

Get your parents up to speed

By Julio Ojeda-Zapata
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It's a mother's familiar lament: "Why don't you ever write?"

Well, Mom, I'm busy. Yes, I could dash off an e-mail now and then and maybe attach a picture or two. But life gets hectic, and I just never get around to it. I am very, very sorry.

But then I had a revelation. I could use technology to automate this. Mom could fire up her trusty e-mail program every day and find scads of Sonny Updates right in her inbox. I slapped my forehead when I realized how easily it could be done.

This all happens via RSS, popular among geekier types for getting the latest content from selected Web sites fed to them automatically. But Mom or Grandma may not know or care what RSS is. They just want to see the kids' or grandkids' latest pictures, blog posts and other online updates via familiar e-mail without having to poke around for them on the Web.

So it hit me: I'd subscribe my e-mail-addicted but otherwise tech-clueless mother to everything I say and do online, from photographs I post on the Flickr photo-sharing site to text updates I post on my blogs

and on the Facebook and Twitter social-networking services.

Setting this up for Mom requires initial tinkering but little maintenance. The main ingredient is an e-mail application with built-in RSS. Several free options are available.

If your mom and dad use Windows, move them onto a Microsoft e-mail program called Windows Live Mail. It's a free download at get.live.com. It is a vast improvement over the e-mail software bundled with the Windows Vista and Windows XP operating systems yet will be familiar to your parents since it's a descendant of those e-mail programs.

If your parents use a Macintosh with the newest version of the Mac OS X operating system (nicknamed

Get RSS-ed.

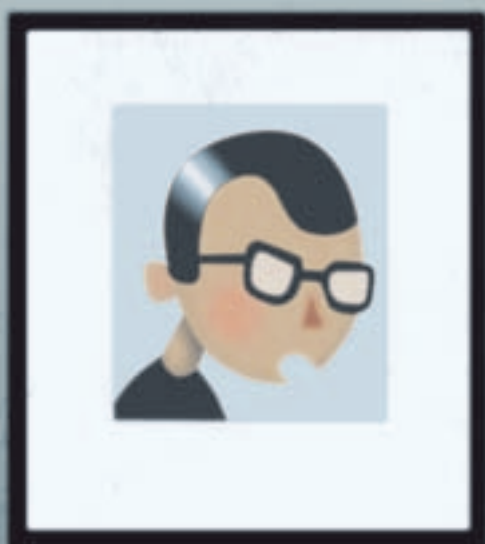
Subscribing to RSS feeds using popular e-mail programs isn't difficult. You just have to carefully follow a few steps:

• **Windows Live Mail.** Click the orange "Feeds" button on the bottom left, then click the "Add a feed" button above.

