

Washington FAMILY

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OCTOBER 2020

Dominique Dauves

Inspiring a new
generation of gymnasts
(and ninjas!)

HALLOWEEN
is Still Happening!



The unexpected journey of an accidental home-schooler. Pg. 18

OCTOBER 2020



On the cover: Dominique Dawes
Cover photo: David Stuck

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Please note we reserve the right to edit or refrain from publishing comments we deem inappropriate.

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WE WANT
YOUR
FEEDBACK

OUR FUTURE LEADERS WILL COME FROM MONTESSORI

If the COVID-19 crisis has taught us anything, it is that we are part of an interdependent, fragile world. It has also taught us the vital importance of scientific thinking. Finally, it has taught us that problems of this magnitude and complexity require adaptive leaders who can work with others to create effective strategies around which all segments of society can coalesce.

Fostering an interdependent mindset, scientific thinking and adaptive leadership skills has been foundational to the Montessori approach to education since Maria Montessori launched her first school in 1907. These outcomes are natural by-products of the way Montessori classrooms function: teachers introduce concepts in a big-picture perspective, allowing students to move about freely and work in small groups, experimenting and engaging in self-directed projects. This structure provides many opportunities for students to practice leading teams and working together to accomplish a goal.



Sometimes parents ask, "How will my child be prepared for the real world?" Our answer is that Montessori principles are the very things our children need to learn to not only be successful in the world, but to improve the world. Montessori principles such as self-motivation, initiative, creative thinking, scientific theory, emotional intelligence, ethics, communication and leadership will be integral if we want to see a world that can better address the next global crisis.

At Oneness-Family Montessori High School, the only Montessori high school in the Washington area, we are building a 21st Century Leadership program founded upon Maria Montessori's vision. We've gathered a team of exceptional thought leaders to create a program that incorporates essential leadership skill sets and will have students joining together for a real-world capstone project in their community each year. The program will launch in September 2020.

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Special Series



Calendar of
Events



Family Matters
Family Fun



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PJ Feinstein
Lifestyle Editor
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Finding the Fun

The transition from summer to fall has always been my favorite: a new school year ripe with possibility. Apple picking and pumpkin carving. Cooler temperatures and, of course, Halloween.

However, because it's 2020—and nothing is normal anymore—autumn this year looks different. Most of our kids started school at home rather than in the classroom, with some parents opting for home schooling instead of hybrid or virtual learning. A spring frost damaged much of the area's apple crop, so there are fewer available apples to pick, and the CDC now recommends we eschew Halloween traditions like trick-or-treating and indoor costume parties because of COVID-19.

If that all sounds depressing to you, I understand. We're used to doing things in certain ways. But just because life has to be different right now doesn't mean it can't also be fun. Take Halloween, for example: In this issue, writer Jamie Davis Smith explores how to make the most of the spooky day, from new ways to trick-or-treat to novel ideas for at-home celebrations.

We also have the most creative pumpkin craft I've ever seen and a Halloween costume contest! (For more information, visit washingtontfamily.com/halloweencontest2020.)

As for the new school year—well, we asked parents to keep a journal of their child's first week of school, and while there were highs and lows to everyone's week, it seems like most kids (and parents) are adjusting to new ways of learning. You can read about their experiences on page 15.

Finally, I had the privilege of chatting with one of my childhood heroes, gymnast Dominique Dawes, for our Mom Life column. The Olympic gold medalist opened her new Clarksburg gymnastics and ninja academy during the pandemic, which is just more proof that good things can happen during challenging times. You can watch a video of our conversation on our website.

Keep wearing your masks, and look for the fun this fall. Happy reading!

PJ Feinstein

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By Washington FAMILY Staff



DEMDACO JELLYFISH BATH MITT

Anyone with a baby at home will want to get their tentacles on this jellyfish bath mitt. Designed by mom and artist Jennifer Heynen, this smiling cephalopod features various patterns and decorations to keep little ones entertained in the tub or out of the water. \$16; demdaco.com



BUBBLY BELLE SHARK BATH BOMBS

You're gonna need a bigger bath! These shark-themed bath bombs are the perfect way to wind down after a long day, with relaxing scents like eucalyptus, chamomile and lavender. You'll love that these products are organic, vegan and 100 percent kid-safe, and your child will love the surprise (a \$15 value) they find as the bath bomb dissolves. \$14; bubblybelle.com

DR. EDDIE'S HAPPY CAPPY MOISTURIZING CREAM

If you're the parent of a kid with eczema, you may be dreading the impending cold weather. After all, the only thing more painful than having itchy, irritated skin is watching your child constantly scratch their own. Made with licorice root extract to relieve redness, this fast-absorbing moisturizer won't sting like many creams and is free of fragrances, dyes and anything else that might cause flare-ups. \$10-\$15; happycappysampoo.com



KISS KISS GOODNIGHT LULLABY MELTING BALM CLEANSER

This Baltimore-based, mom-owned company specializes in plant-based care for sensitive skin. Massage the hydrating gel right into your little one's skin or add it to their bath. It does the job of both soap and moisturizer, and even triples as a gentle makeup remover for mom. \$20; thetot.com



BABYBIBI COLOR ME BATH BOOKS AND CRAYONS

Do you have a young Picasso at home? These waterproof books are a great way to encourage writing, drawing and fine motor skills in an exciting way—during bathtime! The six washable crayons can also color shower tiles and tub walls, but don't worry: they clean up easily. \$20; babybibi.com

SPONGELLE SPONGE ANIMALS

It's time to ditch the dingy loofah in favor of something a little more colorful and a lot more fun. Each animal-shaped sponge is infused with sulfate-free body wash that lasts for more than 14 washes and smells like delicious watermelon, apple or sweet sugar. Plus, they're great for travel (when we can all start traveling again). \$14; spongelle.com



HIBAR SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER SET

We love how easy these solid shampoo and conditioner bars are to hold and use (you're welcome, parents!), plus they're free from sulfates, parabens, phthalates and silicone, so they're safe and gentle on little heads. Best of all, they're a great way to model eco-conscious choices for the next generation. Win-win-win! \$27; hellohibar.com

How to Make a

Halloween
Hamburger Pumpkin

By Lindsay Ponta

It can feel a little sad knowing that Halloween will look different this year with social distancing recommendations still in place. That's why it's a great time to go over the top on Halloween decorations! You'll lift your family's spirits—and your neighborhood's, too—by decking out the front yard. Go with spooky, silly or cute, but whichever theme you choose, I hope you'll find a place for this DIY hamburger pumpkin.

You can find all the supplies to make this project, including the pumpkin, at your local craft store. Many shops are still offering curbside pickup, so you can practice safe social distancing while shopping. Alternatively, you should be able to find everything you need on Amazon.

