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Vol. 13, No. 1 February-March 2011 • www.valleykids.com

Mommy bloggers

Why we read them
The mommy-blogging world
How to get started
Page 2



Kids Best Fest
Pages 12-14



Teens unplugged
Mom takes away the Internet, iPod, cell phone, video games
Page 31



Take back the evening
Corbett's tips for a better bedtime routine
Page 6



Valley parents share ...
Warm-me-up foods for snowy days
Page 26

Valley KIDS

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www.valleykids.com

Love, Limits & Lessons 6

Into the Outdoors 8

Kids Best Fest & YouthFilm 12

Family Fun Calendar 16

Baby-proof your home 24

Valley parents share recipes 26

Teens unplugged 31



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Publisher: Dennis Skoglund

Executive Editor: Tim Blagg

Editor: Chris Harris, Ext. 265

Advertising Director: Rich Fahey

Advertising Sales: Risa Sudolsky, Ext. 215; e-mail rsudolsky@nnews.com

Circulation Director: Kevin LaMagdelaine, Ext. 230

Director of Operations: Doug Hillman, Ext. 206

Mailing Address: Valley Kids, The Recorder, P.O. Box 1367, Greenfield, MA 01302

Physical Address: 14 Hope St., Greenfield, Mass.

Editorial e-mail address: charris@recorder.com

Advertising e-mail address: rsudolsky@nnews.com

On the cover: Mommy blogger Emily Neuburger of Amherst at home, creating art with her two daughters. Neuburger's blog is called "Red Bird Crafts." Story starts on this page.



"how i got lost so close to home," by Conway poet, mother of two and blogger Amy Dryansky. Her blog, "Pokey Mama," celebrating what she calls "slow parenting," is a blend of her short essays, poetry and artwork.

Image courtesy Amy Dryansky

Local moms in the blogosphere

Finding creativity, community and more in online conversations

By CHELI MENNELLA
Special to Valley Kids

When I asked Amy Dryansky of Conway why she blogs, she responded without hesitation, "Because it's fun."

Millions of women agree. According to a 2009 Women and Social Media Study conducted by BlogHer, iVillage, and Compass Partners, fun is the number one reason why women blog. And there are lots of women reading, writing or posting on blogs: an estimated 23 million, according to that same study.

"Blogging fills a niche for me that writing poetry doesn't fill," Dryansky, a poet, mother of two,

and Communications Coordinator at the Franklin Land Trust explained. "And it's allowed me to get back to what I love — making stuff." Her blog, "Pokey Mama," is a blend of her short essays, poetry and artwork, and moves back and forth between her past (becoming pregnant and having babies) and her present (specific incidents with her kids or with writing).

"I wanted to tell the story of what it's like to be a mother and a poet, and talk about what it means not just in practical terms,

Continued on Page 3



DRYANSKY



Photo/Emily Neuburger

Emily Neuburger's blog, "Red Bird Crafts," focuses on creative family projects like these "Story Stones," one of Neuburger's most popular ideas, created from found stones and fabrics.

Blog: Online conversation

From Page 2

but in the kinds of interior shifts that happen and how that impacts artists," Dryansky said.

Getting creative

For Emily Neuburger of Amherst, deciding to be a stay-at-home mom was the catalyst for many new creative projects. Being home with her two daughters, she rediscovered art and craft mediums she used to do before becoming a high school English teacher, like making hand-carved stamps. She turned that inspiration into unique and affordable T-shirts for her kids. Soon, other parents wanted her handmade T-shirts for their kids, too. So, Neuburger started a family business, making appliqué shirts and other wearable and functional art.



NEUBURGER

During this same time, she said, "I was also rediscovering what brought me to teaching English — loving literature, writing, and planning."

After a three-year incubation period, Neuburger was ready to start her own online conversation. In January of 2009, her blog, "Red Bird Crafts," was born. The blog focuses on crafting with children, using simple, colorful, repurposed, and found materials.

Jewish parenting

Amy Meltzer, of Northampton, began blogging in 2008, after she was hired to write a monthly column for the PJ Library, an organization that sends Jewish content books and music to families with young children in participating communities. She reviews the books, but expands those reviews in a personal way by writing about her family's experience with the books. Meltzer, a mother of two and a kindergarten teacher at the Lander-Grinspoon Academy, had already published a picture book, "A Mezuzah on the Door" (Kar-ben Publishing, 2007), when she became interested in writing about Jewish parenting and what it's like to raise kids in a Jewish culture.



MELTZER

"Homeshuling — A Jewish Parenting Blog," focuses on creating a Jewish life for her young children (mostly) in the comfort of their home. Meltzer explained, "The word 'shul' is Yiddish for synagogue." The concept behind "Homeshuling" is all about trying "to create a vibrant Jewish home while spending very little time in the synagogue."

Continued on Page 4

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■ Blogs: Different routes

From Page 3

Mom-based

While each of these women took different routes to the blogosphere, they all share one thing in common — being a mother played a big part in their impulse to start blogging.

