

# How Much Is That Dogma in the Window?

A PREACHY HEALTH FOOD DISCIPLE CAN BE A PAIN IN THE...EAR

**A**NTIBIOTICS!" exclaimed the health food store manager. "Why would you put your baby on antibiotics?"

I groaned inwardly. I had not come into the store to defend my use of antibiotics. I had come in for lactobacillus pow-

der, a nutritional supplement that may help prevent side effects caused by antibiotics. But once the manager got wind of why I needed the remedy, he launched into a harangue about the pitfalls of Western medicine. I could tell from his tone that he wasn't about to give me a balanced presentation. Nor was he inviting me to engage in a dia-

logue. Even making a sale took a back seat to his primary agenda—convincing me to just say no to antibiotics.

Not that antibiotic use should be exempt from scrutiny. Indeed, a good many medical practices should be examined more closely. But knee-jerk opposition to all prescriptions and all physicians is not the answer. After all, the original idea behind the natural

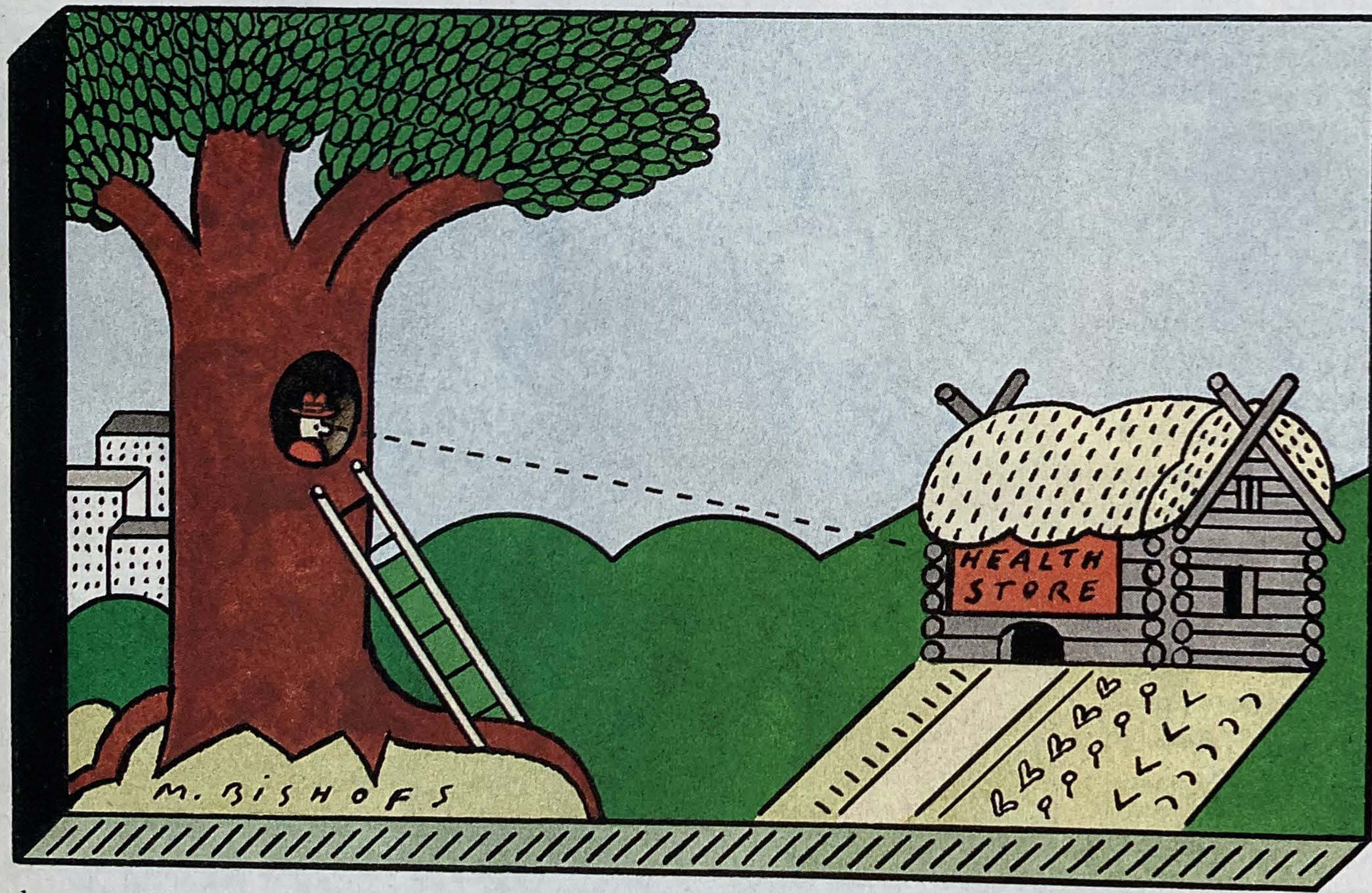
yeast infections and wreak havoc on the intestinal tract. I've even heard these drugs can make children act "wild" or irritable. And because allergic reactions are unpredictable, antibiotics can sometimes be hazardous.

