

# a Playful Path



BERNARD DE KOVEN











*A Playful Path*

Bernard Louis DeKoven



## **A Playful Path**

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## *Prelude*

For a brief, intense period in your life you spend most of your time having fun - except for those equally intense moments when you are taken painfully by surprise. Everything seems to you to be another invitation to play, everything another opportunity for fun: the dog, the water dish, the blanket, a pair of shoes, a pair of feet. You play games like “monster,” making your parents run after you and groan in pretend scariness; and hide and seek, only not really hide and seek, but more just hide, and not really hiding either.

Later, you get better at hiding - a lot better. You learn to hide so well that you don't get found until you decide to come out. You learn to hide for such a long time that you start playing there, all by your self, where nobody can see you. You play on your own, inside, in your very own “inner playground.” It's not that the world is any less fun, your body any less delightful, other people less playworthy, the opportunities to play less present, you any less playful. You just play somewhere else. Somewhere safer. Where you don't get hurt as much, or noticed, even.

The point I hope I'm making here is that it seems highly likely that, unless we do something about it, we're going to find a lot more reasons for us to stay hidden. And if we want to make it safely and sanely through all the changes coming our way, we're going to need to come out and play. And if we're going to come out and play, we're also going to have to take our need to play in the world more seriously: not so seriously that we forget to have fun – but precisely so seriously that we remember.

There are reasons you stay hidden, staying inside to play. O, yes, there are reasons. It's fun inside.

There's so much to play with. And the older you get, the more it seems that outside there is just too much to worry about, to be careful of, to plan for. There are priorities and urgencies and crazy people and politicians and guns and stuff that you just have to pay attention to, a lot. And keeping your job. And money. And as you get older, there's your health to think about, and your children and your grandchildren and your neighborhood and money, still money, forever money. And you don't want so much of you to be seen so much. You especially don't want to be seen playing. You don't want to be seen laughing at nothing in particular, fooling around for no reason, being without purpose. It's embarrassing, it's dangerous, people might think there's something wrong with you.

So when you're walking from here to there, unless it's with someone you feel very safe about, you don't let your self think about how fun it is to walk, how your body moves in the world, how the sidewalk sparkles in the sun, how many people there are to play with. You see a puddle, and you don't let your self think of the fun of making splashes. You think about

how cold and wet it would be, you think about your shoes. And when you walk with someone else, someone who maybe just might not understand how fun you really are, you don't think about what kind of game you could play on the way, about where you could run or hide or what you could climb under or jump over. It's as if the world has become something alien to you, and you've become someone alienated from it, and there's no better place for you to play, but hidden, inside.

So, inside, you're this wonderfully playful, creative, endlessly delightful person. And outside you act just like someone who has to tell herself to smile, to laugh, to look at others not as obstacles, or barriers, or beings to avoid touching. You tell your self that they aren't at all like you, they're not playing inside, not just waiting for someone to say "I found you!"

Me, too. I'm that way, a lot. I get scared. I hide inside. And I've spent 45 years exploring everything I could learn about games and fun and play and playfulness. And after all those years, like you, I still have to remind my self, over and over, probably just as much as you do, that I can come out to play.

Believe me, I know we could be having fun, together. We could be having fun of the most amazing kinds – loving, sensitive, intimate, caring, nurturing, transforming. The same kind of fun we had when we were kids, only deeper, because now we know more. Because we know how dangerous it could be, how deeply we could get hurt, and we'd play, anyway.

I know that if we only let our selves out to play we would rediscover our selves and reunite with the world. If we only remembered to have fun, the whole world would become our playground. I understand that there are times when, simply because we don't let our selves out, we hurt our very own children, our very own lovers, our students, our colleagues, our pets, the people who love us. Not intentionally. Not maliciously. But simply because we're inside, somewhere safe. Not because we want to stay inside. But because we're afraid to come out.

It's not such an easy thing to do, remembering to have fun when and while we can. So I've been practicing. Not so much practicing the remembering to have fun part, because that's a little too hard, given the news and the crowds and the world. So, I've been practicing playfulness. A joke here, a bit of playfulness there, a wave, a doodle, a dance. Basically, whenever I notice an opportunity to do something a little, tiny bit playfully, I take it.

I've come to call this my "playful path." It's not like one of those paths you read about, like a spiritual path, or anything to get religious about. It's more like a way to be on whatever path you happen to be on at the time: a, you know, playful way. You're walking down a street. It's the same street you've walked down before. It's not like you have to find a different street. But this time, you walk a little more playfully. You step on cracks. You walk around a tree, twice. You wave at a bird.

I have a big advantage, I admit. I've been spending my life making games, writing about play, demonstrating what it's like to have fun. I've become what you might call an expert in fun, a guru of glee, so to speak, as it were. But, like you, I still forget. Maybe not as often, but often enough.

So, to help us, me and you both, I've been spending these many months organizing and reorganizing the various lessons I've taught and learned about fun over the years - thousands of posts, volumes of notes - organizing and focusing them on this one idea: the pursuit of playfulness.

So, here's this book: *A Playful Path*. It's a collection of tools, narratives and theories to support us in our efforts to come out and play, to validate and develop playfulness in the daily game, and in the games we share with others with whom we live, work and play.

There are four main sections: the first describes playfulness as an approach to the human experience; the second focuses on games as vehicles for practicing and understanding the art of playfulness in the daily game; the third is about the experience of play; and the final section explores the nature of fun. All this conceptual deliciousness is followed by an appendix of guided fantasies to help you explore your inner playground a bit more playfully.

Fun is why we play. Play is what we do to have fun. Games are what we do to share and enlarge our understanding and mastery of play. And a playful path is what we travel when we bring our playfulness into the world.

Each section is further divided. The first section (A Playful Path) includes theory and narrative supporting the idea of playfulness; exercises in which you can practice a playful sensibility.

The next section (Games) presents games as tools for practicing playfulness. This, in many ways, is a radically different perspective on games, but very much in consonance with the theories I laid out in *The Well-Played Game*. This section begins with discussions of games as tools for exploring playfulness. The focus then shifts to the connections between playfulness as experienced in games, and playfulness as experienced in all human relationships. The focus then narrows to games that are specifically designed to serve as invitations to shared play. The section concludes with a small collection of playful games to introduce to friends, family, and community.

The third section (Play) is largely conceptual, helping you gain a wider perspective on the experience of play and its relevance to every aspect of life. As the second section encourages you to think about games as tools for exploring the daily game, the third section considers play as a tool for becoming more engaged in everything - in the world, in community, in your body, in the experience of being alive.



The final section (Fun) generalizes the experiences of playfulness, games and play even further, going to the core (and target) of all these frames to an investigation of fun itself. It begins with a brief contemplation of the ubiquity and easy accessibility of fun. This leads to a collection of essays on some of the different contexts and manifestations of fun. The section then stretches and deepens the exploration of all things fun, in its widest possible meaning. From there, a small collection of practical exercises for exploring and expanding your “fun awareness.” And finally, “The Oaqui Tales” - a short collection of imaginary wisdom, lightly touching the furthest reaches of a playful path.

And then there’s the appendix. You can think of it as a playful version of self-administered psychotherapy, or perhaps an example of a playful approach to self-discovery. Whatever you think of it, it’s there for you, for the fun of it.

All in all, *A Playful Path* serves as an collection of ideas and tools to help us bring our playfulness back into the open. When we find our selves forgetting the life of the game or the game of life, the joy of form or the content, the play of brain or mind, body or spirit, somewhere in this book there’ll be exercises and narratives that can help us return to that particularly playful path to which our soul is heir.

As such, it can help you rediscover play everywhere, even outside. It can’t show you how to come out to play. That’s something you have to find out your self. And it’s not easy, because, like I say, there’s so much else. But this book can help, and so can your pets, or your friends or your kids or your local play permitter.

No matter where you are in the book, remember it’s all about fun. No matter what you are reading, you’ll find in it one more invitation to share your playfulness with the world. Start anywhere, with any section. Choose your own adventure, make your own playful path.

