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Today's grandparents may have fond memories of the "good old days," but history tells us that adults have worried about their kids' fascination with new-fangled entertainment and technology since the days of dime novels, radio, the first comic books and rock n' roll.

From penny press to Snapchat: Parents fret through the ages

BY BARBARA ORTUTAY
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NEW YORK (AP) — When Stephen Dennis was raising his two sons in the 1980s, he never heard the phrase "screen time," nor did he worry much about the hours his kids spent with technology. When he bought an Apple II Plus computer, he considered it an investment in their future and encouraged them to use it as much as possible.

Boy, have things changed with his grandkids and their phones and their Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter.

"It almost seems like an addiction," said Dennis, a retired homebuilder who lives in Bellevue, Washington. "In the old days you had a computer and you had a TV and you had a phone but none of them were linked to the outside world but the phone. You didn't have this omnipresence of technology."

Today's grandparents may have fond memories of the "good old days," but history tells us that adults have worried about their kids' fascination with new-fangled entertainment and technology since the days of dime novels, radio, the first comic books and rock n' roll.

"This whole idea that we even worry about what kids are doing is pretty much a 20th century thing," said Katie Foss, a media studies professor at Middle Tennessee State University. But when it comes to screen

time, she added, "all we are doing is reinventing the same concern we were having back in the '50s."

True, the anxieties these days seem particularly acute — as, of course, they always have. Smartphones have a highly customized, 24/7 presence in our lives that feeds parental fears of antisocial behavior and stranger danger.

What hasn't changed, though, is a general parental dread of what kids are doing out of sight. In previous generations, this often meant kids wandering around on their own or sneaking out at night to drink. These days, it might mean hiding in their bedroom, chatting with strangers online.

Less than a century ago, the radio sparked similar fears.

"The radio seems to find parents more helpless than did the funnies, the automobile, the movies and other earlier invaders of the home, because it can not be locked out or the children locked in," Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, director of the Child Study Association of America, told The Washington Post in 1931. She added that the biggest worry radio gave parents was how it interfered with other interests — conversation, music practice, group games and reading.

In the early 1930s a group of mothers from Scarsdale, Arizona, pushed radio broadcasters to change programs they thought were too "over-

stimulating, frightening and emotionally overwhelming" for kids, said Margaret Cassidy, a media historian at Adelphi University in New York who authored a chronicle of American kids and media.

Called the Scarsdale Moms, their activism led the National Association of Broadcasters to come up with a code of ethics around children's programming in which they pledged not to portray criminals as heroes and to refrain from glorifying greed, selfishness and disrespect for authority.

Then television burst into the public consciousness with unrivaled speed. By 1955, more than half of all U.S. homes had a black and white set, according to Mitchell Stephens, a media historian at New York University.

The hand-wringing started almost as quickly. A 1961 Stanford University study on 6,000 children, 2,000 parents and 100 teachers found that more than half of the kids studied watched "adult" programs such as Westerns, crime shows and shows that featured "emotional problems." Researchers were aghast at the TV violence present even in children's programming.

By the end of that decade, Congress had authorized \$1 million (about \$7 million today) to study the effects of TV violence, prompting "literally thousands of projects" in subsequent years, Cassidy said.

That eventually led the American Academy of Pediatrics to adopt, in 1984, its first recommendation that parents limit their kids' exposure to technology. The medical association argued that television sent unrealistic messages around drugs and alcohol, could lead to obesity and might fuel violence. Fifteen years later, in 1999, it issued its now-infamous edict that kids under 2 should not

watch any television at all.

The spark for that decision was the British kids' show "Teletubbies," which featured cavorting humanoids with TVs embedded in their abdomens. But the odd TV-within-the-TV-beings conceit of the show wasn't the problem — it was the "gibberish" the Teletubbies directed at pre-verbal kids whom doctors thought should be learning to speak from their parents, said Donald Shifrin, a University of Washington pediatrician and former chair of the AAP committee that pushed for the recommendation.

Video games presented a different challenge. Decades of study have failed to validate the most prevalent fear, that violent games encourage violent behavior. But from the moment the games emerged as a cultural force in the early 1980s, parents fretted about the way kids could lose themselves in games as simple and repetitive as "Pac-Man," "Asteroids" and "Space Invaders."

Some cities sought to restrict the spread of arcades; Mesquite, Texas, for instance, insisted that the under-17 set required parental supervision. Many parents imagined the arcades where many teenagers played video games "as dens of vice, of illicit trade in drugs and sex," Michael Z. Newman, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee media historian, wrote recently in Smithsonian.

This time, some experts were more sympathetic to kids. Games could relieve anxiety and fed the age-old desire of kids to "be totally absorbed in an activity where they are out on an edge and can't think of anything else," Robert Millman, an addiction specialist at the New York Hospital-Cornell University Medical Center, told the New York Times in 1981. He cast them as benign alternatives to gambling and "glue sniffing."

