

PARENTS TALK BACK

Single mom fixes pipes, breaks down barriers

The responsibilities we give our children can help them discover talents and abilities they may not otherwise discover.

Ariel Ruff was the go-to child when anything broke in the house — not because she was the likely culprit, but the most likely to fix it. Ruff’s father was a doctor who died when she was 3. Her mother is a professor at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, and legally blind. Ruff, now 26, would fix the dishwasher or washing machine when they malfunctioned.

“I grew up getting satisfaction from watching things work ... something that you’ve put together,” she said. A bright and motivated student, she graduated high school early and started college, expecting to become a nurse. Into her second year, she decided she wanted to pursue her passion.

“I’ve always wanted to be a plumber since I was little,” she said. When Ruff told her mother she wanted to leave nursing school, her mother encouraged her to make a plan and pursue the career she wanted.

Ruff has innate mechanical ability and loves water. She researched her options and enrolled in a trade school, which would count toward the required four-year apprenticeship required to become a journeyman.

“Plumbing is a puzzle,” Ruff explained. You have to know codes and legalities. It takes intelligence and mechanical ability. “I have respect for that,” she said. She graduated summa cum laude from Ranken Technical College and is a senior apprentice with Roto-Rooter.

Roto-Rooter recently named her one of its top national plumbers based on sales volume, number of jobs and performance ratings. She is one of 11 female plumbers in the company, which employs 2,000 plumbers nationwide.

“The fact that she’s also young, petite and female means that she defies three stereotypes about the plumbing trade to exemplify what is possible,” said Paul Abrams, Roto-Rooter corporate director of public relations. The company noted that there is a shortage of plumbers in the growing and lucrative field. They have been using Ruff in a recruiting video to reach women who may not consider it a viable career path.

Women face significant challenges, such as harassment and sexism, in the trade professions. They represent less than 1 percent of the country’s 573,000 pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median salary is near \$50,000 annually.

Ariel says she typically hears some kind of comment about her gender at every new job she goes to, but when customers say something, her male co-workers stand up for her.

“It makes me want to be a better plumber,” she said. She gets a lot of repeat customers, which suggests she’s changed a few minds.

“I’ve had to face adversity,” she said. Some customers will say right away that they are skeptical she can do the work. “I appreciate every single person who gives me a chance to prove assumptions about women in the trades wrong,” she said.

Do people ever notice that she works around water and shares a name with a Disney princess mermaid? “I get that all the time.” “Customers will call their daughters down to meet me,” she said. Ruff introduces herself to her customers’ young daughters and asks if they’ve seen her movies. “It’s loosely based on the story of my life,” she tells them.

She still has to finish her apprenticeship, and plans to take the test to get her journeyman’s license later this year.

She’s also a single mom of a 7-year-old daughter, who tells her friends that her mom can fix anything broken in their homes. A few months ago, her school invited students to dress as their future job. Her daughter wore her mom’s Roto-Rooter uniform and safety goggles. She was still wearing them when Ruff picked her up.

“How was your day?” Ruff asked. “I had a job in Granite City,” her daughter replied, still in character. “Let me tell you about it.”

Ruff’s nontraditional profession may encourage other women to pursue such fields. It’s already shown her daughter that anything is possible.

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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

Denmark, once again, takes top spot in world happiness report

By JAN M. OLSEN
Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark, perhaps better known for its fictional, suicide-agonizing prince Hamlet and fierce marauding Vikings than being a nation of the happiest people, has just won that very accolade. Again.

Even U.S. Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have singled out the small Scandinavian country as an example of a happy, well-oiled society. On Wednesday, the United Nations made it official: It found Danes to be the happiest people on Earth in a study of 156 countries.

Knud Christensen, a 39-year-old social worker, knows one reason why his compatriots are laid-back — they feel secure in a country with few natural disasters, little corruption and a near absence of drastic events.

“We have no worries,” Christensen said, smiling as he stood on a Copenhagen street near the capital’s City Hall. “And if we do worry, it’s about the weather. Will it rain today, or remain gray, or will it be cold?”