My biggest piece of advice with this project is to relax and not yield to any perfectionist tendencies you may have. The charm of this hamburger pumpkin is in its playful look, and nobody will be checking to make sure all your shapes are perfect circles.

And have fun! Work together as a family to make a platter of burgers or assorted fast food items. Challenge each other to use as many upcycled or recycled elements as possible. Add your favorite burger toppings. Go wild! ■

SUPPLIES

- Craft pumpkin
- Serrated bread knife or saw
- Corrugated cardboard
- Pencil
- Scissors and/or X-ACTO knife
- Hot glue gun
- White foam board
- Acrylic paint in red, white and orange
- Paintbrush
- Craft foam sheets in yellow, light green and dark green
- Light green cardstock



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the craft pumpkin in half with a serrated knife or a saw, if you have one.
2. Find something round that's the same size or slightly larger in diameter than the pumpkin (a salad bowl works well), and use it to trace 5-6 circles onto corrugated cardboard. Cut the circles out, and hot glue them into a stack. This will be your hamburger patty.
3. Trace a couple of smaller circles onto white foam board, and cut them out. Use red acrylic paint to turn them into tomato slices. If you don't have paint on hand, grab a few markers from your back-to-school stash and draw the details instead of painting.
4. Cut three or four imperfect circles out of dark green craft foam sheets. These will be the pickles, so size them accordingly. Cut the same number of slightly smaller light green foam circles. Use a hole punch or your scissors to snip a few small holes into them to represent the seeds. Hot glue the light green circles on top of the dark green ones.
5. Cut a square of yellow foam for the cheese. It should be large enough to slightly hang over the edge of the hamburger patty for a melty look.
6. Cut a couple large pieces from your green cardstock shaped roughly like blunt hearts. Crinkle each piece a bit to give them a texture like lettuce. Fold the narrower ends into a pleat just like you see in skirts or dresses to give the lettuce leaves a bit of height and stability.
7. Assemble the hamburger by hot gluing the various pieces together.

Lindsay Ponta created the DIY and lifestyle website [Shrimp Salad Circus](http://ShrimpSaladCircus.com) in 2009 to inspire busy women to live perfectly imperfect creative lives. She lives in Silver Spring. Find easy DIYs and recipes at shrimpsaladcircus.com.

Easy as PIE

Two new ways to bake with apples

Looking for something to make with that bushel of apples your family just picked over the weekend? These apple recipes—one sweet, one savory—come to us courtesy of Nourish Culinary Co. in Washington, D.C. Follow them on Instagram at @nourishculinary or visit their website at nourishculinary.com.

Baked Oatmeal Apples

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar
- ½ cup rolled oats
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch of sea salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 2 organic Honeycrisp or Granny Smith apples
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a small bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, oats, cinnamon and salt. Once combined, drizzle in the melted butter and mix together to form clumps. Refrigerate for 10 minutes.
3. Cut each apple in half. Using a paring knife or a melon baller, remove the seeds.
4. Drizzle lemon juice on the exposed sides of the apple. Press the chilled butter mixture on top of each apple. Place them in a baking dish filled with ¼ inch of water.
5. Bake until tops are golden brown and the apples are tender, approximately 35 minutes.

Apple, Onion and Brie Tart

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 sweet white onion, thinly sliced
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and sliced
- Pinch of kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup
- 1 puff pastry sheet
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¼ cup apricot preserves
- 4 oz brie or other creamy cheese

Directions

1. Melt the butter in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and apples and sauté until softened and deeply golden brown, approximately 35 minutes. Add a pinch of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Off the heat, add the vinegar and maple syrup. Set aside to cool.
2. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
3. Roll out the puff pastry into a rectangle and score a ½ inch border around the outside. Brush the egg across the entire pastry, then brush the apricot preserves inside the border of the scored edge and arrange slices of cheese on top. Scatter the onion and apple mixture over the cheese.
3. Bake for 25-35 minutes or until the pastry is very puffed and golden brown. ■

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HALLOWEEN T-SNAT



From new
ways to
trick-or-treat to
socially distanced
local activities,
here's how to
make the most
of a pandemic
Halloween

2020

CANCELED!

By Jamie Davis Smith

Any other year, Halloween without trick-or-treating would have been unimaginable. But 2020, as we all know, isn't a normal year.

While 96 percent of parents still plan to celebrate Halloween with their families, according to a Party City survey, 70 percent will forgo traditional trick-or-treating. And that's a smart move: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises against giving out candy to trick-or-treaters, as well as other high-risk activities, including trunk-or-treating, indoor costume parties and haunted houses and going on hayrides with people other than immediate family members.

However, with a little bit of creativity as well as some flexibility, Oct. 31 can remain a spook-tacular day for kids and adults alike. Here are three ways to make the most of a pandemic Halloween.

Come up with new ways to trick-or-treat

As long as you follow all local health and safety regulations—avoiding large crowds, wearing a mask, staying outside—modified trick-or-treating might still be able to happen.

Create a Neighborhood Map: Use Google Maps to create a neighborhood map that allows participating houses to add a pin if they are giving out candy. Without unnecessary stops, your children can finish trick-or-treating faster. Of course, you'll want to keep your group small and maintain 6 feet of distance between the kids.

Make Masks Part of the Costume: Encourage your child to choose a costume that includes a mask as part of the ensemble, such as a ninja or doctor. You can also look

for a mask in a coordinating color or pattern at the same time you purchase their costume.

Institute a "No Eating" Rule: It can be tempting to tear off the wrapper of a favorite piece of candy before it even lands in their trick-or-treat bag, but don't allow children to eat until they are home. Eating requires them to remove their mask, which increases the risk of spreading Covid-19.

Move Away From the Door: Distributing candy at your door puts you in close contact with ghosts and goblins. Instead, try placing candy in chalk-drawn pumpkins 6 feet apart on the sidewalk, sending treats down a PVC pipe or long cardboard tube, or tossing sugary snacks to trick-or-treaters Mardi Gras-style. Other ideas include hanging bags of candy from a tree or simply spreading out candy on a table at the end of your driveway so kids can easily grab a piece as they pass your house. You may also want to limit candy options, as kids often linger while trying to make the perfect selection.

Celebrate at home

For those families who don't feel comfortable with any type of trick-or-treating, there are plenty of ways to make Halloween special at home.

Host a Spooky Backyard Movie Night: Watching a scary (or not-so-scary) movie is a favorite Halloween tradition. Instead of hitting the theater, set up an outdoor experience in your backyard or nearby alley with a projector, Bluetooth speaker and movie screen or ironed white sheet. Or keep it simple and bring your TV outside. Set up blankets 6 feet apart and settle in for a fun evening with friends. The price of admission is wearing a costume!

