

PAREN(T)HESIS – Comic Tradition



Our daughter and I enjoy a simple tradition: We read the comics from the *Sunday Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* each week. We sit together on the couch and spend a few minutes with the four colorful pages. We subscribe to the print edition and pull it inside from the porch before breakfast. During the winter, it warms up to room temperature by the time we sit down with it and usually it gets us chuckling.

She is old enough to read the comics herself, but it's fun and cozy to sit together. On a busy day, we sometimes overlook our tradition and delay reading the comics until Monday night.

Between Friends is aimed at a midlife mindset and often makes me smile or laugh out loud.

She insists that I read the whole page, including *Garfield*, by Jim Davis, before enjoying my favorite. We keep a running joke that I try to skip ahead to my favorite comic, *Get Fuzzy*, by Darby Conley.

I read the whole section aloud, except the "riddles" submitted by children, which are part of *Doodles* by Foote & Sack. Last month these included the groaner, "What do skeletons say before a meal? Bone appetit!" This brand of humor makes me laugh, even writing about it hours later.

When we started this tradition, our daughter was reading but not proficiently. Sometimes I would question whether the content was appropriate for her age, such as when romantic topics flourish for Valentine's Day, but I have only rarely skipped a comic strip throughout the years. Now I view the more advanced topics as a good way to make sure we keep

talking about romantic relationships and puberty.

Politics sometimes show up in these comics and those usually don't interest her enough to warrant explanation. Occasionally a new vocabulary word arises or a cultural reference gives me a chance to explain a new topic.

My husband used to read to her as a bedtime routine, but after years of doing this, their habit has faded out.

I was surprised to learn that reading to children, even when they are very proficient readers, is still helpful. There's a difference between "listening level" and "reading level" and a child comprehends more advanced material when they are listening. Around eighth grade, the listening level and reading level match. Learning this made me want to resolve to read together more, or get serious about my idea to have a parent-child book club.

For now, we will stick to the comics and the tradition doesn't seem lost on our daughter. She has become one of her class newspaper's comic writers. (The joke was on us, her parents, because the first issue's jokes played on our quirks.)

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.

PAREN(T)HESIS – Advising One Another



A friend posted a simple question on Facebook and received insightful answers. He asked his network, What is the best parenting advice you've ever received? Responses came in from his friends, who got to see one another's responses.

Some of the parents invoked the difficult days of parenting by saying, "This too shall pass" or "Breathe, darling. This is just a chapter. It's not your whole story," with an attribution to S.C. Lourie. I have also heard this expressed to parents, especially those staying home with young children, that the days are long, but the years go fast. (When I stayed home with our daughter, I certainly experienced long days but the "years go fast" aspect never rang true—perhaps because writing on deadlines keeps me hyper-aware of dates!)

Two commenters mentioned picking your battles. It might mean going easy on clothing critiques while being more strict on tooth brushing or nutrition. The second person who mentioned choosing what to be strict about followed that advice with "Ice cream for dinner is awesome." Additional ways to express the concept of maintaining perspective were captured with the simple line, "Will this matter when he is 21?" and, "No one ever walked down the aisle in diapers. This, too, shall pass."

Another reminder of the truly important things was shared via an image. The title was "Pick two" and the handwritten image depicted three options: a clean house, happy kids, your sanity. These comments reminded me of a New Year's resolution I made one year to make sure I worried most about the important things and let others go. As my friends and family can attest, that's a tough one for me so I appreciated the reminder.

Another vein of thought was, "Do what works for your child, not what everyone else does." This one reminded me of

something my husband and I occasionally tell our daughter, “Families have different rules.”

I commented on the Facebook post and passed along advice that a wise woman gave to me, “What your children will remember most is your worldview.” To me, it encompasses several ideas—that you’re passing along a way of thinking, whether you intend to or not. This includes political views and if we should be wary of other people and new experiences or, instead, be courageous and curious and give new things a whirl. It extends to whether our first instinct is to criticize loved ones, neighbors, and coworkers, or to approach them with a perspective of appreciation. It even includes whether birthdays and holidays are tons of fun or events to be dreaded.