It was as a mother that Meltzer became interested in blogging about Jewish parenting. “I wanted to see if I had a parenting book inside me,” Meltzer said. “Blogging helped me explore that possibility.”

Amy Dryansky unleashed her blog on Mother’s Day, 2010. “I wanted to connect with other moms and writers, have a conversation about what happens to us, what it feels like to become a mother,” she said.

After her kids were born, Dryansky had writer’s block for three years. Her first book of poetry, “How I Got Lost So Close To Home” (Alice James Books, 1999), had already been published. “I was in a new place in my life, uncharted territory. And I couldn’t get a handle on it. I kept asking myself, ‘What am I — A mom? A poet? A mom-poet?’”

She had to stop resisting wanting to go back to her old creative process, which was no longer viable with caring for young children, less sleep and a lot less time. “Ultimately I changed the process and then the product changed,” she said. She created what she calls “found poems” which released her writer’s block and freed up her creative energy.

The name of her blog, “Pokey Mama,” and its tagline, “Poet. Mother. Worker. Member of the slow-parenting movement,” is based on her own joke about feeling like a late bloomer. She explained, “I started writing poetry in my late thirties, had kids in my late, late thirties. It takes me awhile to come to realizations; I’m a slow mover.” Thus her slow parenting movement was hatched. “More than anything,” Dryansky said, “the blog talks about trusting yourself, and those artistic, creative, mother impulses.”

Real play

For Emily Neuburger, being a mother inspired her to make

Continued on Page 5

Mommy blogs as a business

The world of mommy blogs has become a huge business, generating revenue, scholarships, and invitations to the Olympics, the Oscars, Disney World, Oprah and even the White House for savvy moms. You can follow them on twitter, listen to their advice on satellite radio, and get free stuff just by visiting their sites. Some moms have even turned their blogs into full-time careers, complete with hired assistants.

Corporations and businesses have seen the money-making opportunities at many of these blogs and have offered sponsorships. While there is a down side to these sponsorships with the distracting and flashy advertising sometimes taking up more space than the blog itself, and loss of control over some aspects of the blog, there are perks.

Both Dryansky and Neuburger have their blogs on sites with no advertising, Wordpress and Blogger, respectively. Dryansky admitted there is not as much traffic on sites like these, but for her, being in control of her work and her blog is paramount. She admitted another part of her blogging endeavor was being frustrated with traditional publishing. She wanted a different way to connect with people through writing and not be at the mercy of a publisher who controlled her work, and when or how it would be published. “Blogging revitalized my visibility in the writing world,” Dryansky said and helped her take control of putting her work out there.

Meltzer had her blog on Wordpress, but after blogging for a year, she received an e-mail from a then-editor at Beliefnet, who invited her to move her blog over to the bigger site. She did, thinking she’d get more traffic, and be able to reach more people. While she’s not crazy about the advertisements, she does

Continued on Page 5

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■ Blogs: A wider web

From Page 4

things for her children, which in turn became fodder for her blog. “I noticed my daughter was exposed to different media, and I wanted to make sure she also had real, imaginative, open-ended play. I used what I already had. I went through the recycling, used paper bags and cereal boxes, and other materials on hand, like fabric, felt, and paint.” One of her more popular craft ideas, story stones, was inspired by wanting to create something for her young daughter to use for imaginative storytelling.

Connecting with other moms, forming a wider web of community, has been a satisfying result of blogging for these local moms.

Reader feedback

Amy Meltzer said the response to her blog “has been incredible. I love getting comments from someone I don’t know who’s read my posts and has been inspired by them.” This is part of what keeps her blogging. “The surprising thing about blogging is developing relationships with other moms who are writing about Jewish parenting, the community of other moms doing what I’m doing.”

Neuburger said, “One of the best parts of blogging is the other side of putting it out there — the receiving, receiving inspiration, letting us into their world.” When she decided to stay at home and parent her kids, she craved being part of something else, having other people to bounce ideas off of.

“It’s been so fulfilling being part of a local community of crafters,” Neuburger said. “I was ready to jump into a bigger circle. I wondered what would come of it, would it be fulfilling? I was willing and curious of what might happen. Instantly, it was very exciting to hear from readers, other crafters, and bloggers, which enriched my blogging experience.” She made new mom connections, and even though they are in a virtual world, some of those connections have become real friendships.

Blogging has held other surprises for these moms. Neuburger had been getting great feedback on her clever ideas, and

Blogging business: from page 4

get a little compensation for every hit on her site, and she feels more comfortable asking publishers for review copies of books, now that she’s associated with Beliefnet.

Dryansky, Neuburger, and Meltzer are not typical “mommy bloggers” in that they don’t reveal potentially embarrassing or private information about themselves, their kids, nor their families. While some mommy blogs take a reveal-all approach, these women lean more toward privacy than publicity.