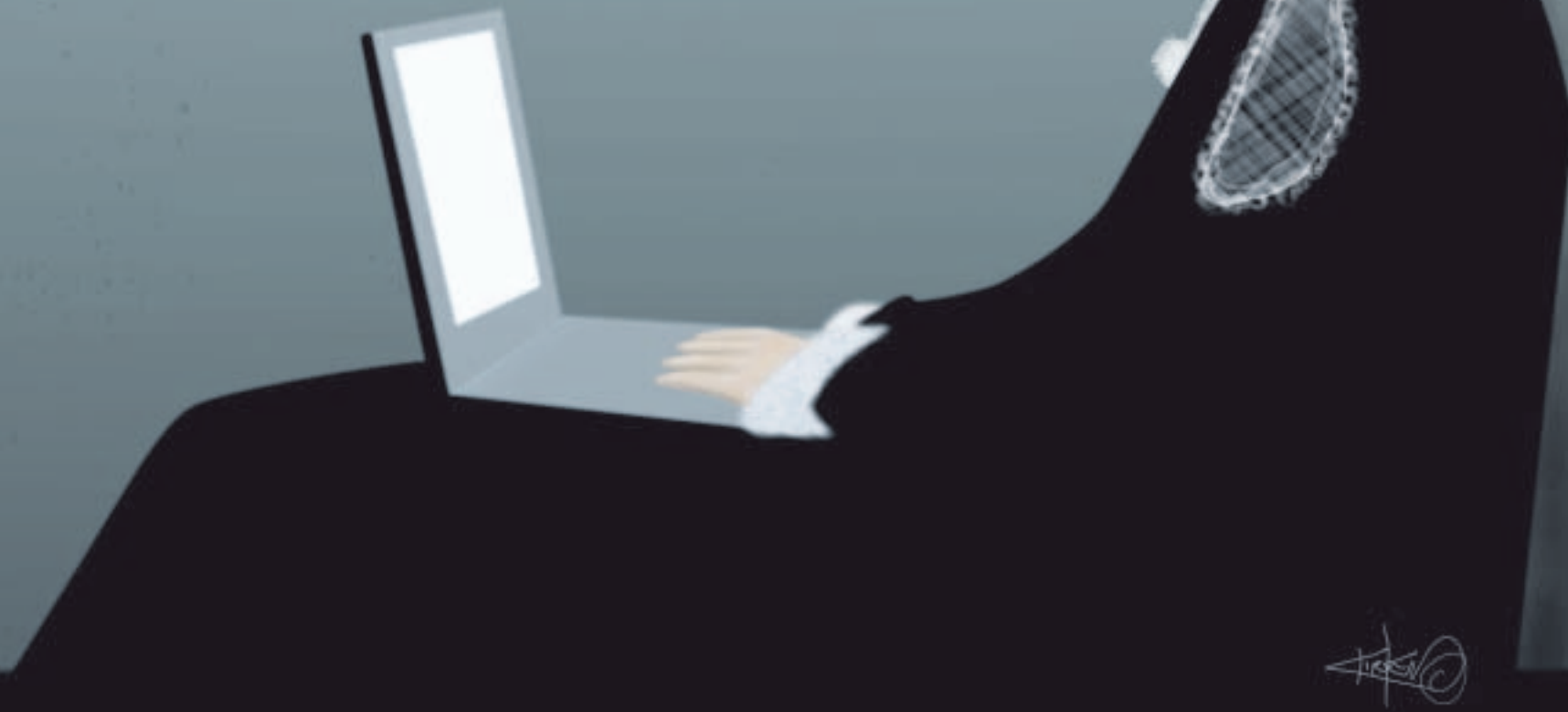
A window pops up for plugging in feed URLs; those are the Web addresses associated with your RSS feeds from Flickr, de.licio.us and the like. (You'll find these addresses by clicking the telltale, often-orange RSS or XML icons on those sites, then copying what appears in the browser's address field.) Paste these in, press "OK" and you are subscribed.

MOM TECH, 3E >

GET RSS-ED, 3E >



With RSS feeds, Mom may not care if you write an actual letter ever again.



PIONEER PRESS: KIRK LYTTLER

health

Scales of justice? Not at the doctor's office

By Stephanie Earls
Albany Times Union

You're at your doctor's office. (No worries — it's just a routine physical.)

A nurse (finally!) comes to fetch you from the waiting room, where you have (coincidentally) just finished reading "Ulysses," front to back. You proceed to the inner sanctum, and suddenly, mysteriously, the nurse is holding a clipboard in his hand.

"OK," he says. "We need you to step on the scales." "Really?" You ask, your gut a mix of worry, panic, anxiety and, well, the Big Mac with large fries you had for lunch two hours ago.

What to do? Truth is, you usually have a choice.

Some patients flatly refuse, said Diane Krosky, a clinical supervisor at Albany Associates in Cardiology. It's their right, though not necessarily a good idea (especially for patients taking meds that cause them to retain or expel water), Krosky added.

Clothes can add an extra 4 to 5 pounds to a weigh-in; and docs say a woman's weight can fluctuate up to 3 to 4 pounds daily, depending on where she is in her menstrual cycle and how much water she's retaining.

But let us pause here to consider this instrument: the scale, in its many forms — from fancy, multifaceted Sharper Image model, to the far-less-expensive, nonslip footy version, to the big daddy doc's monster.

SCALES OF JUSTICE, 3E >

reader alert } living green

"Green living" and "eco-friendly" are the buzzwords these days, but what do they mean to you?

For many people trying to live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle, there's a nagging sense of guilt they could be doing even more. We want to know what little steps or big changes you've made to live green — and what guilty pleasures you still indulge in.

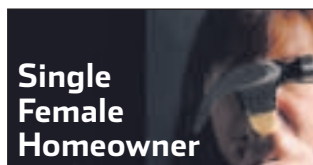
Maybe your family owns an efficient hybrid car but you still haul the kids around in that gas-guzzler each day. Maybe you've installed low-flush toilets but take long, hot showers each morning. Or maybe you've given up plastic bags at the grocery store and pack your purchases in a reusable canvas bag but have to have those individually packaged yogurt cups and applesauce containers.

