

PARENTS TALK BACK

Becoming a mother, even without kids

A steady stream of letters arrived in Heidi Hogan’s mailbox from the same woman two or three times a week.

The two women had lost touch for 10 years, but once they reconnected, the notes rolled in for 23 years, as reliable as the sunrise.

The writer found Hogan at a low moment. She had just lost her mother-in-law, to whom she had been very close.

Ten years earlier, when she was 22, Hogan was in a car accident with her young family. Her husband, 23, and their daughter, 14 months, died in the accident. She and her son, 3, survived. Her mother-in-law had remained a connection to all she had lost, and was more like a mother to her than her own mom. The loss hit her hard.

And that’s when her godmother found her again.

Lenore Anderson had been a church secretary in Milwaukee when she met Hogan’s parents. Anderson’s own parents had died when she was young and she had no immediate family to speak of. Hogan’s parents took her under their wing. She frequently joined their family for dinner after church. They asked her to be Hogan’s godmother when she was born.

Soon after, Anderson moved away to earn her bachelor’s degree, ending up at St. Louis’ Washington University, where she earned her master’s in social work in 1961. While Hogan grew up in Wisconsin, her godmother worked in crisis intervention in the roughest parts of St. Louis. Anderson visited the Hogans about once a year.

Anderson never married, nor had children herself. But when she met a child or any person she liked, she bonded strongly with them. Her goddaughter was certainly in that circle. Years after the accident, Hogan remarried, had two more children and adopted a child with special needs. Anderson visited the kids, sent them gifts and wrote their mother the weekly letters.

She worked as a social worker in the St. Louis area for more than 50 years, and when my husband hired her more than a decade ago, she developed an affection for our children. Every Easter, Halloween and Christmas, packages would arrive for both of them from her.

We were hardly alone as recipients of her generosity.

If she was at a garage sale or in the senior center and spotted something one of her clients or “adopted” children would like, she bought it and sent it. One of the children she counseled early in her career, when he was 10 years old, stayed in her life for more than 40 years. When she had to move from her home in the city to an assisted living center, he took the bus across town to her home to help her pack and move.

As she got older, the osteoarthritis in her back got so bad that she hunched over and pushed the seat of her walker, instead of the handles, to get around. But she continued to work and was devoted to her clients. She would find out which candies the youngest ones liked and keep their favorites on hand.

It was always a mystery to me why a woman so vivacious, with such a generous soul, beautiful through and through, never married or had a family of her own. When I asked Hogan if she knew why Anderson never had children, she said: I’m going to assume I was hers.

Perhaps Anderson figured out that loving people didn’t require anything more than a giving heart.

“She saw the world as her oyster, and it presented pearls to her in the form of other people,” said Pat Way, Anderson’s longtime friend. When Way saw her in a hospital bed, in septic shock from an infection the day before she died, the first thing her friend said was, “You better call Betty and tell her I may not be in tomorrow.” She was worried about seeing her clients the next day.

Hogan said she cried for 24 hours after she learned of Anderson’s death on Jan. 2. She thought of her father, whom she had adored and who died when she was 15, meeting Anderson in heaven.

“I imagined him thanking her for taking care of me.”

At home, there’s an unfinished letter Hogan had been writing to her godmother that never got mailed.

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Selfie sticks

Tourist convenience or purely narcissi-stick?

By BETH J. HARPAZ
AP Travel Editor

NEW YORK — Selfies at tourist attractions are nothing new. But until recently, if you wanted a perfectly composed picture of yourself with Times Square or the Colosseum in the background, you might have asked a passer-by to take the photo.

Now, though, relatively new gadgets called selfie sticks make it easy to take your own wide-angled self-portraits or group shots. Fans say the expandable rods, which allow users to hold their cellphones a few feet away, are the ultimate convenience: no more bothering passers-by to take pictures, no more fretting about strangers taking lousy shots or running off with a pricey iPhone.