*We are inherently playful. Inherently. We inherited our playfulness from our parents, our parents' parents, and, if you want to carry it back to the source, from life itself.*

*This partly explains why we respond so immediately to playfulness - not just when manifested by our children, or any child, but anyone's playfulness. Not just anyone's, but even animals'.*

*We are so inherently playful that we don't have to be even vaguely concerned that we might lose our playfulness. It is built into our bodies, into our very genes.*

*We have been taught to distrust play. Worse, we have been taught that we are not and should not be playful. We have been taught that play is childish, immature, destructive. Taught by people who have themselves lost the path, who were themselves taught by people who believed that fun was, can you believe this: sinful. Taught by people who have inherited a broken culture where common sense has been replaced by common senselessness. Taught that if we work hard enough and long enough and live a life that is dull enough, we will be rewarded - when fun is the reward.*

*So when I talk and write about a Playful Path, I'm neither talking nor writing about how we can or should become playful, because we already are. Or how we can become more playful, because our playfulness is immeasurable. I'm talking, rather, about trusting our playfulness, believing in our playfulness, having faith in our playfulness, letting our selves be guided by our playfulness - because our playfulness will lead us back to life itself. All of life. As much life as we can let in. To the embrace of all-embracing life. To, yes, joy.*



# a Playful Path







## *A playful path*

**“A playful path is the shortest road to happiness.”**

- the Oaqui

When you are playful, when you are feeling, being playful, you are walking a playful path. When you are having fun, when you are graceful, when you are in harmony with your self in the world, when you feel alive, when you are delighted and delightful, surprised and surprising, loving, caring; you are dancing on a playful path. When you are playing, when you are at play, in play, when you are fully playing, when you are playing playfully, you are creating a playful path.

When you stop playing, stop being playful, when you become inflexible, unresponsive, insensitive, humorless, fearful, frenzied, you are on some other path entirely.

For adults, following a playful path is a practice, something you put into practice, and then practice some more. When you were a kid, it wasn't a practice. It was what you did, always. You had to be reminded not to be playful. And you were. O, yes, you were. But now that you have become what you, as a kid, called “an adult,” you find that play is something you have to remind your self to do, playful something you have to allow your self to be.

And once you again take up that playful path you knew so well, you discover that it's different, you're different. You can play much more deeply than you could before. You are stronger, you understand more, you have more power, better toys. You discover that you, as a playful being, can choose a different way of being. A way of being as large as life. A way of being you, infinitely.

## *The Path*

I'll be the first to admit, well, maybe not the first, but I'm admitting it anyway: it's not that easy to be playful. Certainly not for adults, and, from time to time, not even for children. It's easier for dogs, maybe. Puppies, certainly. But even they, if they feel threatened or sick or hungry, fall off the path. Yes, for sure, they get back on it as soon as they can, often with a vengeance. We, the mature ones, not so much. We're too busy playing inside. And outside are things like work and not enough money and too much war. So our kids ask us if we want to play, and we say "no." Sometimes we even get angry at them for disturbing us, as if there are things in our lives that are more important than theirs.

So, I've been looking for things we can do to stay in the daily game a little longer, to leave it a little less easily, to come back to it more readily. I make jokes, do funny stuff, play with toys, play games. But when I'm really off, path-wise, really far off, somewhere depressingly else entirely, I sometimes have trouble getting my self to play or joke around or smile, even. I get angry when I could be laughing, serious when I could be playful. The invitation to play is there, the gift wrapped in sparkles of promise, but I send it back unopened. I mean, I even turn down opportunities to have fun, if you can imagine that.

Which brings us to appreciation and gratitude.

These are what you might call "openers." When you can appreciate anyone, when you can be thankful for any thing, it opens you, like playfulness opens you. It opens you to some place near the core of you. And you can receive again. Feel again. Respond from your playful center again.

I like it when we appreciate things and people and animals and life and stuff. It makes it more fun.

I'm not sure if things are more fun if we appreciate them or if we appreciate them because they are fun. Like we find our selves about to eat a very delicious-looking and -smelling piece of, uh, portobello mushroom, wild-

caught, even, and we pause just as we are about to impale the first bite upon our conceptually drooling fork, just to appreciate the portobello-ish moment and all the enjoyment therewith implied. Maybe to inhale the olfactory bliss of the clarified buttery sauce of it all a little more deeply, to observe the firm, glistening, fleshy 'shroom aglow with premonitory pleasure; or to meditate on the honed sensibilities of the chef who selected this very port- that brought us this bellaness, or all the living beauty it once possessed. (Sometimes I almost regret that I am about to take so much enjoyment from eating something that was once alive. And then I take that bite and I am all about the appreciation thing.)

Then there's post-appreciating. Appreciating the memory of it, savoring the satisfaction of it all. Ah, the sheer pleasure of pleasure, almost as pleasant in memory as it is in deed, indeed.

It's like what you get when you give someone that perfect gift. Not so much that you get appreciated. But that the gift does. Not so much because of all the trouble and expense you went through to get it. But because of the joy that it brings, the delight, the glee. Which make you appreciate the giving almost as much as you appreciate the receiving. Which makes the memory of the giving almost as enjoyable as the giving itself.

I think if I had been the One who created the world, and the mushroom, and the fire and fork, I wouldn't be after praise or gratitude. I think what I'd want most to see is my gifts being enjoyed, appreciated, savored.

I like how the financial world uses the word. For them, appreciation means increasing in value. I think that's what happens for us when we appreciate some-thing or -one. It gets better. More precious. More fun.

Both Merriam and Webster think the synonyms for appreciation are: gratefulness, thanks, thankfulness, and for thankful: blissful, delighted, gratified, happy, joyful, joyous, pleased, satisfied, glad, tickled. Yup. You get thankful, you start appreciating things and people and life – and there you are, back again, delighted, gratified, happy, joyful, joyous, pleased, satisfied, glad, tickled, even. Right smack dab in the middle of a playful path.

## *Following your Playful Path*

Following a playful path is not as much about being playful as it is about your being aware of playfulness: your own playfulness, of wherever you see manifestations of playfulness. It's about noticing playfulness, noticing when you're not playful, noticing when you're not as playful as you want to be, or wish you were, or wish you had been.

Playfulness is like that. It comes from the center of your being, from whatever your soul and mind and heart and body are centered on.

You don't have to be playful to be on a playful path. It helps. But it helps just as much if you only notice playfulness in others. It helps even if you just notice that at this particular moment, at this particular time, you're just not feeling very playful, and you don't even want to be playing. You're, what, grumpy, tired, feeling pressured, busy, focused, doing something too important to be playing around with.

It's like traveling any other path. It's always about noticing where you are, where you're going. It's a journey. And the more you notice, the more present you are; and the more present you are, the closer you are: to your self, to life, to the world.

You often find a playful path in the middle, or maybe close to the edges of other paths; many of which have nothing at all to do with being playful. Sure, you'd expect to find it if you were following a child's path, or a dog's, or maybe an actor's, or artist's, or musician's. But sometimes you find that playful path right smack dab in the middle of a scientist's path, or a mathematician's, or on a spiritual path – without any of those paths getting any less scientific or mathematical or spiritual, or the playful path getting any less playful. Often, surprisingly often, both paths, the playful one and whatever other path you happen to be on or just crossing, deepen each other, strengthen each other. And it's the best. The best. And then, for a time, because of the very nature of playfulness, they, and you, go their separate way.

You follow a playful path because playfulness is an aspect of your self, your life, your world. And the more often, the more clearly you see it, the more present you are to playfulness, the more present it is in you.

## *No guardrails hath the path*

There's at least one good reason that, guardrail-wise, there are none that the playful path hath: because there are times when being playful is not so useful, and path-wise, you just have to get off, immediately.

For example, when you're operating on someone. Even if you're actually a surgeon, there are moments when you have to get off the playful path and focus entirely on the one thing your hands are doing. Sure, sure, there's almost always room for jokes and music and kidding around, except when there's not. And if the playful path had guardrails or even a medial strip, if there were anything between your seriousness and your playfulness, anything that kept you playful when you need not to be, and vice versa, it wouldn't be fun, really, ever. Because fun and freedom go together like, well, freedom and fun.

It's an off and on kind of thing, this playful path. Sometimes you're not playful enough. Sometimes, you're too playful. When you need to get off or on, you really don't want anything standing in your way at all ever. And it's a good thing. Except when you wander a little too far off - which happens, believe you me. And your playful part gets a little lost. And the rest of you gets a little lonely. So, you surround your self with reminders: friends, a spouse or two, pets, kids, joke books, puzzles, toys, happy pith, playful hats, music, photos, online life-lovers. And the best of them, the ones you cherish, show you the way back.



## *It is indirect, this playful path*

To get from point A to point B, you frequently find your self having to go through point C.

Sometimes it's fun. Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes it's transcendent, transmogrifying, transubstantiating, trance-like. More often, it's dance-like, like finding your self in a free form dance where everybody is your partner, or a square dance where everyone is a caller, with music so live that the musicians are as finely tuned to their instruments as they are to each other as they are to the dancers.

