

PARENTS TALK BACK

Thankful for the strange and insignificant things

I used to prompt my relatives to say what they were thankful for before the Thanksgiving turkey was carved.

Holding the bird hostage for some words of gratitude really embodies the holiday spirit, doesn't it? Understandably, the answers became repetitive by the time we made it around the room. Surprise: Everyone is thankful for family, food, good health, friends and shelter.

Those are the things for which we cannot be thankful enough — especially when the news is filled with images of refugee families fleeing war and persecution. We should find a moment every day of our lives to feel blessed for having our physical and emotional needs met. Along with finding a sense of purpose, these are fundamental to our understanding of a good life.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

A recent *New York Times* op-ed by Arthur C. Brooks broke down the science of gratitude and why it makes us happier. In it, he suggested we practice gratefulness for "useless" things, as well. It's easy to recognize the Big Blessings, but the truly happy people find ways to be grateful for the insignificant and inconsequential.

When times seem darkest, it might be even more important to recognize and appreciate the little things. These are the things that can get lost in the midst of larger despair.

I took his advice to heart. Instead of trying to extort gratitude at a contrived moment, I asked my children and husband to share the small, weird things they appreciate in their lives. Their answers were amusing, but also revealed something deeper about what they value.

My 10-year-old son said he was thankful for gravity because "we would be on the ceiling right now without it, and it would be really uncomfortable." He mentioned planet Earth, heaters, comforters and a cozy bed. Clearly, a child who appreciates comfort.

He's also grateful for batteries — the lifeblood to his video games — and for the comics, specifically "Pearls Before Swine" and "Mark Trail." That the daily newspaper is a morning ritual for him is a large joy for me.

His 13-year-old sister rattled off a surprisingly long list, considering that she has that teenage air of chronic dissatisfaction about her so often.

She mentioned ponytail holders, the band Twenty One Pilots, phone chargers, digital clocks, Sharpies that are better for drawing than regular markers, gelatin-free marshmallows and the unicorn emoji. "It's aesthetically pleasing," she explained. I know she's also rather fond of snarky Internet memes.

She added that she's grateful for words in the English language that sound funny, like "disgruntled." To hear her include words among the things she's grateful for provoked an even greater sense of gratitude in me.

I didn't think my husband of 15 years would note anything surprising to me, since we know one another pretty well by this point.

I could have guessed that imported loose tea and turntables (for his hundreds of LPs) would be on his list. But I didn't expect to hear that he was grateful for credit card machines at the gas pump and online banking. I'm starting to see the genetic connection to our child who appreciates convenience.

He added that he's at the age where he's thankful for "oldies" radio station, because they play songs from the '70s — the music of his youth.

Good thing I'm much younger, I thought. (Not that much.)

My own list may have also been predictable. I'm grateful for GPS apps, so I'm lost less often. I appreciate that yoga pants have become acceptable to wear just about anywhere.

The mild fall temperatures and vibrant fall colors make me unreasonably happy.

I also have a fondness for emojis, the hearts and hearts-as-eyes smiley face, in particular. They add an element of warmth to the cold brevity of shorthand communication.

Speaking of phones, I'm grateful for grandfather clauses on unlimited data plans.

I'd be lying if I left off my hometown Cardinals.

Every day, I'm grateful for the prose of the writers I've read.

Whenever I sit down to write, I'm infinitely grateful for readers.

I realized from the commonalities in our lists that convenience is time saved. We appreciate technology that aids connection and communication.

We need music, art, words, entertainment to feel fully engaged.

Sometime in the next few weeks, find a moment to ask yourself and your loved ones about the unconventional things you're all grateful for. See if you learn anything new about each other.

You might find that the small things aren't so inconsequential after all.

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.



AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi

Mison Sere smiles after winning the 2015 edition of the Mr. Ugly competition, in Harare, Nov. 21. Sere controversially dethroned former Mr. Ugly William Masvinu to scoop the top prize of \$500 in a contest marked by allegations of cheating.



AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi, File

Zimbabwe's three-time Mr. Ugly winner William Masvinu poses for a photo, Nov. 13, in Harare. Pageant judges have crowned a new winner, upsetting supporters of the crowd favorite and prompting rioting at the event.

'Mister Ugly' contest upset leads to rioting by supporters

By FARAI MUTSAKA
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Pageant judges have crowned a new winner of Zimbabwe's 4th annual "Mister Ugly" contest, upsetting supporters of the crowd favorite who called the winner too handsome and prompting rioting at the event.

Judges on Saturday chose 42-year-old Mison Sere, citing his numerous missing front teeth and a wide range of grotesque facial expressions, over William Masvinu, who had held the title since 2012.

Masvinu and his supporters mobbed the judges upon hearing their decision, claiming that Sere was "too handsome" to win and his ugliness wasn't natural since it was based on missing teeth.

"I am naturally ugly. He is not. He is ugly only when he opens his mouth," maintained Masvinu, gesturing at his rival.

"Do we have to lose our teeth to win? This is cheating," shouted another contestant, Patrick Mupereki. While no one was injured, there was a great deal of pushing and shoving as



AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi

Contestants stand on stage, during the 2015 edition of the Mr. Ugly competition in Harare, Nov. 21.

the results were announced and insults were hurled at the judges.

Beauty pageants are popular in this southern African country and even though they are typically for women, scandal is not unusual. Earlier this year, Miss Zimbabwe winner Emily Kachote faced a backlash on social media, with Zimbabweans calling her ugly and undeserving of the crown.

She was later forced to step down when just two weeks into her reign, images surfaced of

her posing nude — which incidentally also brought down her predecessor.

Sere dismissed the critics as just "sore losers" as he pocketed the \$500 in winnings.

"They should just accept that I am uglier than them," he said. "I hope to get a TV contract. I already moved around schools performing and showcasing my ugliness so this is a chance to make it on TV."

The complaints of Masvinu

and the other contestants may have a degree of validity. Organizers had previously announced that disabilities or enhancements would not be accepted in the competition which should focus on "natural ugliness."

Pageant organizer David Machowa originally told the Associated Press that he began the contest to remove the stigma of ugliness. "Looks are God given. We should all be proud of who we are."

The pageant involved three rounds of modelling, with individual and group struts down a catwalk of a Harare nightclub.

"Sere made tremendous effort to enhance his ugliness by pulling facial stunts," said judge Abigail Mataranyika, a university student. "Masvinu thought he is so ugly that he didn't need to try hard. That cost him the crown."

This year's competition attracted a record number of 36 entries, compared to just five in 2012 when Masvinu began his winning streak. The competition was suspended in 2014 due to a lack of sponsorship, but this year the owners of a string of Harare nightclubs donated \$1,000.

OUT OF THE VAULT

McKay Reservoir yields ancient rhino bones

Pendleton barber Ray Spangle discovered the rear leg bones of an aquatic rhinoceros while fishing the banks of Pendleton's McKay Reservoir on two separate occasions in 1947. In October 1949 he joined in an archaeological dig with University of Oregon scientists to find more of the skeleton.

Thirty million years ago, Umatilla County was covered in swamps and marshes. Discovery of the rhino remains and those of a deer-like animal added to what little scientists knew about the area's geologic and ecologic prehistory at the time. The rear leg bones of the rhinoceros were



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

large, about 18 inches long, and weighed over 15 pounds in their fossilized state.

Spangle attributed his find to his hobby as an amateur geologist, saying the bones were the same color as the rocks along the shoreline but that he knew they were fossilized bones by their shape.

Aided by Spangle, his son Charles and *East Oregonian* reporter George Skorney,

University of Oregon paleontologist Sam Sargent and Arnold Shotwell, curator of the university's museum of natural history, unearthed six large leg bones, five complete teeth of at least two different animals, two fragmental tusks and the bones of several small animals in the same area where Spangle's rhino was found.