Go Hunting for Candy: Kids don't have to go trick-or-treating to find candy behind every door. Hide their favorite treats around the house and have them search in costume. If you are feeling creative, send the kids on a spooky scavenger hunt or make life easier by hanging a Halloween-themed piñata.

Take Your Decorations to the Max: Make Halloween extra special this year by taking your decorations to the next level. Blow up some spooky inflatables, hang orange twinkle lights and put out some jars of green goo. In the absence of a neighborhood celebration, setting the scene at home will help get your kids in the Halloween spirit. You can also walk around the block checking out other people's decorations.

Boo Your Friends: If you've never boo'd friends on Halloween, this is the perfect year to start a new tradition. However, instead of anonymously leaving bags of candy at their doors, let your kids wear their costume and say hello to their buddies from a distance. You may want to coordinate with your children's friends' parents ahead of time so the gang can take turns boo-ing each other.

Host a Costume Parade: Invite friends and family to a virtual Halloween parade so kids can show off their costumes to each other. If you are lucky enough to live on a street with a lot of children, set a time for everyone to step out on their front steps in costume while the adults clap for them.

Have a "Yes" Day: Another way to make Halloween memorable without trick-or-treating is by saying "yes" all day. Candy for breakfast? Yes! An extra hour of screen time? Yes! Staying up late? Yes! Kids will have so much fun being in charge that they may not even miss going door-to-door with friends.

Participate in social distancing activities

While many local Halloween events are canceled this year, some of the DC-area's favorite performers and places are going all out to make sure kids have a fantastic Halloween.

Host a Virtual Halloween Party: The Great Zucchini, Washington FAMILY's Best Kids' Party Entertainer of 2020, has been keeping kids connected and laughing through the pandemic with his popular Zoom birthday parties. Throughout October, the magician will also be hosting virtual Halloween parties, complete with spooky magic tricks and jokes, and will perform in person at socially distanced outdoor events.

Explore Air & Scare Online: The Udvar-Hazy Center's annual Air & Scare event is a Halloween highlight for many local families. It's still happening this year, albeit online. Visit the Air & Space Museum's website throughout October for Halloween-themed virtual events, including story time and costume and pumpkin contests.

Get Spooky at the Playseum: Every day is Halloween at the Playseum in Bethesda! During the month of October, kids are



encouraged to visit in costume and participate in daily socially distant Halloween activities, including cookie-decorating contests and themed crafts.

Experience a Different Boo at the Zoo: New for 2020, Boo Drive Thru features spooky sights and a fun photo opp—all from the safety of your car. Costumed kids won't be able to fill their buckets with candy galore this year, but they will receive treat bags at the end of the mile-long drive down the National Zoo's North Road. Boo Drive



Thru is taking place on Saturday, Oct. 24, and Sunday, Oct. 25, from 4:30-9:30 p.m., and car passes must be purchased in advance.

Visit a Farm that is Friendly and Frightening: The legendary Cox Farms Fall Festival isn't canceled, but it will look very different from years past. On Monday and Friday afternoons from Sept. 25 through Nov. 5, visitors can drive the farm's traditional hayride route in their own cars. Don't forget to grab some apple cider, kettle corn and donuts for the spooky ride! ■

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washingtonfamily.com/halloweencontest2020

Contest rules: Contest runs Thursday, October 1 - Thursday, October 29. One entry per child, winner will be randomly selected.



New Beginnings

By PJ Feinstein

Three local families kept back-to-school journals during the first week of school. Here's what they observed.

Most families were anxious about returning to school in September. They wondered how hybrid learning would work and whether virtual learning would be an improvement over this spring. Others, who had decided to pull out of public school, were trying their hand at home schooling for the first time.

We asked three local families to take notes during the first week of school and share their observations with us. As we read their back-to-school journals, we noticed that there were highs and lows for every child. What really struck us is that there's no "right way" to do school during a pandemic. We're all just trying our best to make this year as successful as possible for our kids.



HYBRID LEARNING

Name: Christine Stevens

Town: Owings, MD

Child: Sydney, 6

Child's Grade: First

How are you doing school this fall? Our school is going four days in-person, Monday through Thursday, then distance learning on Friday mornings.

MONDAY: Drop-off was amazingly smooth. Instead of all the kids going through the front doors, grades are being separated and sent into three different doors to minimize mixing of the grades. I kinda like it. No more bottleneck, and they've extended the drop-off time from 15 minutes last year to 30 minutes this year. After a quick temperature check and asking the standard COVID questions, we are allowed to pull up to the back of the school and let her out. Pretty easy.

Syd says that school went great, and they got to take their masks off outside. Loving their new teacher so far as well.

TUESDAY: Drop-off went much like the day before—very easy and smooth. Pickup in the afternoon is just like last year: All the kids come out the front door as their names are called. Her teacher seems to be really organized and is communicating good information via email, such as reminders to have their computers charged and bring snacks and about upcoming events like back-to-school night.

WEDNESDAY: Drop-off went easy again. I hope they keep the multiple door drop-off next year. Sydney came out again with a smile on her face and says the day was great! Her class has been doing lots of review of concepts that were well mastered last year. I hope they move on from counting to 10 soon...

THURSDAY: Last day of in-person learning for the week. Sydney came home with additional links saved on her computer for distance learning tomorrow, and the teacher emailed a schedule of exactly when the kids should be logged on to their Google classroom and how the day will work. The teacher's organizational style makes me feel so much better about distance learning. We know what to expect and what to do. Very low stress.

FRIDAY: As promised by the teacher, assignments were posted early this morning so we had time to look over them before the morning meeting. All the kids wore their headphones to cut out distractions (which I think is working well) and spent about 30 minutes going over what they'd be doing for the day and a short lesson from the teacher. We completed the three assignments that were listed in Google classroom, scanned and marked them as complete. Spent another hour reading and working on IXL, a web-based program to supplement math and reading.

Any final thoughts? Overall, I couldn't be happier with the way that school is going this year. The mix of in-person and distance learning is going well, I believe, mainly due to the teacher's great organization and communication to parents. She's teaching the concepts during the week, and we're helping to review and reinforce them on Fridays. I could totally get used to this! ■

So how is the school year going for you? Send an email to Pfeinstein@midatlanticmedia.com with your own thoughts and observations for a chance to be featured on our website.



VIRTUAL LEARNING

Name: Susan-Lisa Gvinter

Town: Rockville, MD

Child: Ilan, 6

Child's Grade: First

How are you doing school this fall? One hundred percent virtual.

