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us up against that age-old battle of parents worrying for their children and trying to build bubbles around them. But I have a boy, and I also want him to grow up and stand on his feet."

Said Butler (who has no children): "Think 'Goonies.' Or think 'Gremlins,' which got dark — that story about finding the father dead in a chimney, dressed as Santa! Families in 'E.T.' and 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' were incredibly dysfunctional. Until recently I thought experiencing that stuff was part of an upbringing. It's how we grew up! Now, when it comes to film for children, we hear parents saying, 'It's no good.'"

'It's no good.'"
Said Fell, "The thing is, kids
know painting with bright colors
doesn't mean the world is cheerful."

When I called John Ardizzone, clinical psychologist and director of assessment at the Family Institute at Northwestern University, and asked about the ramifications of parents who complain of uneasy moments in children's films, he was reminded of a 10-year-old boy he recently treated. His parents, who were divorced, felt the split was amicable and didn't discuss it much with the child: the boy seemed to be dealing with it. But when Ardizzone asked the child to draw his home, the boy drew a normal house and a line beneath it. Ardizzone asked the child about the line; he presumed it was a sidewalk. No, the boy said, that's a cliff.

"Children have to learn resilience, to deal with unpleasant things," Ardizzone said. "Parents naturally want to protect them. But the way to do it is prepare them to meet that world and explain to them they don't have to be so afraid because the parent is there for them, not because there aren't tsunamis or deranged shooters in Wisconsin.

"I'm not saying have an intense conversation about these things. But when I ask parents how they deal with scary pictures, they often say, 'I don't show it to them.' And that is a serious mistake."

Said Hara Estroff Marano, editor-at-large of Psychology Today and author of "A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting": "Not addressing scary images at all? It conveys to kids that some subjects aren't appropriate for discussion. The unspoken message is you, the child, are a fragile thing."

In fact, there's an unofficial nickname among teachers and psychologists for kids like this: Teacup children.

Teacup children.
When Katherine Sarafian, a
producer at Pixar and co-director
of "Brave," was in Chicago this
summer, a parent stood up after a
screening and asked, "How can
you live with yourself?" The
woman's daughter was scared by
a few (admittedly loud and intense) scenes in "Brave." Sarafian
told me that because the film was
PG (as is "ParaNorman") and because the story was rooted in
fairy tales that threatened actual
consequences to a character's actions, she felt justified and wasn't
overly concerned.

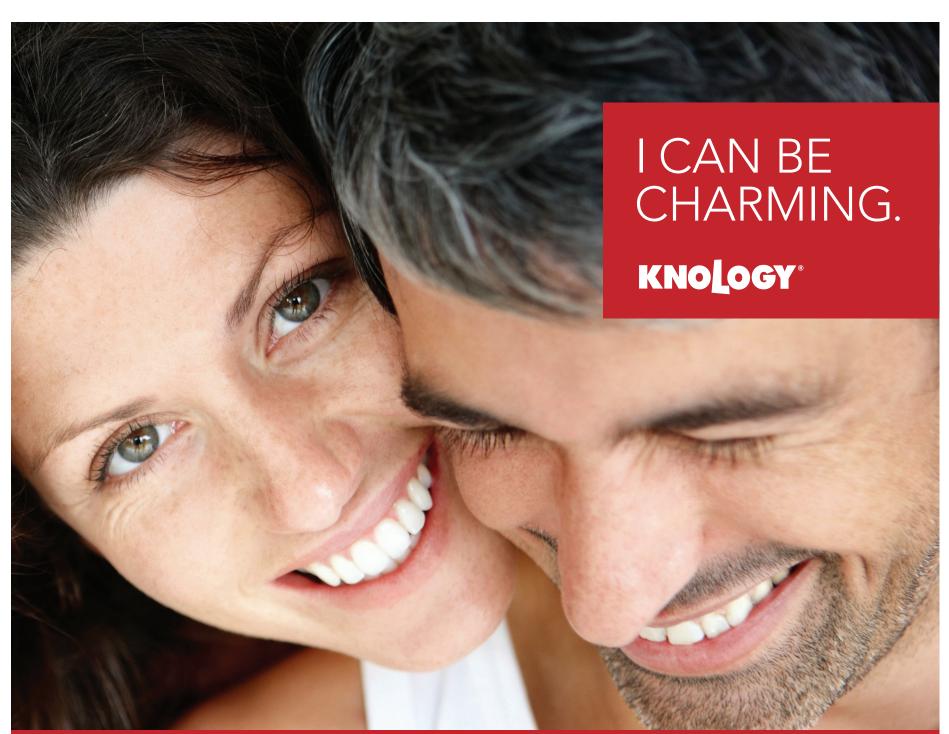
But then she and Mark Andrews, her co-director, think that kids are coddled, she said. "Some of these parents, you want to show them, like, the scary forest scenes in those old Disney movies they grew up on. The first movie I ever saw was '101 Dalmatians,' and I was petrified by Cruella de Vil. That woman wanted to make a coat of puppies. Which we kind of take for granted, but just think about that a moment."

On the other hand, though it's easy to imagine the timidity of, say, the "Ice Age" and "Madagascar" franchises as a natural progression from preschool-obsessed parents and jungle gym bans, that protective-

ness has a longer history.
Said Jack Zipes, a professor
emeritus at the University of Minnesota and an expert on fairy
tales, "the Grimms made major
changes to their tales throughout
their lives, throughout the 19th
century, softening them to suit
Victorian or Puritan sensibilities.
It led eventually to a children's literature that concealed for the
sake of middle-class children. Disney, their movies, were the worst
about concealing."

The irony is that Disney, which is synonymous with watering down, delivered some of the most intense childhood memories of the past century. After all, who killed Bambi's mother? Disney killed her. That paradox has been so pronounced over the years that Tim Burton, in the early '80s, partly left the embrace of Disney's animation department because Disney didn't embrace his eerie "Frankenweenie" short.

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