



# Tales from the Market

When you have kids in tow, anything can happen

By Kelli Wheeler

**Y**ou can tell it's that time of year again. The days are getting shorter. Soccer season is in full swing. Beautiful showcases of autumn's bounty are on display with pumpkins and other gourds, ceramic Halloween decorations, colorful varieties of stacked candy—and my children bring it all crashing down with a dozen sets of geriatric eyes condemning us at our local Bel Air grocery store.

Walk up to any group of mothers and announce, "Went grocery shopping with the kids today," and you will get a sympathetic groan, a hand on the shoulder and a sincere request to let it all out.

"How'd it go? You want to talk about it?"

Once you get off your chest how your oldest threw a tantrum in Aisle 2, your middle one had a cleanup on Aisle 9 and your youngest pooped all over himself, the basket *and* the

groceries in Aisle 15, someone else inevitably has a story that will top it and make you feel better.

Interestingly enough, many of these stories of grocery shopping with the kids have the same setting: the Bel Air in our neighborhood.

My girlfriend Traci recently recalled with still-vivid posttraumatic stress her bag-dumping toddler and his ear splitting meltdown while she tried to calmly redirect him. "As you can imagine, everyone is staring at me as it is primetime shopping at Bel Air at 10 a.m. and the lines are filled with people glaring at me. I could feel their judgmental eyes and imagine them whispering to one another about my childrearing abilities." She was the fourth person in line, but as her son hit previously unknown decibels over the confiscated Goldfish, a checker opened a new line and told her, "I can help you over here."

"Not one person made a comment about my going before them because I am sure they were overjoyed that I was one step closer to the exit," she said.

My girlfriend Michelle had a counter story to Traci's saga. Right after the birth of her second child, she worked up the courage to venture to Bel Air with a toddler and a newborn. All was well until she reached the checkout line, where her toddler, from the front of the cart, reached back and smacked the baby in the face. Baby Katie howled, Mommy Michelle (the most laidback mother on this planet) screamed at Toddler Ashlinn, and Ashlinn began crying too.

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"The sweetest older gentleman in front of me offered to let me go ahead of him," she continued. "His kindness, coupled with my screaming children and I'm sure my overactive hormones, caused me to burst into tears. We were all crying as he insisted we go in front him, reassuring me it was going to be OK as he loaded my groceries on the counter."

Both these women share their stories now like veterans talking

about how they earned their Purple Hearts.

Coincidentally, my friends the Lynches, a family of seven, bring new meaning to the phrase, "I'm going in." Caroline's husband Tim has been spotted at Bel Air pushing a cart with three young children in it, plus two on the sides, and pulling a cart behind him for the groceries.

"They love him at Bel Air," she laughed. "All the checkers know him, they're regulars at the cookie counter, and the older shoppers enjoy visiting with the kids."

Another friend, Jennifer, braved Bel Air right after having her son. "You know how it is after you have a little one: You look forward to the simplest activities." During her pregnancy, she had become very familiar with the checkers, chitchatting about the upcoming birth.

"There I was, with my week-old baby in tow, checking out. The clerk looked at me and asked me when I was going to have that baby—even though I clearly had a new baby in the cart!"

So there you have it. Always an adventure doing anything with the kids, but grocery shopping at Bel Air will leave any parent with war stories to tell for years to come.

Now how did I end up with Marshmallow Whip and a Kool-Aid packet in my grocery bag?

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