

# Maryland man posts daily ‘bad dad joke’ in his front yard to ease stress of coronavirus stay-at-home orders

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KENSINGTON — Maryland’s stay-at-home COVID-19 order has been stressful for Ann and Tom Schruben, self-employed workers who live in Kensington with their 11-year-old daughter.

Ann noticed her husband was a little grumpy. He’s generally a cheerful guy who likes to crack jokes and puns.

In fact, their daughter, Darcy, had given him a book of “exceptionally bad dad jokes” as a Christmas present.



In this May 1, 2020, photo, Tom Schruben and his 11-year-old daughter Darcy pose for a photo after having just posted the daily bad dad joke in front of their home in Kensington, Md. Every morning by 8 a.m., Schruben and Darcy write a corny dad joke on a whiteboard and display it in front of their house. Schruben and his wife, Ann, said they made an agreement with each other to look for happiness after the death of two of their children, and this is an extension of that. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post via AP) (Michael S. Williamson/AP)

When Ann heard a friend in Ohio was posting a daily joke in front of her house, she told Tom he should do the same thing. Tom resisted. Then, about two weeks ago, he grabbed a whiteboard and wrote at the top “BAD DAD JOKES.” He scrawled in purple ink:

“Hold on — I have something in my shoe! I’m pretty sure it’s a foot.”

At 8 a.m. on April 17, he set the whiteboard near the footpath in front of his house and waited inside his screened-in porch to see if anyone reacted.

Nothing. A few hours later, he heard a chuckle from outside.

“Once he got his first laugh, it was so satisfying to him,” said Ann, a landscape designer.

The next day he woke up at 7 a.m. and scribbled his second bad dad joke:

“Without geometry, life is pointless.”

Soon, he heard people laughing as they walked by his home, along a creek on the edge of Rock Creek Park. Some called out to Tom and told him how much they liked the jokes. Others stayed for a socially distanced chat.

A spring returned to Tom’s step. Each morning since, he’s put out a new joke.

“It surprised me how much it made my mood better,” said Tom, 62. “I don’t really know why, I guess I feel like I’m contributing a little bit to other people’s happiness.”

Day 3: What do you call a cow with no legs? Ground beef.

Day 4: What do you call a bear with no teeth? A gummy bear.

One woman who strolls by each day told Tom when she gets home she calls her granddaughter to relay the joke.

“That makes my day,” he said.



In this May 1, 2020, photo, Tom Schruben and his 11-year-old daughter Darcy stand with the bad dad joke sign they just posted outside their home in Kensington, Md., as a neighbor passes by, at right. Every morning by 8 a.m., Schruben and Darcy write a corny dad joke on a whiteboard and display it in front of their house. Schruben and his wife, Ann, said they made an agreement with each other to look for happiness after the death of two of their children, and this is an extension of that. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post via AP) (Michael S. Williamson/AP)

Tom, an environmental consultant, also likes the routine of putting up the joke.

“It gives me a reason to get up and get out in the morning early,” he said. “It breaks up the day and gives me a little purpose. We look forward to it in the house.”

The Schrubens talk each day about which joke to display. They leaf through the book Tom got for Christmas, titled: “Exceptionally Bad Dad Jokes: So frightfully awful ... yet wonderfully spiffing.” Sometimes they pull the jokes from there; sometimes the Schrubens make them up.

“He loves to make really bad jokes,” Darcy said. “He makes a lot of puns.” One joke from the book has prompted the most discourse. On day eight, he wrote:

“I ordered a chicken and an egg from Amazon. I’ll let you know.”

Lots of neighbors were talking about that one, including Jim Pekar, 59, who ambles by the whiteboard each day to see the latest bad dad joke.

“If you don’t like them, well, they’re not supposed to be good,” Pekar said, adding that he calls his neighbor’s humor “stand-up for the shut down.”

