

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Families Online
- Cyberspace Concerns and Cautions
- E-mail Woes and Wonders

## Abe&Sarah.com

by Tina Brennan

As a true and faithful member of the pre-baby boom generation, I had a lot to say to my children about the Internet—not much of which was positive: “The art of letter writing is being lost. The joy of putting pen to paper is being thrown to the wind or the air-waves or whatever. No carefully textured words. No tear-stained pages . . . What will happen to the postal carrier? the stationery companies? the starving artists who design the postage stamps? Would Admiral Nelson have written, ‘I can neither eat nor sleep for thinking of you my dearest love, I never touch even pudding,’ on the Internet to Lady Emma?”

“We are not talking just about the ruination of a few industries and a branch of the government, but about the slow dissipation of romance and passion-on-paper, and pining, and, and . . . everything.”

“Also, if you have something to tell me that is time sensitive, call me on the phone, for pity’s sake. Next, you’ll start messing with the phone company’s budget, and then you’re tinkering with big stuff—like all those guys who wear hard hats and climb poles. Why, the trickle-down effect could be enormous. What will happen to the lunch box industry, and even Lily Tomlin?”

Their reactions to my soapbox pontifications were as varied as the seven of them—from, “Now, Mom, you’ll get used to it. Come on, I’ll help you,” to, “What will all the quarry men do when Mom moves out of her cave and builds a house of wood?”

My day of reckoning dawned when circumstances forced my husband to work on the other side of the country for four months, and our budget pre-

vented frequent phone calls. Using e-mail was going to be it. . . . I would have to succumb.

As he gloomily brooded in the airport while waiting to depart, I used every trick in my bag to cheer him up: “You know, I’m studying Genesis, and just this morning I was reading about Abraham setting out in his old age in answer to God’s call. I think we are like Abraham and Sarah.” “Yeah, right,” was his bubbly response.

Our e-mail beginnings were awkward and sometimes frustrating—just like any relationship that takes a new twist. But after a few days, I started addressing my e-mails to “Dear Abe” and signing them “Blessings from the tent, Sarah,” and out of thirty-six years of marriage emerged two crazy, fun-loving, silly spouses.

All of the things about the Internet that I had bemoaned became tools to make this time of separation just a little more bearable. Its speed was a big help when I had questions. I would just zip off an e-mail to Abe before I turned in for the night, telling him that the lead camel needed to be reshod on all four hooves with studs, and that it snowed last night, and I couldn’t find the ice melter for the sidewalks. When I got up in the morning, a “Dear Sarah” would be waiting on my computer, cursing the costly camel and giving directions to the ice melter.

The months of separation passed with more laughter than tears due to this marvel that I had disparaged because of my own fear and ignorance.

My husband has an office in town now, but he still travels frequently. Every now and then a “Dear Sarah” will pop up on my screen, and I just have to

laugh out loud. The beast sure can become the blessing.

(Tina Brennan, mother of seven and grandmother of four, lives in Yakima, Washington, with her husband of thirty-six years.)

It has been wisely said that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Technology has us constantly catapulting into new and amazing areas. The methods have changed, but the dilemmas remain basically the same.

Back in 1837, in his oration “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson stated that “books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst.” Sounds a little like our Internet woes and worries.

There is help for offering solid guidelines for family Internet use. One of these is Citizen Link Research ([www.family.org/cforum/research](http://www.family.org/cforum/research)). Tips include building good boundaries by locating the computer in an open family area, limiting Internet use to certain hours, and giving parents tools to remove offensive material that is available to their children.

A little research time to set family guidelines will allow parents and children to use the Internet wisely and well, but still use it!

# A Day in Cyberspace

by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart

Subject: nothing much  
Date: Fri, 14 Jan 2000  
From: beckyfrench@usonline.com  
To: frenchd@clare&franciscollge.edu

Isn't this Internet great! Wish I'd had it in college. You're a click away!

But the Internet is not without its challenges. Luke wants it in his room. I say no. Am I being over protective?

