

PARENTS TALK BACK

Trump inspires selfies with Muslims

At first I thought it was a joke. Like the satirical Funny or Die video “Muslim-Meet,” which offers “a surefire way to cure your Islamophobia.” That video spoofs ignorant Americans being introduced to a random Muslim American and discovering their commonalities, like living in an apartment, loving soup and watching Netflix, “just like me.”

The conceit of the two-minute video is humanizing a regular human to those who would believe that Muslims have retractable horns growing from their heads. It makes us laugh because the notion is so obvious, it’s silly.

Well, perhaps not so obvious.

Scott McNorton, 35, an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, was so fed up with the anti-Muslim bigotry he heard that he felt motivated to do something to counter it. He didn’t have any Muslim friends, nor did he know much about Islam. He grew up in Waynesboro, Virginia, about three hours south of D.C., where he said a lot of people were just like him: white and middle class.

Shortly before Christmas, he was sitting in the university’s student center and saw a Muslim student wearing hijab walking across the room. He approached her and asked if she would mind taking a selfie with him.

Understandably, she was a little puzzled by the request from a stranger. She’s a student, not a campus attraction, after all. He explained to her that he wanted to post pictures of himself with Muslims to help educate others who have never met a Muslim. This was his attempt to promote tolerance through exposure.

“Oh yes, that would be awesome,” she replied, gave him a high five and thanked him for the selfie.

Thus began #SelfiesWithMuslims. At first he would post the images on his own Facebook page, beginning each status with “One day a Christian man meets …” and briefly describe the encounter and Muslim he met. He has since created a separate page, which has garnered thousands of likes from around the world.

In an interview with a local paper, he said he wants people to see that Muslims enjoy being outdoors, playing sports, watching Netflix, playing video games and hanging out with friends. One of the women from his selfie encounters concurred, adding that she likes to eat bagels with Nutella, too.

It would seem satirical if McNorton wasn’t so genuinely earnest and if the Muslims he approached weren’t so touched and thankful for his gesture. The project has led him to visit local mosques and get to know a community he knew nothing about before.

Ironically, the social media project was inspired by GOP presidential hopeful Donald Trump. After McNorton heard his call for ban on Muslims entering America, a proposal denounced by the majority of Republican officials and candidates, he could not stay silent.

“I grew up in a family that was very high on morals and values and respect,” he said. “It is ridiculous that someone has to stand up and say something. But it’s not about being a Catholic, like me, or a Muslim. It’s about being a decent human being to another person.”

Imagine how bizarre #SelfiesWithaJew or #SelfiesWithaChristian or #SelfiesWithanAgnosticWhoStillLikesTo CelebrateChristmas might sound.

McNorton’s efforts seem less ridiculous given the backdrop. He grew up in the same county as Riverheads High School, where a teacher recently drew national attention and local fury for giving geography students a lesson that included information on Islam and Arabic calligraphy. And Bruce Hagen, the mayor of Superior, Wisconsin, where McNorton now lives, has come under fire for a recent Facebook comment. Under a picture of Michelle Obama, Hagen wrote: “Unbelievable! She and her Muslim partner have destroyed the fabric of democracy that was so very hard fought for.”

Obama has repeatedly said he is a Christian. Hagen has since apologized and accepted an invitation from the Muslims in his community to meet them for a meal at their mosque.

McNorton said he wants his own two children to learn the same values his mother taught him.

“I want them to see that it’s OK to put yourself out there. It’s OK to learn from others. It’s OK to educate others.”

He’s been overwhelmed by the hugs, smiles and encouragement he’s received from random Muslims he’s met. One of them, Ahmed Maamoun, is an assistant professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He met McNorton at a recent Friday prayer service.

“Thank you for what you are doing for us,” Maamoun said to him, gladly posing for a group selfie.

McNorton says that while the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, he’s gotten a few negative messages. Some people are upset by his wanting to portray Muslims as normal people. One person said he hopes McNorton “gets taken out” for what he’s doing.

“People want to scare me,” he said. “I’m not scared.”

We’ve gotten to the point where some Americans are so upset by the message that Muslims are normal people that they would wish death upon that messenger.

Sometimes it’s difficult to distinguish reality from satire.