As a poet, Dryansky, is already very open about her life. She admits there is a risk of exposing too much, but mostly blogging feels good to her. She’s putting it out there because she wants people to read it. She claims her blog is honest and intimate without being embarrassing. And she is careful with how much information she reveals about her family, and how she writes about them, often talking with her 12-year-old daughter, before she posts anything related to her.

To maintain the privacy of her family, Emily Neuburger does not reveal her daughters’ names, and instead uses the code names Mouse and Chick. She also doesn’t show their faces in the many photographs peppered through out her blog.

Getting started

All three local mom bloggers took the initiative and set up their blogs by themselves. Both Blogger and Wordpress have tutorials to get beginning bloggers started. Both host sites are free, the only cost being your time. “If there’s any inclination to start blogging — go for it,” Neuburger suggests. “You don’t have to wait. If it feels right, just do it, and let it evolve naturally. This is not high stakes. Part of getting starting is reading other people’s blogs, commenting on other blogs, and just getting into the conversation.”

— CHELI MENNELLA

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Valley Parents share: Snowy-day favorite foods

From Page 26



Photo/Andrea Bugbee

Maril Alsup of Northampton with her niece **Evelyn** (center) and her nephew **Joseph** (left). Evelyn and Joseph live in Florida, but they like to drizzle honey over fresh snow when they visit family in the Pioneer Valley.

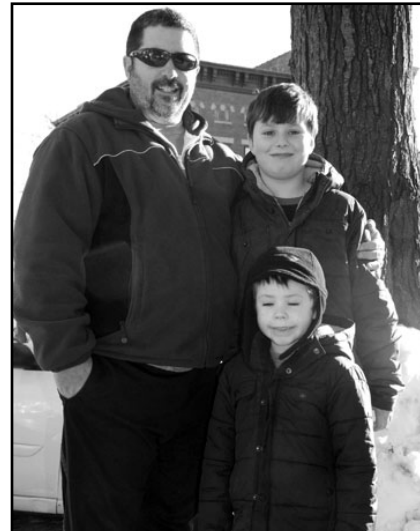


Photo/Andrea Bugbee

Jr. and Pam Morales of West Springfield with their children, **Alexander** (center) and **Christopher**. The Morales likes to soup up hot cocoa with add-ins such as Hershey kisses and peppermint sticks.

said, adding, "You can make cookies with carrots or squash in them, too."

Five-year-old **EVELYN ALSUP** may be from Miami Beach,



Photo/Andrea Bugbee

Bob, Charlie, and Sam Stanton of Holyoke. Snowy days make this family crave fried macaroni, a warm, filling dish easily made from leftovers.

Florida, but when she visits her aunt **MARIL ALSUP** in Northampton, she knows just what snack to eat when flurries begin to fly. "You get a cup of snow and put honey in it," she

said. "Or hot chocolate with marshmallows."

PAM AND JR MORALES of West Springfield say they got their special hot cocoa recipe when visiting Springfield's Bright Nights display with their kids. "We call it magic cocoa," said Pam. "You make your favorite hot chocolate mix and drop in two Hershey's Kisses and marshmallows, then you stir it with a candy cane or a peppermint stick. A cinnamon stick is good, too."

Warmmmmm!

Last but not least, **BOB STANTON** of Holyoke has a great recipe for de-icing his two boys, 8-year-old **CHARLIE** and 4-year-old **SAM**, after playing in the snow.

"We do fried macaroni. It's an old Italian thing. Put a little leftover macaroni in a pan with oil and then you fry it up. It gets nice and crispy, too. Then we put some sprinkle cheese — that's parmesan cheese — on it," Stanton said. "We love that on snow days."

Blog: Blogger snapshots

From Page 5

this motivated her to write a book proposal. The publishing company liked her craft ideas, and that she had a readership and a way of reaching people through her blog. Her book will be published by Storey Publishing in 2012.

Blogger Snapshots

◆ "Pokey Mama: Poet. Mother. Worker. Member of slow-parenting movement."

Who? Amy Dryansky, Conway mother of two, ages 12 and 9

What's the scoop? The blog is a blend of Dryansky's essays, poems, and artwork intermingling her past and present, and telling the story of what it's like to be a mother and a poet.

Where to find her?

www.amydryansky.wordpress.com

◆ "Homeshuling: A Jewish Parenting Blog"

Who? Amy Meltzer, Northampton mother of two, ages 5 and 7

What's the scoop? The blog focuses on creating a vibrant Jewish home for families while spending little time in the synagogue.

Where to find her?

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/home-shuling>,

www.kveller.com (Her book-of-the-month for the PJ Library Book Review), and her picture book, *A Mezuzah on the Door* (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2007)

◆ "Red Bird Crafts"

Who? Emily Neuburger, Amherst mother of two, ages 3 and 6

What's the Scoop? The blog is all about crafting with children using simple, colorful, repurposed and found materials to make unique creations.

Where to find her?

www.redbirdcrafts.blogspot.com,

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www.redbirdcrafts.etsy.com
Watch the blog for news on her craft book to be published in Spring 2012.



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