Sara's grades came. Not great. She'd rather play computer games—like Luke. What do you think? Love, Mom

Subject: cyberspace concerns  
Date: Fri, 14 Jan 2000  
From: frenchd@clare&franciscollge.edu  
To: beckyfrench@usonline.com

Hi Mom! Got Grandma's e-mail. She's excited.

OK . . . Luke's online-in-the-room thing. Don't do it. I know I begged you for it myself and got mad when you said no. But looking back—RIGHT DECISION. In his own room, you don't know how much time he's online, what Web sites he goes to. (Actually, you can find that out, but do you really want to play Sherlock Holmes?) If you let Luke, Sara will ask next. You are right—the Internet is great, but it has some seedy sites. Let them surf in the family room. They know you could walk in any time, so they'll stick to "parent approval" stuff.

Don't be naive. They'll explore someplace else. I did it myself last year. Go to someone's house, get on the Web, pretend you're someone else, enter a chat room, say bad things . . . check out some dirty Web sites . . . etc. Hate to be blunt, Mom, but you'd find out sooner or later. But listen. I knew you wouldn't allow that in our house. I say keep making that statement to Luke and Sara. (But don't say it was my idea.)

One more thing. To make homework more fun, have Sara and Luke visit [www.startribune.com/homework](http://www.startribune.com/homework) (Twin Cities) or [www.wsu.edu/DrUniverse](http://www.wsu.edu/DrUniverse) (Washington State University). Lots of info. All subjects. Questions get answered within 24 hours. We gotta teach Sara and Luke to be "critical users," right? (Like that phrase? Learned it in media class. Your tuition dollars at work!!)  
Love, David

Subject: High-tech Me  
Date: Fri, 14 Jan 2000  
From: gmaemma@rael.com  
To: beckyfrench@usonline.com

Hi. E-mailed David. This new computer—so fast! What fun! I don't have to walk away and make a pot of tea, waiting for the pictures to appear on the screen.

Guess what! Go to our diocese home page. They have the saint of the day, and a daily prayer! Isn't that great? And there's a link to U.S. bishops—[www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org). You can link to every diocese in the country! I found all kinds of Catholic stuff! Amazing! So much fun!  
Talk to you later. Mom

Subject: Surprise! It's me!  
Date: Fri, 14 Jan 2000  
From: frenchs@stelizabeth.schoolnetwork.com  
To: gmaemma@rael.com

Hi Grandma!

I'm at computer lab at school. We finished our assignments, so we're on free time. Mom said you have a new computer. Did you get a color printer? You should. They're cool. Hey, try this Web site: [www.hampsterdance.com](http://www.hampsterdance.com). It's funny. I love you.  
Sara

(Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart lives with her husband, Ralph, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her forthcoming book is titled *Know It! Pray It! Live It! A Family Guide to "The Catholic Youth Bible,"* Saint Mary's Press.)

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## Tips for Parents

The Internet can be a very helpful research tool for homework assignments or for work-related assignments. It can even help you find recipes! It is the best way to stay informed on late-breaking news. However, as you know, the Internet can expose your children to things you may not want them to see or hear. Here's a few helpful tips for integrating the Internet into your family life.

- Spend time surfing the Net with your children. Make it a voyage of discovery and learning. If you happen upon a site that is offensive to you, make it a teachable moment, explaining to your children why you view the material as harmful.
- Use a filtering software program to block access to adult Internet sites. There are several options that can be downloaded from the Internet itself. Go to [www.safesurf.com](http://www.safesurf.com) or [www.surfwatch.com](http://www.surfwatch.com) or [www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com). But remember, no piece of software can replace your own responsibility as a parent.
- Remind your children that the rule not to talk to strangers applies on the Internet as well. Tell them to never give personal information such as their address or phone number to a stranger, and to never answer e-mails from people they don't know. If your child makes an online friend and would like to get to know that person better, ask your child to introduce the person to you first.
- Tell your children to never give out a password and to always use a nickname when entering a chat room or visiting a bulletin board.