

PARENTS TALK BACK

Real life lessons from a fake town

My child’s CEO aspirations were quashed after just a day of managing fake employees.

He is one of 12,000 St. Louis-area students who will get a dose of reality this year at BizTown: one of the most valuable elementary school field trip experiences I’ve encountered as a parent.

It’s offered by Junior Achievement (J.A.), a nonprofit organization with 114 chapters across the U.S., which aims to educate students about entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial literacy. The St. Louis chapter, in addition to about 30 others nationwide, has a mock mini-city in which students spend the day learning how the “real world” works.

Each of the fifth-graders in our school applies for a job in one of BizTown’s 17 businesses. They spend the day running the town — working, making financial decisions, paying taxes, shopping and running errands.

Imagine my delight when my youngest chose to work as CEO of MasterCard. (Businesses that sponsor the hands-on learning center are named in the town.) Perhaps this will be the first of several CEO positions, I said to him, hoping to plant a seed.

He headed to school in a pressed suit and tie, ready to conquer the world.

He came back a broken man.

“Oh my God, I don’t want to be an adult,” he said.

He ranted about his day as took off his suit jacket and loosened his striped tie.

“First of all, there was a guy who couldn’t do his work,” he started. “Then, I had to sign my name about a hundred times. There was a problem with the payroll tax. I had to update the system five times before I could get it to work. And then I had to send the bill to the printer, and they denied it. Two times! Only one person paid their taxes on time. I had to work a double shift on a station I didn’t even know how to do. And some people took way too long on their breaks.”

Worn out and weary, he kicked off his dress shoes and said: “Everything hurts.”

To anyone who has managed employees, his experience has the ring of truth to it.

Lori Jacob, president of J.A. of Greater St. Louis, said the great thing about the BizTown experience is that it gives students a chance to realize the relevance of what they are learning in school. Participating schools complete 20 hours of a financial literacy curriculum, and the trip to BizTown is the capstone experience. It costs schools about \$15 per pupil, which is roughly half the actual cost of the program. Business sponsors subsidize the programming.

The program is so popular that a school that missed its day due to a snowstorm offered to come back once the students had been dismissed for summer. And they did. Another school made up a missed day on a Saturday.

Jacob said J.A. would love to accommodate more students, but their BizTown is booked throughout the year. J.A. would need support from business sponsors to build another location to serve more students.

For any business that has bemoaned the lack of a qualified workforce, here’s a chance to invest in teaching students skills that are critical to workplace success. Giving students a chance to run a business and manage their peers as employees is an eye-opening experience at this age.

It leaves an impression.

I asked my daughter what she remembered from her class’ trip there two years ago. To my chagrin, she had applied to be the reporter at the radio station. (Please consider a more reliable and profitable line of work, my child.)

“I learned that some people are bossy,” she said. “And some people can’t do math.”

The CEO of the radio station where she was working ordered 500 pieces of coal instead of five due to a calculation error.

Another pearl of wisdom: “You shouldn’t trust some people with a microphone.”

That sounds about right.

She admitted that being a reporter was the best job in BizTown because “you can leave the radio station at any time to do whatever. You have a pass to do that.”

It’s hard to argue with that.

In their fake jobs, the students learned a few truths about the way the world works.

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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.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

COFFEE BREAK

No empty nest

Young women live with mom and dad like it’s 1940

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL
AP Business Writer

Young women are living with their parents or relatives at a rate not seen since 1940 as more millennial women put off marriage, attend college and face high living expenses.

A Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data found that 36.4 percent of women between the ages 18 and 34 lived with parents or relatives in 2014, the most since at least 1940, when 36.2 percent lived with family.

It is a very different world for women now, though, despite the “return to the past, statistically speaking,” says Richard Fry, a senior economist at Pew.

Fry says young women are staying home now because they are half as likely to be married as they were in 1940 and much more likely to be college-educated. Economic forces such as increasing student debt, higher living costs and economic uncertainty are also playing a role.

Casey Ballard, 29, was living in Portland, Oregon, but rent ate up roughly two-thirds of her paycheck and she was ready for a career change. A September move back with family in California allowed her to try out teaching as a substitute, and now she plans to pursue teaching full-time.

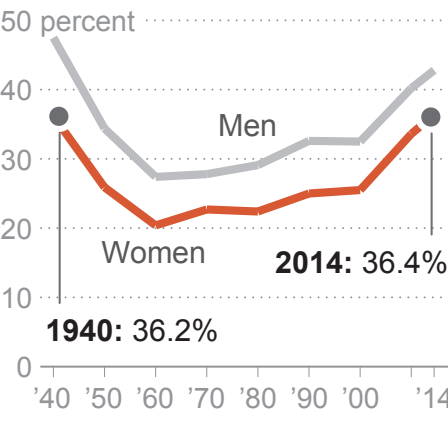
“There was that element of frustration and feeling like a failure,” she says about returning home. “But then the logical side of me kicked in and said, ‘It’s just fiscally responsible.’”

Young men have historically lived with parents at higher rates than young women, and similar economic and cultural forces are keeping an increasing number of men at home too in recent years. But the rate young men are staying home with their parents and relatives, 42.8 percent, remains below the 47.5 percent level for men in 1940.

The percentage of young men and women

Living with family

Young women ages 18 to 34 are living with their parents or relatives at a rate not seen since the 1940s.



SOURCES: Pew Research Center; Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

living with family fell after the 1940s as more women joined the workforce, the overall workforce expanded, and marriage rates increased.

But while marriage was once the life event that triggered a move out of the family home, it is now coming later with each generation, if it comes at all. The median age of marriage for women is now 27, up from 21.5 in 1940. For men, it is 29.3, up from 24.3 in 1940.