The Scandinavian nation of 5.6 million has held the happy title twice before since the world body started measuring happiness around the world in 2012. The accolade is based on a variety of factors: People’s health and access to medical care, family relations, job security and social factors, including political freedom and degree of government corruption.

Egalitarian Denmark, where women hold 43 percent of the top jobs in the public sector, is known for its extensive and generous cradle-to-grave welfare.



Esben Nielsen/Polfoto via AP

This April 2006 file photo shows Nyhan in Denmark. On Wednesday the United Nations announced they found Danes to be the happiest people on Earth, in a study of 156 countries.

Few complain about the high taxes as in return they benefit from a health care system where everybody has free access to a general practitioner and hospitals. Taxes also pay for schools and universities, and students are

given monthly grants for up to seven years.

Many feel confident that if they lose their jobs or fall ill, the state will support them.

Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia University, one of those behind

the report, says that happiness and well-being should be on every nation’s agenda.

“Human well-being should be nurtured through a holistic approach that combines economic, social and environmental objectives,” he said in a statement before the World Happiness Report 2016 was to be officially presented in Rome on Wednesday.

The Roman Catholic Church welcomed the study, declaring that happiness is “linked to the common good, which makes it central to Catholic social teaching,” according to Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, one of Pope Francis’ key advisers.

Kaare Christensen, a university professor in demography and epidemiology in Odense, where fairy tale writer Hans Christian Andersen was born, says it doesn’t take much to satisfy Danes.

“They are happy with what they get. Danes have no great expectations about what they do or what happens to them,” she said.

Christian Bjoernskov, an economy professor at the University of Aarhus, Denmark’s second-largest city, believes feelings of self-assurance and self-determination have a lot to do with it.

“Danes feel confident in one another... when we stand together, we can succeed,” he says. “And they also have a strong belief they can decide their own lives.”

After Denmark, the next happiest nations last year were Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, followed by Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden.

The United States was 13th place, two spots higher than the previous year.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Pie-eating contest nearly derails Navy career

Herbert Otto Roesch, the son of pioneer Umatilla County brewer William Roesch, served a long career in the United States Navy, beginning with his appointment to Annapolis in 1904 after graduating from Pendleton Academy. Along the way he made quite a name for himself as a championship marksman and a talented ship’s commander. But a pie-eating contest almost squashed his career before it began.

Roesch started his U.S. Naval Academy studies quietly in 1905, but soon rose to prominence with his marksmanship skills. In 1909 he went up against the best shooters of the Army and Navy during a tournament at Camp Perry, Ohio, and beat all comers. He shot 50 out of 50 at 800 yards, and missed acing the 1,000-yard trial by one point. He scored 98 out of 100 in the skirmish run and fired 10 shots in 40 seconds during the 200-yard rapid fire



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

Home in Pendleton, the town rallied around his new-found fame and presented him with the first-ever blanket woven on the new Pendleton Woolen Mills looms. He was also honored by the National Society of the Sons of the Revolution for “outstanding marksmanship for excellence in practical ordnances.” Herbert Roesch was on his way to big things.

But in August 1910, disaster almost struck. Graduation from the Naval college was imminent. A group of underclassmen

embroiled in a pie-eating contest asked Roesch to referee, and the result was allegations of hazing, the withholding of his diploma and the threat of a court-martial. Fortunately, the Secretary of the Navy deemed the matter too trivial for notice, and Roesch earned his place as midshipman on the *USS George Washington*.

Roesch proved to be worthy of the Navy’s forbearance. In 1911, during maneuvers in San Francisco Bay, he pulled four sailors out of the water, saving their lives. An *East Oregonian* editorial suggested he should be considered for a Medal of Honor. He moved up the ladder of success quickly, serving as lieutenant commander of the *George Washington* by 1918.