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Poll: Most have stayed friends with an ex

By EMILY SWANSON
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans think making a clean break with an ex helps speed the healing process after a breakup, according to a new Associated Press-WE tv poll. But not all of them are listening to their own advice.

Six in 10 think cutting off contact with an ex is very helpful for getting over a breakup, and about the same percentage say it’s usually not worth it to try to stay friends with an ex.

But their actions often tell a different story.

Just over half of those who have ever experienced a breakup say they’ve personally stayed friends with an ex. Even among those who say they don’t think it’s usually worth it, 38 percent have remained friends with at least one former flame.

Over 4 in 10 have broken up with someone only to get back together again, and more than a third have slept with an ex. Thirteen percent have continued living with someone they broke up with for financial reasons, and the same percentage have gone on vacation or spent a holiday with their ex.

Many also find themselves doing things that remind them of their former flame. Four in 10 have visited an ex’s profile on Facebook or other social media. A quarter have sneaked a peak at a social media profile of someone their ex was dating. Young Americans are especially likely to look an ex up on social media. Two-thirds of those between age 18 and 34 have visited the social media profile of an ex, and 4 in 10 have scoped out someone an ex was dating.



John Sleezer/The Kansas City Star via AP, File

In this Feb. 14, 2015 file photo, a couple hug after leaving a lock during “Locking Your Love” to the Old Red Bridge Valentine’s Day event at Minor Park in Kansas City, Mo. The bridge is located between Holmes and Blue River Roads and has become a popular place for couples to leave locks with messages on them.

Forty-five percent of Americans have listened to a song that reminds them of their ex.

Not everyone who tries to remain friends with an ex can make it work. A third have tried unsuccessfully to stay friends post-breakup. And some might be better off cutting the cord. Thirty-two percent say feelings for an ex have prevented them from finding a new relationship.

There are some circumstances when most Americans do agree that it’s worthwhile to stay friends with an ex. More than half think it’s worth it if a former couple have mutual friends, and 9 in 10 think it’s worth it for a couple who have children together.

Among Americans who have been divorced, just 21 percent say they stayed friends with their ex, but another 44

percent say they stayed on speaking terms.

After a breakup, Americans are more likely to turn to family and friends over new flings for help in healing. Nearly two-thirds say support from friends is extremely or very helpful in getting over a breakup, and two-thirds say the same of support from family. Only a quarter think of new relationships as that helpful, and even fewer say casual dating is helpful.

Women are more likely than men to think support from friends and family is helpful, while men are more likely than women to think of new relationships or casual dating helps.

Three-quarters of American think it’s better to wait before getting into a new relationship after a breakup, while about a quarter think it’s not important

to wait. For anyone who does try to stay friendly with an ex, 62 percent say it’s better to wait before trying that, too.

The AP-WE tv Poll of 1,241 adults was conducted ahead of the premier of WE tv’s new show “Ex Isle.” The poll was conducted online Nov. 20-23, 2015, using a sample drawn from GfK’s probability-based KnowledgePanel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Respondents were first selected randomly using telephone or mail survey methods, and later interviewed online. People selected for KnowledgePanel who didn’t otherwise have access to the Internet were provided access at no cost to them.

ODDS & ENDS

Idaho man finds art in back hair

NAMPA, Idaho (AP) — One man’s back hair is another man’s canvas. At least that’s how Mike Wolfe, 35, of Nampa, Idaho, has decided to approach manscaping.

Wolfe tells KTVB-TV that after years of feeling ashamed of his body hair, he asked a friend in 2008 to trim an American flag on his back rather than undergoing hair removal processes like shaving or waxing. Since then, the two meet up several times throughout the year to design a new creation onto Wolfe’s back.

“Pssh, it’s manhandling back hair,” said Wolfe. “It’s disgusting. But it’s funny. You can’t deny it’s funny.”

Tyler Harding, a former graphic artist who has been friends with Wolfe for more than a decade, says it takes about an hour to complete the artistic trim.

And the creations can now be seen on a calendar — called a Calend-hair — available for \$20. Some proceeds will benefit a charity at Wolfe’s church.

Designs are uniquely named, such as Grim Reap-hair for October and M-hair-achi Band for May.

“Everybody always makes fun of the guy with back hair,” Wolfe said. “Well now it’s my turn to shine, right?”