Mail your examples with your name, hometown and phone number (not for publication) by April 9 to Living Green, c/o Amy Nelson, St. Paul Pioneer Press, 345 Cedar St., St. Paul, MN 55101 or e-mail them to anelson@pioneerpress.com.

home

Talking to the rookie — young, healthy, single and rolling up her sleeves

Projects and predicaments — the stuff of this column — never let up for a homeowner. And while this veteran Single Female Homeowner hasn't



run out of things to say (like that could ever happen), we've decided to add another voice to this column.

The new SFH (henceforth "Rookie SFH"), who bought her house four months ago, shared her experiences installing her own hardwood floor in a recent column. Reaction to the column was great. As a newbie, her experiences are far different from mine. She's also more likely to attempt a complicated DIY project than I am.

So, we're going to trade off on column duties. She'll write about the first time her dad visits her new house; I'll write about conjuring the ghost of my DIY dad to help me when I haul out the jigsaw. She'll write about the first vegetable garden in her house; I'll curse my

crappy soil and the voracious bunnies that threaten to make this the last vegetable garden at my house.

Occasionally, we'll both contribute to a topic for one column.

To introduce Rookie SFH, we had a little Q&A session:

Veteran SFH: You're young, healthy and single. You can travel and buy toys like bikes or cars or clothes. What on earth possessed you to buy a house?

Rookie SFH: In the past 10 years, I've lived on both coasts and in the mountains, so I was ready to settle down. When I lived in the Northwest, I fell in love with gardening and the amazing freshness of the food there. I wanted to be able to walk out my back door, pick a handful of snow peas and throw them in the wok for dinner.

SINGLE FEMALE HOMEOWNER, 3E >

health } straight from the source

Understanding vital link between good health, good friends

Friendship has a hidden health benefit. When scientists who run the landmark Framingham Heart Study investigated the social lives and health of 1,267 men, they found those who were the loneliest had the highest levels of a compound in their blood linked to heart disease.

"There's more and more research to show if we don't have relationships, it's a health risk," says Mary Jo Kreitzer, director of the Center for Spirituality & Healing at the University of Minnesota. "Some studies even suggest being alone or isolated is as risky for your health as cigarette smoking or high blood pressure."

Yet, many Americans have fewer friends than ever before. One Duke University survey found one in four people have no close companions.

"Making and keeping friends is challenging," Kreitzer says. "It doesn't happen automatically or spontaneously; sometimes, you have to work at it. But the results are worth it."



Susan Flagg-Godbey

Here's her advice for bolstering your friendship factor:

Q > I barely have time for laundry, let alone a social life. What can I do?

A > Start with things you're already doing. At work, instead of eating at your desk, have lunch with people you really enjoy. If you like to walk or exercise, invite a friend or neighbor along. Even taking a walk with a pet is great for companionship, and it's a good way to meet people. If you belong to a church or other faith community, attend coffee hour or volunteer for an activity where you'll meet people.

Spending time with friends is one of the first things we let go of when life gets busy. I would urge you to make time — you owe it to yourself. And when

you make plans with a friend, mark it on your calendar just like a doctor's appointment or an important work meeting.

Q > Is it really so bad to just want to be alone?

A > It's a matter of balance. Spending time alone can be absolutely healthy; it's a good way to feed your inner life.

Having relationships with others stretches us, expands our horizons and connects us to something that's bigger and beyond just ourselves. It's an essential part of being human, because we're social creatures.

If you have no friends, you can be at risk for the health problems made worse by loneliness. Have your alone time, but schedule people time, too. Volunteering, joining an organization of people who share an interest or a hobby that you enjoy, or just spending a few minutes chatting with neighbors when you happen to see each other are good places to start.

Q > It was so easy to make

friends when I was a kid and then as a mom with younger children. How do we empty nesters get connected again?

A > Friendships don't automatically happen for adults the way they can for kids. You have to be intentional about it.

When my youngest child graduated from high school, I realized I was losing a large part of my social network. I wouldn't be seeing all the people I was regularly connected with during all of his growing-up years.

I advise people whose children are still living at home to start building their own social networks before their children graduate, but the same steps will work if that has already happened.

Take the initiative by joining a cause you believe in or by involving yourself in social activities that reflect your own interests — a book group, a swimming class, a hiking club or a political organization.