But some travelers bemoan the loss of that small interaction that came with politely asking a local to help preserve a memory. And critics express outright hatred of selfie sticks as obnoxious symbols of self-absorption. They even have a derisive name for them, playing on the narcissistic behavior they think the sticks encourage: narcissi-stick.

Sarah Kinling of Baltimore said she was approached “17 times” by vendors selling selfie sticks at the Colosseum in Rome. “They’re the new fanny pack — the quickest way to spot a tourist,” she said. “The more I saw them in use, the more I saw how much focus people were putting on selfies, and not turning around to see what they were there to see.”

When Kinling wanted a photo of herself with her sister and sister-in-law, she asked strangers to take the shot. “Even when the other person didn’t speak English, you hold your camera up and make the motion and they understand,” she said.

But some travelers say it’s better to stage your own vacation photos. Andrea Garcia asked a passer-by to take her photo in Egypt and later realized he’d



AP Photo/Remy de la Mauviniere

Tourists use a selfie stick on the Trocadero Square, with the Eiffel Tower in background, in Paris, Tuesday. Selfie sticks have become popular among tourists because you don’t have to ask strangers to take your picture, and unlike hand-held selfies, you can capture a wider view without showing your arm. But some people find them obnoxious, arguing that they detract from the travel experience.

zoomed in on her face, cutting out the pyramids behind her. “I couldn’t really be mad at him — he wasn’t my photographer, I didn’t pay him,” she said. The experience made her appreciate the selfie sticks she sees tourists using at 1 World Trade near her office in Lower Manhattan. “Take control of your image!” she says.

Selfie sticks are just starting to show up at attractions in the U.S., but they’re ubiquitous in many destinations overseas, from Dubai’s skyscraper, the Burj Khalifa, to the Eiffel Tower in Paris. A soccer stadium in London, White Hart Lane, has even banned them because they obstruct other fans’ views.

The Four Seasons Hotel in Houston started making them available to guests last week,

“similar to the way many hotels provide umbrellas,” said hotel spokeswoman Laura Pettitt.

The sticks range in price from \$5 to \$50. Simpler models merely grip the phone, so users must trigger the shot with a self-timer on the camera. More sophisticated versions either use Bluetooth technology or connect the phone to the stick with a cord, with a button on the grip triggering the shot.

Jasmine Brett Stringer of Minneapolis writes a lifestyles blog called “Carpe Diem with Jasmine” and uses selfie sticks to record her videos. “A friend brought one back from Dubai and I said, ‘I’ve got to get one,’” she said. Now she doesn’t have to rely on others to help shoot her work. The sticks are also an improve-

ment over hand-held selfies because they let you shoot “at better angles, avoid the awkward arm reach and the dreadful half-face shot.”

Megan Marrs of Boston, who writes a travel blog called Vanishing Balloons, thought the sticks were ridiculous when she saw them on a trip to South Korea last fall. “It seemed so vain and silly,” said Marrs. But she bought one to bring home as a gift, ended up trying it herself and became a fan.

“I don’t love intruding on other people’s experience, asking them to take my picture — they’re there to enjoy their time, too,” she said. “Sometimes I feel silly — one more tourist taking a selfie in front of the Colosseum — but I’m more comfortable doing it myself than asking someone else.”

OUT OF THE VAULT

Race spectacular features unconventional athletes

Two Pendleton car dealers in February 1986 decided to stage a race down Main Street, pitting the best drivers they could find from around the world, in a bid to drum up customers during a slow time of year for their businesses. Specially built vehicles were brought in from Seattle just for the race. But special training was required prior to the big day because the racers — hamsters — were used to sleeping during daylight hours. The original brainstorming session had favored a turtle race, but hamsters were easier to procure.

Dave Rayburn, sales manager at Pendleton Ford, and Doug Bauch of Performance Chrysler each had a stable of



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

the little furry creatures they were busily training for the big race. Special cars, powered by hamster exercise wheels, were the vehicles of choice. “We’ve had a little problem, since they’re nocturnal,” Rayburn said, as he used a foot to stop “Rambo,” who had left the practice track and was speeding backwards out of control. “We’ve been giving them vitamins and working out in the morning and they’re getting much, much better.”

