

Family Spotlight

a l o c a l f a m i l y g u i d e

Parenting in Public

Ways to keep kids engaged
and behaved at restaurants
and other places

Also inside:

- Teen driving
- Author feature
- Happenings



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Cover photo: A mom and daughter attend Mountain View's Multicultural Festival last year.
 ANDREW YEE/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Parenting in public

How to keep young kids on their best behavior

By Sarah L. Morford
Special to the Town Crier

It starts early. There is a point at which coming home from the hospital with a newborn with little more than a half-pack of diapers, a scheduled appointment with the pediatrician and a cotton striped hat feels like sheer madness.

But soon, each of us will settle into a routine with our little one and over time that routine at home feels safe and predictable.

Next comes the more daunting challenge: leaving the house with the child. Leaving the house comes with parallel challenges. First, one must face the tactical side – timing, coordination, gear and travel itself. These will embroil you initially but will soon feel banal compared to what some might see as the monumental challenge of parenting in public.

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SARAH L. MORFORD/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Taking youngsters to public places, like a grocery store, can be a challenge for parents.



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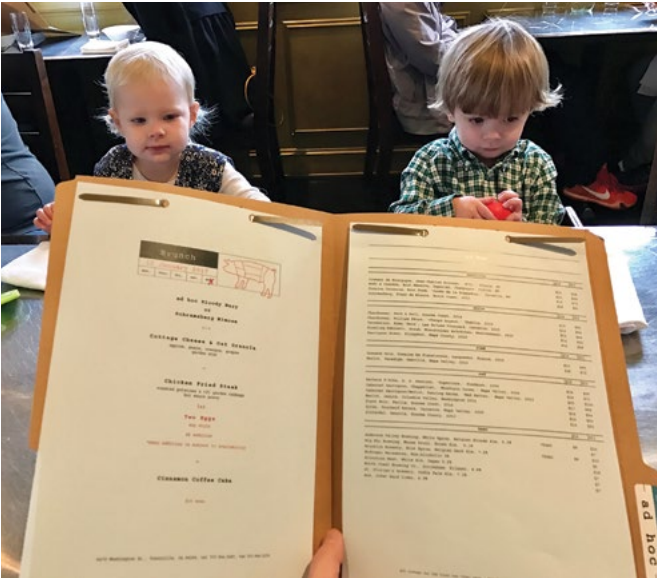


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With our parenting on full display in public, one sometimes feels like the Emperor with No Clothes. The highest highs and lowest lows can come from having the approval of strangers and, conversely, their judgmental, unwelcomed criticism and side-eye. I’ve put together some tried-and-true strategies to arm you for your next outing.

When your little one is not yet mobile, leave the house as much as you can. We made a sport of trying new restaurants when our daughter was young. Wearing her in a wrap so that she would sleep soundly through dinner, we could still sit in a two-top and keep a low profile. Alternately, a car seat often fits great in a booth. Do opt for a restaurant where the din and ambience can serve as the perfect white noise to keep a sleeping child asleep and avoid intimate, small, quiet places. Opt to be outside during these early months when babywearing hikes, walks and festivals are easier. These nonmobile months also can be the perfect time to plan travel abroad or across the country.

Once your little one is mobile and eating solids, you’ll venture to a different set of places. When eating out, I recommend going at off-peak times to minimize wait times with wiggly little ones. Review the menu in advance and order something the moment you sit down so that some



SARAH L. MORFORD/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

When dining out with the family, make sure to bring toys and other items that keep kids entertained.

food comes quickly. Sweet potato fries are soft, healthy-ish and ubiquitous these days. Bringing a few items can make eating out easier – keep a lightweight fasten-on chair like the Inglesina Fast Table chair in your car in a canvas bag and buy sticky plastic one-time use placemats. With sticky placemats, you’ll avoid your child throwing plates, cups and



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silverware (this is the age when dropping things is hilarious) and you'll ensure a clean eating surface. With those two items, you can set up shop anywhere and the chair will keep the baby at appropriate table height (whereas restaurant high chairs can be quite large and rarely keep baby contained).

When your kids reach age 2, it helps to keep a lightweight bag in your car filled with your "on-the-go activities" – small things, such as games or toys that are new and interesting and can help pass the time or temper a tantrum. Thrift stores, the Dollar Store and Target's "dollar section" are great places to pick up things for your table bag. Our bag always included Wiki Stix, lift-the-flap books like "Dear Zoo" and "10 Little Tadpoles," stickers, "Water Wow" books and Go Fish for older kids.