MONDAY: Today started off OK. Ilan was logged in on time and ready to go in his new "office"—the dining room. He met his teacher and was generally complacent throughout the day. Recess was the highlight: Ilan rode on his bicycle for 90 minutes around the cul-de-sac and almost forgot to eat lunch. There were expected technical kinks with first graders not fully knowing how to read and log into things and the teacher learning how to use the system concurrently. I chalked them up to "growing pains" and figured by tomorrow, we will all have one more day of experience and, hopefully, fewer technical issues.

TUESDAY: A total disaster. The teacher was discussing reading comprehension requirements with the reading specialist over Zoom while the kids were supposed to be doing individual work, and they didn't know whether to listen to her or to watch the video attached to their work. I had to jump on and request that the sidebar conversation be taken offline to reduce the distraction and to protect the students' privacy. I sat there the entire time because the technical issues were out of hand. As soon as Ilan turned his

camera on, everything went to black screen. He restarted the computer at least five times and logged out of/back into Zoom at least eight times. I called the school for technical support, but they were unable to help. Eventually, the problem self-corrected.

WEDNESDAY: Breakout rooms were interesting. I watched my son staring at four other children, not one of them willing to be the first to speak. I emailed the teacher letting her know that they needed guidance in these breakout rooms as the students aren't certain what is expected of them. We had the black screen issue again, but it self-corrected an hour into the morning. Otherwise, the technical issues had calmed down and it was a generally better day.

THURSDAY: The teacher is getting better acclimated, and things seem to be calming down. Unfortunately, one student was crying and, without knowing how to use Zoom in gallery view, the teacher didn't see the upset child. I texted the mom that he might need help in order to de-escalate the situation. I suspect that the teacher does not have two screens, one with Zoom in gallery view and the other to share her screen.

FRIDAY: Ilan got kicked out of Zoom and couldn't get back in without the teacher letting him in. I had to text another mom to have her daughter let the teacher know that he was stuck in Zoom purgatory. She eventually let him in and the rest of the day went fairly smoothly.

Any final thoughts? There are a lot of growing pains associated with virtual learning. First graders are not designed to sit down for a full school day nor should they be expected to know how to maneuver a Chromebook or laptop. These are also extremely trying times for teachers as they are working on commanding a class of 20+ young children who are expected to pop in and out of different Zooms. Every day is better than the day before, and I think we will have kids who finish the year knowing more than when they started, but it might not be quite the same quantity as in-person learning. ■



HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Sheena Girty

Town: Hanover, MD

Children: Eli, 10; Shiloh, 8; Trinity, 4; and Asher, 2

Children's Grades: Fifth, third, pre-K and preschool

How are you doing school this fall? We are doing full home school using the Sonlight curriculum exclusively. Our curriculum is literature heavy and everything is done in books. We don't use devices at all for school unless we are looking up more information about a field of learning or taking virtual tours.

We are currently doing the following subjects daily: Bible, history, geography, math, science, language arts and reading. In October, we will begin learning Spanish. Throughout the week we make sure to do art, P.E. and music, as well. With our curriculum you can choose between a four- or five- day school week. We chose the four-day schedule, and I'm so glad we did. We have one day open for extracurricular activities, field trips, co-ops or whatever we decide to do.

MONDAY: Mondays are always filled with a bit of excitement and a bit of drag. We start our day at 8 a.m. and we end around 2 p.m. On Mondays we are introduced to our new concepts that we will be learning for the week in each subject. We get our spelling words, our new geography song and our new Bible verse.

TUESDAY: The kids know the flow. They rise, dress, clean their rooms and head downstairs for Bible time and breakfast. We recite our memory verse for the week and get into our Bible reading. During breakfast, we strategize for the rest of week, then we head to the basement for school. We do all the remaining subjects down here. Most of the "teaching" I do is for my fifth and third

graders. When they're set up on something they can do independently, I do circle time with the little ones. We go over our alphabet, numbers, days of the week, months of the year, shapes and colors. Then we do a coloring activity and read a book.

WEDNESDAY: Wednesdays are identical to Tuesdays. We get to work, do what we need to do and get done. Wednesday is usually when we do our more "involved" art projects. We study and make sure we have our weekly math concept and spelling words down because tomorrow we will have tests on those. Any spelling words that are missed are added to the following week's list, and if the math concept wasn't fully understood, we don't move on until it is.

THURSDAY: It's test day! It's also our last full day of school, and it's our shortest day.

FRIDAY: We have been doing outdoor field trips on Friday. We went to the National Zoo to see some of the animals we had learned about in science. We are hoping the Smithsonian will open up eventually so that we can explore those too. We just finished ancient Egypt and wrapped up study with King Tut. It would have been nice to go and see what the museums have on ancient Egypt, but we made due with YouTube videos and virtual tours of the Giza pyramids.

Any final thoughts? Although we feel like we were forced into this position, home schooling is what it is best for our family, and we are thankful we are able to do it. We like that we don't have to have a Wi-Fi connection to do school, plus our curriculum is only 36 weeks long. We actually are at the beach for a week, and we will be doing school in our down time. ■



WHEN “Mom” BECOMES “Teacher”

By Laura Farmer

The unexpected journey
of an accidental home-schooler



HEATHER OSTEN PHOTOGRAPHY

It all started to unravel when the first drop of blood hit the carpet—“it” being my Instagram-perfect, curated vision of what our family’s home-school would look like. The owner of that drop of blood (and several more drops to follow) was my curly-headed, precocious three-year-old, the youngest of our bunch of four kids ages 10 and under. Her chubby finger had gone after a booger during story time, and she didn’t stop her pursuit until her nose sprung a leak all over the carpet. That kid is determined, I’ll give her that.

But that soiled carpet wasn’t just any carpet. It was the final purchase for our playroom-turned-schoolroom. This light blue carpet with bold alphabet letters, accented with Eric Carle’s drawings of animals, represented the stake I put in the ground to hold onto some semblance of control as the pandemic tossed all of our expectations about the coming school year to and fro. All summer, the emotional whiplash of adjusting to back-to-school rumors and various draft plans of in-person versus hybrid versus virtual learning was wearing me out. In response to this uncertainty, I decided to create the best darn learning environment I could. Hence, my tricked-out playroom and the now-stained carpet.

Obviously, my carpet is not the only thing this pandemic has indirectly ruined. Far from it. Plans, finances, milestones, even lives have been upset—sometimes tragically so—by an inanimate virus that doesn’t care if your kid misses their graduation or you lose your house. As a parent, it has been tough to keep my own sanity afloat when life seems adrift in this sea of uncertainty. So choosing to home-school was another stake I put in the ground in an effort to moor our family’s sanity to something more solid than the shifting sands of school reopening plans.