Sometimes it's seriously playful, like the way an artist plays: totally focused, utterly devoted, and yet, always listening, yielding when the medium seems to push back, released from expectation, from judgment, released into the moment of play, of playing with, of being played with, playing along and along, playing until the work itself stops playing.

Other times the path gets very narrow, and to keep from going off into what appears to be chaos or oblivion or endless boredom you have to pay very careful attention to every step or glide or leap.

But most of the time the path is wide - so wide it doesn't matter where you go, and the music, and the joy take you everywhere.

## *Life and death on your playful path*

Even without you, your playful path is never empty. There's always something or someone there to discover, to invite you to play.

There are things you've left and things you've found and things you pretended and things you just forgot.

Some things are just plain junk - those you can make toys out of, or make a game out of, or look at, or take along with you, or just watch them, or lie on them, shelter under them.

Then there are the things you need to learn to play around - not play with, play around: like the things that make you itch or are very sharp or fragile.

Some things are obstacles; too big to move, too heavy. Those things you can try to jump over or dig under or climb.

Some of these things are pretend. Some are not.

There's life on your playful path, and lots of it. Some of the living things on your path might not even be particularly playful, or playworthy, or safe, even. Most are. They want to play with you, want to love you, want to make you laugh. Some, for some reason, want to hurt you. Some hurt, are hurting. And some, sometimes, go away, and sometimes die. And sometimes, the hurting dying things are the very things that love you.

And that's just too much to play with or around. Too much for anyone. Not right away. Not right after.

It's fun to play dead. But when some living, loving thing really dies, or leaves you, right in the middle of the game, right where it used to be so much fun to play together; you discover that you don't feel like playing any more. Not right then. You don't have to get off the path entirely. But you do have to stop playing, to take it in. You have to let the grief in. You might even have to let the anger in, the depression, the tears, the screams. Because, player that you are, you understand that you have to give your self over, completely, as totally and freely as a child might: to the grief like to the game, to the pain like to the fun. Player that you are, you embrace it and let it embrace you, naked, without protection. Because when you are completely grieving, like when you are completely playing, you are still complete.

It is only when you stop receiving, when you stop letting your self feel, when you separate your self from the pain that you have to leave the path; and die, a little, too.

## *The path, the poop. and the wasp*

There, in the very midst of my personal playful path, I found a small, yet salient poop offering. I walked on, playfully, as is my custom, awash in the humor and yet unplumbed significance of it all, only to discover that my path had directed me back to the poop, and to the trash can beyond, wherein, fortuitously lay a swath of clean newspaper just ample enough for semi-sanitary poop-handling.

So, paper in hand, I returned to the poop, as we all must do. I laid the paper over the poop, and wrapped it, o so assiduously, and let the path take me playfully back to the receptacle of anonymous waste, wherein I somewhat gleefully surrendered the poop.

Thereafter, the path returned me. I passed, with something like smugness, the now reclaimed pooplessness of it all, musing lightly on the goodness of my deed.

Approximately 50 metric yards thereafter, I found my self facing a far more profound test. For there, actually smack in the middle of my resumed path, lay a far more profound and expressive offering of canine nonchalance.

Nearby, as it happened, walked a dog-walker, who, by the kind of happenstance that happens when you're standing on a playful path, had upon her wrist a dispenser of poop bags. I directed her attention to my new self-evident duty, and suggested to her that she might want to donate a poop bag towards my mission. And she, uncannily, gave me two.

Thanking her with a perfusion of thanks, I effused my way back to my newfound poop pile, and, charged with a sense of civic, shall we say, duty; I proceeded to engage in poop-removal-like behaviors, only to discover that yes, I needed both bags, and then some.

While I leave you to contemplate the uncomfortable consequences of the thensomeness of it all, suffice it to say that I accomplished the mission, dumped the bags, and wiped the residue on a secluded patch of grass, shortly thereafter resuming my blissful progress along my playful path, which had become, due to my diligence, doody free.

I didn't reach the conclusion of this particular episode until the next day. 'Twas another lovely day, and my path beckoned to yet further adventures in playfulness. This time, I began with purpose. I marched my self towards the thoughtfully-provided poop-bag dispenser for civic-minded dog-walkers, and sought out the roll of sanitary poop bags as advertised therein. I couldn't help but notice that the bottom section of the dispenser had been apparently repurposed to function as a receptacle for used tissues. And so (I'm about to get to the point of this entire conceptual perambulation), and so, I reach into the top half of the aforementioned dispenser, only to find

that it, too, had been repurposed —by a vagrant gang of wasps.

I was immediately struck by the speed of their response to my hand's presence, and, returning to my path with admirable alacrity, I was sorely impressed by the amount of venom released in that millisecond of our encounter. And so, perforce abandoning my poop-patrol, I returned the path, and, whilst sucking assiduously on my wound, found my self saying to my self: "this, then, too is revelation: there's the path, there's the act of caring, the playful pleasure of doing good without reward or reason, there's the poop, and there's the wasp."

## *A squirrel explains a playful path*

The other day, when I was thinking about a playful path (which I try to do as often as possible – about, you know, what it feels like when I’m on or off it, what you might call its “spiritual topography”), I met a squirrel who, for the duration of our meeting (OK, not so much a meeting, but an encounter, you know, each of us stilled in our awareness of the other), seemed, naturally, to be there to answer the very question I wasn’t quite asking.

So alive, so filled with life this squirrel seemed to be (as all living squirrels seem to be – you know, a lot of scampering, a lot of sudden sitting up, taking notice) talking to me, standing there for something (I’ve always admired squirrels for that – not just for their gloriously bounding grace, for their seeming celebration of anything – but especially for their, you know, playfulness: like when they chase each other round and round a tree, double-helixing their way up and down and up – such athletes, so committed, so completely engaged), patiently illustrating what a playful path was really like:

Not so much like what you’d call a path or a road or a winding trail, the squirrel explained, but something three-dimensional, with branches everywhere, more like, wouldn’t you know it, a tree, whose bifurcating ways, even though they seem to be growing in every possible direction, each lead to the light.

Not a grown-up path, not a flat path like you would find on a map, but a path whose playfulness is very much like the path you probably perceived when you were a child: many-branched, multi-dimensional, where you could leap from here to anywhere and never lose your way, always be found.

## *Playfulness*

Playfulness isn't really an achievement. It's a gift. Let me say that again. Playfulness isn't an achievement, it's a gift. And that gift comes to those who choose to receive it.

Playfulness is a gift that grants you great power. It allows you to transform the very things that you take seriously into opportunities for shared laughter, the very things that make your heart heavy into things that make you rejoice, it turns junk into toys, toys into art, art into celebration. It turns walking into skipping, skipping into dance. It turns problems into puzzles, puzzles into invitations to wonder.

And yet, even though I rigorously claim that "a playful path is the shortest road to happiness," it often happens that we don't choose to be playful. We could, but we don't. Maybe we're not happy enough. Maybe some perverse part of our self is having more fun being miserable. After all, there's so much to be miserable about, so much fear, so much pain, such deep poverty - even the best of us, even the most professionally playful of us choose to stay inside to play, when there's a whole world out there to play with. And even though we have the choice and we know we have the choice, we simply can't get our self to go out and play. We can't act playfully, or let our self feel playful or let our self be playful.

Those are the times when it's clearest:

Playfulness is not an achievement. It's a gift.

In truth, I bet you could say the same thing about happiness.



## *Play and Playfulness*

Here's a thought to think about: most games don't encourage playfulness. Unless you're talking about the kinds of games kids play. Well, some kids' games. Some kids. Maybe little kids. Maybe playground games. When they aren't involved in Little League, or toddler tennis or baby bowling.

If by games you mean sports, or games with official rules, or traditional games like shuffleboard and chess and bridge; playfulness is not what you'd think of as happening very much. Maybe between games. But not during, not when you're all focused and keeping score and playing for the team and record and things. Play is happening. O, yes. Sometimes even deep play, amazing, astounding play, play of the immersive, transcendent, sometimes just-about-heroic kind might even be happening. But not playfulness.

Playfulness, as Carse<sup>ii</sup> would describe it, belongs to the realm of "infinite games."



Dylan McKenzie, NYU Game Center

## *Wonder*

The entrance to your playful path is wonder. The first step in the rediscovery of your playfulness is that moment when you allow your self to wonder at something, to wonder at the beauty, the intricacy, the touch, the sense, the workings of the world.