But what about the benefits? Before these drugs came along, bacterial infections spelled death for millions. If an infection—like the one in my son's ear—

happened to spread into the covering of the brain, a child could die of meningitis. (Even barring such a dire consequence, chronic ear infections, if left untreated, can cause permanent hearing loss.) Withholding antibiotics when bacteria are invading the body can be a risky business. Doing so in the name of new-age "enlightenment" compounds risk with arrogance.

While the new just-say-no-to-anything-unnatural ethic rarely involves a life-and-death sit-

uation, it seldom serves the consumer. I still wince when I recall my midwife's remarks after my second baby's birth. Although labor tends to get easier with each delivery, I wound up going through three grueling days the second time around—and, near the end, requesting an epidural (spinal) anesthetic. Several hours later, while I



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health movement was that medical consumers should have additional choices. To condemn whatever the doctor orders is to take freedom away.

As I looked at the manager, I remembered all the negatives I had ever heard about antibiotics. They are often overprescribed, so they may not work when they're really needed. They can cause

BY LISA BRAVER MOSS



was resting comfortably with my new son, the midwife breezed in to say wasn't it a pity I'd "given in" to the epidural because I was so "anxious." Never mind the healthy eight-pound product of my efforts. From the midwife's point of view, I'd failed.

Then there was the time I called La Leche League, a leading breast-feeding organization, for help in weaning my infant. I had anticipated a calm discussion with a counselor who would give me all the necessary pros and cons. What I got instead was an earful about the evils of infant formula and an aggressive you-must-continue-to-breast-feed-at-all-costs spiel.

The presumptuous remarks of a midwife or a breast-feeding counselor may appear inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. But underlying such

have liked to tell the manager. I had wanted to tell him that lactobacillus may help ward off antibiotic-caused yeast infections in women, as well as candidiasis (yeast) diaper rashes in babies. That my pediatrician said it was safe. That if you mix it with a little juice and take it an hour after that first pill in the morning, your antibiotic troubles may well be over.

But the manager only wanted to hear why I would willingly subject my child to the horrors of Western medicine.

I told him about my son's ear infection. It didn't faze him a bit. "Have you noticed any change in your baby's behavior since he started taking those antibiotics?" he asked pointedly.

"As a matter of fact, yes," I replied crisply. "I've noticed he's stopped pulling on his ear and screaming. Now where did you say the lactobacillus powder was?"

*Lisa Braver Moss writes frequently about health issues.*

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comments lurks a dangerously regressive message: Don't assert your needs or make your own decisions unless they conform to the party line. Whatever happened to the idea that consumers should have as many choices as possible? Is the new intolerance of anything "unnatural" really an improvement over the dogmatism of the proverbial white lab coat?

Like many people today, I'm trying to combine the best of Western medicine with the best of alternative thinking. It's a complex and ongoing process. Most doctors I've encountered don't seem to mind a little consumer experimentation. But natural health advocates—at least the ones I've run across—often put down any attempt to mix orthodox and alternative remedies. I find it ironic that a group that clearly views itself as progressive can be so reactionary about consumers' free choice.

As I stood in the aisle of the health food store, I thought of what I would



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