Eventually, our school district arrived at their final reopening plan: virtual learning. I knew the eldest of our brood would be able to navigate distance learning’s various logins, passwords, schedules and platforms with an independence and maturity that belied her 10 years. So she will embark on a Chromebook adventure this fall with our local public school.

For the rest of my kids—and their Luddite mom, most of all—virtual learning would not be ideal. I knew that our active,

make-me-learn third grader and his wide-eyed, new-to-learning kindergartner sister would do much better learning from a warm body than through the screen. So I scoured the internet and relentlessly polled “real home schoolers” (those who chose to home-school long before this pandemic—they are my heroes!) to cobble together a reasonably effective school curriculum.

And that’s how I became an accidental home-schooler. Yet home schooling is an intimidating prospect. I would not have chosen this route if the pandemic did not choose it for me. After ten years of raising babies, this was the year I would finally get to focus on my back-burner marketing career. Plus, I have the greatest respect for educators and their expertise in teaching everything from phonics to physics, earned from accredited higher education institutions, honed over years of classroom experience. My children have benefited from countless teachers’ care, creativity and selflessness. Who am I to try to fill their shoes?

My only response is that I’m “mom.” I know and love my kids better than anyone else. I have a vested interest in their success and will do whatever it takes to help them succeed. But as much as I hope this primal, mama-bear love can overcome my deficiencies as a teacher, I’m also aware that it poses its own challenge. As I watch my son struggle to complete a tough math assignment, I have to stop myself from rescuing him and giving him an easy out, simply because it hurts my heart to watch him struggle.

As I write this, we are only a few weeks into this home-schooling journey. So far, I can say that it has been the best of times and the worst of times, to paraphrase Dickens. We start our days with “Circle Time,” where we gather and sing together, read picture books, stretch and say a prayer. Despite occasional drops of blood on my new carpet, this is usually a precious time together.

Then begins the worst of times: math. I’ll spare you the details of tantrums and tears. Sometimes even the kids get upset. Our day then progresses through language arts, lunch, science and history—also known as “How many plates can mom spin simultaneously?” as I hop between children for various writing lessons, phonics games, computer technical glitch fixing, lunch prep,



potty training help, sibling spat refereeing and science experiments. It's non-stop and exhausting, but also fulfilling.

Finally, at the end of the school day, we come together for our favorite part: tea time. This was a concept I learned from one of the hundreds of home-schooling

blogs I consulted as I tried to cram for this endeavor.

We gather to eat a snack and sip a hot drink—which has the effect of slowing us down—and enjoy time reading aloud, discussing current events or doing a creative activity. It allows us to “press pause” and

appreciate a sweet moment, regardless of that day's highs and lows.

Because no matter of how we choose to educate our kids, each day will most certainly have its share of highs and lows. Education during a pandemic is ideal for no one—not our teachers, not us parents and certainly not our kids. There are so many dedicated mamas and dads out there who are managing the tricky balancing act of working full-time while also guiding their kids through virtual learning. There are also parents who are sending their kids to in-school learning, who worry about their health and safety. And there are parents like me, thrown into home-schooling and hoping I can do enough to help, not hinder, my kids' education. Regardless of the “how,” we are united in the “why”: helping our kids learn about this world to gain empathy for others and the necessary skills to help them succeed.

That's worth a whole lot more than my blood-stained carpet. ■

Laura Farmer is a writer, marketer and public relations professional. She lives in Maryland with her husband, Tim, and their four kids.

HEATHER OSTEN PHOTOGRAPHY

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A blurred background image of a classroom where several children are raising their hands, suggesting an active learning environment. The children are wearing light blue shirts.

2020

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- ☐ What kind of medical assistance is available on-site?
- ☐ How can I best reach staff members with questions about my child's progress?
- ☐ What is a typical day like?
- ☐ Would my child be a good fit for inclusion?
- ☐ What support will my child need — from the school and at home — to be successful?
- ☐ Does the school provide transportation modifications?
- ☐ Are there scholarship opportunities?
- ☐ What other resources in the community are available for my child's specific disability or medical condition?

Camp



- ☐ Is the camp inclusive to all members of the community or does it focus on one group?
- ☐ Can the camp provide the necessary accommodations for my child (specialty staffing and sensory and dietary provisions, for example)?
- ☐ What is an average day at camp?
- ☐ How is staff recruited and trained?
- ☐ What kind of medical assistance is available on-site?
- ☐ If there is swimming, what safety measures are taken around the pool?
- ☐ Can I visit the camp ahead of time and meet with my child's counselor?
- ☐ Is transportation assistance available?
- ☐ Are there scholarship opportunities?

COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES



YOUR AUTISTIC TEEN



by Dana Reinhardt

All of us remember our first job. Whether it was helping out with the family business, serving sweet treats at the local frozen yogurt shop, mowing lawns or working at a summer camp, it was an experience that, for better or for worse, you'll always remember.

While first jobs rarely launch your career, they are an important step to establishing yourself in the workplace. They are an opportunity to practice working as part of a team, taking responsibility, conducting oneself professionally and interacting with customers. All teens should have access to these valuable experiences.



TEEN WANTS A JOB

How can you provide support?



1: LISEGAGNE; 2: STURTI / E+; 3: SOLSTOCK / E+ / STOCKBYTE; 4: MANGOSTOCK; 5: KALI9 / E+ 6: FATCAMERA / E+ / GETTY IMAGES

For parents of teens with autism, the job search can be a daunting idea. Significant gaps in education, awareness and inclusion continue to persist in the workplace for individuals with autism. This has resulted in a high unemployment rate for those individuals. According to Autism Speaks, nearly half of 25-year-olds with autism have never held a paying job.

Here are a few tips as you consider job opportunities for your teen, help them navigate the interview process and equip them to succeed once they've landed the job:



Set clear expectations for the job-hunt process

It's important to have mutual guidelines and parameters you and your teen can agree on upfront before diving into the job search. For example, how many hours is your teen willing and able to work, given other commitments? Will they need help with transportation? What kind of environment will be most conducive to success? Consider lighting, noise level, potential for crowds, etc. that could be sensory triggers. This will help focus your search and ensure that you invest time in finding a job that's going to be a true fit for your teen's needs and your family's needs.

Consider their strengths — and interests

When people picture individuals with

autism in the workplace, they may picture jobs that are routine based and entry level. While jobs like these may be an excellent fit for some individuals with autism — especially in the summer when the learning curve can be steep and fast — individuals with autism are a diverse group. Like all teens looking for a job, individuals with autism have a wide range of strengths that can be valuable in a variety of settings, whether that's an excellent memory, attention to detail, analytical abilities or high-level math skills. The list goes on and on. It's important to emphasize and encourage these strengths in your teen and explore opportunities for them to leverage and build on those skills.

