

Just for Fun

The Art of Having Fun

By G. Raymond McCullough

Sometimes I wish I was still between the ages of 6 and 11. The age of 6 was when I was first allowed to cross the street, and I became aware of a much bigger world. Things started to change at age 11 when the dreaded puberty started to rule my world. Yes, ages 6 to 11 were magical when fun and play came naturally. Also, I believe this was the time when my imagination was the most active. I could take sticks or little plastic toy soldiers and turn them into hours of fun.

I can remember the days when a field was like the great expanses of the Serengeti, a creek was like the Columbia River, a ditch the Grand Canyon, and when a small hill was a mountain and I was the "King of the Mountain."



Imagination (ours or others) makes life fun.

At some point my life took over and my imagination and playful spirit was put on the back burner. I suspect you can relate to becoming increasingly focused on school, trying to fit in, keeping up with the proverbial Jones, and making a name for yourselves. This all has the potential to stifle our imagination and relegate the idea of "play and fun" to the dusty corners of our minds.

At this point some readers may be thinking, "I will just have a couple of drinks, a toke on the pipe, or snort a couple of lines and then the fun is back on." That may work for some in the short-term but we all know there are long-term consequences to this approach to having fun.

I have found that lasting fond memories are created with a natural approach to having fun, when we put our imaginations to work. In this way we are unlikely to destroy parts of our mind and body, and much less likely to find ourselves posing for a mug shot.

Several years ago a friend shared with me the story that follows: One day when he was "watching" his 4 year old son. His son was playing in a sand box with 2 toys, one a dump truck and the other a bulldozer. His son was lost in his world of imaginary play, pushing sand up to and into the dump truck. My friend stood nearby smoking a cigarette lost in his own thoughts. At some point his son said, "Daddy can you come play with me." My friend told me, he hesitated to understand what his son was asking. His initial reaction was to say, "Not now son daddy is tired." However, he moved closer at the request of his son and pushed the truck around with the toe of his foot. His son noticed what he was doing and said, "Daddy, no not like that you have to get on the ground." My friend hesitated but then relented as he got down on his knees with bulldozer in hand. His son gave him instructions, "Daddy you have to push the dirt to me and put it in my truck so I can put it over there." My friend told me he felt uncomfortable playing with the truck and bulldozer in the sand box. The experience felt foreign and alien to him. As he explained this he started to cry. I asked him why he cried and he said, "I realized that I don't know how to play and I never have. I can't remember ever playing and having fun." As we talked further, he connected this to his childhood (or the absence of it). "I had to grow up quick because I had to take on the role as an adult. My parents were both abusing alcohol and drugs." After a brief moment of tearful silence, he said, "I always thought I would teach my son all the things he would need to know in life. I never thought my son would be my teacher...teaching me how to play." He later added, "I felt humbled by the experience I had with my son."

Let's talk ball. The power of a ball is amazing. When it comes to fun a ball of some form can usually be found in the area. Are you familiar with the game called Four Square? When I was a kid this game bridged the gender gap. For those of you who don't know Four Square starts with a square being drawn on the pavement with chalk and divided into four equal squares 1, 2, 3, 4. One player occupied each square.



The person in square one is always the server and can serve the ball to a player in any of the other squares. The key is that the ball must bounce once and only once before it is returned to one of the players in any of the other squares. If the player fails to return the ball or knocks it out of play they must go to square 4 and the other players rotate to the next higher numbered square. The player in square 4 is always subject to being eliminated from the game if they fail to return the ball to another player as previously described. This game accounted for countless and endless hours of fun. It usually ended when the ball lost air or play was stopped because one or more players were called home by their parents. I have introduced this game to many adult clients (even hard core U.S. Marines) and after some initial grousing they flowed into the fun of the game as if they were 9 or 10 years old. Now that's fun!

During the month of August, my staff held an outing at Fort Flagler. A co-worker and I arrived early to scope out the place. It's beautiful but there are not many facilities that inspire playful competition. Hence, I called a co-worker that was in transit and asked her to pick up a badminton set. While waiting for her to arrive we dealt with our boredom by tossing a football around between pancake handed colleagues. Soon our co-worker arrived with the badminton game we set it up and the fun began. Everyone played on teams of two with the losing team having to take on the next challenger. It was a blast and we got some excellent pictures of nimble staff diving for the birdie as it arched over the net. From my vantage point it seemed like all the pressures and demands of work melted away. The staff was transported to a place where it was okay to look silly, uncoordinated, and where the outcome of the game was irrelevant (maybe the outcome being irrelevant is a reach).



Umm...I guess you don't need a ball to have fun. The next day talk back at the office was not about the delicious food (the ribs were especially delicious). Instead it was about the fun we all had playing badminton. Boredom was DOA.

Boredom is one of the biggest challenges for people who have made a choice to abstain from alcohol and other drugs. When they quit using they find they have a lot of time on their hands. This can be even more challenging for a person that has never learned to have fun or who has forgotten how to have healthy, clean, legal fun.

Remember the arch enemy of boredom is an active imagination that translates to having Wholesome FUN

Having fun takes imagination and some creativity. Also, it requires us to get out of our comfort zone. We have to be willing to try some things we've always wanted to try but never have.

Remember, use your imagination. If that doesn't work get your child or a younger sibling, nephew, or grandchild to help you out. An exercise I use with adolescent clients is to have them brainstorm fun activities by naming as many activities as they can for each letter of the alphabet—it gets interesting. Try this with your family and friends. Keep it simple, legal, and Fun!