Speaking of family gatherings, I will be seeing my extended family this month and plan to ask my cousins, parents and in-laws, and aunts and uncles the best parenting advice they ever heard. Perhaps the best advice of all is to be open to ideas from successful parents who have touched one’s own life.

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**PAREN(T)HESIS – Defending
Dads**



Normally I don't pay much attention to celebrity spats but one last month piqued my interest. TV personality Piers Morgan called out James Bond star Daniel Craig for "baby wearing." If you haven't heard of this parenting trend, baby wearing means carrying a baby strapped into a mini backpack or sling made to carry the youngster. Parenting authorities, including those who write for the *Ask Dr. Sears* website, endorse the practice and talk about myriad benefits such as less crying and fussing and improved learning.

Craig played the 007 macho man role in four James Bond movies. On October 15, Morgan tweeted a picture of Craig wearing his newborn daughter and wrote "Oh 007...not you as well?! #papoose #emasculatedBond". "Papoose" is another term for a baby-carrying backpack and can refer to any baby or specifically to a Native American. An "emasculated" man has lost his masculinity, so "emasculatedBond" was intended to insult.

Many people on Twitter, especially fathers of young children, disagreed with the criticism of baby wearing. They defended their stance by sharing things like pictures of military men in civilian clothes using baby carriers.

To me, the responses defending baby wearing were reassuring, but the original incident itself was telling. Men who are hands-on parents still need to defend themselves. When they go beyond practicing and watching sports with children, they may get some scrutiny from their social circle. (And for famous dads, the social circle can encompass everyone on Twitter.)

Several years ago, I interviewed local stay-at-home dads for this paper and remember some of them mentioning that they get teased by other men. Perhaps younger people are more open to the concept – Gretchen Livingston wrote for Pew Research in September that the percent of stay-at-home dads is higher among millennials. Across age groups nationwide, more men are

staying at home to raise children than in the past. In 2016, Pew found that 17 percent of all stay-at-home parents were fathers. This is a noticeable increase from the 10 percent measured in 1989 (the first year Pew collected reliable data on fathers).

American society is definitely still adjusting to dads being closer to babies. Even the *Ask Dr. Sears* article extolling the virtues of baby wearing emphasizes the mother-child relationship when it begins, "It is natural for baby to be close to his mother. Babies are happiest when being held by mom. Babywearing is a great practice for keeping baby happy and to help build a stronger bond between mom and her baby. The benefits of babywearing help babies grow up smarter and happier."

We all want babies to grow up smarter and happier, so we should open our minds to involved dads.

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Varying Speeds of Parenting



After parenting for about 10 years, I have realized that its intensity ebbs and flows. The way I think about the amount of effort required for parenthood can be compared to a speedometer.

Newborns need 10 to 12 diaper changes per day and need to be attended when they wake during the night so let's say that

puts that stage at 75 miles per hour. (Colicky babies might be 80!)

Toddlers still need diaper changes and require lots of supervision so they don't harm themselves. They can make shopping challenging as they grab at things on shelves and displays and make noisy requests. That stage is 85 mph.

Next, some parents experience a smooth spot in the road sometimes called the "golden years." I have heard other parents explain that it's great because it does not involve any D's, which are diapers, dating, and driving. They are potty trained and parents no longer need a stroller. Kids can get their own snacks and dress themselves. At this stage, kids still enjoy spending time with their parents. This age gets 35 mph.

That's a comfortable speed, but parents and their children keep traveling the road together and do not have a pause button. Ages 9 and 12 arrive, the tween years, and children develop a stronger sense of independence. Parents need to talk about puberty and similar topics and monitor phone use and social media behavior. Friendship disagreements seem more serious. This age gets 50 mph.

My husband and I have not experienced parenting a teen—but I hear stories that make me think it will be a stage characterized by spikes of high speeds.

Romantic relationships develop along with stronger opinions about hair and clothes. Drinking alcohol and using drugs might be new temptations and at this stage, many parents and children disagree about time spent with the family versus friends. I'll gauge the speed when we get to that part of the journey.