After the search was completed, Sargent and Shotwell conjectured that the finds may not necessarily have been from the same water-laid volcanic ash formation as Spangle's rhino and deer, possibly because the bones were found in gravels exposed by erosion of the dam's

waters rising and falling. While the rhinoceros lived some 30 million years ago, bones of a prehistoric horse and a saber-tooth cat found in the same general area were laid down during the last Ice Age, 1-2 million years ago.

Sargent and Shotwell urged people who find fossilized bones to leave the site intact and contact scientists who can remove the finds properly.

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

Man ejected from football game sends police 240 doughnuts

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A California man sent 20 dozen coconut doughnuts to police officers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as payback for getting kicked out of a Badger football game.

The man traveled from Los Angeles to see the Badgers play Northwestern at Camp Randall Stadium on Saturday. He was assigned a seat in the student section away from his friends, so when he tried to join his friends, officers threw him out, UW-Madison police spokesman Marc Lovicott said Tuesday.

Come Monday, 240 coconut doughnuts mysteriously appeared at police headquarters. The delivery driver gave officers the man's name and Lovicott tracked down an email address and began corresponding with him.

"This was meant as a harmless way to both show general gratitude for the job you do (which is awesome) but slight disdain for my treatment Saturday (which was not so awesome)," the man wrote, according to Lovicott. "Donuts (sic) are awesome, but coconut donuts are not so awesome."

Lovicott declined to release the man's identity because he

wasn't arrested and the agency wanted to respect his wishes to remain anonymous. The man refused to give his name to The Associated Press.

It wasn't clear exactly what transpired between the man and the officers at the game.

Lovicott said police tend to be very strict in the student section. Asked if the man was drunk, Lovicott answered by saying he wasn't belligerent and was respectful, calling the incident an "unfortunate misunderstanding."

"This was a teachable moment," Lovicott said. "If we knew more about his circumstances, we would have done things differently to get him with his group."

Lovicott didn't immediately respond to an open records request for the man's name and copies of the emails.

As for the doughnuts, police donated them to the Salvation Army.

Teen misses turn, accidentally runs full marathon

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A Pennsylvania teenager's family says he accidentally ran all 26.2 miles of the Philadelphia Marathon because he missed a turn on his half-marathon course.

WPVI-TV reports Evan Megoulas runs on his high

school's cross country team in Palmyra, 80 miles west of Philadelphia. He set out Sunday to run the 13.1-mile half-marathon. His family was waiting for him at the finish line but became concerned when he didn't show up.

They say they gave police a photo of Evan, and officers tracked him down in the Manayunk section of the city. He felt good despite missing his turn and wanted to keep running.

Evan's brother says after he completed the marathon, officers wanted a picture with him.

His time was 5:23:11.

Condo board wants pet DNA to track down poop

DESTIN, Fla. (AP) — Some Florida condo owners are steaming after their homeowners association asked them to submit their dog's DNA in order to fine owners who don't pick up after their pets.

Some Harbor Landing residents said they feel it's an invasion of privacy. A letter sent last week asked residents to register their dogs and cats with the association through a DNA test, citing a significant increase in the amount of animal feces found throughout the property recently, including inside the elevators.

"The DNA sample will then be sent off to a lab for testing and recording. This will then allow for the Association to track down the owner of the pet waste and stop the problems," the letter stated.

Pet owners would have to pay for the DNA test, registration fee and any potential cleanup fees.

Condo officials say it's a voluntary process but some residents fear they will be evicted or asked to leave.

"I think the consensus is that we are trying to be reasonable, cooperative, but this just rubs the dog owners the wrong way," one resident told the *News Herald* but declined to use their name for fear of retaliation. "It feels invasive, over-reaching, and was enacted by a board who last month tried to outlaw smoking on your own private deck."

Condo officials said the measure is only meant to help keep the property clean.

"Between the two buildings here at Harbor Landing we have a total of 33 dogs," said Maintenance Supervisor Mike Russell. "We just can't catch the people that are not picking up behind their dogs, so the board chose to go with DNA testing."

Joe Sanderson, president of the Harbor Landing association, said the process is actually common among similar groups and, once enacted, often leads to a feces-free environment.