At the same time, it's important to encourage your teen to think about their interests and passions. Some teens with

autism may find themselves limited by the box in which society has placed them. But as with any young adult, taking a job that they are excited about can be more fulfilling, can encourage creativity and can inspire them to dream big and take ownership of their future.

Play out several mock interview scenarios

In anticipation of the unpredictable nature of interviews, run a few different scenarios with a mix of questions so that you can talk through potential responses with your teen and prepare them for the uncertainty. This allows them the opportunity to work through those challenges in an environment where they feel safe and comfortable and with someone they know and trust. It can even be helpful to



ask another friend or family member to conduct one of the mock scenarios so that they can practice with different interview styles and generalize their skills.

Provide a toolkit for self-advocacy

As your teen explores job opportunities, it's important to be both realistic and supportive. We know all too well the harsh realities of this world and how cruel people can be. There's a possibility your teen will face disrespect, discrimination and rejection along the way. Consider how you can equip your teen to face those circumstances when they arise, whether it's during the hiring process or once they've landed the job. This can include educating them about the types of interview questions that employers legally

should or shouldn't be asking as well as sharing ideas for how they can message their strengths and skills.

Look for community education opportunities

See the process as an opportunity to advocate for your son or daughter while you educate your community in the process. Take time throughout the year to reach out to a few businesses in your community to see if they would be interested in inclusion training or a workshop. This can be a unique way to raise awareness and create more opportunities not only for your teen, but also for other individuals with autism.

Remember that while individuals with autism certainly face a unique set of challenges, rejection is a universal feeling.

You can remind your teen that they are not alone by sharing stories of individuals with all different types of backgrounds who faced rejection before they found success.

As parents, though we want to protect our kids from facing hurt and rejection, we need to give them the opportunity to explore their independence. And as a community, it's important that we continue to advocate for inclusive hiring practices and workplace policies for our children and future generations. ■

Dana Reinhardt is the education director of HASA, a Baltimore nonprofit that provides health, speech-language, education, language access and inclusion programs to people of all ages, and oversees Gateway School, a nonpublic school for children with autism and other communication-related disorders.



Flu Shots & More

Fall and winter health during COVID-19

BY COURTNEY MCGEE

I often find myself awake at 3 a.m. with random thoughts bouncing around my head. Lately, my worries are centered around COVID and what we might expect in the coming seasons. Specifically, how much of our “old normal” and “new normal” will coincide?

Take flu shots, for example. My family has always gotten them in October. But one recent night, I wondered if we even need flu shots this year. If we’re taking the proper precautions against COVID-19, then aren’t we protected against other illnesses, too? If we’re being safe, kids also shouldn’t get colds, strep, mono, pink eye, stomach bugs, head lice and a whole bunch of other things, right? But are we doing things correctly?

To find answers to some of these questions, I reached out to infectious disease expert Dr. Kelly Anne Gebo, director of public health studies and a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. I am thankful that Gebo had some great advice to share.

Get. The. Shot. Now.

“It is absolutely important to get flu shots,” says Gebo. “More than ever, this is the year to get a flu shot.”

Gebo cautions that “there will be co-spread of both viruses,” and you could actually get the flu and COVID at the same time. However, the flu has both a vaccine and treatment available. “Let’s get that managed because we can,” says Gebo.

If you get sick, it may be hard to tell whether it’s influenza or COVID, so you’ll need to get tested. Testing requires (already strained) supplies and healthcare resources—another reason to try to prevent the flu.

If you haven’t already gotten your flu shot, schedule an appointment now. Vaccinating early can provide coverage until March. Will we need a booster later? It’s hard to say right now.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) takes the same stance in their vaccine

recommendations for the upcoming flu season. They advise that everyone ages 6 months and older should be vaccinated, and it can be done anywhere that is licensed and able to offer the age-appropriate vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also strongly recommends getting the flu vaccine, preferably by the end of October.

Optimistically, we should have a workable vaccine for COVID-19 within the year. Unlike the flu vaccine, which can be administered in northern nations in the fall and southern nations in the spring, the COVID vaccine will be in demand globally at the same time. Logistically, physicians expect that it will be an overwhelming challenge, but hopefully, with all the great minds in science working vigilantly on this, an end will be in sight before too long.

Sanitize away, but safely!

Another late-night thought: Will all this use of hand sanitizers contribute to creating some sort of “super germs” over time? Or is that a myth? Around here, we treat hand sanitizer as a good-enough-until-you-can-get-to-a-proper-sink quick fix, but we’re definitely using far more of the stuff than we ever have before. Is that safe?

“Hand sanitizer is strongly recommended,” Gebo says. She reassured me that overusing sanitizer won’t create problems with tolerance and resistance. “That’s really more about long-term antibiotic use, not hand sanitizers,” she says.

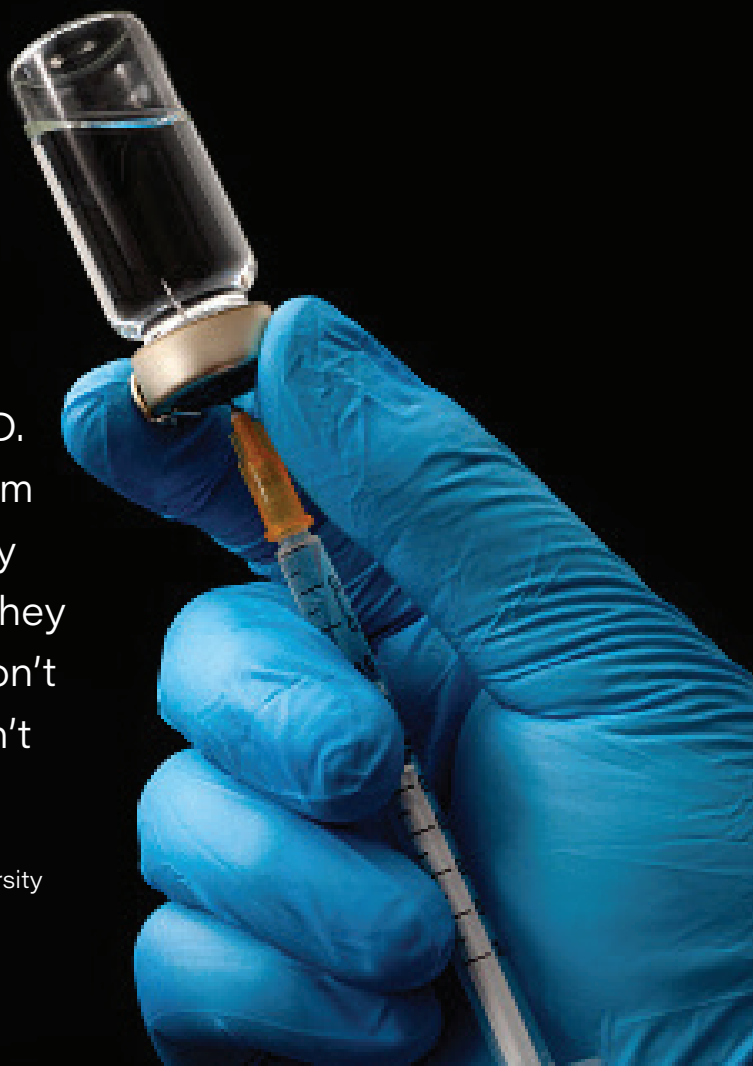
To kill the COVID-19 virus, we are supposed to seek sanitizers with more than 60 percent alcohol. At that potency, ingesting even a small amount could poison a child, and the AAP reports that poison control calls for hand sanitizer ingestion rose by 79 percent in March. With that in mind, please safeguard hand sanitizers around young children.

