

PARENTS TALK BACK Sending 12-year-olds completely off the grid

The most enriching, eye-opening learning experience happened nowhere near my child's school this year.

For 45 years, the Parkway School District in St. Louis has sent its sixth-graders to an outdoor school on YMCA campgrounds a couple hours away by bus.

It's a four-day experience; it used to be a week-long program, until budget cuts eliminated a day.

"We talk about connecting with nature," said Ron Ramsport, coordinator for Healthy Youth Programs for the district. "It's really about disconnecting with electronics."



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

My daughter's class recently took the trek into the wilderness (a very tame wilderness, as all the cabins have air conditioning and electricity) for lessons on water ecology, wildlife and soil quality, along with outdoor activities like horseback riding and hiking.

The most daunting aspect is the absolute ban on any digital devices for the entire duration of the trip.

"We weren't sure we were going to make it," my daughter said.

One of her friends packed grid paper in case she got Minecraft DTs.

Twelve is the perfect age for such an immersive off-the-grid experience. It may be the first time in their conscious lives that they don't have a tech device nearby for four consecutive days. They are part of that first cohort who won't remember a time before ubiquitous handheld screens. They were toddlers when YouTube was born. Google, only four years older than them, has been their constant guide.

Removing them from their hyper-connected, screen-saturated environments offered some of the most significant lessons of the year.

They immediately noticed the loss of instant access to information.

"If you wanted to know how to do something, you had to look it up in the field guide or ask a teacher," my daughter said. "You couldn't just search it."

It's not surprising how often questions strike a sixth-grader. During a class outside, a student wondered what the most common rock in Missouri was. No phone to find an answer. On the bus, a student wanted to solve a Rubik's Cube. She couldn't Google the solution. They couldn't even check the time or set an alarm without resorting to anachronisms like watches and alarm clocks.

In addition to finding new ways to access information and solve problems, they had to manage new ways to communicate.

"We couldn't contact our friends on the other teams (through texting)," my daughter said. If you needed to talk to someone, you had to do it face-to-face. Imagine that.

The hardest part for her was being unable to document the experience through the camera she usually carries 24/7.

"There were lots of things I wasn't able to take pictures of," she said. That was annoying. After all, this is the pics-or-it-didn't-happen generation.

Eventually, the impulse to constantly document lessened, and the moment took on its own value. The camaraderie was vital.

"I coped because I had 12 of my friends with me in a cabin," she said.

The absence of their phones and tablets proved less of a distraction at night, which is when most school children retreat into their digital cocoons.

"I got closer to people I wouldn't have talked to otherwise," she said.

Even if the students didn't think about that overtly, at some level, the experience reinforced the importance of human connection.

But it wasn't just the children who broke away from their tech dependence. As parents, we have become accustomed to the digital tether. Sending your child away without any way to check in on them runs counter to the prevailing parenting norms.

Becky Lopanec's daughter, Julia, also went on the trip. Lopanec said she may have missed her daughter's phone as much Julia did.

"I spent the week sending her random text messages knowing that her phone was off and at home," she said. Lopanec sent a series of texts during the next four days: "How's the bus ride?" "Who's in your cabin?" "Sleep tight." "I'm leaving the light on in your room because it makes me think you are here." "Don't forget to brush your teeth," and so on. She even sent her pictures of the dogs.

"It's how I coped with her first overnight," Lopanec said.

My own phone was a reminder of how terribly I missed my girl. I caught myself rereading our old text conversations while she was gone. They are heavily emoji'd.

My daughter had a sentimental reunion with her sky blue iPhone upon her return.

She cradled her phone in her hand like a delicate baby bird when she first saw it in her bedroom.

"Wifi," she sighed. "It's so beautiful."

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.

Summer camp goes wild: Kids find fun at animal shelters

By SUE MANNING
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Children who love to dance, act or play sports have summer camps specialized just for them. But many parents don't realize that kids who are passionate about pets can have the same immersive experience.