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Device Free Dinner



During my childhood in the mid-1970s through 1990s, my dad was a patrolman with the New Berlin Police Department. When he was assigned to work in the section of the city that included our neighborhood, he would occasionally stop home for lunch. We were accustomed to seeing him in uniform, of course, but it was always a bit strange to hear the police work being broadcast over the radio on his hip. Typically we would hear the dispatcher calling out to officers followed by their responses.

Radio communication relied on a lot of shorthand abbreviations. Hearing the codes flow back and forth was a glimpse into a protocol that Dad knew fluently but that my sister and I couldn't comprehend. During these quick lunches of leftovers or a homemade sandwich, he would turn down the volume while continuing to monitor the communications. Occasionally he would abruptly grab the radio off his hip, raise it to his mouth and make a few statements to the dispatcher, typically ending in the one radio phrase I knew, 10-4. Then he would walk out to his squad car and drive away. Even as a young child, my sister and I understood that Dad was not ignoring us in favor of an electronic device and recognized it was his duty to pay attention to his radio, even during a lunch break.

At the end of the day, the four of us usually gathered as a family for dinner. Sometimes sports practice got in the way but we sat together at the table most nights. Dad was off duty by then. Email was not yet prevalent and office workers like my mom commonly left their work behind. The parent who cooked often watched the evening news while preparing the meal, but we turned off the TV while we ate.

Today the invasion of technology into family life is one of the biggest contemporary parenting issues. Modern parents and other caregivers can easily bemoan that we have no model from our own childhood to rely on and yet our parents chose whether or not to prioritize gathering together to eat and whether TV was a part of meals. Going back further, some of the early inhabitants of the house my family and I now live in, likely chose whether or not to have the radio blaring while they ate together.

Family members who dine together with screen-free meals are important to a child's well being.

The Family Dinner Project, housed at Harvard University, points out, "Over the past 15 years, research has shown what parents have known for a long time: Sharing a fun family meal is good for the spirit, brain and health of all family members. Recent studies link regular family meals with the kinds of behaviors that parents want for their children: higher grade-point averages, resilience and self-esteem. Additionally, family meals are linked to lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, eating disorders and depression. We also believe in the power of family dinners to nourish ethical thinking."

The site explains that families have many meal opportunities beginning with breakfast. Making breakfast the family meal may work better for some families with a parent who works second shift or with kids who have lots of after-school activities, providing an alternative if the family dinner isn't feasible.

Families could also gather for a dessert of fruit before bedtime if other opportunities to eat together do not fit their schedule. The project also points out that elaborate cooking is not an imperative and that “family dinner” can be sandwiches.

The nonprofit Common Sense Media provides tips for how to get started and what to talk about when people aren't looking at their phones or other devices that you can follow via #DeviceFreeDinner. Our family has no “secret sauce” for great conversations and sometimes we are a bit quiet. We talk about what happened in our day, news that's fit for a child's ears, and plenty of nonsense and inside jokes.

A wide spectrum of professions have on-call employees and those who have to stay connected beyond normal work hours. For them, like my dad, being fully present is not always possible. Families are better off whenever parents can be fully present without a screen at meals and influence their kids to do the same.

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Sibling Fights



When we are in the doldrums of winter, parents and other caregivers look forward to summer. Yet there can be something about August that brings out the ornery streak in children.

Other parents, especially teachers who stay home with their kids during summer, tell me that sibling rivalry flares up in August. Thinking back to my own childhood, I know my sister and I occasionally argued but I don't remember when it peaked, other than on long car trips to the northern end of the state when we argued over space in the back seat. Our own daughter has no siblings but was close with a child at an in-home daycare. Two years in a row, she hit that child—in August.

Greeks and Romans expected doom and gloom during the dog days, which were named after an annual celestial event. To them, Sirius was the dog star of Orion and its ascendance brought war. Perhaps that means sibling war, too.

Many parents expect that their children will be emotionally close to one another, so it's upsetting when reality looks different. All that arguing doesn't seem like bonding.

Experts say that close relationships with siblings and even conflicts are healthy because they help kids deal with similar issues later in life. Of course, they are competing with one another and also competing for parental attention. They are learning to deal with the deepest emotions like envy, anger, and even hatred. Young siblings playing together can have as many as three to seven conflicts an hour, as reported by K.J. Dell'Antonia in the *New York Times*.