So, how do you find wonder when the world has become too familiar, the promises too far out of reach, too rarely fulfilled, in the light of the knowledge that it once was everywhere?

Well, he responds predictably, how about doing something else? Anything else. Taking a nap, maybe, first. Then a walk in a place where you can look, just look, or touch, or taste or, smell, or, you know, feel things like the sun and wind and your body moving.

Now is always new. Never then. Step back into it. Pretend something. Pretend that you are a camera, everything you see, every movement of your eyes, every saccade part of the recording, everything you hear captured. In real time. Pretend you are the director, framing and focusing on each moment, each effect, each change in light, each shadow. Pretend you are in a theater, and you are watching it all in iMax 3D. The camera pans down. You see the sidewalk sparkling in the sun, moving at the edge of a shadow, framing a single scintillation. It is your shadow. Wonder of wonders, it is yours.



## *Being playful*

You don't have to play to be playful. You don't need toys or games or costumes or joke books. But you do have to be open, vulnerable, you do have to let go.

Playfulness is all about being vulnerable, responsive, yielding to the moment. You might not be playing, but you are willing to play, at the drop of a hat, the bounce of a ball, the glance of a toddler, the wag of a tail. You are open to any opportunity. You are loose. Responsive. Present.

You have to be present to enjoy the sunrise, to delight in the light of your child's delight, because otherwise you simply aren't there to catch it. It goes by you as if it and you aren't even there.

Playfulness means presence, but not just presence. Responsiveness, but not just responsiveness. Presence and responsiveness, lightness and attentiveness, improvisation and creativity, a willingness to let go and become part.

There's nothing hard about being playful. The hard thing is let your self out to play so that you have that choice, the hard thing is recognizing the opportunity, the brave thing is accepting the invitation.

Why do you stay inside? Why do you fail to go out and meet the opportunity? Why does it sometimes seem so hard to accept the invitation? Watch the news. Listen to the news. Read the news. Walk in the crowds. Go to school. Go to work. Look around. Look at the faces surrounding you. Think about cracking a joke, a smile, even. Think about cracking the barriers that separate you, define you. Think about how important it seems for you to be taken seriously, to appear in control, always in control, everywhere in control.

When you are playful, you let go of all that. You are not even thinking about being in control or controlling anyone else. You're thinking about fun. And if you see the opportunity, you take it. If you see possibility, you acknowledge it.

When you are feeling playful, it doesn't seem particularly brave to come out and play, to invite someone to play with you, even at the office, even with a stranger. When you're not feeling playful, it seems foreboding, forbidden, wrong, dangerous, even. You risk being laughed at, made to feel foolish, seeming disrespectful, childish, crazy. And to act playfully, to be playful, given all that, is exactly that: brave.

But the payoff, the payoff! Taking that step, braving the ridicule, the loss of control; to follow a playful path is, in truth, “the shortest road to happiness.” I say that because that kind of path, a playful one, takes you to where the fun is. And if you are there, with the fun, the sheer fun of it all, well then, there, too, with you, is happiness.

## *Play fully*

There's playing around. No, not that kind of playing around. The kind when you're being, well, playful. You're having fun, you're playing, but you're not really playing. You're not, as some people call it, "playing your heart out." Or, as I might call it, "playing from your heart." Or, as I also might call it, "playing fully." Maybe you're worrying about what people are thinking about you, about whether you're good enough. Maybe you're playing some kind of fun, kid-like game, and you're worried about what people who aren't playing might be thinking about you. Maybe you're not feeling well enough. Maybe you're tired. Bored, maybe. The point is, you're not completely present, not entirely invested, not totally in play.

To play well, you have to play fully. To get to that place where you are at home again, at home in your self, at home with the people who are playing with you, at home in the world - you can't hold anything back. Anything.

When you're a kid, that's exactly how you play: fully. You can't help your self. Even if you could, you wouldn't want to. It wouldn't be as much fun. But when you stop being a kid, it takes you longer to let your self play as fully as you know you can. The world has gotten a lot more worrisome, people a lot more complex, a lot more hidden from each other. So you've become more circumspect, more cautious, and even when you decide to play, it takes you a while before you decide it's safe enough for you to play fully.

It's no wonder it takes you so long. You watch television. You read the newspaper. You spend time with other adults and children who spend most of their days in institutions that methodically drain away the capacity for joy, where laughter is, to say the least, suspect. You live in a culture whose very roots invalidate playfulness. Work ethics, Puritan ethics, the Joneses - all the rules and mores and manners you're supposed to follow, to keep up with. And yet, you also live in a culture that, from time to time, positively flowers with joy.

## *Play playfully*

Playfulness opens you. It lightens your heart. It makes you more receptive (because you are looking for things to play with and people with whom). It engages more of you: mind, body, senses, abilities.

Play, sometimes when you are playing games, and even more sometimes when no one is being particularly playful, also has its consequences. It focuses you on the game and decreases your awareness and sensitivity to what is happening outside the game. It focuses you on the objectives, the goals of the game and decreases your awareness and sensitivity to anything outside of the game that might be engaging the hearts and minds of your fellow players. It releases you from responsibility for what might be happening outside the game so when the game is over you are like someone who has recently awoken, and in that moment of temporary disorientation more open to the world, to your fellow players.

Playing playfully redefines the game and the consequences. It is transformational. It changes you. It changes how you relate to your children, your peers, to the people who serve you, the people who love you, the people with whom you work, sing, eat, love, play; the people you sit next to, the people you serve, the people with whom you stand in line, cross the street. You don't get disturbed as easily. You listen more carefully. You are more interested, more compassionate, more aware. You rediscover the person you love being: alive, energetic, caring, responsive. You laugh more completely, you smile more deeply, you are a better friend, parent, lover. You dance more. You paint more. You are more.

## *Playing for fun*

### **Play Play Fully Play Playfully**

During the course of our working lives, most of us lose touch with the sources of our personal power. Play, especially when it is whole-hearted, whole-minded, whole-bodied, is an experience and expression of personal power. When we play, and play fully, and especially when we play playfully, we are engaged, involved, in charge.

So this is what I believe:

- fun is fundamental to happiness
- we can have more fun

And this is what I discovered:

There's a direct connection between the experiences of alienation and stress, and the amount of enjoyment people are having – that the more alienated and stressed people are, the less fun.

And I've seen how people can make anything more enjoyable – their jobs, their relationships, the things they make and do.

That's it. That's all you need to know. As long as you are playing, as long as you are fully playing, and playing playfully, a playful path is more likely than not to be the path you're on. And as long as you stay on a playful path, you make even the daily game more fun.

That's the thing about a playful path. As soon as you stop playing, or stop playing fully, or stop playing playfully, suddenly you're somewhere else, on some other kind of path, a path that is most definitely not a playful one and ultimately not particularly fun.

Whoever chooses to respond playfully, most often and most...um...playfully, can be said to be a "traveler on a playful path." Someone creating, having and being fun.

What is odd, especially to those of us who have, from time to time, walked that very same playful path to which I herein allude, is that people would choose any other way to experience the world. Why would you not want to follow a playful path? What other path is better designed to take you to happiness? What more reliable guide to happiness than fun and creativity, spontaneity and responsiveness, laughter and playfulness?

Traveling a playful path is a kind of whole person, whole community, whole society, whole

world yoga with laughter and games and exercises and studies and arts that help you create a daily game that is more fun for you and the world.

Playing for the sheer fun of it all, you rediscover:

- the spirit, art and science<sup>iii</sup> of fun
- how you can make things more fun for your self, and everyone around you.

## *Becoming playful*

It might be too hard, asking too much. Telling your self to be playful might be like telling your self to be happy. Granted, it'd be great if you were happy. Or even just more playful. But if you don't think you're either, telling your self to be happy or playful isn't going to make it happen. In fact, it's likely to make you depressed, frustrated, angry at your self for being someone you just don't want to be.

That's what worries me about this whole idea of telling your self to be playful when you think you're not. I mean, who's telling whom? Is the self that's telling you to change such an expert in playfulness that it can change you? I don't think so. I think that particular self is anything but playful. That's the very self that gets so serious, so humorless, so disparaging. And the self it's talking to is probably the one that feels bad about itself, feels that there's something wrong with it, something that needs to be, heaven forfend, changed.

It's a good idea to be more playful. Just like it's a good idea to be happier. But to get there, you need to stop telling your self to be different.

