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Get inspired by these volunteers who know something about giving back

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COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

Family fretting

New role as co-parent and unfamiliar role as daughter fuel conflicting feelings

I have been writing these commentaries for over a year now and have been consistently impressed by the restraint shown by the counselors and therapists within our community.

The urge to call up and offer guidance to me must be nearly overwhelming for some of these people. I salute their fortitude and professional integrity and wish only that long-distance carrier salespeople could demonstrate such behavior.

Writing these columns actually has proven to be a very enlightening form of self-therapy—a sort of mental masturbation perhaps? After all, isn't masturbation just arriving at a conclusion by yourself? And while my little forays into deep thought and self-analysis have never led me to a place where I put much credence in the concept of reincarnation or past-life regression, recent changes in my personal life have led me to the conclusion that I was at one time Attila the Hun.

With a new relationship bringing the introduction of a child into my life, I find myself astounded by the attitudes I have toward children, behaviors, discipline and the entire structure of dining etiquette within our society at large.

I am a person who seldom eats food unless it is wrapped in paper or thawed in a microwave, and yet I find myself now giving dissertations on proper cutlery usage. Whereas my previous knowledge of forks consisted largely of knowing they're excellent tools for removing cat hair from the garbage disposal, I now can describe at length their proper grip, placement and utilization.

I can go on at length about the need for a proper bedtime and the consequence of building structure and discipline...all this, mind you, from a person who has established an entire career and lifestyle based on never having to be anywhere before noon. Some sort of generations-old genetic implanting has me saying things that real mothers have said forever and ever and ever (or so it seems to the child involved).

For many reasons, my emotions have been on an interesting roller-coaster ride of late (though those around me would be questioning as to just when I'll be getting to the "up" part of the coaster). The dynamics of my personal life have changed dramatically. I now interact with a preteen on an almost daily basis, and on an almost daily basis I don't know what is the right thing to say or do. I don't know how to be a positive influence. I don't know how to parent. I have never been a mother. I fear the complexity. It surely involves far more than issuing rules and expectations. How about the expectations others have regarding me? How do I meet those?

At the same time that I chose to undertake this new venture, I learned that my mother has cancer. This is a person with whom I do not have a close relationship. There is no animosity, no enmity, life just led us in different directions.

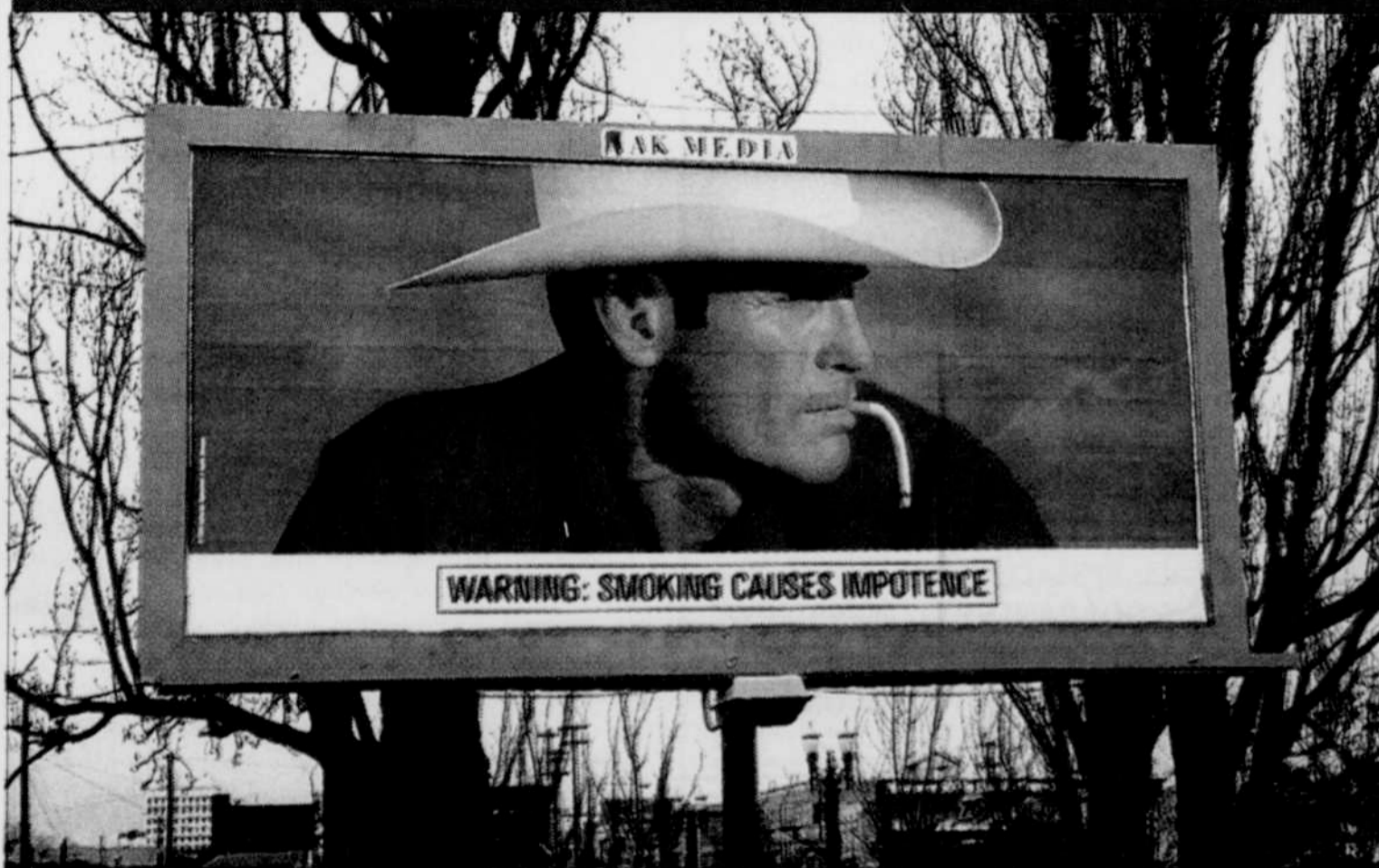
As with many others, my family of choice has evolved into my family of significance. Lack of commonality, lack of interest in explanation, lack of God-only-knows-what has frayed away the supposed bonds of family. These bonds weren't slashed in anger, nor torn away with disgust; they were simply worn away by disuse and the erosion of disinterest. Just as "don't ask, don't tell" isn't working in the military, it doesn't really work with families either.

And now with the illness of my mother, I find myself in a position where I feel called upon to fill another role—another role that is neither familiar nor comfortable. Just as I have never been a mother, I have also never been a daughter. My fear is that I will be neither. My anxiety is great. I yearn to bolt and run. I fancy late-night escapes to Montana—perhaps a new career as a goat herder.

But escape is not an option. Stepping up to my responsibilities is my only choice. Learning to parent is going to be the easier of the two circumstances that face me. Learning how to be an adult, i.e. parent, is hard; coping with the illness is harder. Although I fear that I can't be a good daughter, I'm also sure that I can't be a bad one.

**Just as I have never been a mother, I have also never been a daughter. My fear is that I will be neither.**

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in your pipe
and smoke it**PUBLISHER AND MANAGING EDITOR** • Marty Davis**NEWS EDITOR** • Inga Sorensen**ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR** • Oriana Green**COPY EDITOR** • Christopher D. Cuttone**CONTRIBUTORS** • Kristine Chatwood, Katy Davidson, Jonathan Kipp, T.K. Mantese,

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