Some parents tend to intervene and help solve the problem, while others let the children work it out. Sibling arguments can be especially awkward for a parent when one child has a friend over to play and that friend witnesses the whole conflict and its repercussions.

Now, some Milwaukee schools start in August. The move was intended to help academically but may have a pleasant, unintended consequence—reducing sibling squabbles.

“Dog days are actually defined as the period from July 3 through Aug. 11 when the Dog Star, Sirius, rises in

conjunction (or nearly so) with the sun. As a result, some felt that the combination of the brightest luminary of the day (the sun) and the brightest star of night (Sirius) was responsible for the extreme heat that is experienced during the height of the summertime.” Source: space.com

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Milwaukee Pride



Drive along any residential street in Bay View and you’re likely to see a U.S. flag or two displayed on a porch or flag pole. These aren’t up only this month for Independence Day but sway in the lake breeze spring, summer, and fall. You might also see the Milwaukee People’s Flag, though not everybody recognizes it yet.

A 2016 contest resulted in over 1,000 entries and professional judges narrowed the choices. Citizen voting eventually finalized the selection that shows a white sun rising in a golden sky above blue Lake Michigan. Bay View resident Robert Lenz designed the popular flag, which is not yet official because the Milwaukee Common Council has not designated it a replacement for the official flag.

Cases for iPhones, tumblers, pillows, shirts, and more are emblazoned with the symbol. The site Milwaukeeflag.com contains links to merchandise. The design has even found its

way onto a cap that incorporates the flag design with the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team's glove logo. All this merchandise is fair game and no royalties are necessary because the flag is in the public domain.

The enthusiasm for the new unofficial flag and its related merchandise, plus shirts like the popular style displaying "MILWAUKEE HOME," make me glad to see our hometown pride front and center. Milwaukee does have some very serious issues that it needs to make progress on, such as income disparities and other inequalities along racial lines, police-community relations, lead pipes that affect the water supply, prevalent human trafficking, and terribly unhealthy birth outcomes for those who live in some of the city's neighborhoods.

Yet Milwaukee and its surrounding communities also have huge potential.

I live in Bay View now but grew up in Waukesha County. Many people there did not have a great opinion of the city and rarely ventured into it except for festivals and events at the Mecca Arena or, later, the Bradley Center. My sense now is that Milwaukee is more accepted by suburbanites, and Bay View is certainly known as a destination for great restaurants and a place to get a good salon haircut.

When I asked our daughter whether she thinks most kids would be proud to say they are from Milwaukee, she replied, "Yeah, I guess so." I hope Milwaukee makes progress on its significant challenges. Some day her kids, when asked a similar question, can reply, "Of course!"

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Supporting Strengths Or Working On Weaknesses



Local kid does well” is always a good storyline, and I really enjoyed seeing someone from the greater Milwaukee area excel at sports. Divine Savior Holy Angels High School graduate Arike Ogunbowale plays guard at University of Notre Dame and helped her basketball team win this spring’s National Collegiate Athletic Association championship. She is a steady player who started all 38 games this season and led the league by scoring an average 20.8 points per game. Her junior season will best be remembered with her last-second shot during overtime versus powerhouse UConn to take Notre Dame to the national championship, and then her incredible winning shot in that championship game over Mississippi State. She earned the tournament’s most valuable player award.

Though I have never met Arike, I admit that I felt a distant pride in her NCAA Final Four performances. Watching the victories from my living room TV, I thought things like, “You go, girl!” and “She is from my hometown!” I called my parents, who are big prep basketball fans, to make sure they were watching. Then I turned back to the TV and chuckled a bit in appreciation when she explained during an interview that she had been practicing “late game,” setting herself up for success in last-second situations. After a victory she gave her mom, Yolanda, a heartwarming on court hug that recirculated at Mother’s Day and made me smile again.