Try this, instead. Try letting your self tell you. Ask it to let you know when it's feeling happy or playful. In fact, I'd suggest an even simpler question. Ask it to tell you when it's having fun.

Fun, like I say somewhere later on, is easy. Playful, happy, maybe not so much. But fun? You can have fun watching television. OK, maybe not like deep fun. But fun, nevertheless. You can have fun reading, browsing, searching for something on the computer. You can have fun eating. Chewing gum. Knitting. Taking a walk. Tasting. Feeling. Smelling. Listening. Touching. You can have fun watching someone else have fun.

After a while, after you've spent enough time listening to your self talk about all the fun you're having, you can start asking your self to tell you when you're feeling playful or even happy. It's easier for your self now because you've been talking so much about the fun you're having, and usually when you're having fun, that's what you're feeling – happy, playful even. Maybe not deeply happy or profoundly playful, but, you know, you're having fun, and, well, that's what makes you happy, makes you want to play, makes you even want to get other people and beings and things to play with you.

And then, see, you've become the playful person you always were, but never thought you were enough, never noticed, never allowed your self to believe in. And so your life starts feeling even more fun, and you start feeling even happier, being even more playful. Just like that.

## *Playing together*

When it comes to play, playfulness and a playful path; many of the wiser of grown-ups understandably look to the young for guidance. Children (human and animal) embody everything playful. Given the chance, the freedom, given a reasonable amount of safety, that's all they do is play.

But the young are different. Their minds are different, their bodies are different, their agility, their abilities to recover from hurt, their readiness to smile, to abandon themselves to glee and grief, momentarily, and then to go on to the next fun thing. We grown-ups are not like that. There's a difference between the kinds of fun children have and what we might call grown-up fun. Allow me to put it this way:

Kids play because they have to. It's how they learn the world, how they grow, how they cope. For kids, play is life. For grown-ups, play is a return to life. For grown-ups, play is ultimately and essentially a spiritual experience, a renewal. This is what play brings us. This is what we bring to play.

Using children as mentors can be inspiring, but never more than partially successful in guiding us back to a playful path. On the other hand, by playing with children - rather than by just sitting on the sidelines, observing them at play, and musing maturely - we (adults and children), not only rediscover, but redefine a playful path.

Three minutes of playing with an infant, and we are goo-gooing and peek-a-booing and joyously abandoning all outward signs of adulthood. Play hide-and-seek with a five-year-old, and we're crawling under tables, sneaking into closets, trying as hard as we can to believe that we can't see where they're hiding while the kids are trying just as hard to make sure they're hiding where we can see them. Playing with eight-year-olds and suddenly we are lost with them in debates plumbing the real meaning of fairness and cheating.

And then there are the older children who are plunging so rapidly into adolescence and beyond, rushing so completely headlong into what they believe to be adulthood, that they are already less reliable when it comes to modeling playfulness, but perhaps better guides to what we have grown up into and away from.

Playing with children, playing together, becoming as close to equals as we can without losing the way back, we are different than we are when playing with our peers. We (children and adults) are challenged, not by competition or comparison, but by the connection itself. We commit our selves to a game that is constantly changing and only occasionally reasonable.



Children are different too. They don't play the way we do. So to play with us, they play differently. We are more powerful, more threatening, more cautious, more dangerous – so they require clarity, explanation, patience. When we play together, we learn each other. We frustrate each other, we make demands, we get angry sometimes even. But as we learn to play through those moments, and we manage somehow to stay together, all ruled by the same pretense, we are reopened.

So we learn to play gently, responsively. We learn to let go of rules and goals and roles and expectations, and, instead, embrace each other. When things get a little too hard, we take time out, we take turns, we change sides, we change rules, we change who makes the rules. Hand in hand, we lead each other to a more playful path, and when we let go, we discover that our own paths have become new again, playful in ways that we hadn't anticipated, more vivid, more, yes, fun.

You can say the same about playing with animals or playing with older people or with people who speak a different language: playing together, we redefine each other, we redefine fun.

## *Playfulness and humor*

Our sense of humor has a lot to do with our ability to stay on a playful path. Joking with a stranger, laughing together, sharing a moment of playfulness, we connect, we build bridges across the divide that keeps us strangers.

That sense of humor is more interesting to me than humor itself, more than jokes and comedy skits. It's a way of perceiving the world. A way of keeping our selves and each other sane, human, open, responsive, playful. A way of connecting, of recognizing each other, of affirming community.

And the sense of playfulness is more interesting to me than what or how we play. It's the state of mind, of mindfulness, of connection, responsiveness, yielding that interests me; of giving oneself over to the moment, to the other, to the relationship, to the impossibility of being alone and the possibility of being with.

## *The playful spirit*

If you search for “spiritual” things and ways (and who doesn’t?) in this book, you’ll probably find enough here to make you a believer. Hopefully, a believer in playfulness. Not Play, per se, but playfulness. Not Play as an abstraction, but your own playfulness, your own sense of what it means to be playful. You believe that what it feels like to be playful, what you feel like when you are playful, is important, really important; that everything you find your self playful with – the things and people and ideas and animals and plants and places and times – is a sign. And what those signs point you to is your own personal, and deeply spiritual path. A playful path. A path that will take you deeper into life. A path that will lead you to happiness, to awareness, to oneness, to your mission, to your very own personal purpose.

Not that playfulness is a religion of any kind, but a religion of every kind.

I’ve been noticing lately, as I let my self write more and think more and talk more about playfulness, that playfulness has in fact become my spiritual path, and probably has been, long before I had or took the time to notice. It’s funny, but even things that make me angry or sad are helping me, guiding me ever more clearly and singly to accept, fully, what it means, what I mean when I say playfulness is a thing of the spirit. At least, of my spirit.

It’s my mission, is what it is. Having, teaching, sharing, evangelizing the spirit of playfulness. Because there are those who believe more in endorphins than they do in playfulness, more in telling you how you, too, can be happy, than in helping you trust your own amazing sense of playfulness. Because there are people who believe that playfulness is the barrier to fulfillment, to morality, to faith, to holiness, to the blessing of existence.

So now you know. This book is not really about fun or games or even playful games, or play, even free play, or laughter or health, even. And neither am I. I’m about playfulness, deep playfulness, the deepest playfulness I can reach, the deepest playfulness itself can reach. I’m about a way of playing and a way of laughing and a way of healing that celebrates life. The playfulness: the sheer, profound, infinite playfulness of it all.

## *Practicing Playfulness*

**“The Path that is best for you is the Path  
that keeps the best of you in play.”**

*-the Oaqui*

Playfulness is what you might call a practice. It's something you need to remind your self to do until you don't.

There are many good reasons to let be playful, and many equally good reasons why you generally don't. Which explains why it's called “practice.”

So, here's what you might need to remember: 1) you can almost always choose to be playful, 2) you're almost always allowed to be playful, 3) and in all likelihood, you'll be glad, and so will the people with whom you are playing.

The easiest way to practice playfulness is, as you've probably already surmised, by playing. And, of the many things you might be playing so that you can practice playfulness, often the most instructively fun of those things are games.

Especially games that are obviously playful, games whose only purpose is to engage your playful self. Games that have nothing to do with score, or winning, or being on one side or another. Games that play with playfulness itself.

Games like these.

## *Holy days*

My wife Rocky and I try to spend all day Saturday alone together. It's always been a holy kind of day for us. A day of rest and reflection. But as we've grown older together, and further away from organized religion, our Sabbath became a day for us to reflect on the holiness of our love for each other.

We have breakfast in bed together. We have one of those milk frothers, and we've learned how you can sprinkle cinnamon designs on the foam, so whoever's making breakfast usually makes some kind of playful, loving design. You know, hearts or initials or things that turn into hieroglyphics that we interpret together. After breakfast, we usually read together from one of her journals, making a present out of our past. Then maybe we just look out the window together, at the squirrels and leaves and birds and people passing, or just snuggle. And then it's almost time for lunch.

Sometimes we both take an afternoon nap, more often it's just me – so we both get some alone time (even though I spend mine sleeping.) Then we go on a neighborhood walk together and come home for a cup of tea and whatnot and a few games.

I love how we play together, playing for fun, not keeping score; scoring, if anything, how much we laugh or appreciate each other's brilliance or playfulness. We've been playing Banagrams<sup>iv</sup> for a while now. Again, not keeping score. Just playing until we've used up all the tiles. Maybe giving each other tiles when desperation sets in. Lately, we've been playing side-by-side, seeing, after a while, how we can link our crosswords together. O, we're so symbolic.