Thousands of youngsters ages 6 to 17 will attend day camps this summer at hundreds of animal shelters across the country. The urge to nurture animals starts early — especially with pets becoming key parts of families — giving rise to the popularity of programs that offer budding veterinarians and other young animal lovers a way to help dogs and cats and learn the responsibilities of owning pets.

"This is absolutely one of the fastest growing programs at the shelter," said Christen Benson, executive director of the Humane Society of Sarasota County, about 50 miles south of Tampa, Florida.

But, she said, the first question from parents often is: "What are they going to do, clean the kennels?"

"These camps aren't about getting free volunteers in to scrub cages," said Michelle Ramos, director of education for the Arizona Animal Welfare League & SPCA in Phoenix.

They are designed to introduce children to animals and show them how the creatures fit into their world, Ramos said. Campers learn to feed, exercise, wash, train and care for dogs and cats. In some camps, older youths can watch a surgery, help with minor stitches and monitor an animal patient to test out careers in the field.

Caroline Golon of Columbus, Ohio, is building a national database of camps on crayonsand-



AP Photo/Chris Carlson

In this March 16 photo, Mikayla McCarthy, 15, left, and Ashley Carter, 14, look at a red-tailed boa constrictor during the Arizona Animal Welfare League & SPCA spring kids camp in Phoenix. Thousands of youngsters from 6 to 17 will attend similar summer camps this year at hundreds of animal shelters across the country.

collars.com, her national blog for pets and kids. So far, she's found over 250 shelters with camp offerings.

"Many parents don't know it's an option for their animal-loving kids, and some of the shelters have truly incredible programs," Golon said.

Sisters Taryn and Kayla Alessandrino, 23 and 26, respectively, went to camp in Phoenix over a decade ago when the programs were just getting started. Taryn Alessandrino has since gotten her veterinary technician license and returns to the shelter each summer to help with classes. Kayla Alessandrino is in her last year of veterinary school in Scotland, and her sister awaits the day

they can set up a practice.

"I thought I wanted to be a vet, too," Taryn Alessandrino said. "One day, we got to go in where they were doing spay and neuter surgeries, and I instantly realized that was not something I could do."

She enjoys taking temperatures, measuring heart rates or giving shots, so she became a vet tech.

"Since I was able to walk, I wanted to be around animals. They are great, so calming and can cheer you up if you are having a bad day. They are therapeutic," said Alessandrino, who has five cats, three dogs, a leopard gecko and a bearded dragon at home.

At the Arizona Animal Welfare League & SPCA, campers get to meet exotic animals at the shelter's sanctuary. Guapo, a 5-foot iguana, is the most popular, Ramos said.

In Florida, the Humane Society of Sarasota County launched its camp three years ago to give children ages 7 to 12 a chance to bond with animals, play animal-themed games, make animal-themed crafts and hear from speakers.

When camps start, about half the kids have pets at home, said Benson of the shelter. When it's over, about two-thirds of the participants own animals, because their families have adopted furry friends.

OUT OF THE VAULT

WWII bomber crashes kill 14 near Pendleton, Boise

During World War II, Pendleton was a training site for bomber crews supporting the war effort in the South Pacific. A pair of crashes killed 14 men and injured two more on March 16, 1942, when B-17 Flying Fortress bombers went down between Pendleton and Boise, Idaho, during separate routine night training exercises from the Pendleton air base. A second crash happened just 10 days later, but all 10 crewmen parachuted to safety.

One of the B-17s crashed three miles southwest of Gowen Field, near Boise, at approximately 2:30 a.m. on March 16. Four men were killed in the crash, and two men were seriously injured. One of the flyers killed in the crash was 2nd



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

Lt. Charles Hosford III, of Butler, Pennsylvania, the pilot of the bomber. The 25-year-old Hosford had been married just a month before in the Pendleton base's chapel to Helen Pruitt of Pendleton, and celebrated his birthday the day before the crash took his life.

The second bomber crashed 20 miles south of Pendleton in the Blue Mountains, and salvage crews struggled through the snow to recover the wreckage and the bodies of the 10 crew members, who all perished instantly in the

crash. The wreckage was strewn over a mile-wide area after the plane hit one ridge and then caromed across the canyon to the other side. Only parts of the tail and one wing were found intact.