Young women and men began staying home or returning there at a more rapid rate after 2000, a trend that sharply increased with the economic uncertainty brought on

OUT OF THE VAULT

Hermiston man drills ‘breathing’ well

A Hermiston man drilling a water well on his property in 1965 ended up with nothing but air — and a hole that inhaled or exhaled depending on the weather.

Carol Northrop, who owned a home and steel fabrication shop on the Hermiston-McNary Highway north of Hermiston, decided to drill a well on his property on October 24, 1965, using a 1928 engine mounted on a 1929 truck he built himself. His bit got stuck in bedrock about 87 feet down, so he decided to blast through the obstruction. After extricating his bit with some difficulty, Northrop lowered 10 sticks of dynamite and filled the hole with water, to direct the force of the blast downward.

Northrop set off the dynamite



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

and stood by with a camera. He was expecting the water to shoot 30 feet or more into the air. Instead, water lifted less than a foot from the top of the pipe, and the rest disappeared

down the hole.

On Oct. 25, the well began to emit air with a strong sulfur odor. Two nights later the well inhaled all night. The next day the well was dormant, but resumed inhaling for 12 hours that night. It blew the next morning and then all was quiet. There was no pattern to its breathing.

Northrup was stumped, as was a friend, a former oil well driller and civil engineer. But another man said the phenomenon is not uncommon in Idaho, and that the hole was responding to barometric pressure, “blowing” during times of low pressure and “sucking” during high pressure events.

“Breathing wells” can occur when connected voids exist beneath the surface of the soil. In the Snake River Valley near Pocatello, where breathing wells are more common, an excavation in the 1930s revealed that boulders 6 inches to 2 feet in diameter were found underlying the gravel and cobble layer deposited from the Portneuf River and Utah’s Pleistocene Lake Bonneville. Some of the

voids between the boulders were 5-6 inches across.

Northrop wasn’t sure what to do with his well, though he did attach a can to the top of the well Halloween night, scaring trick-or-treaters with the haunting whistle. He briefly considered lowering a camera into the well for flash photos, with a view to opening up any big hole he found to the public for a fee. In the end he decided to try blasting the bedrock again, hoping to find the elusive water table and fill in the voids at the same time.

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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

This Christmas, city won’t stand for ‘Charlie Brown’ tree

READING, Pa. (AP) — A year after its scraggly “Charlie Brown” Christmas tree caused an uproar, a Pennsylvania city is putting up a more traditional tannenbaum this holiday season.

The official Christmas tree in Reading will be a pleasingly plump, 25-foot-tall white fir. The tree was hoisted into place on Tuesday.

Last year’s tree was a sad-looking Norway spruce that drew immediate comparisons to the sparse sapling in “A Charlie Brown Christmas.”

Some demanded a replacement, but instead, Reading wrapped a blue blanket around its base and adorned it with a single red ball to match the puny pine in the beloved TV special.

This year, city officials say they wanted to put their best foot forward. A tree-lighting ceremony will be held later this month.

Officer who sent flowers to woman she pulled over praised

SOMERVILLE, Mass. (AP) — A Massachusetts police officer who sent flowers to a woman she pulled over for speeding has received a commendation.

Somerville Officer Ashley Catatao on Tuesday received a Beyond the Call of Duty Award from Chief David Fallon for her empathy and professionalism during the Nov. 4 traffic stop.

Catatao pulled over a vehicle



AP Photo/Michael Rubinkam

In this Dec. 12, 2014 file photo City Councilman Jeff Waltman photographs the city’s official Christmas tree in Reading, Pa. A year after its scraggly “Charlie Brown” Christmas tree caused an uproar,the city is putting up a more traditional tannenbaum this holiday season.

driving 40 miles per hour in the 30 mph zone, intending to issue a warning.

She noticed the driver was crying and visibly upset. The Winchester woman explained that she just found out her mother was being placed in hospice end-of-life care.

Catatao says she sent the flowers because she has a mother, is a mother, and never wants to forget that the drivers she pulls over are “real people with real things happening in their lives.”

Dog that ate BBQ skewer wins award for unusual claim

PRINCETON, W.Va. (AP) — A dog that ate a barbecue skewer has won a national competition for most unusual pet insurance claim.

The Bluefield Daily Telegraph reports that the 5-year-old Boxer named Curtis beat out 11 other pets in online voting for Nationwide’s Hambone Award, named in honor of another dog

that ate a ham while waiting to be rescued from a refrigerator.

Valerie Mould of Princeton says Curtis ate the skewer during her daughter’s birthday party in 2014. Curtis was taken to Virginia Tech’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital, but doctors couldn’t find the skewer. Curtis was sent home, but returned to Blacksburg a few months later. This time, veterinarians found the skewer when they operated to remove a baseball-sized mass between the dog’s stomach and pancreas.

Curtis is now doing fine.

Legally blind barber awarded \$100k for wrongful termination

BOSTON (AP) — A legally blind barber has been awarded \$100,000 by a Massachusetts commission against discrimination after it says he was wrongly fired.

The Boston Herald reports Joel Nixon had been working for Tony’s Barber Shop in Norton for a year before his boss discovered his condition.

The 29-year-old has retinitis pigmentosa, a condition affecting his peripheral vision and making it hard for him to see at night, the Herald reports. He’s been declared legally blind by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.

Nixon says barber shop owner Tony Morales fired him in 2012 after he tripped a couple of times while in the shop.

The state awarded Nixon \$75,000 in lost wages and \$25,000 for emotional distress in a Friday decision.

Morales disputes Nixon’s account and plans to appeal.