Then last month I got to see Arike compete as the first college athlete on the TV show *Dancing With the Stars*. On the first episode, she joked about being out of her comfort zone,

given that she is great at basketball (and performed really well in soccer in high school, too) but dancing isn't her strong suit. She hesitated to wear the heeled shoes that female dancers typically wear to perform. She balanced dancing rehearsals and performances with the heavy workload of the end of an academic semester. Unfortunately, she was eliminated on the second week.

Seeing her publicly put effort into something out of her strike zone made me think about parenting my own child and ponder whether it is better to help a child bolster her strengths or improve on her weaknesses. There's never a shortage of advice about parenting and almost every conceivable aspect of modern parenting seems to be addressed in a book. The advice on this topic includes some experts who say that we parents shouldn't follow our instincts to focus on the weaknesses but instead should enhance strengths. When we see mostly good grades on a report card and one bad grade, we shouldn't focus too much on the bad grade. We don't want children to think, "My dad/mom only picks on me and never notices what I do well."

One term for this approach is strength- or the plural "strengths-based parenting" (and a well-regarded book carries that title). Experts describe a true strength as something that a child is not only good at, but also chooses to do often and obtains energy from doing. In the expert's definition, a child who is good at chess but never chooses to play a match outside of practice or competition does not have a true strength for chess.

Experts say it's important to recognize a strength and then help children develop it by providing the proper materials at home. Someone good at drawing needs a full craft box and plenty of paper. This seems a bit obvious but apparently it's frequently overlooked.

These experts don't mean that parents and other caregivers

should not address weaknesses at all, but to resist the urge to blow weaknesses out of proportion. It applies to ourselves, too. Author Daniel H. Pink advises people to achieve satisfying, productive careers by thinking about what they do consistently well and what gives energy rather than drains it.

Parents who want to assess their child's strengths can use Gallup tests, but I would think most parents can name their child's strengths. After all, it's the thing they are often asking to do. (Researchers point out that parents and other caregivers should also encourage character strengths.)

As final report cards roll in, parents will see a mixture of grades. The low ones should only be part of the conversation.

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.

PAREN(T)HESIS – Falling Furniture Hurts Children



When a child occasionally visits a workplace, such as on Bring Your Child to Work Day, people see things differently. A candy dish usually gets lots of attention, along with any bright plastic toys at a work station.

Similarly, when children enter a home, things can look a lot different from their point of view. Even having kids over for a few hours for Mother's Day brunch or a Memorial Day picnic can cause one to look at one's home differently. When kids come to visit, most people are cautious about making certain

kitchen knives are not within a child's reach nor are glass objects that could crash. Parents and a lot of grandparents and other relatives regularly cover outlets and buy baby gates.

But many people are not aware of the dangers of falling furniture, especially heavy chests of drawers or dressers. Even furniture manufactured by well-regarded brands has been recalled or has failed tests by *Consumer Reports*. Its May issue portrays furniture that can tip over as a "hidden hazard in your home." Appliances and televisions can also tip and hurt, or even kill, kids. A heavy TV slipping from a high dresser could fall with the force of thousands of pounds, akin to a Packer lineman's hit.

While I don't personally know of anyone who has been hurt, the Consumer Product Safety Commission statistics show that it's common. A person is hurt an average of every 17 minutes from furniture, a TV, or an appliance tipping over on them in the U.S.

In the case of bedroom furniture, children can open and climb the drawers causing the dresser to tip over on them. Perhaps they wake from a nap and start playing, unknown to their caregiver. In the worst cases, the weight of the tipped-over furniture kills a child and a parent lives with a tragic loss, and guilt that home furniture wasn't secured.

Parents whose children have died from tipovers have published videos on anchorit.gov, a public service effort by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Lisa Siefert, whose two-year-old son died, said in a video, "A lot of people use the excuse, 'I watch my children, so I don't have to anchor my furniture, I don't have to anchor my TV.' I will tell you, you are not faster than a falling TV or a falling dresser, even if you're right there." She wishes she could knock on every door and shout at people to anchor their furniture in hopes of preventing a death like her son's.