Q > I love my friends, but I'd like to meet new people, too. I feel by trying to make new friends, I'm betraying my old ones. Is it OK to want to expand my circle?

A > Absolutely. In fact, one of the hallmarks of a healthy, vital person is curiosity — a drive to grow and evolve. Being open to new people, new possibilities and new experiences is a good thing. It doesn't mean you're leaving your old friends behind; you're just adding more.

This could also be a chance to evaluate your current relationships.

If a friendship is healthy, you should feel you can be truly authentic and be accepted for who you are.

It's a good idea to set limits if you find you're in a friendship that's draining or seems one-sided.

But don't walk away from a good friendship because little things bother you. Nobody's



hospitals,
clinics,
neighbors

Bethesda Hospital
St. John's Hospital
St. Joseph's Hospital
Woodwinds Health Campus

HealthEast
Care System

www.healtheast.org

perfect. To be a good friend, you have to be accepting, too, and you do that by being non-judgmental and open to the gifts others bring into our lives.

This column is written by Susan Flagg Godbey and the editors of Better Health & Living. Check out bette4rhealthandliving.com for more health news and information.

money }
everyday cheapskate



Mary Hunt

Put friend to work cleaning porcelain sink

I remember looking at the porcelain kitchen sink the day we moved into our home and making this mental note: Must replace sink right away.

The problem? The previous owner was a bleach freak, a habit that removed the shiny finish and left the sink dull and susceptible to staining.

Not long after, I found a friend — one who showed me how to remove all stains. As long as it was very white, that finish issue wasn't a problem. It has been 21 years, and my friend and I still are keeping that same sink looking nearly like new.

Curious? Read on.

Rusty sink: Here's a great way to get those ugly rust stains out of your porcelain sinks: Use Bar Keepers Friend, a cleaning product available in many supermarkets. Just sprinkle a bit on a wet sponge and get to work scrubbing. The rust stains will come off like a charm. Just make sure you do a test in a small space first.

— Bill, Michigan

Note from Mary: Thanks, Bill, for the reminder that Bar Keepers Friend is one of those products I hope I never will have to live without! Besides being in local supermarkets, BKF is also available online and on sale through April 15 for "Everyday Cheapskate" readers at SoapsGoneBuy.com. To get the \$3.50 sale price for a 21-ounce can (regular price: \$3.95), use coupon code MH350 at checkout.

Spot the stain: Before my family members put a spotted item of clothing in the hamper, they tie the arms of the shirt or the legs of the pants together. That's the sign that tells me I need to treat spots on that garment before washing.

— Karen, e-mail

No-stick cakes: I have found that if I grease my cake pans with butter first and then pop them in the refrigerator while I am mixing up the batter, the cake never sticks to the pans once I pour in the batter and bake it.

— Bethany R., Ohio

Potluck reception: I've got a great idea for an inexpensive wedding reception: Make it a potluck. Our friends were delighted to be part of our wedding in a more involved way than being merely spectators. They also outdid themselves in what they brought; their favorite or signature pieces filled the table.

— Miriam K., e-mail

Send tips to mary@everydaycheapskate.com or [Everyday Cheapskate, P.O. Box 2135, Paramount, CA 90723](mailto:EverydayCheapskate, P.O. Box 2135, Paramount, CA 90723).

CONTINUED FROM 1E

> Scales of justice

Let us take a moment to appreciate the symphonic sadism of weighted doctor's scales: The heavy thunk, thunk, thunk of the larger bottom weight being coaxed higher and higher — from 100 — to 150 — no, wait — 200. It sparks primal anxiety.

But hold on, your session is not over. Now comes the loose, raspy slide of the top weight

as your nurse blithely taps it farther — and farther. This smaller weight measures the smaller (but no less crucial) increments, the one, two, three, five, 10 pounds between the biggies. Tap — tap — tap?!?!?

Who hasn't left an encounter with the doctor's scale with at least an ounce of skepticism that the scale

weighted them heavy?

And what, exactly, do scales, spring- or balance-based, tell us?

When it comes to emotions and health, the scales can speak tons, say docs and weight-loss experts. The numbers they divulge can be a heavy load when it comes to health, ego and emotion.

"I get weighed in for corporate wellness purposes, and I'm, oh ... like, I won't have my coffee in the morning," said Alicia Smith, the regional marketing director for Jenny Craig.

ers and significant others.

Those in the medical profession are no strangers to such hang-ups.

