



EXPECT SUCCESS

THE BEAUTY OF BEING BORED

"The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity." D. Parker



"I'm bored." How many times did we say that during our childhood? My parents' standard replies were, "go outside," "go play," or "find something to do" with the latter response followed by "or I'll find something for you to do" (which in my household meant cleaning chores since we owned a business). Needless to say, we found something to do quickly or kept our boredom to ourselves. In either case, their responses were a blessing in disguise. When forced to go outside or find something to do, it was with my siblings or on my own. My parents didn't stop the work they were doing to set up a play date for us or sit down to play a board game, and with three television channels and no computers, technology entertainment was VERY limited. Yikes, this sounds like misery for today's children. Or does it?

You see the blessing in disguise was that we were left to figure it out - on our own. That, in itself, was a great education given to us by default. Boredom led to creativity as we dreamed up new games. New games led to learning the art of compromise as we argued about rules (and new rules made up along the way). Boredom led to picking up a book and reading in my bedroom on sleepy afternoons. Those books took me on adventures like living on a train with the Boxcar Children or, in my teen years, serving as a nurse in the Vietnam War. Boredom in the car (no, kids never got to choose the radio station we actually wanted to listen to) forced me to look out the window and take notice of the passing landscape, and play the license plate game or memory games to pass the time. Boredom gave me "down time" which led to laying in the front yard looking at cloud formations, riding my bike around the neighborhood or walking uptown to the store. That "down time" was my thinking time. Whether I was conjuring up something in my imagination, thinking about what I wanted to be when I got older (definitely a singer in a variety show) or thinking about who I could call to play with later, it was "me" time left up to me to figure out.

Now, in an era of feeling the need to keep children entertained, I fear they have lost the advantage we had of being bored and learning how to truly entertain themselves, not with iPads, Gameboys, television and organized play dates, but using their imagination to create a new game, write a story, go exploring in the backyard or build a fort out of sheets and tree branches.

This week, our elementary school is taking part in Global School Play Day 2018. It is an idea being celebrated at schools around the world to emphasize the benefits of unstructured play. The irony is that, for most of us, unstructured play was an everyday occurrence rather than a planned event. So how we can make this type of play more common for our kids, of all ages?

Maybe we can start by sharing our own childhood stories of the creative ways we passed our time. Sharing our stories inspires conversation and starts traditions. Then we can follow it up by "un-planning" their free time. Encourage them to find things to do on their own the "old school" way - a deck of cards to play solitaire or build a card house, an ice cream pail to build a snow fort, paper, scissors and glue to design a project, or a library card to check out books. Let's give our children the same blessings in disguise.

(PS-I would love to hear your childhood stories of boredom. I've got a funny one about a glass of water and a cereal bowl.)