The dedicated activities bag is key because its contents are novel and not messy. Bring your own into restaurants especially, because crayons mostly get eaten or dropped. Resist the urge for screen time but keep short attention spans and wiggly kids in mind when you plan where to eat. We love places with large patios, fish tanks and booths where kids can bounce or explore or walk around during meals with a parent.

Even with the best of intentions, the activity bag and all the snacks, sometimes outings still don't go as planned. Take heart: You'll rarely find a parent whose cheeks haven't burned with the embarrassment and shame of a child who

is melting down in public, causing a scene and making it impossible to do much else but endure.

As a parent, it helps to expect the unexpected. Humor can go a long way toward diffusing a situation. If you're in the middle of something with your child, consider putting on blinders. Keep the focus on your child, stick with him or her and in the situation. People won't change, but at the end of the day you can know that you took the high road, stuck with your child during a tough time and survived to leave the house again.

Remember that mutual respect goes a long way. Parents: Talking to and checking in with people when your kids are exploring out in public goes a long way; a simple, "Is he OK near you?" can open up an easy dialogue. Similarly, be sure to teach your children good dog etiquette: Children should always ask if it's OK to say hello to a dog, never approach a canine from behind and offer a hand first for a sniff.

Finally, for those who have forgotten what it's like to raise tiny humans: Tell a mom she is doing a good job, and you could make her week. Pick up a grocery bag and offer to help instead of rushing around her. Make a kid smile across a restaurant, and you can be the hero of dinner. Kindness multiplies. They say it takes a village – go out and explore yours with your kids and don't let anything hold you back.

Sarah Morford is a former Mountain View resident. To read more of her parenting experiences and advice, visit her blog at whininganddiningblog.com. ▲



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Navigating the road toward getting a license

Dealing with the DMV, lessons and more

By Miranda Li

Learning to drive is a rite of passage for 16-year-olds in America; once teenagers receive the keys to a car – and their independence – they may never come back.

However, they must first prepare for the extremely long and tedious process of acquiring a driver license. As a recently licensed teen driver, here are my tips and tricks to surviving the journey.

Start the process early. Not only does this give teens a taste of freedom as soon as possible, it also saves a lot of money. Insurance rates for new teen drivers are a lot higher than for those who have at least a year of experience behind the wheel. After I turned 16 my junior year, I postponed my driver education for six months to study for the SAT –

which my driving instructor said was stupid, because standardized testing is not life-or-death, but driving very much can be.

The first step of the process is to undergo 25 hours of driver education in order to take the permit test. Because most California high schools do not offer classroom instruction, despite it being required by law (Ed Code 51220 j), your best bet is an online driver education program. I recommend perusing Groupon for the best deal (some courses even teach you how to change a tire) and then begin your 25-hour driver ed extravaganza. I also suggest looking for practice tests online and taking as many as you can, as these questions are often repeated on the actual exam.

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creating new smiles for patients from all over the Bay Area and country.

When he’s not working, Dr. Field enjoys time with his family doing any outdoor activity they can and attending Bay Area sporting events. Dr. Joseph Field delivers excellent results for his patients and gives back to our beautiful San Francisco Peninsula.

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When it’s finally time to take the permit test, arrive at the DMV with your certificate of completion of driver education, driver license application, birth certificate or passport and residence card, Social Security number and the \$33 application fee. Nothing I say can truly prepare you for the DMV. You may have heard awful things about it – dozens of people packed into one small building, impatient customers arguing with staff and hours upon hours of tedious waiting. I’m here to tell you all of it is true. However, you can make an appointment for your permit test, which I highly recommend to avoid the waiting.

What most people don’t know is that if you pass the test, the photo they take for your permit will be the one shown on your license. So if you didn’t make an appointment in advance and woke up at the crack of dawn and rushed to the DMV an hour before it opened only to see the line already wrapped around the building – like me – chances are you won’t love your license photo (but then again, no one does).

Once the permit is secure, you’re free to drive – with supervision. So it’s time to find a suitable driver’s academy and undergo six hours of behind-the-wheel training. This was easily the most terrifying six hours of my life, as I had just learned how to start a car and adjust my mirrors before

being thrown into action, trying to navigate the busy streets and follow traffic signals along with directions. Maybe try practicing before your first lesson, if your parents are willing to take the risk of being in the car with you.