Generally speaking, people simply hate scales — even when they've sought out a doctor or a program specifically to help them lose weight, said Dr. Stewart Erner, a bariatric medical specialist.

His basic attitude about scales? It's a comparison tool and nothing more.

But try telling that to the weight-conscious patient preparing to ascend the platform.

CONTINUED FROM 1E

> Single Female Homeowner

Veteran SFH: Back when I bought a house (and dinosaurs roamed the Mississippi River valley), there was some pushback of the you're-a-woman-you-can't-do-this-alone variety. Is that still happening?

Rookie SFH: Actually, I felt pressure from my single friends to buy a house. Their attitude was, "What are you waiting for? When are you going to settle down and commit to a house?" They were all

buying houses and getting loans under 6 percent. When my 26-year-old brother bought his house with no money down, I felt like I was really behind the curve.

Veteran SFH: Do falling house values have you worried?

Rookie SFH: Not in the short term, because I bought a foreclosure in a stable neighborhood. But I'm no longer counting on skyrocketing

property values to fund my retirement.

Veteran SFH: What's your favorite thing about your house?

Rookie SFH: I love the second story of my house because I've put so much work into it — ripping out old carpet, painting the walls, putting in new hardwood floors. It feels like my space in a way that an apartment never did. In the other parts of the house, I still feel like a caretaker, just keeping it nice until the real owners return.

Veteran SFH: What's the one thing you'd change if

money were no object?

Rookie SFH: I'd put in new, more energy-efficient windows. And solar panels. I have a secret dream of living off the grid.

Veteran SFH: What's the one thing you'd change if DIY skills were no object?

Rookie SFH: I'd completely redo my basement — fix the foundation, install glass-block windows, get rid of a bunch of crumbling concrete and bad supports for my porch and my sagging living room floor. It's a massive project. My dad thinks I can jack up the living room floor on my own. I'm not so sure.

Veteran SFH: Have you purchased anything for yourself in the past four months, or has all your money been spent at Home Depot and Ace Hardware?

Rookie SFH: Menards is my new recreational shopping spot. I've gotten to the point where I know the whole store layout and actually find myself lingering in sections like millwork.

Contact Veteran SFH or Rookie SFH at sfh@pioneerpress.com. The column appears every other week.

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> Mom tech

"Leopard", Apple's Mail software works nicely. I recently upgraded my folks to Leopard on their iMac so I could get them RSS-ed. If your folks use an older OS X version, an e-mail app called Thunderbird (getthunderbird.com) will do just as well.

The next step: Subscribe your parents to your "feeds" from Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, your blog and anything else you regularly update online. RSS veterans will know exactly what to do; others might be a bit foggy on the details, so see the accompanying box for step-by-steps.

Pretending to be my mom, I plugged all my own feeds — from my Flickr, Twitter, de.licio.us and Facebook accounts, among others — into Windows Live Mail, Apple Mail and Thunderbird. It all worked perfectly.

I also put in addresses for my tech-podcast feed, which points to download-

able video files, and my YouTube account with streaming versions of those videos. I will probably omit these from my mother's setup since she's on pokey dial-up in rural New Hampshire.

So, Mom, sorry I don't write more often. But we'll be far better connected with my RSS feeds in your mail, trust me.

Julio Ojeda-Zapata can be reached at 651-228-5467. Get more personal tech at twincities.com/techtestdrive and yourtechweblog.com.

CONTINUED FROM 1E

> Get RSS-ed

• **Apple Mail** (Leopard only). Select "Add RSS feeds" via the "File" pull-down menu. In the window that appears, click the "Specify a custom feed URL" button. Paste in a feed address, just as you would in Windows Live Mail. Bam! You're subscribed.

• **Thunderbird** (Macintosh and Windows). This one is slightly trickier, so pay

attention. Begin by setting up an RSS "account" before punching in all your RSS feeds. Click the "Tools" pull-down menu, select "Account Settings" and click "Add Account."

In the "New Account Setup" windows that show up, select the "RSS News & Blogs" option, and click

"Continue." Give the account a catchy name (such as "Sonny's Feeds"). Click "Continue" and "Finish" (or "Done" on a Mac). An RSS-account icon will materialize on the program's left side.

Now, to get feeds into Thunderbird, you right-click on the RSS-account icon and pick "Subscribe" for a feed-address window. Click the "Add" button and paste in a feed URL. Rinse, repeat.

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