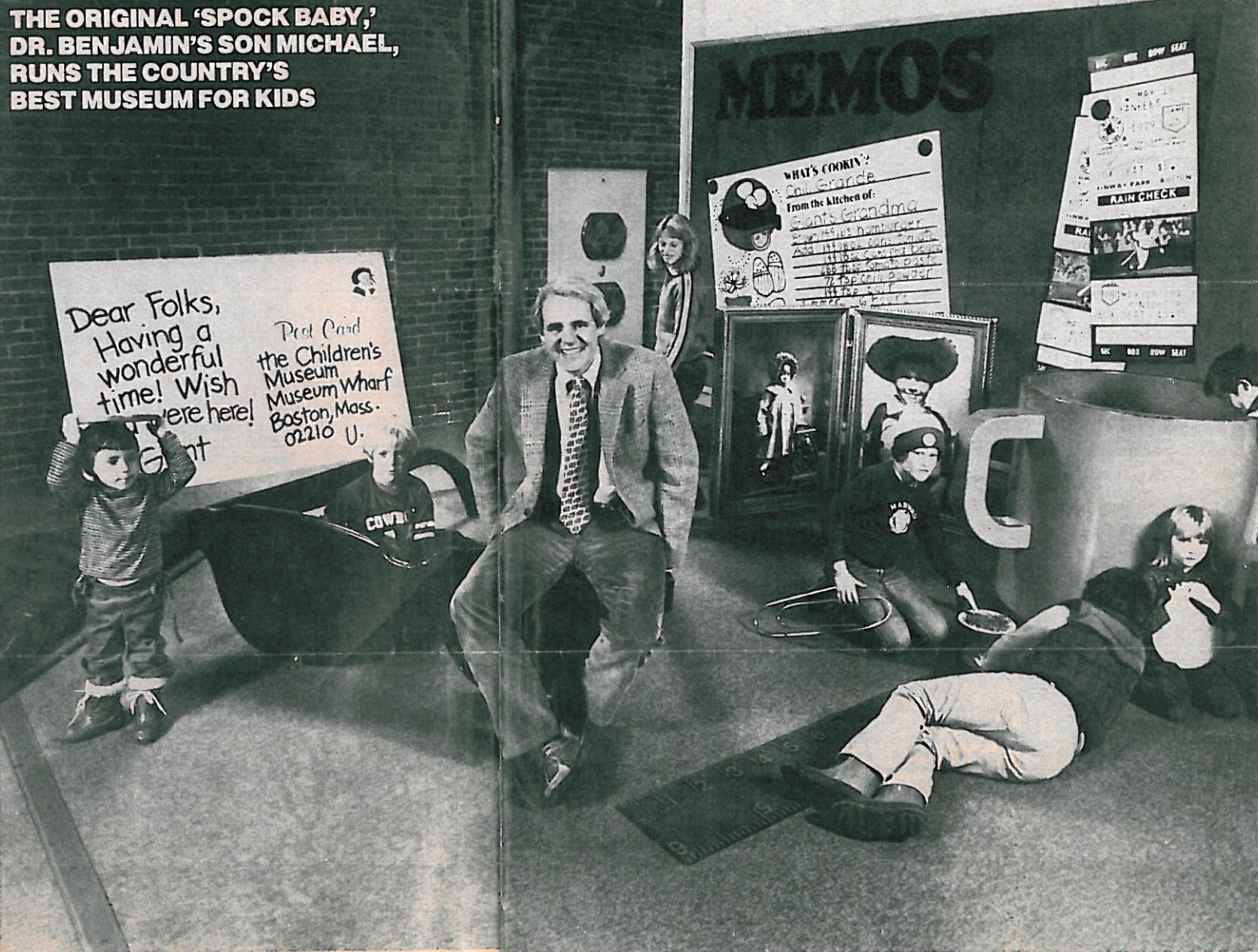
His father knows a thing or two about kids, all right. He is Dr. Benjamin Spock, the pediatrician who wrote *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* in 1945; it has sold more than 29 million copies worldwide. Michael Spock's contribution to the younger generation has been to develop the world's most innovative museum for children; each year it has 400,000 visitors.

Michael Spock quietly bristles at the notion that his father's books somehow unleashed a "permissive generation" of overcoddled youths. "My father was saying you could enjoy your kid and trust your own instincts," says Michael. "His books dealt with practical issues; I learned a lot from him. When your kid has a fever at 2 in the morning, what do you do? You look it up in *Spock*!"

Michael may have been a "Spock baby" himself, but he went through a problem-filled childhood. He is a dyslexic and, he remembers, "It was fifth grade before I was able to decode reading and writing." Eleven years older than his brother, John, now a Los Angeles architect and contractor, Michael spent much of his childhood alone, wandering around New York by subway, commuting to his remedial classes, haunting museums and junk shops. "I became the kind of learner who enjoys real stuff and three-dimensional ways of communicating information," he says. "Traditional learning was hard for me."

He recalls that his father was a strong, caring parent, albeit a somewhat distant one. "He was always busy, teaching a lot, and I had this sense of his being very revved up," Michael says. Nonetheless, when Dr. Spock joined the staff of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., young Spock thrived in his new Midwestern surroundings. He became a National

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Michael Spock joins kids on "The Giant's Desk," where all objects are 12 times normal size.



At age 1, a delighted Michael was perambulated around Manhattan's Central Park by his dapper dad.



Honor Society student in high school as well as the state backstroke swimming champ.

In 1950 Michael enrolled in Ohio's progressive Antioch College and experienced "a sort of classic adolescent identity crisis." Though Antioch's work-study program normally required five years to complete, it took Spock nine because he dropped out three times. During the breaks he worked at various jobs, including a tour as a hospital orderly which convinced him a medical career was not for him. "There was a lot of anxiety among faculty and family over what was going to happen to me," he admits. His one lasting commitment then was matrimonial: He married fellow student Judy Wood and together they supported their growing family by designing exhibits for small museums. In 1962, after a year at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, Michael landed the post he now holds.

Taking a cue from a 9-year-old's query about how things like the telephone worked, Spock produced an exhibit that demystified familiar objects. That teaching philosophy still pre-

Daughter Susannah, son Peter and wife Judy join Spock in checking the artifacts in the museum's Victorian house display.

vails in today's much-expanded museum, housed in a renovated warehouse near Boston Harbor. Among the exhibits there's a TV production set ("Station WKID") where youngsters can create their own newscasts, a factory assembly line where they make spinning tops (and keep them), a "What If You Couldn't" exhibit demonstrating such difficulties as getting around in a wheelchair. The museum centerpiece is a full-scale three-story Victorian house cut away to reveal details down to the plumbing.

The noise level when the museum is full can be ear-shattering, but, says Spock, "Actually, we're very carefully programmed. We're not laissez-faire about people running around here any more than my father is laissez-faire about child rearing."

Adds Michael, who is himself the father of three (Daniel, 22, a visual arts major at Antioch; Peter, 20, a Hampshire College sophomore; and Susannah, 14, a ninth grader), "We'd like to think of ourselves as a place where you can touch things, have fun and forget you're in a museum." JON KELLER

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