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AUTO HOME BUSINESS  TRAVELERS



Sharon Gothard Weissman (center) surrounded by nieces, nephews and sons Dylan (upper right) and Garrett (lower right).

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SnuggL'Up more than pillow talk

A mother's solution for her child's restless sleep brings comfort to others

BY LYNN MILLS

Sharon Gothard Weisman didn't know why she kept those hideous lavender/pink/black/white lycra maternity shorts. But she's glad she did.

Her eight-year-old never had a full night's sleep. One day while watching television together, he rubbed her leg, sheathed in the funky old shorts. "What do you want me to do, make you a pillow out of my shorts?" she asked flippantly when he wouldn't stop, repeatedly telling his mom how good the fabric felt. The next day she did just that, and he slept through the night for the first time in his life. She made a few more, which her kids and their friends fought over and the SnuggL'Up pillow was born.

"I came to realize that it helped my child, so I might have stumbled onto something that could help other kids," Weisman said. "When we went back to figure out why it worked, we read that there actually is a body chemical released whenever you feel something soft."

With a few friends, Weisman started SnuggL'Up, Inc., a philanthropic based for profit company (now SnuggL'Up America, which is awaiting final IRS designation as a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation) with the intent of making pillows to give to hospitals. She searched for fabric that matched the feel of her old shorts (literally feeling every bolt) and the right stuffing to make them perfectly smooth. The pillows are 100% hypoallergenic, machine washable, and made in the USA.

Through feedback, she soon discovered that the pillows have a soothing effect on challenged people, from autistic children to Alzheimer's patients. One

mother credits the pillow with teaching her autistic son to accept her cuddling - his first word in three years was "snuggle." "She said we gave her the greatest gift we could give her - a way to get a hug from her son."

The pillows caught the eye of City of Hope, and Weisman was asked if she could give them to children undergoing chemotherapy on September 11, 2001. "While I was getting ready, I saw the planes hit," she recalls, detailing how she went from room to room, talking to kids and giving them pillows. "We were with one little girl whose mom was reading a poem that I had written and put with the pillows, and the mom was crying, and the little girl was sitting there with her bald head and earrings, all dressed up and just hugging the pillow and smiling from ear to ear. I got what they call the 'Ahhh moment,' where I knew this was something I was supposed to do."

Weisman now also works extensively with Starlight Starbright Children's Foundation and the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation, helping children and adults in hospitals and hospice care, as well as the bereaved.

Kathy Sandler, program director for Elisabeth Kubler-Ross says, "The pillows provide the psycho-social support, offering a tangible item for people who are in a time of crisis. In a death experience, the pillow provides comfort for the patient, but then becomes the linking object for the family once the patient dies. The smell, the feel, the remembrance. Because grief, we can't necessarily hold in our hands. The pillow gives us something tangible to hold for our memories, and it's a very powerful tool for the grieving."

In the educational arena, the company recently launched "SnuggL'Up With a Good Book," promoting literacy among teen parents and their children. "Younger parents may not have the education that they should and there are studies

that it puts their children at risk if they continue the cycle," says Weisman.

Community service projects play a large role in the company's endeavors and have been implemented at schools, including Millikan Middle School and Pinecrest Schools. Roscomare Road Elementary is currently running a program in the fifth grade, which is part of the curriculum, meeting fifteen LAUSD standards for English and Social Studies.

"It's a way to teach in a creative way, while also teaching philanthropy," explains Weisman, who says that "the students journal, choose a hero, read a biography and write about the hero, raise money for a child or senior in hospice and present that person with a SnuggL'Up pillow and family care kit, and do a final creative project about the experience."

Kristen Wyshywaniuk, the Roscomare teacher who wrote the curriculum, says "I teach wonderful kids and they're naturally motivated and want to do well, but they really seem to be taking it that extra step. A lot of them who put things off to the last minute have been asking me for weeks and weeks about specific things that they want to bring in for their presentation. So they are really making it their own and they're excited to do it and they don't feel like it's necessarily an assignment. It's something that they want to do."

The students also sell popsicles and baked goods at school to raise money for the program. "When Sharon said that they were going to have their own patient to visit, they were all totally captivated by that idea and so excited to have it be such a one-on-one experience and really getting to know somebody else," Wyshywaniuk said.

Weisman, who is hoping to bring the program to other schools, says, "It's great to see kids excited about philanthropy."

Weisman was raised in a "service oriented" environment. "If we got a dollar for allowance, a quarter went for children who didn't have anything." She'd studied to be a pediatric ER nurse, but feared she was too emotional. "I was afraid a child would die and I wouldn't be able to take that. Here it is twenty years later and I'm doing what I was supposed to do. It took me having my own children and seeing a lot of life to be able to do it." At least once a week, she personally distributes pillows at a hospital or hospice.

Available in a travel size, a full body size, and the original thigh-size, the pillow fits all ages and lifestyles. "An executive can be sitting in a tough meeting and lean back against one and maybe he's not so stressed. I have a friend who's a CPA who literally takes it around wherever he goes," says Weisman.

"We say it's all about spreading comfort, security, and love, which is something everybody, no matter what the age, needs. And this is a cool way to do it." *

Check out SnuggL'Up at www.snugglupamerica.org.

TECHNOLOGY TRIUMPHS

Who you gonna call? Hoaxbusters!



BY GEOFFREY NEIL

I first heard of Jessica Mydek back in 1997 when an email explained that she was at death's door, suffering from terminal brain cancer. My heart was yanked into my throat from a rush of sympathy for little Jessica. The message claimed American Cancer Society would donate three cents each time the message was forwarded. This hoax was soon crushed (for good, I thought, until it recently popped up again in my mailbox) when the American Cancer Society stated that no fundraising efforts were being made using chain letters of any kind.

Other sympathy hoaxes have reappeared in new, more elaborate forms over the years—some going as far as to include photos of sick children. Unfortunately, some have found these chain emails effective for gaining a thrill or profit by exploiting the trust, goodness and gullibility of people.

In the context of technology, the term "social engineering" generally refers to psychological manipulation of people to obtain information from them. By that definition, email hoaxes are a form of social engineering because they exploit sympathy or greed of people to trick them into sharing information via email.

There are debates over whether email chain letters are simply adolescent pranks, or a practical tool used by spammers to harvest email addresses. This may not be the most sophisticated method of email harvesting for spammers, but the friend-to-friend forwarding keeps the message tucked safely beneath spam filters that "allow" all messages from friends. So it's possible for hoax emails to be a practical tool, not only used for "kicks."

What to do if you receive a suspect email? If something looks "hoaxish," check it at www.hoaxbusters.org. It takes literally 15 seconds or less to pull up their web page, search a keyword and discredit the hoax. Hoaxbusters have compiled a vast encyclopedia of constantly updated Internet hoaxes and they do a great job of debunking them.

Part of the education Hoaxbusters offers includes five telltale signs that an email is a hoax:

- 1) Urgency - Use of capital letters, and many exclamation points in the subject.
- 2) Tell all your friends - This line in at the end of any message I receive strips it of all credibility. Legitimate warnings do not include this request.
- 3) This isn't a hoax - The body of the message will claim credibility by quoting an expert or a trusted friend who "knows about these things."
- 4) Direct Consequences - Act now or else dire consequences will follow OR you'll miss out big time.
- 5) History - Is the message filled with >>>> marks? These indicate that people suckered by the hoax have forwarded the message countless times.

Now HURRY!!!! Send this article to everyone in your address book! The 3,146th person to get this message might win a prize (maybe). My friend who knows computers told me this is for real. ACT NOW!!!

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