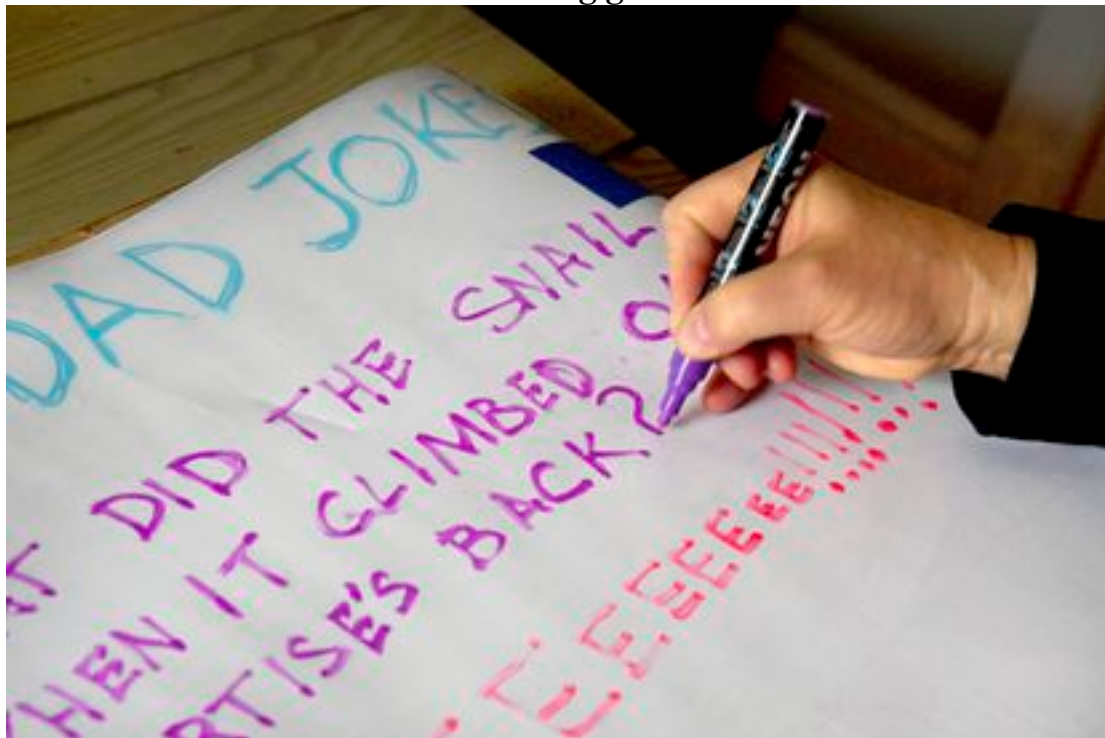
Mana McNeill, 65, also saw the chicken-and-egg joke as she walked through the neighborhood with her walking buddy, Tina McKay, 68. Both women live nearby in North Chevy Chase.

It was raining that day so Tom had covered the sign in plastic wrap to protect it.

“We stopped and read the joke, and we had to think about it for a minute,” McNeill said. “Then I finally got it. I’ve been telling other people the joke since. It’s clever.”

She has known the Schrubens for years, since their grown children were in school together. But when the women walked by that day, they didn’t know Tom had been putting out jokes.

“That was great fun, we had a chuckle,” McNeill said. “It was a nice respite on our walk. You have to find something great in this mess.”



In this May 1, 2020, photo, Tom Schruben puts the finishing touches on the daily bad dad joke at his home in Kensington, Md. Every morning by 8 a.m., Schruben and his 11-year-old daughter Darcy write a corny dad joke on a whiteboard and display it in front of their house. Schruben and his wife, Ann, said they made an agreement with each other to look for happiness after the death of two of their children, and this is an extension of that. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post via AP) (Michael S. Williamson/AP)

That is exactly the life perspective that has kept Tom and Ann going since two of their six children died from medical issues, one in 2002 and one in 2009, they said.