



Forest Lake Times

# Opinion

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## Stupid Hannah moments: Stuck in a creek

Hannah Davis  
News Editor

While I claim a light brunette as my natural hair color, I do — from time to time — have some “blonde moments.” I’ve come to claim these moments as “stupid Hannah moments,” and there are many to choose from. This column series will tell some of my favorites.

Earlier this summer, I visited extended family at the farm up north. I took the four-wheeler ATV out for a quick spin before I was supposed to leave, joking with Grandma as I walked out the door, “I promise not to get it stuck.” I just wish I would’ve remembered to knock on wood as I left the house.

The early summer had been fairly dry, and the swampy marsh that’s typically impassable had turned to caked mud with tall reeds.

Being the adventurer that I am, I passed the grove of trees — typically where the earth turns to swamp — and pushed my way forward about 75 yards to the next grove of trees at higher ground. Feeling good about the traction on the trail, I passed that grove of trees and continued on, squatting over the seat and using my legs as shock absorbers as my arms pivoted back and forth as I maneuvered around the bumps.

I came across a puddle, and at this point feeling a bit invincible, gently pressed the throttle forward, certain I could gently get through if I took it easy. Next thing I knew, the nose of the ATV was pivoted downward and water was flooding up. Turns out, that puddle was a creek, and I had taken a nose-dive straight into it. I knew it was bad when, within seconds, water rose to just above where my ankles would be had I not pulled my feet up.

Being the stubborn girl I am, I didn’t want to call for help. I hiked up my shorts and, with my old running shoes on, jumped into the swamp water, grateful we live in Minnesota and not the south where the alligators roam — while simultaneously not trying to freak out about the spider that I just saw scramble around the four-wheeler. For about 15 minutes, I did everything I could think of to try to get the nose out of the water and back onto someplace with traction. I tried moving the four-wheeler over onto another track, centimeter by centimeter, with no luck. I got in front of the ATV, waist-deep in the creek, found a perch for my feet, and heaved while I gently pushed the throttle in reverse. Nothing worked.

I had brought my cellphone with me, as I usually do on these treks for emergency purposes. So I did what I had avoided thus far: I called the house.

“Don’t tell me you got

stuck,” was Grandma’s opening sentence.

“Well, stuck could be one way to put it,” I said. She just laughed, which was a relief on my part.

She sent help in the form of my aunt and uncle, who tried bringing the tractor down the path. They quickly aborted that mission, realizing the trail was still too wet for the tractor. So my uncle brought the tractor back, and my aunt walked the 100 yards or so to help me with the four-wheeler.

We pushed, we shoved, and as we were barely able to nudge the nose out of the creek, I lost a shoe. But my love of shoes — particularly, those running shoes — was trumped by my need to get the four-wheeler out of the creek, so I just kept pushing and let my shoe get lost to the muck in the creek. Though we had succeeded in getting the nose out of the creek, we still couldn’t get traction enough to move the four-wheeler anywhere, so we walked back to the house — me, with one less shoe, making a strange “squish, step, squish, step” sound as we walked. I also learned that once you get wet — like, really wet — bug spray no longer works, so the sound was more like “squish, step, slap, squish, step, slap.”

Once we got back to the house, we called in neighborly reinforcements.

First came the neighbor kid with his side-by-side ATV. We got out to the scene of the crime just fine, backed up to my ATV, and hooked it up to the side-by-side with a tow rope. I hit reverse as he hit forward. Despite my voiced concerns prior to the attempt, neither of us moved and he buried his side-by-side to the floor in mud, leaving us both stranded.

Then came another neighbor and family friend with his ATV with a winch. He took one look and laughed for a solid 60 seconds before turning to help. He first hooked up the neighbor kid’s side-by-side and pulled him out of the mud, then moved onto my ATV. He pulled me out with no problems, and we made it back to the house — three hours later than I intended to leave.

One thing to note about my family: We tease each other. I was told my punishment would be to tell the rest of my family, including all of my cousins, that I now hold the golden trophy in our family for “most stuck ATV ride.” It’s a good thing I’m among the youngest of all of us, as that taught me how to take the teasing (and dish it right back too).

I recently saw that family friend who helped pull me out, and he thanked me for the entertainment that day. I looked at him and said, “You’re welcome. But I don’t dare do it again.” We both laughed.

## Community support needed now more than ever before

### Around the District

Steve Massey



Like many of you, I have great hope for the new year, and for our schools, staff and students. For many months, we have struggled together to adapt and stay safe during a worldwide pandemic, doing our best to make sense of expert guidance and new regulations. With a vaccine in production, and initial doses already provided to health care workers, we have hope that the next several months will bring about the return to normal we’ve all been waiting for.

We’re not there yet, however, and our schools will continue to see a big impact from COVID-19 for many weeks to come.

