



Submitted photo  
Being a parent can be one of the hardest things a person does. Luckily writer Lacey Hoyer, center, thinks daughters Iris, left, and Avery are worth it. Most of the time.

## Parenting's amazing highs, infuriating lows

By LACEY HOYER

Being a parent is hard. Just a few weeks ago I was standing in one of the cramped shower cubicles at the Astoria Aquatic Center, trying to lather shampoo into my oldest daughter's hair.

We'd been having a good time swimming, and so I was caught off guard when, suddenly furious, she turned and tried to push me out of the stall.

"Get your wicked hands off of me!" she screeched at the top of her little lungs. Dripping wet, with bubbles of shampoo still in my own hair, I burst into nervous laughter as I glanced at all the other women in the locker room who were busy pretending not to have heard or seen us. My cheeks burned as I stormed back into the shower and forcefully commenced rinsing us off.

"Don't you ever speak to me like that again," I growled through gritted teeth. Avery's enraged look melted away and she began to wail.

"I just wanted to wash my hair myself," she sobbed.

"Well, too bad," I snapped, knowing there was probably a better way to handle the situation, but being too angry and embarrassed to know what it was. When she finally left the shower stall to get dressed, I stayed behind for a minute, turned my face to the spray and I just screamed. Quietly. Because.

When my husband and I first started our family, I had no idea how hard parenting was going to be. In a very vague and intangible way, I knew that getting through the newborn period would be grueling, and it was, but somehow I had convinced myself the years between toddler and teenager were going to be nothing but fun. A golden period full of play, exploration and the innocent sweetness of childhood. The honest truth, however, is the day-to-day of parenting children of any age often feels like riding a high-amplitude sine wave. Without a seatbelt. A single afternoon can be full of not only amazing highs and instances of pure transcendence, but also incomparable moments of tedium, frustration, panic and heartbreak.

Our daughters are almost-5 and

almost-3. They are blond, blue-eyed, skinny little things, with my husband's sense of humor, my stubbornness and their great-grandmother's talkative streak. Avery is so glamorous that she would have made Grace Kelly feel frumpy in comparison; while Iris is happiest when playing in the dirt and not wearing pants. We spend most sunny afternoons outside working in the garden and feeding our chickens, or walking and biking to the park down the street. We read endless amounts of books and do copious amounts of arts and crafts. We go to the library and to the beach. We make things out of Legos. We chase each other around the house. I have experienced occasions of such perfect happiness with them that I thought my heart might literally burst.

**Parenting is hard. Harder and simultaneously better than I ever thought possible.**

We also have epic battles of wills and breakdowns of communication. We argue and we yell. There are hurt feelings and there are tears. There are some days when I am convinced I will not make it to 7 p.m. Days when their whining makes my whole body contort in misery. Days when they don't listen to a single word I say. Days when they fight like they are mortal enemies, and days when they give me attitude like they are already well into their teen years. Days and days and days.

Worst of all though, are the days when they scream that I am the worst mama ever, that I ruin everything and that they don't want to be my children anymore. And I can tell they mean it, even if only momentarily, by the tears of anger and frustration

running rivulets down their splotchy red cheeks.

Those are the days when I just manage to put them to bed before retreating to my own corner, feeling overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted and absolutely certain I'm messing them up for good. I wonder how I could do better, how I could get rid of the doubt, guilt and indecision that wracks me whenever I have a moment that is, to put it simply, not my finest. I know so many of the things I do are wrong but I hope I do it right enough of the time to make up for it.

When we got home from the pool that day, it was over. We'd had our bad moment and then we moved on. Avery talked excitedly about the fun we'd had, the rings she'd retrieved from the bottom and how maybe next time we'd go down the slide. I hadn't let go of the guilt as easily as she had discarded her anger though, so when I tucked her into bed that night I made sure to let her know how sorry I was that I had yelled.

"You know I love you always, even when I'm mad, right?" I asked her.

"Yeah," she said, squirming and rolling her eyes in that way that almost-5-year-olds do. Forgiving me and accepting me, imperfections and all, with a squeeze of her arms around my neck.

Parenting is hard. Harder and simultaneously better than I ever thought possible. We do the best we can. We love them with all we've got. We apologize when we screw up. We take the doubt and the guilt and we try to turn it into something positive, next time. And, ultimately, we hope it's good enough.