When our child was a toddler, I worried about a bookshelf falling on her. A few extra holes mark her bedroom walls from failed attempts to secure the shelf. We eventually did fasten it to the wall with little anti-tip kits that included screws and a plastic connector. Updated versions with metal connections are available online and at local hardware stores and cost roughly \$10 (search for “anti-tip kit.”) I haven’t purchased furniture recently but have read that new furniture includes the necessary parts.

Installing anit-tip kits isn’t a fun chore but it certainly seems worthwhile. Holes in the wall are a small price to pay for the peace of mind.

Read more about tipover hazards, including accounts from parents of injured children: anchorit.gov and for tips: anchorit.gov/how-to-anchor-it

Make Your Home Safe From Tipovers

Use sturdy furniture

Televisions should only be placed on furniture designed to hold a television, such as television stands or media centers.

Secure your TV

Televisions that are not wall mounted should still be anchored to the wall.

Mount flat-screen TVs

Mount flat-screen TVs to the wall or to furniture to prevent them from toppling over.

Keep CRT TVs low and stable

Cathode Ray Tube televisions, which are wide and heavy, should only be placed on furniture designed to hold a television, and should be anchored to the wall or the TV stand.

Secure top-heavy furniture

Existing furniture can be anchored with inexpensive anti-tip brackets. New furniture, such as dressers, are sold with anti-tip devices. Install them right away.

Remove tempting objects

Remove items that might tempt kids to climb, such as toys and remote controls, from the top of the TV and furniture.

Purchase anti-tip devices

Anti-tip devices are sold online and in-stores for prices ranging from \$5 to \$25. Visit a home improvement, electronic, or mass merchandise store to purchase anti-tip devices or search online for “anti-tip strap” or “anti-tip kit.” Install the anti-tip devices according to manufacturer instructions, and always double check the attachment points to make sure the device is secure.

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.

PAREN(T)HESIS – Time For Kids



As Mother's Day approaches, we will see lots of articles and interviews about motherhood. Many will be insightful and surely provide a new angle for thinking about raising children or inspiring a new appreciation for its blessings. But I find one truth that stands above the others: The importance of spending time with children. I don't mean dressing up for holidays, going on Wisconsin Dells trips, or attending concerts together. I'm thinking of plain, old quotidian time.

Having tea together, sitting around reading, or assembling a puzzle don't make good photographs or moments to share with grandparents. They won't sound impressive in a daily journal or look good on Instagram. But what doesn't make a good social media moment does make a good parent-child relationship. It's true, too, for grandparent and child or guardian and child.

I've heard executives brag about attending all their kids' games. But I know they weren't around for much "everyday" time after school when nothing particular was happening except meal prep and homework plus lessons or practices. I think it's nice to attend some of one's children's games, chess matches, dance recitals, etc., but during these events, the child isn't getting interpersonal interaction with their parent, who is sitting with other adults.

In my opinion and that of child expert Dr. Meg Meeker, it's more important to be around to do things like help with homework, share a podcast, or bake something together. Meeker, a pediatrician who has listened to children share their needs and fears for 30 years, has concluded that every child wants lots of attention from parents—even 16 year olds who roll their eyes when their parents enter a room.

Looking back on my own happy childhood, I do distinctly remember and appreciate one Christmas and one birthday (I got an awesome purple bicycle), and I especially remember a trip that just my mom and I took to Florida, which was a big treat for us.

More than those isolated, exciting events, I remember playing catch or shooting hoops with Dad after school, reading on the couch on a Saturday, and dozens of outings on weekends like cross-country skiing or hiking in Muskego Park or the Southern Kettle Moraine. My sister and I played sports or our own invented fun with neighborhood friends. To me, these unremarkable hours are the true building blocks of my childhood.

Sometimes my parents had fun without us and went out with friends, while my sister and I were “stuck” with fish sticks for dinner and a babysitter. My dad, a police officer, often had to work weekends. But I got an overriding sense that there was time for us to be together and that’s precious to me now.

Some of my most deeply-felt memories seem almost silly to share because they were so commonplace: goofing around with the dog, playing in a treehouse my dad built while he worked nearby in the garage with the Badgers football on the radio, and lying in sunbeams in the living room with my sister while my mom made pudding on a Sunday afternoon. These are the most evocative vignettes for me. No photograph triggers these recollections and they are not the type of thing American society applauds.