After practicing your new driving skills for 50 hours (including 10 hours of driving in the dark), you are finally able to take your behind-the-wheel driving test to obtain your license. The appointment needs to be booked months in advance, as they are often completely filled. I have friends who even used an outside service to book an appointment for them. When you begin the driving test, remain calm and take a couple deep breaths – the worst that can happen is having to wait a couple months and try again.

If you pass your behind-the-wheel test on the first try, congratulations! You’re ready for the roads. If you don’t, no worries – I didn’t, either. Learn from your mistakes and try again. And when you finally do become a licensed driver, just be glad you made it through the ride and will likely never have to go through the process again.

Miranda Li is a Palo Alto High School senior and Town Crier intern. ▲



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Brett talks ‘Tiger’

Author/illustrator offers advice to young artists

By Eliza Ridgeway
Staff Writer/elizar@latc.com

Clad in red suede slippers with pink silk tassels, a tiger blazer and carrying a hedgehog purse, prolific author/illustrator Jan Brett looked the part when she came to town with a message of creativity to share this winter.

Los Altos-based Linden Tree Books hosted Brett earlier this winter in a talk geared particularly to children. Known for her detailed illustrations in books such as “The Mitten” and “The Hat,” Brett shared pointers on how a drawing comes together with the audience. Using Prisma-color markers, she drew a tiger from start to finish as she spoke, describing both technical tricks and overarching insights into how to foster and feed the creative process.

Brett said that listening to music has often led her thoughts to follow a creative path they might not otherwise



CARA ASKREN/TOWN CRIER

Children’s author and illustrator Jan Brett presents her work during a recent tour stop at Linden Tree Books.

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have found, and she referenced animals in her own life – a hedgehog, chickens, a dog – as sources of persistent inspiration. She offered pointers as she drew the tiger, noting that she works particularly hard on eyes, whose expression of emotion usually first draws an onlooker’s gaze. She walked her young listeners through how the shape of eyes move and change with the flow of feelings.

Some tips for young artists at home, gleaned from Brett’s tiger-drawing talk:

- As you’re drawing, if something looks off to you and you don’t know why, hold your picture to a mirror. Seeing it backwards can feel like seeing it for the first time.
- Always sign your work – no one can draw exactly like you can.
- Set a kitchen timer for 1 hour and tell your family that you want alone time to work.

“The world around you becomes less important and the picture unfolds by itself,” Brett said.

She told the audience that she has been practicing for 65 years, and that “every time I do a book I think maybe this one will be the best because I’ve been practicing.”

Brett’s latest book, “The Tale of the Tiger Slippers” (G.P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers, 2019), reimagines a folktale originally born in Baghdad but creatively reset, by Brett, in the lavish style of Mughal court painting.



CARA ASKREN/TOWN CRIER

Jan Brett signs a copy of her latest book, “The Tale of the Tiger Slippers” at Linden Tree Books in Los Altos.

“It is like looking through a portal into the past,” she said of the ornate artwork now found in museums around the world, its gilt borders twined with animals and flowers.

In an interview with the Town Crier, Brett explained that visiting with young people around the U.S. on her three-week book tour gave her a reassuring sense that books still have a thriving place in the digital age.

“It is very inspiring to see these young people who love books,” she said. “Parents are in such an unusual situation because they want to prepare their children for the future and want them to be comfortable with technology, but we don’t want to lose our grip on all the wonderful venues books have taken us through in our lives.” ▲

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Family-friendly events abound

By Cara Askren

Town Crier Editorial Intern

An array of local events aimed at families are on the horizon. They include:

- **National Geographic Live, 7:30 p.m. today, Stanford Memorial Auditorium.** In “When Women Ruled the World,” Professor of Egyptology Kara Cooney explores the reigns of history’s most powerful ancient queens. While these female leaders’ rules are often neglected, their influence and power has had a major impact on history. Tickets/info: live.stanford.edu.

- **Los Altos Youth Theatre’s “She Kills Monsters,” March 6-15, Bus Barn Theater.** Adapted from the book by Qui Nguy-

en, “She Kills Monsters” follows Agnes Evans after her sister Tilly’s death. Although the sisters were not close growing up, Agnes later discovers that Tilly was a passionate and well-known Dungeons and Dragons player and enlists Chuck, a “dragon master,” to help her better understand her deceased sibling. Tickets/info: losaltosstage.org.

- **Pacific Ballet Academy’s Spring Showcase, noon and 5 p.m. March 21 and 22, Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts.** The showcase features the Mountain View academy’s student dancers alongside members of its studio company. Tickets/info: mvcpa.com.

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