Wolfe’s wife takes some credit for him flaunting his fur. When they went on their first date, Wolfe told her he was hairy. He felt nervous at the time, but she took it in stride.

“Looking back now this might be because of me,” Jamie Wolfe said. “Maybe I shouldn’t have given him so much confidence in his back hair.”

Dog leads police officer to trapped canine companion

ORANGE, Mass. (AP) — It was a scene straight out of an episode of “Lassie.”

Police in western Massachusetts say a dog approached an officer on Tuesday barking frantically and then led the officer across a field and down an icy, 30-foot embankment, where the dog’s canine companion had become entangled in the undergrowth.

Firefighters in Orange used a ladder to free the trapped dog, which was taken to a veterinarian for a checkup.

The two dogs had run off hours earlier when their owner suffered a medical emergency at her home and was taken to the hospital. Police tried to catch the dogs, but they kept running away.

Police said on their Facebook page: “Apparently, any dog in the right circumstances can turn into Lassie.”

Grenade that cleared courthouse was gag gift for new sheriff

BEAVER, Pa. (AP) — A grenade that led authorities to evacuate a county courthouse was a gag gift intended for the newly elected sheriff, authorities said



Mike di Donato/KTVB via AP

Tyler Harding, right, trims a design on Mike Wolfe out of his back hair on Dec. 30 in Nampa, Idaho.

Thursday.

Beaver County Sheriff Tony Guy ordered the evacuation as a precaution Wednesday after the box addressed to him was X-rayed along with other incoming mail.

The novelty gift included a real — though disarmed — World War II grenade mounted on a plaque with a sign reading, “Complaint department. Take a number.” A numbered plastic ticket was attached to the grenade’s pin.

The sheriff said he didn’t recognize the sender’s name.

“When I saw the name on the package, that’s the first time I’d seen the name or heard of the person,” Guy said.

County detectives quickly tracked down the sender, who explained he was simply a fan of Guy’s and wanted to welcome Guy into office with a funny gift.

District Attorney David Lozier said Thursday that the sender won’t be charged with a crime because his intentions were innocent. But Lozier issued a warning to others.

“Just because this is legal does not mean it’s smart,” he said.

The courthouse was evacuated for about 80 minutes Wednesday.

Police get complaint for ‘Forrest Gump’ quote on Facebook

WARWICK, R.I. (AP) — A Rhode Island police department is reviewing its policy on using Facebook after a complaint about a quote from the movie “Forrest Gump” that was included in announcing an arrest.

Warwick police arrested an 18-year-old and a juvenile Sunday on the department’s parking lot on misdemeanor charges that the two were taking hubcaps off a marked police car and trying to steal equipment.

WJAR-TV reports that police posted a mugshot of the older teen on the department’s Facebook page with the quote, “Stupid is as stupid does,” a line from the movie.

The suspect’s brother told the television station that police shouldn’t have called his brother stupid.

The department removed the photo and replaced the quote with “You can’t make this stuff up.”

Police tell WPRO-AM they’re reviewing the policy.

Two-year twins: Babies born Dec. 31 and Jan. 1

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Twins in San Diego are getting some attention because, though born just minutes apart, one has a birthday in 2015 and one in 2016.

Jaelyn Valenica was born New Year’s Eve at 11:59 p.m. Her twin brother, Luis Valencia Jr., arrived at 12:01 a.m. on New Year’s Day.

KGTV-TV reports that the babies were due at the end of January, but doctors at San Diego Kaiser Permanente Zion Medical Center called the mother in because one was in a breech position.

Man auctioning \$1,000-a-month lottery prize

PORTAGE, Mich. (AP) — A bankruptcy trustee is auctioning a lottery ticket that will pay \$1,000 a month — until a 73-year-old southwestern Michigan man dies.

Donald Magett of Portage won the “Cash for Life” game in 1984. But the winnings lately have been going to trustee Tom Richardson to pay Magett’s creditors. It’s the main asset.

Richardson has a judge’s approval to hold an online auction Thursday through www.repocast.com. The opening bid is \$30,000, which means Magett would need to live a few more years for the winner to at least break even.

If the winning bid is higher, the break-even point is even longer. And don’t forget about taxes.

Richardson says he’s been told Magett is in good health. Magett couldn’t be reached for comment Monday. A phone number isn’t listed.