Since the beginning of the school year, our

priority has been to have students in school as much as possible without compromising staff and student safety. We have been able to accomplish both goals throughout most of this school year, although the winter virus surge temporarily put our students in distance learning.

With new guidance from the state, we have announced a phased return to in-person learning for our elementary students, beginning mid-January. We are also working toward getting our middle school and high school students back into our buildings, as soon as community case numbers and state guidance allows.

We are excited to wel-

come our students back to their classrooms. While we’re hopeful for a steady decrease in COVID-19 cases as vaccine distribution ramps up, we also know that we still have a long way to go with this pandemic.

One of the key challenges in the COVID-19 era has been in our ability to keep staff available for in-person work. Before we transitioned to distance learning in November, our district was facing many challenges relating to staff members who were sick or needing to quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19. In many cases, the exposure was happening outside of our schools, showing the key impact of community spread on our

ability to successfully operate schools.

I would ask that all of us do our part to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 in our community. If we all do our best to avoid large events, limit the group size of our social gatherings and continue following CDC and state guidance, it will be a significant help to our district’s efforts to keep teachers and students at school.

Now more than ever, I appreciate the efforts and support of our community, and the enthusiasm for keeping students in school. It is clear that our community shares our desire to provide a quality education for each student. As we ring in the new year, I am looking forward to a time where COVID-19 does not cast a shadow over our schools, and we can all work together toward this goal.

*Steve Massey is the superintendent of Forest Lake Area Schools.*

## How family therapy can help

Familial relationships are typically regarded among the closest and most meaningful in our lives. At the same time, they contain inherently complicated, complex ways of relating and emotional coping that often extend not only through our lifetimes, but across generations. In our families of origin, we learn to relate to ourselves, each other, and the world; and the patterns we develop there tend to stick around, even becoming expressed in future generations.

A common misconception is that healthy and effective families experience little or no conflict, while in actuality, there may in fact be quite a lot of it. The presence of relational struggle within families is unavoidable and natural and can even be viewed as helpful for bringing awareness to areas needing to be addressed and improved upon. Differences in personality traits and environmentally learned patterns in all of us can create barriers for seeing, hearing, and understanding one another. An important predictor for successful families it is not whether there is conflict, rather it lies in the family’s ability to identify and manage conflict in healthy ways when it does.

Perhaps the majority of people see the need for family therapy as arising from crises such as a separation or divorce, the death of a family member, addiction, or abuse. While families dealing with these kinds of circumstances do frequently seek and benefit from family therapy, there are a great number of families who turn to it with a desire to improve communication and to learn to relate to one another in healthier and more connected ways.

Current stress levels are high in many families, particularly in the current state of the world, and families in the community are doing their very best to bal-

### Thoughts of a Therapist

Carrie Niles



ance their time and emotional responses. Distancing from friends and extended family, navigating learning and working from home, finding and keeping work, and so many more challenges understandably lead to reacting rather than responding thoughtfully to one another throughout the day. Over time, these interactions can build, contributing to a lower threshold for patience and understanding.

Family therapy can identify and address these areas of disconnection and pain that appear within family systems. Its perspective aims to treat not only individual mental health symptoms and diagnoses, but individuals and families within the context of their relationships and environments. Families receive guidance on how to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs in clear and healthy ways in order to increase the chances of being more fully seen and heard by others. Every family member’s feelings and needs are regarded as important. Depending on the established goals, family therapy can focus on and occur with all or parts of families, and can address dynamics for couples, parents, and entire families as a whole, even including extended family.

Family therapists John and Julie Gottman, founders of The Gottman Institute, identify healthy communication habits and patterns in relationships: the use of I statements to express feelings and needs; appreciation for the positive traits in others; accepting others’ perspectives,

while acknowledging and taking responsibility for one’s own wrongdoing; and learning to calm and self-soothe oneself. Establishing healthy boundaries around these ways of communicating, by identifying what is okay and not okay within the family unit can fundamentally strengthen trust in the relationship, building strong and resilient families and individuals within them. Goals of family therapy can encompass a range of subjects, and create lasting positive change for nuclear and extended families, as well as future generations.

It is important to remember that no families are perfect. When stress runs high and good intentions are lost in harsh or impatient tones, repairing the relationship by acknowledging and accepting responsibility for one’s behavior is critical and impactful. Revisiting the interaction when calm, by seeing and hearing, acknowledging, and accepting responsibility for the feelings involved, can go a long way for repairing the connection. In all families, mistakes and missteps will happen. In healthy and resilient families, those transgressions are seen as human. Remember that there will be conflict and emotions will not always be expressed in gentle and calm ways, but there is value in the repair, the continued work toward improving relational interactions, and building healthy resilient families within our communities.

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