Sometimes we play ping pong on the table our kids got us from one of their neighbors. As usual, we don't keep score, and most recently we play without a net; but with ping pong, especially when we share a really long volley, we often reach an almost magical togetherness. Sometimes we even play swing music from YouTube to accompany our game, and when one of us goes to retrieve the ball, we do a little dance together. Sometimes we just sit around, silently, enjoying the quiet that we create for each other.

And then our little dinner together, and then, after having a day turned so completely to each other, we return to the week.

## *Applauding leaves*

Here's a story about a little game-like thing that can only be played during the fall:

One afternoon in the fall, decades ago, my wife and I had taken chairs up to the field to watch the leaves fall. It was one of those times in our lives – a bright, beautiful day, the kids happily occupied, clear, warm light, a cool breeze. And in that cool, bright breeze, leaves, scintillating with color, waving at us.

And as we were sitting, watching leaves dance and fall, we were so struck by the graceful, spiraling fall of one particular leaf, that we actually, spontaneously, simultaneously applauded it. And then, a little later, another leaf danced its way to the ground, with such unique and final poise that we applauded it, as well. Together. Each fall, a little death. Each dance, uniquely final.

A few minutes later, as the breeze strengthened, we were applauding again, again, and again, and our souls, I swear, were dancing together with the leaves, celebrating life and time and world. And we laughed. And thought about the kids. And carried our chairs back down to the house, still laughing.

## *Passing humanity*

One of my favorite things to do when I go for a walk is to make passing contact with strangers. It's a fine art, requiring careful timing and sophisticated strategy.

A pass begins anywhere between 10 and 5 paces (the fewer the paces, the greater the challenge). During this time, you must establish eye contact and determine the form of encounter, verbal or non-. Each has its own range. Nonverbal can vary from smile to wave to hat-doffing (for the hatted few). Verbal can vary from "hi" to "hello" to "howya doin'" to "beautiful day" and beyond.

It can be a very rewarding game, especially when someone actually acknowledges and returns your greeting, the degree of reward depending on the form that response takes relative to your opening gambit. So, for example, a smile and a nod in response to your opening smile is significantly more rewarding than a nod or smile alone. A verbal response to your nonverbal opening is even more rewarding. Clearly the combinations are endless.

It can be an equally disheartening experience when your gambit of greeting is not returned.

To bridge the psychic abyss left by a Gambit Declined, I, from time to time, like to keep score. Every time I get a response, I give anywhere from 1 to 10 points to Humanity. In like manner, when I don't get a response, I chalk it up to Man's Inhumanity to Man. Since I am on the side of Humanity, I am always gladdened when Humanity wins. Consequently, I am constantly exploring new and more effective strategies to secure Humanity's ascendance in the Great Game. And, when the victory goes to the dark side, I, at least, am not personally implicated.

One of the things that makes this game so richly playworthy is all the variables. The allure of finding a winning strategy often keeps me smiling and waving even when Humanity is 10 or even 20 points behind.

It is in this spirit that I reveal one of my most exemplary and successful strategies:

First, you need to find someone with a baby. I do like babies, by the way, so the following is no mere ploy. The trick is to smile at the baby first. Not that you'd expect to get a smile back. Depending on how many paces you were apart when you initiate the smile, you might go so far as to include a mini, baby-appropriate wave. The second, and equally crucial part of the trick is to glance up from the baby in time so that the implied greeting is deflected upwards to the adult. I've become so skilled with this strategy that Humanity has earned as much as 8 points from a single passing encounter.

## *Toilet Paper Tug of War*

In my earliest stages exploring what would become the Interplay Games Curriculum<sup>v</sup>, before I discovered that children's street and playground games were going to be the key to the soul of my work, I focused solely on theater games. I had had some wonderful experiences teaching kids improvisational theater and had hoped to bring similar joy and creativity to my inner-city charges.

I managed to develop a few game-like exercises that proved fun enough for the kids to want to play again and again. One of which was Toilet Paper Tug of War.

The way I played it, I gave two kids a length of toilet paper (about a yard) and invited them to act as if they were playing tug of war with a real rope. To succeed at the improvisation, one of the kids had to lose, and the toilet paper had to remain intact.

It turned out to be surprisingly fun, though rarely successful. I'd say out of every 10 attempts, only one pair managed to get through the exercise without tearing the toilet paper. But the kids loved it and wanted to play it over and over. I don't know if it was because we were using toilet paper (a vaguely "naughty" prop) or because the task was so funny in the first place. But serious fun was most definitely had. And it was, to me, at least, a near-perfectly objective correlative for what the art of acting was all about: the delicate art of creating a believable relationship.

In my later years, I tried playing it with a rope made of socks, which also invited the exercise of high drama and modicum of interpersonal restraint, but, for me, at least, trying to play a believable game of tug of war with a yard of one-ply toilet paper remains in my memory as an apotheosis of educational theatrics.

I still play the toilet paper version today, primarily when I'm playing with couples. The game turns out to be a powerful simulation of the dynamics of most human relationships. No matter how much we want to move another person, the relationship can only withstand so much tension before it breaks. To engage another human being in genuine dialog, both participants need to remain aware that the relationship takes precedence over winning. In fact, winning itself is meaningless when the overriding goal must always be to keep the relationship intact.



## *Kvetch Kakophony*

There's a very funny, often silly, and oddly healing movement called "Complaints Choirs." Wikipedia explains it as "a community art project that invites people to sing about their complaints in a choir together with fellow complainers."

The Kvetch Kakophony is similar in affect, but far less artful.

One person is the conductor. Everyone else stands in a choir-like array. When the conductor signals, everyone starts singing their complaints about whatever they feel like complaining about. At the beginning, they might start out singing to a particular tune, like Hava Nagila or Take Me Out to the Ballgame. After a while, they should be encouraged to change to any tune they feel like complaining to, regardless of what tune anyone else is using. The conductor can get as conductor-like as she so desires, getting the choir to sing more loudly or more quietly, appointing people to be soloists or to sing duets etc. Singers can choose to sing in whatever language compels them, or in complete gibberish. No rhymes or reason, either, are required. Kvetching noises are encouraged.

## *Dayeinu, the game*

There are some patently playful games you can play that can prove as laugh-provoking as they are love-affirming. There's a game, for example, loosely based on the Passover song "Dayeinu," or "it would have been enough for us." It's often played as "It's Not So Bad," or "You think you have problems?" Or "It Could Have Been Better."

Dayeinu, it would have been enough for us. If our only blessing was to be in the same family, it would have been enough. If we weren't just in the same family, but also loved each other as much as we do, it would have been enough. If we were just in the same family and loved each other as much as we do and lived long enough to appreciate each other as adults, it would have been enough....

It's a loving competition, one that can be both fun and varied. For example, where the object is to think of something that, if you're playing the "it's not so bad" variation, isn't as bad as something else. You can start with anything that's not so bad: life, death, purpose, the pizza you just ate. "That pizza wasn't so bad," you say, for example. And then I might say "neither was the service." And you: "even the lighting wasn't so bad." And on and on until we can't think of anything else that wasn't so bad. And then we play "It Could Have Been Better." We could have also played "If Only" (in Yiddish "halevai"). If we had only seen each other and joked together and touched each other and not played It Would Have Been Enough together, it would have been enough.

It Would Have Been Enough is not just a game. It's the Jewish version of The Theory of Relativity.

And fun. Even in the hospice. So much fun that it couldn't have been more fun, even if we wanted to. Well, maybe a little more...

## *It Could Be Worse*

There's a game called It Could Be Worse where each player has to think of something awful that "really" happened that was definitely more awful than anything that anyone else thought of.

For example, you say to your self: "I think I'm going to lose my job." Then, your self says to you: "It could be worse, you could have already lost your job." And then you respond to your self "It could be worse than that. I could have lost my self-esteem." To which your self responds "It could have even been worse than that, you could have discovered that you don't have any self that's esteem-worthy." Etc. Etc.

You can play it sitting in a circle, someone saying something that could be worse, someone else, anyone, whoever thinks of it, saying something that could be worse than that. And then someone else. And then someone still else. Worse and worse and worse. Until someone says "it could've been better."

Some say that this is a variation of the more classic game: You Think You've Got Problems?

It's a very funny game. It's funny how funny that game is. You'd think it would be depressing. But you'd be wrong.

## *Playing with rejection*

Even rejection, which, at times, seems as worse as it can get, can be an invitation to practice playfulness, and to some very healing play, in deed.