Rayburn’s stable included, among others, “Critter Marquis” who boasted four-leg drive, fully independent suspension and a nonpolluting biodegradable fuel system; “Refrigerator,” who worked out consistently at 4:30 a.m.; and “Percival,” a four-year veteran who trained in the Andes Mountains and was making his U.S. debut in the Saturday spectacular.

The Bauch athletes included “Hemi Hamster,” a Detroit native who had been suspended from racing after taking payoffs; “Pepe Le Pue,” who turned out to be “Penelope Le Pue,” making a comeback after a near-fatal accident; and “Road-Runner,” an Arizona racer

who trained in front of hungry coyotes.

Favorites for winning the contest were Ford’s “Bubba Da Rat,” described in his biography as an underdog with a fourth-grade education, and Chrysler’s “Mr. Zee,” a virtual unknown from the Blue Mountains who had a reputation for “winning at any cost.” Following the big race, a barbecue and live music were planned on Main Street.

Unfortunately, the *East Oregonian* did not cover the Saturday race, so the winner is unknown.

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ODDS & ENDS

Officials tell family to scale back treehouse

GRANITE BAY, Calif. (AP) — Northern California authorities are telling a Placer County couple to prune back their deluxe treehouse.

Mike and Pat Splinter’s 500-square-foot treehouse features a full kitchen, a bathroom and all the plumbing. The Animal Planet cable network highlighted the structure last month in the show “Treehouse Masters.” The episode featured the Splinter family making hard candy for Christmas in the treehouse kitchen.

But Placer County deputy planning director E.J. Ivaldi tells the *Sacramento Bee* that the family already has a full guest cottage on their property. Because of that, authorities say the treehouse’s full kitchen, and mattress, must go.

“They can use it for entertaining,” Ivaldi said. “What the county approved was a residential accessory structure. For the purpose of them being able to do a TV show, they were allowed to build a kitchen with the understanding that the kitchen would come out.”

A noted national treehouse designer, Pete Nelson, built



AP Photo/Sacramento Bee, Lezlie Sterling

Mike Splinter stands on stairs going up to the treehouse Dec. 30 in the backyard of his home in the Sacramento suburb of Granite Bay, Calif.

the Placer County masterpiece for more than \$60,000. The treehouse’s owners have not yet commented on the county’s order.

Police: Naked man broke into homes, used hot tub

KEIZER (AP) — Police near Salem, Oregon, say they arrested a naked man after he broke into two homes, drank booze and used a hot tub at one of them.

Officers received a 911 call early Sunday from a woman who

was house-sitting in Keizer when she was awakened by noises coming from the laundry room.

As she went to check it out, the laundry room door slammed, so she grabbed a knife and called police and her husband.

Police found the burglar inside, naked, and arrested him without incident. Investigators determined that he climbed in through a back window after removing a screen.

They also noticed that screens had been removed from windows at a neighbor’s home. Police say the suspect had burglarized that

home, drinking the homeowner’s alcohol and using the hot tub and shower.

Agency’s Bigfoot post makes big imprint on social media

PHOENIX (AP) — An Arizona agency’s posting about Bigfoot is leaving its mark on social media.

The Arizona Department of Transportation Facebook post from Jan. 1 reads: “We might have spotted a family of sasquatches on SR 260 near Heber this afternoon. What do you think?”

Accompanying it is a couple of traffic camera photos showing a blurry cluster of figures on the side of the road.

As of Tuesday, it had been shared more than 3,700 times and had nearly 1,000 comments.

Spokesman Tom Herrmann says his agency tries to drive traffic to its Twitter account using humor — a strategy that has helped them gain followers.

The mysterious figures haven’t budged in days, leading Herrmann to believe they’re something a lot more down-to-Earth than the original post suggests: shrubbery.