

Morganton News Herald – Sunday, November 27, 2016

Generations



Tracking children in a hi-tech world

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

Some Baby Boomers may remember the question posed on TV and radio, "It's 10 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?" It was used as a public service announcement for parents during the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The PSA, which reaped an award by making Time magazine's "Top 10 Public-Service Announcements" list, usually preceded the station's late-evening newscast.

During the 1960s, growing up during the Baby Boomer age gave kids an immense amount of freedom. Sure, our parents loved us, but predatory fears hadn't yet surfaced in all forms of media as it has today.

On weekends and holidays, my siblings and I left the house in the morning and didn't return until close to dinner. There were street activities such as hop scotch, tag, roller skating, hide and seek, and softball when the neighbors didn't complain about trampling on their manicured lawns.

As teenagers, we didn't have cellphones to check in and our street games turned into trips to the movies where you could see the same flick over and over without being chased out, hanging out at the pizza parlor, or simply listening to rock and roll on 45's with friends and practicing new dance steps.

But, today, parents can easily answer the question of where their children are by checking an app on their phones, such as MamaBear, Life360, Canary and My Mobile Watchdog, to name a few.

I recently went out to dinner with a Mom who uses Life360 and this app was amazing. Launched in 2008, this free app uses GPS tracking technology that enables family members to see one another's whereabouts on an invitation-only map, find lost or stolen phones, and even alerts

users about recent crime in the area. When family members reach their destinations, they can let one another know by checking in with the push of a single button, which beeps on the corresponding phone. If there's a problem, they can push a "panic" button to send out a voice, email or text alert to their family circles. The app also enables smartphones to detect when people are in a car crash and it automatically contacts emergency response.

As beeps sounded throughout dinner to alert my dinner partner that someone had gotten somewhere, she showed me the map on the screen and the icon's route of travel of the person who happened to be attached to the other phone.

I asked her if a teenager would purposely leave the phone behind when he or she traveled, defeating the purpose of the app, but it made sense when she assured me that teens today would rather lose their right arms than part even for a minute with their phones.

Would my parents have embraced an app to pinpoint exactly where I was at all times, especially during my teenage years?

If Dad had the app, he would have known immediately that I had played hooky from school even though my younger brother, George, swore up and down that he had seen me get on the bus.

And what about when I was finally allowed to date at 16? If Mom followed the route of me and my 18-year old first boyfriend on the app, would she be able to better understand what a wonderful time I had even though all we did was drive around for an hour and a half in an old Chevy and only briefly stopped at a White Castle for a couple of square hamburgers?

And back to Dad, again. If he had the Life360 app and been told that I was going with friends to a movie, would the app blow my cover by showing that I was actually in the Tiki Lounge, 45 minutes away with the same girl friends, and that I had gotten into the dance hall using false proof?

As far as me being the parent with the app, would it have helped or hindered my watch over my two sons and one daughter, especially during their troubled teen years? Sometimes when the kids visit and sit around telling stories about things that happened while they were growing up, a shudder goes through my body because I hear about something I didn't know.

And now that they've all made it into their 30's and 40's, that's just fine.

In today's dangerous world, this kind of app is an amazing tool on both sides of the spectrum even if the teens aren't crazy about it.

Peg DeMarco can be reached at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.