

Of a certain age.....

By Sue Stafford
Columnist

Playing impromptu games of softball or tag, taking long bike rides with friends, or alone, with no particular destination (and no helmets), or building forts in the woods from tree limbs were the stuff of my childhood in 1950s Portland. No cell phones, minimal TV time, no computers, no Facebook, no texting, no Twitter.

My parents generally weren't worried about where I was every minute of the day. The fear of a dangerous stranger wasn't on my radar. I wasn't afraid to ask for help from adults I didn't know, trusting that they would help me — and they did.

I was basically wrapped in a safe cocoon of innocence with very little impact from the world beyond my familiar boundaries. There was no ability to see breaking news as it was happening. I was

spared trying to make sense of bombings, riots, mass shootings, police brutality, or terrorist attacks abroad or in my own country. My world was a safe place.

With the advent of TV, I was able to see Ozzie and Harriet humorously deal with everyday family happenings. The Mickey Mouse Club was populated with happy, smiling faces of kids like me singing and dancing.

Elected officials generally conducted themselves in a dignified manner, working to promote the common good through collaboration and compromise, or so it appeared. The presidential conventions actually meant something and we listened to them on the radio, and later watched on television along with millions of interested Americans.

Where have those days gone? How did we get to the point of overscheduled children with little free time for

imagination and unstructured play? There are too many families living with unbelievable work and monetary pressures, with parents having to work and not able to be around when their children get out of school. We are all electronically connected, and at the same time sadly disconnected.

Don't misunderstand me. All was not sweetness and light in the '50s. Each decade has its own set of problems. But it seems that as technology has advanced to "improve the world" and enable more and quicker contact around the globe, we are actually becoming in many ways more isolated from human interaction.

Texting has replaced face-to-face conversations. The joy of anticipating the arrival of that long-awaited handwritten letter has given way to quick emails sent out to groups of people, many of whom I don't even know.

On Facebook I am able to see more about someone's life than I might even want to know, often of little importance. Facebook and texting may take the place of a pleasant exchange spent in another's company or talking with them on the phone, catching up on what makes our friendship special.

I plead guilty to this myself.

While everyone is glued to some kind of screen, what happens to the very fiber of the family — the conversations around the dinner table, the quiet times before sleep when children often share their secrets and parents are able to look into their eyes and truly "see" them? I wonder about the children who grow up seeing the back of their parent's head in the front seat of the car, while staring at a video on the drop-down screen. Often I see children mutely walking behind a parent who is

engaged on their cell phone rather than with their child.

Life is worth living, not because of all my gadgets and high tech, not because of my busy-ness and activities, not because of what I own or do. Life is worth living because of my deep relationships with those I love and who love me. The human connection that feeds my soul and gives meaning to my life is really all that will matter when I come to the end of my time on earth.

I can't go backwards and return to the "good old days" (nor do I really want to), but I can bring some good things forward to the present. I can at least occasionally unplug, slow down, write a letter to someone I care about. I can turn off the TV, the computer, and the cell phone. Instead, I can read a book, enjoy the silence, have a heart-to-heart conversation, go outside, maybe even play a game of tag.

adolescence is challenging.

But we can help you and your daughter navigate the highs and lows.

Puberty is a time of great change for young girls. At St. Charles Center for Women's Health, we encourage our young patients to take charge of their health from the very start. We help educate parents and daughters in the areas of body image, self esteem, anatomy, pregnancy and relationships.

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