Another training exercise on the Pacific coast almost spelled disaster for Roesch and his men in September 1923. As commander of the *USS Nicholas*, Roesch and the rest of Destroyer Squadron 11 were taking part

in a high-speed engineering run when the leading ships received inaccurate navigation information for the entrance of the Santa Barbara Channel. Seven destroyers in the group, including the *Nicholas*, ran aground on the rocks of Point Pedernales, known to sailors as Honda, or the Devil’s Jaw. Roesch and his crew valiantly battled the heavy seas but eventually he and the crew had to abandon the ship. All of the *Nicholas*’ men survived, but 23 other sailors lost their lives in what became known as the Honda Point Disaster.

Herbert Roesch remained with the Navy for the rest of his working life. He died in 1961 in San Diego, Calif., at the age of 75.

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ODDS & ENDS

Town looks to revive botched restored fresco success

MADRID (AP) — More than three years after a botched fresco restoration by an octogenarian painter became a major tourist attraction for a northern Spanish town, local officials are looking to inject new life into the phenomenon by opening a center that celebrates the fresco.

Borja Mayor Eduardo Arilla said 160,000 people had come to see the fresco since the story of Cecilia Gimenez’s restoration of a Christ fresco in a town sanctuary went viral in 2012. He said with the new center, the town hoped to keep attracting up to 30,000 visitors annually.

Gimenez became a sensation when pictures spread on the Internet of an “Ecce Homo” (“Behold the Man”) mural she disfigured while trying to restore it. Twitter users redubbed it “Ecce Mono” (“Behold the Monkey”).

“It’s to give the painting a new impetus,” Arilla told The Associated Press. He said Gimenez, 85, will be at the inauguration later Wednesday, along with the granddaughter of the little-known Spanish painter of the near 100-year-old original, Elias Garcia Martinez.

The new center will bring together stories, photographs and videos documenting the impact of the restoration. Visitors will be able to see the fresco in the adjoining chapel — and for those feeling inspired, there will be canvases to try to paint your own version.

The center will also display the fresco’s new official merchandise — ranging from T-shirts to teacups — which also will be available on Amazon. Proceeds are to be split between Gimenez and the sanctuary’s home for retirees.



AP Photo/Javier Vinuela

View of the botched restoration version of ‘Ecce Homo’ fresco by 19th century painter Elias Garcia Martinez, at the Borja Church in Zaragoza, Spain

College on lockdown after light saber mistaken for gun

EAST FARMINGDALE, N.Y. (AP) — A New York college that went on lockdown over a report of a gun on campus says the weapon turned out to be a light saber.

Students and staff members at Farmingdale State College on Long Island were told to shelter in place Wednesday while police investigated a report that someone was assembling a rifle in a school parking lot.

College spokeswoman Kathryn Coley says the rifle was actually a “Star Wars” toy.

Cops warn residents of men challenging others to rap battles

CHARLTON, Mass. (AP) — Police in a Massachusetts town are warning residents to be on the lookout for men challenging passers-by to rap battles.

Charlton police told WCVB-TV that a black SUV containing a group of men in their late teens or early 20s pulled up next to three teenage boys Saturday afternoon.

One of the men got out of the vehicle and started rapping. The other men then asked the teens if they wanted to “spit some bars” with them. When the boys declined, the men drove off.

Police say it doesn’t appear to be an attempted abduction, but the boys were frightened. Charlton’s website says it’s one of the 50 safest cities in Massachusetts.

Jail bans photos after drug-soaked pictures discovered

SALEM, Va. (AP) — A Virginia jail is no longer allowing inmates to receive personal photographs after officials found pictures that had been soaked in a drug.

Western Virginia Regional Jail Superintendent Bobby Russell tells *The Roanoke Times* that the pictures were saturated in a liquid form of the narcotic-addiction treatment drug suboxone. Those receiving the photos could chew on them to absorb the contents.

Russell says it can be difficult for investigators to detect suboxone, especially on photos. On white paper, it leaves a slight yellow stain.

The jail had already banned all nonwhite paper and any papers containing drawings or paintings because of the trend.