Our immune systems

What about all this sterilization and

"It is very important to not have a stigma about COVID. Stigma prevents people from getting tested because they don't want to be positive. They don't want to tell people, don't want to quarantine and don't want to be blamed."

—Dr. Kelly Anne Gebo, Johns Hopkins University



isolation? Are we potentially weaken our immune systems? After all, we've been limiting our exchanges with the world around us for the past seven months. Will the lack of challenges to our immune system bring on more troubles with allergies, asthma or autoimmune disease?

That's another misconception I can put to rest, according to Gebo. She explains that we shouldn't see more than typical numbers, although people with those diagnoses do need to take extra care to avoid viruses.

"We are still exposed to environmental factors—molds, pollens, rodent fecal matter, etc.—those things do not change, especially if we at least get out and walk around outside (as we should)," she says.

Social impacts

Gebo recommends we continue physically distancing while socially connecting. "During this time, we need to be physically separate

to prevent transmission, but we really need to avoid social separation," she says.

Feelings of isolation can be overwhelming, especially for extroverts and people who thrive on mingling, such as teenagers

"Their whole goal is to interact—it's part of development," says Gebo.

Families, including teens, need to be active, get plenty of sleep and eat well. Gebo also recommends meditating or finding other healthy ways, such as reducing screen time, to reduce anxiety.

"The mental health impact of this pandemic is substantial," she says, adding that this could be particularly true as we head into winter. When it's darker and colder, it is more important than ever to find ways to engage with others and stay connected.

Socializing (from a distance) may be important, but frankly, it can be stressful to go out with all these new rules to follow.

"Everything that was easy before now has

10 more steps," says Gebo, agreeing.

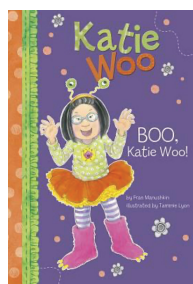
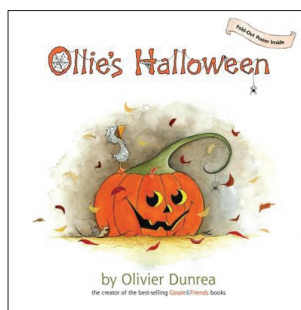
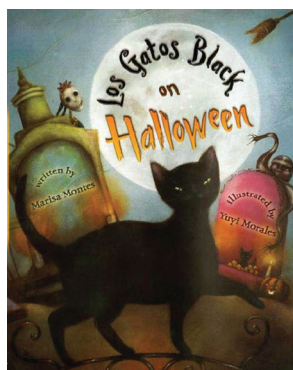
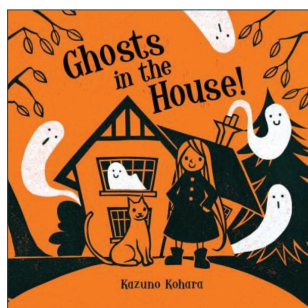
This virus has taxed people emotionally, mentally and financially. It has strained family relationships. People are exhausted and tired of being afraid. But, Gebo says, "Don't be scared. Be safe."

No stigma

Her final note is a good reminder for us all: "It is also very important to not have a stigma about COVID," she says. "Stigma prevents people from getting tested, because they don't want to be positive. They don't want to have to tell people, don't want to have to quarantine and don't want to be blamed."

But she says, "It is important to know, and to let people know, to further protect people."

We're all doing what we can to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. It's hard—very hard, sometimes. Be kind to one another, be safe and schedule your flu shot today. ■



Spooky Stories

12 Children's Books to Read on Halloween

BY MIERKA WILLIS AND TARA THOMAS, DC PUBLIC LIBRARY

When the District's leaves begin turning and the rain starts bringing cooler weather, Halloween is drawing near. There's no better way to celebrate than creating a new family tradition of settling inside with a chilling tale.

PICTURE BOOKS

'Ghosts in the House'

Written and illustrated by Kazuno Kohara

A little witch moves into an old house on the edge of town that turns out to be haunted. How inconvenient! Luckily, she knows just what to do in order to make her new house a home. Kohara's minimalist illustrated picture book is perfect for a non-scary Halloween read.

'The Scariest Book Ever'

Written and illustrated by Bob Shea

Are you braver than a ghost? This nervous ghost does not want you to visit the dark forest. Why would you do that when you could just stay home with the cat and eat donuts? Find out how brave you are with this funny and brightly colored book by the author of "Dinosaur vs. the Library."

'Los Gatos Black on Halloween'

Written by Marisa Montes, illustrated by Yuyi Morales

In this lively poem, written primarily in English, los muertos rise from the dead, los esqueletos dance while rattling their bones and young readers are introduced to Spanish words in a playful and humorous manner that begs to be read aloud.

EARLY READERS

'Ollie's Halloween'

Written and illustrated by Olivier Dunrea

Excellent for beginner readers, this seasonal addition to the Ollie series introduces Halloween themes. Join Ollie and his other farm friends as they dress in costume to spend the evening having haunting fun together.

'Boo, Katie Woo!'

Written by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Tammie Lyon

Katie wants to dress up as a monster for

Halloween, but when she goes trick-or-treating with her friends JoJo and Pedro, she isn't scaring anyone. Katie's story is a good pick about finding another way to enjoy a holiday when it's different than expected.

'In a Dark, Dark Room and other Scary Stories'

Written by Alvin Schwartz, illustrated by Victor Rivas

One of the most lasting collections of horror and urban legends for early readers, this book was re-released in 2017 with updated illustrations by Victor Rivas. A strong preface for a family read aloud of Schwartz's "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark," brave readers are sure to love these spine-tingling tales.