Many, many years ago – before inkjet and laser printers, before even laptops and correcting-Selectric typewriters – that many years ago – when I was convinced that I was going to be a professional poet (professional poet, ah, the naive, uninformed ambitions of youth). I found my self the unwilling possessor of a growing collection of what professional poets of the time classified as “rejection slips.”

In a moment of pre-self-immolation, I found my self at my nearest wall with a roll of tape, decorously affixing my rejection collection into a visually pleasing display. I discovered what some describe as a “grim satisfaction” as my personal wailing wall assembled itself before me. In fact, I found my self sending my poetry to more and more prestigious publications, harboring a deeply hidden hope that one of my poems might actually find acceptance, whilst gathering some of the most prestigious rejection slips known to the unknown poets of the world.

This proved mildly amusing – mild enough to keep me from laughing hysterically, amusing enough to provide incentive to keep me submitting my poetry to the gatekeepers of the literary world.

By the time my wailing wall had reached its aesthetic apotheosis, I decided it might be time for me to pursue an alternate strategy.

I wrote my own rejection slip. A rejection slip rejection.

It read:

“The author regrets that he is unable to accept the enclosed rejection slip. This in no way reflects on the quality of the rejection, but rather on the author’s needs at the present time.”

Signed, in print, of course:

“The author.”

I took my manuscript to a local press, and had 500 printed, on vellumish cardstock, with an embossed frame. From then on, for next 30 or so rejections, I returned the rejection slips to the publisher, with my rejection slip attached – with high-quality paper clips, even.

I actually heard back from a couple publishers – with handwritten apologies, no less.

I still have 468 rejection slip rejections somewhere. I decided to go into teaching, instead.

## *The Out-Blessing game*

Trying to out-bless people is much more fun than trying to outguess them. For this reason, I give you: The Blessing Game.

Sit in a circle. Whoever is so moved makes a blessing – any nice wish that that person wishes to wish on anyone else. Anyone else who is now so moved makes an even better blessing, trying to out bless the previous blessing.

Or, get in pairs. Put your hands on each other's heads. Take turns out-blessing each other. Continue until you both feel truly blessed or have had enough of this loving playfulness.

A round of out blessing might go like this:

- You say: May the fruits of your labors never spoil
- And I say: Amen. And may they all be delicious
- You say: Amen. And may they be always ripe
- And I say: Amen. May they be available in your local supermarket
- You say: On sale

### **Alternative Blessing Cycles**

*But if you do (or don't, or isn't)*

- I say: May you never run out of toilet paper
- You say: Amen. But if you do, may there be a box of tissues near by
- I say: Amen. And if there isn't, may there at least be a sink in easy reach

*Combined with the standard out-blessing exchange:*

1. You say: With a clean towel right over it
2. I say: And a bottle of antibacterial soap
3. You say: And a can of deodorant

*Followed by a return to the But If You Do or Don't or Isn't play:*

- I say: And if there isn't any deodorant, may there be a window
- You say: Amen. And may it be easy to open
- I say: Amen. And may it lead to someplace outside the building
- You say: Amen. And may there not be a hurricane

## ***Blessing Game Starters***

Here are some out-blessing starters, to help you get, well, started:

- May you be happier than a lark
- May you never be taken to be sillier than you want to be or more seriously than you think you are
- May this blessing make more sense to you than it does to me
- May your optimism be based in realism and your pessimism totally unfounded
- May you be wise enough to know how lucky you are, and v.v.
- May all your accidents be happy
- May you have as much money as you know what to do with
- May you look happier than you have a right to be, and feel happier than you look
- May your injuries heal before anyone adds insult to them
- May all those who bless you be blessed
- May your misery have company

And finally, from a traditional Hebrew prayer: “May all the holes in your body that are supposed to be open stay open, and may all the other ones that should be closed stay closed.”<sup>vi</sup>



## *Being Blessed*

When my wonderful friend Zalman and his amazing wife were last in town, we arranged to meet in West LA for some hugs and Indian food. After dinner he and I and our delicious wives (Rocky, mine, Eve, his) were almost actually accosted by a briefcase carrying, suit-wearing man wielding a paperback book. Being the warm and terminally polite people we like to be, we were immediately subjected to a sales pitch of stunning complexity and only minimal coherence. He had written and published a book proving that Abraham's little-known wife Keturah was the progenitor of most of the civilized world and Denmark (something about the tribe of Dan).

Now, Zalman is a biblical scholar of great depth and high repute. When the bookseller asked rhetorically, "and, how many people know who Abraham's other wife was?" Zalman answered his question immediately. And yet never once in his entire monologue did the impassioned author deign to find out with whom he was actually speaking.

At the end of the pitch, the guy explained to us that he was going to offer us a very special opportunity. That for \$20 dollars, he'd not only sell us his book, but sign it, personally.

"All right," said Zalman, "I'll make you a bargain. I'll buy your book, but I want something extra."

"Of course," replied the self-proclaimed proclaimer, "I'll be happy to dedicate it to you or any person of your choosing."

"Thank you," said Zalman, "but I want something else. Something even more special. I want your blessing."

The fact is, I don't remember what the blessing was. But I do remember how Zalman, with his simple request, transformed this whole somewhat seamy encounter into a profoundly moving spiritual experience.

From that day on, I've made the Out-Blessing Game an integral part of my work.

## *There Must Be a Good Reason*

So, here's the game. You decide on something you think is rude or just plain wrong, and you take turns coming up with good reasons for people behaving that way. Someone starts: "did you hear that guy honking his horn over and over?" And then you take turns building a better and better reason for his behavior:

- "maybe he's on his way to see his wife in the hospital"
- "and she just had a baby"
- "and she forgot what name they decided to call it"
- "and he's lost"
- "and running low on gas"
- "and his wife forgot her cellphone"
- "and the hospital called to say she keeps on asking for him"
- "and he has to go to the bathroom..."

It's fun. It's the kind of game you can play with the family, in the car, or at a restaurant or in the supermarket or in line. And it kinda lightens things up, even though maybe those people really are bastards.

My wife taught this game to me. She likes to play it with herself when she's driving or in some place crowded. Whenever someone does something rude, like cut in front of her, she tries to think of an explanation for that person's behavior. Not a condemnation. An exercise in compassion.

## *Human Spring*

Played in pairs.

Stand facing each other, about arms length apart. Legs slightly spread for balance. Arms up. Elbows bent. Hands palms out.

On a mutually acknowledged signal, lean towards each other without bending, until hands meet. Then push against each other's hands so that both players spring back to the upright position.

It's kinda like vertical push-ups.

Continue until you are filled with confidence at your mutual abilities. Then step back a bit and try again.

And so on, a bit further apart each time, until you've gone far enough, and you both are amazed at the combined length to which you can go in the name of fun.

Or you fall down.

It's not just about trust, or risk, or foolhardiness. It's also about connection, connecting, about relationships, about being there for each other.



## *Mutual Meditation*

Hold each other's wrists so that you can feel each other's pulse. If you don't want to hold on to each other's wrists, any pulsing part of each other's anatomy will do. The stronger the pulse the better. On every other pulse, say the word 'Me.' Continue doing this until you hear the 'we.' Then start saying 'we.' Perhaps on every third pulse. Saying 'we' over and over again, listening, of course, for the separate and yet co-joined 'Me.'

## *Follow the Follower*

Turn on some gentle music and sit facing each other. One of you is the reflector. The other the reflectee. The reflector simply does whatever the reflectee does. Continue in these roles for 10 inhales. On the 11th, change roles. Continue thusly for the next 8 inhales, and, on the 19th change roles again. Continue in like manner until you can't tell who is the reflector and who is the reflectee.

## *Handland*

Lie on your backs, with your heads together, ear-to-ear, and your feet at opposite ends. Put both your hands straight up in the air, above your face, so you can see each other's hands. Think of it as a stage up there, where your disembodied hands can carry on conversations, speaking in your disembodied voices. You're on your backs, hands in the air.

You let your fingers do the talking. It's like shadow puppetry without the shadows. Hand shaking. Hand slapping. Hand music. Hand dancing. And whenever you need to thicken the plot, bring in the Foot Beings, the dialog with whom invariably leading to a semi-yogic collectively calisthenic Whole Body Air Theatre.

