

TEXAS LIVING

Family & Kids Day

Dallas Morning News



ARTSDAY

Power and pity

An exhibition at the National Gallery of Art charts Rembrandt's last stand. 4E

DallasNews.com

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Are your ter' dictions

With Harry Potter book 4 out July 16 — and the suspense is killing us! — it's great if we had just one page of a new book right at what would that be? We'd like you to write one page that would fit in *Harry and the Half-Prince*. Tell us where it falls in the book. Don't worry about what's on the page before or after. Include name, age, city and a phone or e-mail. We'll consider separate entries for the best adult and child entries. E-mail your page to hp4contest@scholastic.com or write us at Scholastic, P.O. Box 770, Dallas, TX 75265. Nancy Churmin

writers wanted
Playwrights in grades 4-8 are invited to submit one-page scripts to the annual PUP (Playwrights Under Progress) contest. Sponsored by Junior League of Dallas, this is in collaboration with the Dallas Children's Theater's annual PUP Festival. Three plays will be chosen for production at the Dallas Children's Theater. For information, contact www.juniorplayers.org or call 972-343-1111. Deadline: May 15. N.C.

INSIDE

h hopes

Four Plano teens of the band *Rocky* are rocking daily, and they're ready to take their band ready to take the stage in the Texas 1000 Showcase Competition at the Dallas Guitar Show and MusicFest. Family Entertainment, 5E

COMING UP

FRIDAY

Spring Gardening

Celebrate the joys of spring with surprises of the growing season. Texas Living:



Photos by LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer

Jennifer Blakley, (left) of Plano, and pen pal Hanne Magnussen, of Denmark, share a laugh after meeting at long last.

GOING THE DISTANCE

After 22 years, trans-Atlantic pen pals skip the stamps and the clicks, sealing a hug at D/FW

By MICHAEL GRANBERRY
Staff Writer

Jennifer Blakley had been waiting for this moment for 22 years. "I have butterflies, yes I do!" she said. "I do. This is my first time to be nervous. I haven't been nervous. I haven't been. You'd be surprised how calm I've been about it."

Jennifer was talking fast. Her husband was bemused. Because Matt Blakley knows that 22 years of expectations don't exactly mesh with "calm."

At any moment, Jennifer, 35, would come face to face with fate. Her pen pal of more than two decades — a Danish woman she had never met or spoken to on the phone — would land at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Hanne Magnussen, 36, would walk through the revolving doors of Gate 30 at the Terminal B baggage claim area and take their friendship to a new level. She and Jennifer had thought about this moment since 1983, when Ronald Reagan was president and the Cold War was still, well, cold.

Hanne would bring with her a husband and two children and 22 years of shared memory. "I don't know what to say," Jennifer said to her husband.

"Well," Matt said, "why don't you just say... 'Howdy?'"

Tying anything at that point to calm down his wife, to make her laugh, he reminded her of what their 7-year-old son had been saying all week: "When are our Danishies coming?"

A friendship blossoms

When Jennifer was 13, growing up in Pearland, Texas, a friend — who ceased to be a part of her life long ago — told her about a pen pal company. So, she dashed off a letter, asking for a female correspondent, and six weeks later, she got a postcard in the mail with Hanne's address," she said. "So, I

Find a pen pal

Founded in 1950, World Pen Pals helps facilitate the type of relationship that Hanne Magnussen and Jennifer Blakley enjoy.

In its July-August 1999 issue, *Zillions* magazine gave World Pen Pals its "recommended/top category" rating for pen pal organizations.

To contact them:

845-246-7828;
www.world-pen-pals.com; P.O. Box 337, Saugerites, NY 12477.

Other penpal resources:

■ www.epals.com, whose "global network" connects more than 101,882 classrooms, 4.6 million students and educators in 191 countries for classroom-to-classroom projects in the world's "largest online classroom community."

■ www.pen-pals.net claims to offer "exciting pen pals worldwide. Contribute to World Peace through understanding and good communication." Contact Lorin & Nina Lee, Pen-pals.net founders; 808-949-5000; 500 University



personal touch seals friendship of pen pals

Continued from Page 1E
 and forth, at least once a week, a pace the two have maintained for two decades plus. At one point, they exchanged autographs, and once, Jennifer sent Jennifer a videocassette. (She had a special equipment just to be able to watch it.) So each had heard the other's voice, despite never having met in person.

At the beginning, they shared the normal girl stuff — favorite foods, favorite colors, favorite music (Duran Duran). Jennifer said, "We could have been friends for a long time. We were eerily similar. We were separated by parents and cultures. We really grew up with each other."

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"We could tell each other secrets! After all, who would she tell in Denmark?"

Jennifer Blakley

America, Hanne sat at home in Hirtshals, nervous as a cat. But, make no mistake, it was a "good" nervous.

