

Laura on Life: Where beavers and gophers come from

by Laura Snyder

When I was a kid, I used to have a puzzle of the United States. I learned so much from repeatedly solving that puzzle, that when I saw a similar product in a store, I bought it for my children.

So many kids have no idea where on the planet they live. If you asked my six-year old where he lives, heâ€™d tell you, â€œIn a house.â€• Wellâ€¦ that narrows it down considerably.

I always worried that if my children became separated from me in a mall or at the fairgrounds, would they be able to tell the authorities where they lived? â€œIn a houseâ€• probably wouldnâ€™t cut it.

â€œWhatâ€™s your name, son?â€• (Kids donâ€™t generally speak in syllables and as a result their name comes out sounding nothing like whatâ€™s on their birth certificate. So the answer to this question might not be easily translatable.)

â€œWhere do you live?â€•

â€œIn a house.â€•

â€œWhich house?â€•

â€œMy house,â€• the boy says, trying to be polite.

â€œOkay, but whatâ€™s your address?â€•

Thinking the man is a little off, but still trying to be polite, he answers, "I'm a boy. This is a shirt, not a dress." Man, if he has to count on this guy to get him back home, he's in real trouble.

"Ah right. Do you know your telephone number?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

“I’m not supposed to tell strangers that.”

“Okaaaay, maybe you could push the numbers on the phone and call your house?”

“Okay, but you can’t look.”

The boy would hunch over the phone and push the buttons. After a moment, he’d hang up and say, “The lady told me to hang up and try again, but that loud song hurt my ears!”

What are the chances that he’d know the area code?

So, my kids now have a puzzle to teach them where they are and where everything else is. This puzzle also tells the nickname of each state, but my children tend to take things pretty literally, so Iâ€™m not sure if that particular feature will help or hinder their education.

Because Wisconsin is called the â€œBadger Stateâ€•, they now think that Wisconsin is the only place you can find badgers.

Similarly, the only place you can find beavers is in Oregon. The only place for gophers is Minnesota and Utah is the only state that has beehives. The jury is apparently still out on whether the wolverines found in Michigan are animals or X-Men.

They canâ€™t wait to visit Kentucky to see if the grass is really blue; and, by the way, if Oklahoma is the â€œSooner Stateâ€• why isnâ€™t there a â€œLater Stateâ€•?

The questions included "Why does Texas only have one star?" My daughter decided it had to do with the American flag. If Texas had more than one star on the American flag, there wouldn't be enough room for all the other states' stars. How considerate of you, Texas.

They wondered why, if California was the Golden State, Nevada was the Silver State and Idaho was the Gem State, why was Montana the Treasure State?

They concluded that since Missourians say "Show Me" so much, there are no maps in Missouri.

I wanted very much to straighten them out on some of these issues, but the one time I did, I got myself in trouble:

“Mom, I can understand why Iowa would want to be called the Hawkeye State because hawks see really good, but why would Ohio want to be called the Buckeye State? Is it like buck teeth, only it’s their eyes that stick out? “Cause that sounds like a scary state to visit.”

“No, honey, buckeyes are nuts.”

“Oh that’s not very nice, mom.”

You may reach Laura Snyder by e-mail.

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