

Pway Wiff Me Daddy

By Andrew Gustafson

I'm a guy who loves to read, study, attend courses, and evolve myself intellectually. Recently, however, I'm finding that my greatest learning comes from my home and my greatest teachers are my kids, especially my two year old son. He's teaching me the value of abandoned laughter and play.

Ostensibly I impress an image that play time isn't something that I'm good at; playfulness seems gauche and out of my depth. People who don't know me well would say that I'm 'too serious' or 'all business'. I would call that a misinterpretation of who I am at a root level, but I suspect that I'm not alone in this; that many adults and youth feel the same reservations towards flamboyancy. Thus, the accusations leave me the desire to understand the possible value of retreating from within to live more spontaneously and outwardly colorful.

Dr. Clifford Oliver, one of my greatest teachers over the past few years, believes that every person is born into a one hundred room mansion of possibility; with our whole lives ahead of us we have the inner capacity to be anyone we want, whatever we want, and to be as happy as ever recorded in history. However, studies recorded in the 1960's explain that children hear prohibitions every nine seconds; no, don't, can't, shouldn't. Recent studies support this, while others suggest it might be closer to 6 seconds. These words induce feelings of shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, and confusion, even with the grandest of intentions to cascade our children with the gifts of socialization and enculturation. The outcome of this continual indoctrination is, as we all hope, safety and security for our children, but soon the one hundred room mansion of possibility is dwindled to a bachelor suite of non-possibility, as the hopes and dreams, desires and wishes, and imagination of our children are sidelined for the 'real heroes', our salvation; structure, discipline, learning, and control. Some reasonable reflection on the part of parents is necessary.

Laughter and play are innate. We're born with the capacity for, the appreciation of, and the drive for lots of fun; pleasure all the time. Joseph Chilton Pearce asked the question, "why do children want to play all the time, practically from birth and to the extent that they will turn everything into

play if allowed, while we adults have a totally different agenda for them, one we too have held since our own departure from childhood. We are convinced our agenda for our children is good for them and are perplexed when they resist the apparent benevolence with all their might, mystified as to why it is that nature would build into children a compulsion to play when responding to our adult wisdom about learning to survive often seems to suffer as a result."

Robin Sharma also suggests that children are some of our greatest teachers. He, along with countless other self help experts, make a living telling us how to improve our lives, our relationships, our work productivity, our wealth, and who we are in general. But Sharma suggests this is all drivel. He asks where the arrogance comes from to infer that we could improve on something that was created by the divine and in His image. He suggests that, therefore, the concept of self-improvement is ineffectual; that the real 'improvements' in life, relationships and health come through 'self-remembering'. Even the most Darwinian thinker should be able to appreciate this line of reasoning as it's obvious that we've *evolved* from carefree, fun, laughter filled children into perpetually more stressed, worried, and staunchly uptight adults. Remember when you were young, carefree, stress free and able to hear and free to follow your intuition? In a world where over 90% of disease and over 65% of deaths are related, directly and indirectly, to stress, it seems that a simple health improving lesson for us might be to 'let go' a little, relax a little, and laugh a lot. Children laugh, on average, over 400 times daily. Adults laugh only 11 times a day. When was the last time you laughed out loud; really let loose with gut wrenching laughter? When was the last time you even put yourself in an environment where something that funny might have even been said or occurred. When was the last time you sang your song, danced your dance, or lived a day worthy of poetic record? And when was the last time you played. Nothing else, just play. No rules or referees, no structure, no inhibition, and definitely no agenda, just back to the good old days in the sand box, swimming pool, back yard, basement tent, or toy room style play?

After considering the question posed above for quite some time, and devoting years of study to the subject, Pearce wrote an entire book dedicated to the answer, in which he concluded that, "play *is* the whole reason for and essence of life - and not just for children, but for all God's

children, whatever their age; and I understand that our great model's observation that we must become again as little children meant precisely what it said. But I also *know* that our refusal to play and our prevention of play in children, our insistence on forcing them into defensive procedures, *are evils of long-standing.*"

So when my son asks me each day to, "pway wiff me Daddy!!" I need to set aside my intellectual understanding of how that action is literally saving my life through its clear health benefits, opening my mind to new and profound possibilities, and supporting my journey of 'self-improvement'. I need to forget that although I'm devolving in terms of my encultured view of societal responsibility I'm actually participating in the one activity that will more rapidly transcend my mind and heart than anything I could possibly dream up on my own. I need to let everything escape my mind and play, laugh and have unadulterated fun.