"It's amazing!" she said by telephone. "I've known her longer than I've known my husband. We go so way back. I can't even remember our first letters. I remember she sent me gum, and it was so different from our gum. We wrote a lot about movies and food. After we had children, we got closer, I think. We talked about more family stuff. Feelings."

"We could talk about marriage and when we felt happy, when we felt ... upset. We could argue with our husbands and talk about that. We talked about everything — religion and terrorism. When the World Trade Center was hit, I wrote her right away."

E-mail, of course, has elevated the correspondence to a new dimension, though e-mail, both women say, is a mixed blessing. When cyberspace came into vogue, the letter-writing stopped. Because of e-mail, Hanne was able to notify Jennifer within hours that her 11-year-old daughter had been hit by a car while riding her bike. And Jennifer could bare her soul on a daily basis in 2003, when her husband was called up by his Reserve unit and deployed for most of the year in California.

"I'm nervous she will be disappointed — with me," Hanne said. "And I'm nervous about a lot of other things. Will we get along? Will our kids get along? I know her so well, and yet we've never met. We've never even talked on the phone!"

Despite being tempted, Hanne refused to call Jennifer on her last birthday. She even refused to call the day before departure, to provide updated flight details.

"I don't care if it's a big air-



LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer
Alison Blakley (left) celebrates her 11th birthday with Lisa Magnussen, also 11. They are following their moms' example.

port," she said. "We'll just have to walk around until we find each other. We can't speak until we actually see each other! I want nothing to spoil this."

Worth the wait

Showtime!

For Jennifer, "the moment" had arrived. Peering beyond the revolving door, she saw a 22-year relationship walking right at her. "There they are!" she screamed. "Oh, my gosh! Oh, my gosh! She sees me, too!"

And then came the waves, cascading gales of girlish laughter, followed by an endless hug. It was a warm embrace between women who have shared so much — adolescent angst, courtships ending in marriage, the rigors of childbearing, the sorrows of wars and terrorism.

"Oh, my gosh!" Jennifer said. "How are you? Oh, my God, oh, my God! How are you? I don't believe it. I don't believe it."

"This is surreal!" Hanne said, her arms still clinging to Jennifer.

"Hey, that's my word!" Jennifer said. "I can't believe you're here. Just look at me. I'm shaking."

Hanne's husband, Jon Magnussen, said his wife had grown eerily quiet as the moment drew near.

"Expectations," he said with a smile.

Soon, the Magnussens and

same house. It would be two weeks of baseball and barbecue, Easter egg hunts and even a bit of Duran Duran.

"I was worried, but not any more," Hanne said with a smile as big as Texas. "She's absolutely wonderful. She and her family are everything I dreamed they would be."

To the naysayers: Ha!

OK, so that was Saturday night, March 19. How was it going nearly two weeks later?

Never better, Jennifer said. Night after night, she marveled at the fact that her pen pal of 22 years was sitting across from her at the evening table. She also feels vindicated, for more than one friend had waxed skeptical about the prospects of the meeting she and Hanne had prayed for since 1983.

"I think we knew what to expect more than anybody else," Jennifer said. "Everybody else kept telling us we didn't know

what to expect. But we were right."

"We were right," said Hanne, who has discovered in person that she and her pen pal have more in common than she ever thought they would. "We're alike. We think alike about a lot of stuff. And we're kind of the bossy types. We like to control people. We like to organize stuff!"

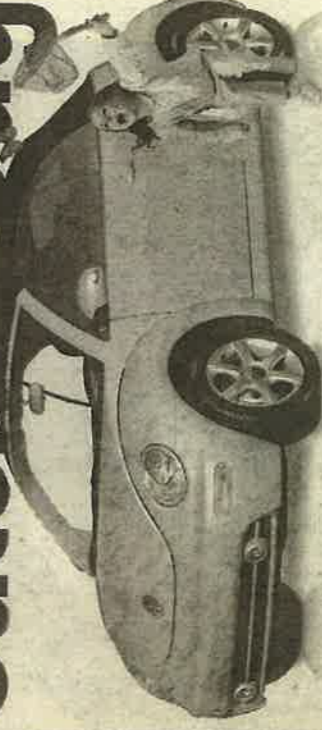
As the women looked at each other and laughed, Jennifer shook her head. She still can't believe all the naysayers, the ones who kept saying she ran the risk of feeling disappointed after meeting her pen pal in person.

They were wrong, she said — meeting a lifelong friend in person is 100 times better than getting a letter or an e-mail.

"Now it's her turn to visit me," Hanne said. "So do it now, Jennifer. Book your flight to Copenhagen. We can't afford to wait 22 more years."

E-mail: mgranberry@dallasnews.com

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icipation builds

hours before leaving for