A third Flying Fortress crashed shortly after takeoff on March 26, landing a half mile from the home of Jack Shafer, who owned a ranch six miles northeast of Pendleton, near Adams. Shafer first caught sight of the plane traveling at about 5,000 feet with smoke trailing from its motors. A few moments later the 10-man crew bailed out and parachuted safely to the ground. The plane then went into a left spiral and crashed to earth "like a ball of flame," according to Shafer, strewing wreckage over a half-mile area. The first

Army men to reach the crash site were six African American privates from an infantry division stationed at Walla Walla, who were en route to Walla Walla from Pendleton when the crash occurred. They took charge of the scene and stood guard duty until the crash crews could arrive from Pendleton Field.

On a lighter note, one of the sergeants involved in the March 26 crash complained, "With all that territory to land in, I had to light on a barbed wire fence and tear my pants."

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Driver gets ticket for driving with the 'Most Interesting Man' in carpool lane

FIFE, Wash. (AP) — A Washington State Patrol trooper says it's by far the best carpool scam he's seen, but it didn't work.

As KOMO-TV put it, "Troopers don't always stop people in the HOV lanes, but when they do, they prefer 'dos' passengers."

A motorcycle trooper parked along Interstate 5 near Tacoma on Monday afternoon spotted a driver and a rather unusual "passenger" pass by him in the carpool lane. When the trooper stopped the car, he discovered the "passenger" was a cardboard cutout of the actor who portrays "The Most Interesting Man in the World" in Dos Equis beer ads.

The driver's response? "He's my best friend."

The Most Interesting Man was not confiscated, but the driver was told not to use him again.

Channeling the cardboard cutout, the State Patrol tweeted: "I don't always violate the HOV lane law ... but when I do, I get a \$124 ticket."

Police track suspect through Snapchat

FAIRFIELD, Maine (AP) — A Maine man who'd been wanted by police for several weeks made a couple of



AP Photo/Washington State Patrol, Trooper Tony Brock

This Monday photo shows a cardboard cutout of the "The Most Interesting Man In The World," otherwise known as actor Jonathan Goldsmith, of Dos Equis beer TV commercial fame, strapped to the passenger seat of a driver who tried to use the image to qualify to drive the carpool lane on Interstate 5 near Fife, Wash.

critical mistakes that led to his capture — he sent out social media messages pinpointing his location.

The Somerset County Sheriff's Office had been looking for Christopher Wallace, of Fairfield, in connection with a burglary in January.

Police tell the *Morning Sentinel* that on Sunday night they received tips from people who said Wallace had posted on Snapchat that he had returned to his Fairfield home.

So, police went to the house. While they were searching with permission of the resident, they were tipped off that Wallace had posted a new Snapchat

message saying police were in the house looking for him and he was hiding in a cabinet. He was found in the cabinet.

Woman drops off old mortar round at Texas recycling site

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (AP) — A woman recycling some items she found on her South Texas property included what turned out to be a piece of old military explosives.

Corpus Christi police say a bomb squad was dispatched and the mortar round was safely destroyed. Nobody was hurt. Police say the 62-year-old

woman apparently did not know that the item she picked up and transported Monday was an old mortar round. Police do not believe the woman knew the piece was potentially explosive.

She told authorities that she found the item while cleaning her property in Sandia, about 30 miles northwest of Corpus Christi.

Employees at the recycling center recognized the mortar round, cleared out the place and called bomb experts.

Jury convicts man of attacking woman with his cane

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A Memphis man has been convicted of attacking a woman with his cane because his cigarette lighter was missing.

The Shelby County District Attorney's Office says a jury convicted 57-year-old James Shettles of aggravated assault on Tuesday after a two-day trial.

Witnesses said Shettles confronted the woman in June 2013, angrily accusing her son of taking his lighter. The woman testified that he threatened to blow her head off if he didn't get it back.

Shettles swung his cane at her, but the woman was able to block it with her hand. He then went into his home and retrieved what looked like a handgun and threatened to kill her.

Police later determined that it was a toy cap gun.