

# KIDS FIRST



## Dirt

You are wondering why such a zany title. After all you hate dirt. As a matter of fact, so does your family, friends, and the vast majority of North Americans. We are obsessed with dirt and the unclean. We are fastidious, fussy, and clean obsessed. Let me show you. How many of you take off your shoes when entering the house? Look at a glass before drinking from it? Wash your hands compulsively? Wear a hospital gown to hold your newborn? It has more bacteria on it than your infant! Wash your clothes after wearing them only a few hours? Scrutinize the table ware before eating? Or any of the other million idiosyncrasies we all do.

So why do we do this? Well ... we have been taught that germs are bad. That one can get germs from anything and everything. That germs should be eradicated, wiped out, killed. That no mercy should be shown. Take no prisoners our parents told us. So we do what we have been taught. This sterile obsession we

then pass onto our children and the myth of clean is propagated.

Our obsession with cleanliness is causing our own demise. I am not referring to personal hygiene; rather, I am referring to our "everything-spotless-and-clean" mentality.

More and more authorities are convinced that everyday dust and even dirt is actually good for you. Our search and reach for sterility is actually harming us and our children. I realize this may sound a bit alarming for many of you, but read on!

Our health is based on a properly functioning nervous system, immune system, and endocrine system. The new science connecting these components is called, **psychoneuroimmunology**. Many feel that the immune system, the endocrine system, and the nervous system are one and the same. This new science investigates the relationships between these systems and how they integrate and interact together for the health and well being of the individual.

What has this to do with dirt you ask?

Bart Classen MD, of Classen Immunotherapies in Maryland, a vaccine researcher, told me in a personal communication, that the immune system of today's child is in serious trouble. He feels that because of our search for cleanliness and sterility,

our immune system is no longer being exercised as it has been in the past. These thoughts are echoed by Steve Marini D.C., Ph.D. a chiropractor and immunologist, Philip Incao MD, and countless others.

More and more scientists are realizing that most of the childhood diseases are innocuous and are there in order to exercise a young immature immune system of a child. You probably think that a child having measles, chickenpox, etc., is a terrible thought. Not so. These diseases actually teach the immune system how to deal with the myriad of viruses and bacteria of his world. This is a good thing. In fact, Howard Weiner, a prominent Harvard immunologist, feels that our vaccination program actually "skews" the activity of the immune system making our children more susceptible to more serious complications later in life. In these situations, such an immune system will not be able to deal as effectively with a bacterial or viral invasion because it has never had to try. I tell my patients that even the common cold and flu has a place; they teach the immune system how to fight! This is good. Just because you feel sick when you have the flu doesn't mean you are. It simply means your body is doing exactly what it has been programmed to do. This is not sickness.

This is an expression of health! I am not saying that you have to like it, but ultimately it is for your benefit. To circumvent this system is not in your best interests.

There are a number of supplements I can recommend which increase the function of the immune system; after all that is the name of the game.

Manganese  
Vitamin B complex and Pycnogenol  
Vitamin A plus carotenoids  
Zinc and copper  
Bovine colostrum  
Garlic  
Amino acids (L-Arginine, L-Cysteine, L-Lysine)

Some of these need to be taken in restricted quantities, so be aware.

So...don't be so fastidious. Let some dirt into your life. You'll be a healthier person for it.

If you need additional information, please call me personally at 605-665-8228

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## Margo

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has become known mainly as the fifth-grade teacher at Sacred Heart School. She has seen the school's student numbers double during her career.

"We had 147 students in grades K-8 when I started here, and now we have more than 300 students," she said.

With the growing enrollment, new elementary and middle schools were built while the old school was demolished.

At the time, Sister Margo remarked how sorry she was to see the 1920 shelves lost in the razing of the old school. Unknown to her, friends rescued the shelves the night before the school's demolition so she could place them in her new classroom.

Her room also contains a fellow nun's painting that depicts Christ embracing little children. Another display contains former student Scott Luken's laser etchings on granite.

While Sister Margo may have changed buildings, she didn't change her classroom style — even still teaching her students a prayer in German.

The Rev. John Rutten of Sacred Heart Church saw examples of her no-nonsense approach.

"I pray with the teachers in Sister Margo's room each morning before school starts," he said. "When I walked in her classroom, I saw signs on the walls that you normally don't see in a school."

The priest referred to messages such as "Excuses Stop Here" and "Your Mother Does Not Work Here, Clean Up After Yourself."

"She believes that she is educating a human being and not just trying to pour knowledge into them," the priest said. "She teaches in a way that you just don't see often anymore, and yet people love her. She gains such respect from her former students. It's incredible."

### SWEET DEAL

As an example, Rutten pointed to the students' willingness — even excitement — to arrive at school by 6 a.m. to launch a baking session with the nun.