MIDDLE GRADE

'The Jumbies'

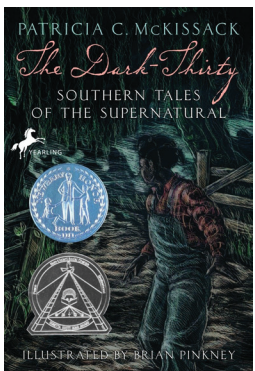
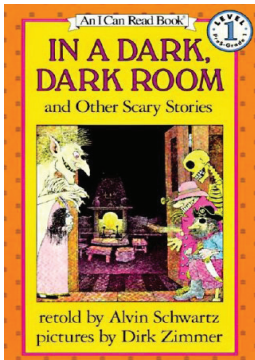
Written by Tracey Baptiste

Corinne doesn't believe in the dangerous creatures her fellow islanders call "jumbies," but when she chases an agouti deep into the forest and senses a creature following her, she's not sure what to believe. This thrilling read, the first of a trilogy, is lush with Caribbean folkloric elements.

'The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural'

Written by Patricia McKissack, illustrated by J. Brian Pinkney

A half an hour before it becomes totally dark, the monsters come out. This is the dark-thirty—an eerie time that serves as a perfect setting for nine short spine-tingling tales and one poem that span pre-Civil War to modern times. African-American storytelling comes alive as Black characters confront the realities of living in America's racist history. Each story contains an author's note that provides historical context and is accompanied by black-and-white scratchboard illustrations.



'Spirit Hunters'

Written by Ellen Oh

When Harper moves with her family to a creepy Victorian house in D.C., her brother Michael starts acting strangely. Harper urgently wants to get out of the house and figure out why she's experiencing an eerie sense of déjà vu with Michael's new personality. Oh is a local author, and the book's familiar setting make it a great choice for kids who want an extra realistic scare.

YOUNG ADULTS

'The Cabinet of Curiosities: 36 Tales Brief & Sinister'

Written by Stefan Bachmann, et al

This thick collection of three dozen haunting short stories is a collaboration between four authors. Featuring black-and-white illustrations throughout the book, these themed tales span from slightly creepy but merely shiver-inducing to realistically and frightfully disturbing,



providing any teen with a definite case of the heebie-jeebies.

'Cuckoo Song'

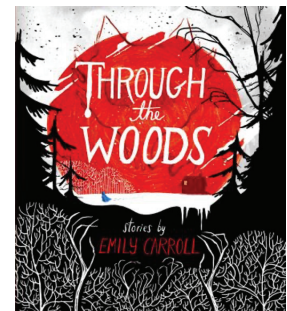
Written by Frances Hardinge

Triss wakes up from a traumatic experience and something doesn't seem right. She's hungry all the time, her sister Pen is acting strange around her and she can't shake the feeling that her dolls are watching her. Part mystery, part fantasy, part sentient doll terror, "Cuckoo Song" is a wonderful Halloween pick.

'Through the Woods'

Written and illustrated by Emily Carroll

With horrifying stories and skillful illustrations, this graphic novel contains a masterfully illustrated collection of five tales that will make you want to sleep with the light on. A variety of classic horror techniques gives each story its own ghastly feel and creates an unforgettable and terrifying read your teens will want to experience more than once. ■



A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a dog's face, likely a Weimaraner, with brown and white fur and striking light-colored eyes. The dog is looking slightly to the left of the frame.

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Dominique Dawes



OCCUPATION: Owner and founder of Dominique Dawes Gymnastics Academy & Ninja

WORKS: Clarksburg, MD

FAMILY: Husband, Jeff; and children, Kateri, 6; Quinn, almost 5; and Lincoln and Dakota, 2 1/2

Do you know a local parent who juggles multiple priorities while making a positive impact in their community? Nominate them as a subject of our Mom/Dad Life column by emailing editor@washingtonFAMILY.com.

Dominique Dawes may be best known as an Olympic gymnast—she and her teammates, the “Magnificent Seven,” won gold at the 1996 games—but she’s always considered herself a businesswoman. Her latest venture is a gymnastics and ninja academy where she hopes to inspire young girls and boys.

What do you love about being a mom, and what do you find challenging?

I was home with my kids for quite a few years, and I was still doing some work and travel and motivational speaking outside the house. But the majority of my time was spent with the little ones, and I will say it’s just a daily grind. It exhausting physically, emotionally, in all different ways. But it’s worth it because you see those little successes when a kid says the first word or a kid crawls or you realize they’re recognizing the boundaries and not always trying to push the limits.

How much do your four children know about your gymnastics career?

My two oldest ... know about my career because my husband actually likes to show them YouTube videos of me performing back in the day because I refuse to do any gymnastics today. However, both those young girls, they love it when I do a cartwheel. They love it when I do a back handspring. They light up.

Why did you feel like now was a good time to open your own academy?

What motivated me ... was everything that came out in the sport of gymnastics, the dark cloud that was truly revealed in 2016 when the Larry Nassar scandal became center stage. ... There are too many amazing women that have so many gifts ... and they’re still questioning themselves. They have a low self-esteem. Maybe they don’t make the wisest decisions in life because of the way they were treated. And that’s what I do not want for my kids. That’s when the seed was planted for me to start a gymnastics academy.

What’s something that makes juggling motherhood and your new career easier?

I think the only reason why I can juggle this

right now is because it’s a family affair—because my husband’s involved, because the kids are here. ... I mean, [my husband] was a teacher for 18 years, one of the favorite teachers in this Maryland area, and now he’s getting back in the sports world as a (former) college athlete himself. It was honestly a no brainer. But if he couldn’t be involved, if my kids weren’t involved, I will guarantee you this would not be something that I would be pursuing.

Besides gymnastics, what else do you and family like to do together?

We love doing family walks. I think everyone and their brother, when we were in quarantine, everyone started hiking and bike riding and being outside and experiencing the beauty of nature. We’re a Catholic family, so we enjoy going to mass. ... We’re a big sports family too, always watching sports, always talking about sports, wanting to go to sports events and hoping to put our kids in not just the sport of gymnastics and ninja but other sports as well.

How do you take care of your mental and physical health right now?

A little bit of silence is always a good thing. And it’s hard to get—any mother out there knows what I’m talking about. So I do embrace the times when I’m driving to the gym, and there’s not one kid or two kids or three or four kids in the car screaming at me. Those moments where I can just embrace the silence and be centered and not have a lot of noise from the world distract me and truly be led by Christ.

What are five things you always carry in your purse?

A rosary. Literally 50 masks because if you don’t have a mask on these days you can’t go anywhere. A journal—I always journaled as an athlete. My kids’ hair bands are always in my purse or on my fingers. And I would say lip gloss, but being that I wear a mask nearly 24/7, I don’t have to worry about that anymore! ■

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