But while most of society doesn’t value them, they are valuable. Though they’re free, or don’t cost much, they are not easy to achieve in today’s fast-paced society.

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.

Learn more about Dr. Meeker: megmeekermid.com

PAREN(T)HESIS – I’ll Bet Ya



Wanna bet?

My husband and I have enjoyed very small-scale bets since our early days of dating. The bets have been a source of friendly competition and a way to set aside differences until we could undertake a little research to decide upon a winner. The topics are usually trivial and esoteric – some are too strange to print. Our friends laughed along with us when they heard about the ongoing record we keep of all our little bets in our “bet book.”

Now our daughter is part of the contests over topics like last month’s Super Bowl outcome. We wager things like who gets to select dessert or who gets to pick the next board game we play. Sometimes the debate over the appropriate wager takes a lot of back-and-forth and becomes its own mini negotiation.

For the bets about trivia topics, it is surprising how often the winner is decided by semantics or interpretation. So we are very deliberate in the wording of the actual bet, such as, What is the average rainfall in Milwaukee County in the month of March for the years 2000 to 2017? versus How much does it usually rain in March?

In the fall we included my parents and sister and enjoyed a six-way bet about the first day of snow here in the Milwaukee area. It was our second year doing the first-snowfall prediction and experience taught us to be specific, after all, pride and a whole six dollars was at stake! So we specified that the first snowfall must be measurable (no mere “traces”) and reported at Mitchell Field.

I have heard that kids often adopt the worldview and general outlook held by their parents. I hope that low-cost, lighthearted games like these reinforce the view that learning new facts can be fun and it’s ok to disagree with those you love. And, it’s a lot of fun to win!

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PAREN(T)HESIS – Olympic Lessons



Network television will be honoring American athletes at the XXIII Olympic Winter Games this month. I love hearing the athletes' backgrounds and learning how they fought through hardships to achieve the elite levels in their sport. Some stories really pull my heartstrings, like one from my childhood when speed skater Dan Jansen learned of the death of his sister while he was at the Olympics.

I was in my young teens in 1988 and remember feeling a little awestruck that someone from my area was an Olympian with a solid chance at winning a medal. Then I had a hard time believing that he fell in the 500-meter race, then fell again a few days later in the 1000-meter event. It took my young mind a while to absorb all the twists and turns of that athletic saga.

I recently revisited his story while reading a book about Wisconsinites who have competed in the Olympics called *Going for Wisconsin Gold: Stories of our State Olympians*, by Jessie Garcia. Reading about the story still brought tears to my eyes and the continued emotion made me hesitate to check YouTube for clips. (I did watch clips and even the Visa commercial made me misty eyed.)

The saga didn't end in 1988. Locals will remember that Jansen competed in more Winter Olympic Games and eventually medaled in the 1994 Olympics while setting a world record in his last Olympic race.

Many of Bay View's current parents have poignant memories of Olympic stories of triumph and defeat like those of Jansen, speed skater Bonnie Blair, and alpine skier Picabo Street. (We were a little young for Eric Heiden's amazing 1980s performance, but many current grandparents remember.) Since the drama and emotion of the Olympics can be seared into our brains, the next few weeks seems like a good time for some "teachable moments." When watch the games with our children, we can extend what we're viewing into a discussion on our culture, beliefs, and values.

Sometimes even a star loses big, and in front of a big audience. It's still important to act with dignity and maybe aim for another chance in the future.

Life isn't a movie plot, and unfortunately the circumstances of real life are often fraught with contradiction. Tragic things can be happen alongside wonderful things, even for an Olympic athlete.

One moment of glory isn't effortless, it's the culmination of years of hard work and tradeoffs.

Often an effort is about much more than personal achievement. It is often about the effort and achievement of a team, country, or for a higher purpose like worldwide cultural exchange.

It can be exhilarating to watch amazing comebacks or perfect performances. I always like an underdog. Underdog events and some years even the less popular events get me fired up. All in all, sports provide lots of opportunities to discuss life lessons, at least the segments aired before bedtime!

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.