The gift of perspective

As a lover of history I find myself reading the news and trying to determine whether an event, innovation or social change is significant or just part of a predictable pattern that we have seen in the past. I tend to hope that it is a predictable pattern so that I have a reference point for how to handle the change and reassurance that others have lived through similar experiences.

Outside of watching the news, I also try this exercise on topics that cause me anxiety, primarily raising children. I often hear from my plus-50-year-old friends, "I can't imagine having to raise kids today with cellphones and school shootings and..." My heart races a little faster and I wonder: Is raising kids today a significantly scarier prospect than it has been throughout history?

A part of me thinks yes; yes, there has been a historically significant leap from the previous norms and challenges of raising kids. My parents and grandparents never had to navigate appropriate screen time nor the effects of cyber-bullying. Kids didn't have to go through metal detectors to go to school or practice active shooter drills. Kids could ride their bikes all over town and respond only to a dinner bell or a cue from the street light that it was time to go home. No GPS units attached to your child or a cellphone in their elementary-age pocket.

However, the other and louder voice inside of me responds that I am not considering the big picture. Parenting in America today is one of the safest times medically to bring children into the world. If a child is premature they have a significantly higher chance of surviving and thriving. As they grow, we bring our children to regular well-checks and immunize for a slew of diseases that killed or maimed children of previous generations. Economically, our children are protected from working in factories and mines. When I take the time to reference history I know that parents have always had reason for anxiety, that this again is a predictable pattern.

I recently watched a documentary about Mr. Rogers and he talked about the troubles plaguing youth in the 1970s. What stuck with me was his emphasis that while the external world of children is rapidly changing, what is going on internally for children remains timeless. Kids need to know they are safe and loved. And families need the support of the community in raising children. One form of support is simply providing perspective.

Generational perspective is a wonderful gift. But it is important to not just recount how much better the good old days were but also how some things were still scary or uncertain and how kids still misbehaved and even rebelled. I know as a parent I am relieved to hear the retelling of the have-you-lost-your-mind behavior of teenagers in the past. One such story that has stuck with me is of my own grandfather, who came from a super strict home, getting kicked out of high school for putting Limburger cheese in the vents of the school. Another story involved my uncle's rebellious stage, when he frustrated his parents by refusing to cut his long hair and wore obnoxious bell bottom pants to FFA events. And yet both my grandfather and my uncle went on to be great members of the community.

I also think about anxiety filled stories seniors have shared with me of going to school during the Cold War and practicing putting on gas masks and drills of hiding under their desks preparing for a nuclear bomb to drop. While it doesn't alleviate my fears of an active shooter, it gives me a comforting perspective that parents have continually had to swallow their fears and allow their kids to be part of the bigger, scarier world. And, kids will be OK. And, eventually, they too will become worry-filled parents.

Mr. Rogers once said, "Parents are like shuttles on a loom. They join the threads of the past with threads of the future and leave their own bright patterns as they go." I like to think about how the experiences of my grandparents have shaped my parenting approach and someday, if I'm lucky, I'll hear my voice come out when my daughters chastise their offspring.

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LIZ CASSIDAY

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- The Green Boomerang will have a warehouse sale Friday and Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon. The sale will include furniture, filing cabinets, kitchen items and a bag sale for clothing. The sale will take place at 1201 Bowie Road.

- A presentation entitled, "Hemingway's Unrequited High School Crush," will be offered by Robert Elder Saturday from 9-10 a.m. at The Hub on Smith. Elder is a writer and Hemingway scholar. Elder's essay documenting his discov-

ery of love letters was the featured article in the most recent edition of The Hemingway Review. Elder is the author of eight books and founder of Odd Hours Media. He also serves as a mentor at Tech Stars, 1871 Chicago and Northwestern College and is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities Grant: Creating Humanities Communities along Wyoming's Hemingway Highway. A book signing will follow the presentation; Elder's book, "Hidden Hemingway," will be available for

sale. Refreshments will be provided. This event is open and free to the public. The Hub on Smith is located at 211 Smith St.

- The Hub on Smith will offer a "Create Your Own Greeting Card Workshop" with Heidi Roesler. This class will get your creative juices flowing; and the results will be special cards to share with family and friends. The workshop takes place the second Saturday of each month from 12:30-3:30 p.m. Sign-up at the front desk the Wednesday before the class.



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Wed - Ham Loaf w/Pineapple Sauce
Thurs - French Dip
Fri - Cod Baked w/carrots, leeks
Sat - Cheese Burger
Sun - Roasted Turkey
Mon - Meatloaf w/Roasted Tomatoes

*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

Tue - When I'm 64...	5:00 p.m.	Café
Wed - Gentle Yoga	10:30 a.m.	Community Room
Thurs - Big Horn Mountain Adventure	Leaves 8:00 a.m.	Lobby
Fri - Born in a Barn	10:00 a.m.	Café
Sat - Greeting Card Class	12:30 to 3:30 p.m.	Art Studio
SAT - Hemingway: Unrequited High School Crush	9 a.m.	Community Room

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

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