*Lacey Hoyer manages to squeeze in time working at Clatsop Community College and The Daily Astorian in between parenting her two spunky children. A graduate of the University of Oregon, she lives in Hammond.*



## Writer's Notebook

# Let's do some railing

By GAIL COLLINS  
New York Times News Service

Just before Congress slunk away for the three-day weekend — which it was, of course, planning to stretch into a week — senators from the Northeast held a news conference to denounce Republicans for underfunding Amtrak passenger rail service.

"Amtrak has some infrastructure that is so old it was built and put into service when Jesse James and Butch Cassidy were still alive and robbing trains," said Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.

"In Connecticut we have a bridge that was built when Grover Cleveland was president," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

Now you have to admit, this is pretty compelling. Especially if you merge them and envision Butch Cassidy and Grover Cleveland robbing commuters on the Acela Express.

The Northeast corridor from Boston to Washington is the centerpiece of the nation's commuter rail system. It carries more people than the airlines, makes a profit and takes an ungodly number of cars off extremely crowded highways. However, it needs \$21 billion of work on its bridges, tunnels, tracks and equipment.

We've all been thinking about it since the terrible derailment in Philadelphia this month. In a moment of stupendously bad timing, House Republicans chose the day after the accident to cut more than \$1 billion from the \$2.45 billion the Obama administration had requested for Amtrak.

Speaker John Boehner said any attempt to link the two things was "stupid." As only he can.

Let's take a middle road, people, and assume that while the Philadelphia crash might not have been related to any funding cut, it's a good reminder that running packed trains through 19th century tunnels and bridges is asking for trouble.

Amtrak is a managerial mishmash, trapped under the thumb of Congress and also responsible for long-distance service across the country, touching cities from Chicago to New Orleans to Grand Rapids to Salt Lake City on a series of routes that are never going to make money. Conservative groups that call for the privatization of Amtrak are basically envisioning a system where the Northeast Corridor is left to fend for itself while the money-losing routes fade into history.

"Ideally, we would like to see all transportation spending and taxing devolve to the states," said Michael Sargent of The Heritage Foundation. None of the Northeastern

senators at the news conference complained about the cross-country money-losers. Perhaps that was out of deference to their colleague, Dick Durbin, D-Ill. Perhaps they instinctively understood that no matter what the drain, Amtrak has a better chance of political survival running through 46 states. It's a theory that works great for the Defense Department. Maybe the senators just had a national vision of what national rail service is supposed to be.

"It's worth reminding our colleagues the Northeast Corridor is the only part that makes money," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., in a phone interview. "But that doesn't mean I want to get rid of the rest of the system. If we only kept the portions of government that made money, there wouldn't be any point to the state of Connecticut running a Department of Children and Families anymore."

What's your off-the-cuff verdict, people?

A) Save the railroad!  
B) Prioritize! Every train for itself!

C) They can do anything they want if they'll just get together and fix the pothole on my corner.

Wow, I believe I see a majority for the pothole. Remind me to tell you about how members of Congress just passed the 33rd super-short-term highway bill because they haven't been able to come up with any normal road repair funding since 2008.

Transportation unites the country, but the crowded parts and the empty parts have different needs. Cities require mass transit, which is something that tends to irritate many rural conservatives. (It's that vision of a whole bunch

of strangers stuck together, stripped of even the illusion of control.) Remote towns and cities need connections to survive, even though the price tag seems way out of proportion to those of us who don't live on, say, an Alaskan island.

Amtrak's operating budget is about the same as the Essential Air Service program, which subsidizes commercial air service to remote communities. Most of the flights are at least two-thirds empty. CBS News, in a report this year, found one flight between Kansas City, Missouri, and Great Bend, Kansas, that generally carried only a single passenger.

Everybody knows that the government can waste money. (If you have any doubts, I will refer you to a recent report by Pro Publica about a glorious new \$25 million, 64,000-square-foot headquarters for the military constructed for U.S. troops in Afghanistan even though said troops were going home.) But making money-losing links between different parts of the theoretically United States doesn't seem to be in that category.

Fix Amtrak. Connect the country.



Gail Collins

**Amtrak is a managerial mishmash, trapped under the thumb of Congress**



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