The baked goods have become legendary, Sister Margo admits.

The idea began when she noticed students were hungry by

mid-morning and had trouble concentrating on their work. She received the principal's permission to launch the baking project and sell the 23 to 30 batches of rolls.

"I noticed some kids turned it into a family thing, having a roll with their parents for breakfast at school," she said.

Sister Margo invited the school's DARE police officer to come for rolls, and he brought other officers. "At one time, we had five or six police cars in front of the school, and a neighbor checked out what was going on at Sacred Heart with all those police," she said with a laugh.

While a successful project, the baking sessions became an all-day affair that distracted from classes, Sister Margo said. The students now bake cookies eight times a year, making 900 to 1,000 cookies during each three-hour work session.

At the start of each year, the students meet with a local banker to take out a loan for expenses and to learn about business. Sister Margo also teaches smart shopping, meeting a budget and conducting sales.

She also stresses teamwork. "If you don't show up for work and do your share, then it doesn't get done unless you shift responsibility to someone else," she said.

At the end of the year, the students donate half of the proceeds to the school and divide the remaining half among themselves as profit. This year, the project made \$790.

"At the end of the school year, each kid walked out with \$25.49, but they also learned so many good lessons," she said.

### INSPIRING OTHERS

Sacred Heart educators Marcia Olnes and Kim Olson see the nun's witty side.

"I would point to Sister Margo's sense of humor in any situation," Olnes said. "Her immediate comments are always brief, well chosen, to the point yet humorous, whether dealing with students, parents or colleagues."

Sister Margo has mastered hands-on learning, Olnes said. "Learning was constant and real," Olnes said, "whether it was growing tomatoes in the classroom; hatching and feeding spring chicks; students planning, cooking and eating their own Thanksgiving meal; or earning classroom money to buy from her 'Recycled Store.'"

Olson has seen the nun's lifelong impact on her students.

"The students don't realize it when they are in her classroom, but she teaches them stewardship, honesty, respect, compassion and how to live a Christ-like lifestyle," Olson said.

Sister Margo became a mentor all teachers, Olson said.

"She has been someone that any (of us) can go to when we have questions about the church or need any special guidance," Olson said. "She has the right words that help you through times of disappointment, strug-

gle or even joy."

Olson received such strength and guidance during a turning point in her life.

"One time, when I wasn't sure that I was in the right place, (Sister Margo) said, 'Who are you here for? Do you love the kids?'" Olson said. "When I said, 'I love the students,' she told me to let everything else go and focus on the kids because that is what was important."

### CHANGING TIMES

In recent years, Sister Margo has seen technology greatly enhance learning, but it has also hampered children's social skills, she said.

"They don't talk with each other, they text — even if they're standing right next to each other," she said.

Social media has also led to cyber-bullying, she said.

"It's so much easier to bully someone or say something mean about somebody when you aren't looking at each other," she said. "You don't have to see the pain in the other person's face, how you're making them hurt by what you said."

In recent years, Sister Margo has found parents who try to shield their children from failure. "But when you fail, that's when you develop real growth," she said.

Sister Margo told of a student who, after receiving his first report card, chose to stay after school and finish his work in quiet rather than join his friends.

"Kids are so real, and they are so sincere. They try hard to do

what's right," she said. "They really know when they blow it, but they are also really ready to make a correction and are so willing to admit it."

Sister Margo has sought to be straightforward with her students.

"You want to make the right kind of impression by being honest with them," she said. "If they do good, you affirm it. If they don't, then you tell them. You don't whitewash it."

Sister Margo acknowledges many students come to school with tremendous baggage from their home lives.

"I had one of my students tell me, 'It's tough being a kid.' I agreed, because they feel the stress, that somehow it's their fault if there are problems at home," she said. "I give them good, solid moral answers and let them know I'm here for them."

The students return that love, as seen when a student gave the nun a hug before leaving for the day.

The scene has become com-

mon through the years, Olnes said.

"If Sister Margo was working after school with a student, no matter what the situation or reason, when the student was ready to walk out the door, Sister Margo would call out their name," Olnes said. "As they turned to look at her eyes, she would say their name and these words: 'Remember, I love you!' And even better, the student would always respond with a smile, 'I love you, too, Sister!'"

"As a colleague, it was the greatest lesson and gift I received from Sister Margo: Never forget to always give students unconditional love and hope!"

Sister Margo possesses special gifts and shares them with others, Rutten said.

"She is someone who knows Jesus Christ and what a Christian life should be," he said. "She is one of the most alive persons in the Yankton community."

You can follow Randy Dockendorff on Twitter at [twitter.com/RDockendorff](http://twitter.com/RDockendorff)

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