## *Food Theatre*

- 1) Prepare at least five or so finger foods, each with a different crunch. For example: cranberry sauce, cashews, ginger snaps, cheese nips, and garbanzo beans.
  - 1.a) Place each in a small saucer or cuplet. Make two sets.
  - 1.b) Decide who is going to be the first Chewer.
- 2) Blindfold the listener. The listener places an ear to the Chewer's cheek.
  - 2.a) The Chewer takes a small piece of one of the foods, and chews as necessary.
  - 2.b) The goal, if one is needed, would be to identify what is being chewed, and perhaps how much of it, along with some estimate of swallow duration.
  - 2.c) Or perhaps both Chewer and Chew Detector, both chewing and listening at the same time whilst simultaneously attempting to identify what the other is eating.

Estimated duration: 3-8 minutes. Activity is often left incomplete due to hilarious incapacitation.

## *Dessert Roulette*

One of my favorite Food Theatre Games was taught to me by my wonderful and far-too-long gone friend Burton Naiditch. He called it: Dessert Roulette. This is just one version: You're in a restaurant. And you order one more dessert than there are people. Place the desserts in the center of the table.

Simultaneously, reach for the dessert of your choice. Take more or less a bite, and return the dessert to its tablecentric position. Play repeatedly. The first dessert to be eaten is the winner. And so is everyone else.

For more variety, add more desserts. Or, make it the rule that you can't move a plate, but rather must fork the dessert into your mouth, even if the dessert is located across the table. Or, you might each try to select the dessert that you think your partner wants, take a forkful, and then try to feed each other simultaneously. To increase the challenge, you might add reservoirs of dessert condiments (bowls of whip cream, crushed nuts, non-fat fudge), making dessert-forking a two-stage operation. Or forget the fork and use your fingers to feed each other.



## *P.S.*

You can't make your self more playful. Just like you can't make your self dry when you're getting rained on. Sure, you can be playful, even when you're caught in the rain. You can laugh and splash and have your self a merry old time. But you can't make your self dry. Not until you get out of the proverbial rain.

Most often, your state of playfulness is like a state of grace. It happens. Not necessarily because of anything you're doing or choosing or are. Not because you're so spiritual or wise or talented. But more because you are, for the moment, being blessed.

Sometimes it's a squirrel that makes that particular blessing, or a child, or a lover or a cloud or the rain. Sometimes those very beings and things are the very reasons you're not feeling or acting so playful.

Sure, the more you play, the more you get to be playful. Even more sure, the more you get to be playful the more likely it is that you'll respond playfully to just about anything.

But it's never just you that makes you so playful.

Most of the time it's you and something else - like you and the wind, or you and the play of light, or the play of something alive, or the reflection of light in someone's eyes, or you in the reflection of someone else's moment of delight, or you and the touch of wind on your body, or the touch of a child or a pet or a lover or the rain.



# Games





## *Games*

**“It’s easier to change the game  
than to change the people playing it.”**

*-The Oaqui*

The thing that makes games so useful to us in exploring a playful path is that they aren’t for real. They’re for play. And whatever significances we want to attribute to them are just that - significances we attribute to them. They, in fact, are not significant. They are not supposed to be. They’re for fun.

O, sure, you can play for things other than fun. You can play for money. You can play for status, for acceptance, for manifesting your innate superiority and intrinsic value to the universe. But none of that has anything to do with the game itself. Poker is poker, whether you play for money or drinks or getting to see each other naked.

*A Theory of Games*

**“Fun is better than winning”**

-The Oaqui

## *The theater of games*

The games kids play - in playgrounds, backyards, wherever they are free to play like kids - offer opportunities for a range of role-taking and group-building activities; and their cultivation should be recognized as extensions of drama. Such games may be woven into workshops for reminding people how to play, how to explore spontaneity and the building of mutually supportive relationships. Though degrees and types of competition vary, from everybody wins to some win/lose, they're still games as long as "it's fun!"

I had my Master's in Theater<sup>vii</sup> and I was hired by the School District of Philadelphia to write a drama curriculum for elementary school teachers. I was working with inner-city children between the ages of 5-11, most of whom were sent to us because they were someone else's behavior problem. I very much wanted to help the kids create some kind of theater experience that they found meaningful, relevant, and, most importantly, fun. My single criterion for success was: if I walked out of the room for two minutes, would the kids be doing the same thing when I came back. It was really the only way I could think of to be sure that they were doing it for themselves, and not for a grade or for me. This was a very tough test for my understanding of what it meant to teach theater.

Nothing I tried really worked. They didn't warm-up to the warm-ups. They were too skittish for the skits. O, they were polite. And they'd do what I asked. But nothing clicked. Eventually, I unearthed my Viola Spolin book, *Improvisation for the Theater*<sup>viii</sup>, and tried some of her theater games. They were enthusiastic about the game part. But the moment I stepped out of the room, chaos ensued in all its many chaotic glories. Finally, out of desperation, I asked them if there were anything at all that they actually wanted to play together. "Yes," they chorused, "a game."

A game. not a theater game. Just a plain, playful kids game. "You know," they appended, "like Duck-Duck-Goose." "Duck-Duck-Goose"? That's the game where everyone sits in a circle and one kid, the Fox, taps each kid on the head and says "Duck" until she reaches the one kid she wants to get chased by. She calls the kid "Goose." The Goose stands up and gives chase. If tagged by the Goose before getting to the Goose's vacated seat, the Fox has to start over again. If not tagged, the kid that got, um, chosen is the new Fox. It struck me as a playful game, with really no relevance to the higher dramatic arts. But a deal is a deal. So we played. And after a while, I walked out, and after another while, I came back in. And they were still playing!

They even invited me to play. I was honored, but hesitant. I gave in. I played their game. Because it was theirs. And, yes, I had fun. And while I was having all that fun I began to be able to appreciate the game as more than a game. As, in fact, theater. For us potential Geese,

it was all about acting like you wanted to get chosen (or not). Too enthusiastic or blasé, and you stay a Duck forever. For the Goose, it was about whom do you pick, and how hard do you run. Pick a friend who is faster than you? Pick someone you don't like who is slower than you? Pick someone you want to like? Someone you want to like you?

And once the Goose is chosen, the game achieves something like high drama. The Goose jumps up and gives chase. Can the Fox make it back to the Goose's home place and free herself of the curse of Foxhood? Will the Goose tag the Fox and damn it to yet another cycle of Foxiness? Unless, of course, the Goose doesn't really want to catch the Fox. Unless the Goose actually wants to become Fox herself. But what if the Fox wants to remain Fox? What if she doesn't run so fast, or stumbles, or has other sly strategies for maintaining her Foxiness yet another round.

As the drama unfolds, the rest of us Ducks, temporarily relieved of any further involvement, observe in relieved delight. Will the Fox make it? Is it a good chase? Do they run as if being Fox or Goose were as important as life itself? Or as if it were just plain playful?

Forty years later, while in Israel, in a place called Moshav Modi'in, I was speaking to a family (one of the founding families) about the "theater of games" - exemplifying it with my typical story of Duck-Duck-Goose. I was talking in particular about how children play with trying to get "not chosen" if they don't want to be picked. One of the people I was talking with, a woman named Leah, mentioned to me how a skill like that was a matter of life and death for people in the camps (concentration camps). I went silent. I nodded. I cried. I went on.



## *The dramaturgy of games*

I had to play it first. And when I did, I realized that the clearly playful game of Duck-Duck-Goose fully satisfied my criteria for a meaningful, kid-produced, kid-acted, kid-directed, theatrical experience. It was highly dramatic. It was something they actually wanted to do, actually could organize and become engaged with. Thus I began work on my “theater” curriculum and my lifelong exploration of the Theater of Games.

I soon discovered I was working within a global theater. Searching for more and more games, I found books of games from all over the world. The games that are played out in the Theater of Games are in fact a form of literature – not written, maybe, not even oral, perhaps, but “enacted” – and thus handed down, from generation to generation, neighbor to neighbor, culture to culture. The literature of games can convey complex relationships, roles and consequences, issues of conflict and heroism.

The comic-tragedy of Duck-Duck-Goose holds a great fascination for young audiences, and is one of many variations on a theme of what one can only call the “Game of Tag.”

Somebody’s IT.

One person is singled out and assigned a role different from the undifferentiated many. This makes his actions so monstrously predictable that we call him IT, because in order to do what he’s supposed to, he always has to do it.

IT Doesn’t Want to Be IT.

In fact, IT’s only goal is to make somebody else IT.

If IT tags you (all it takes is contact), you’re IT (instantaneous reversal of roles).

Before most children play Tag, they find themselves fascinated into sheer delight by a group of tag-like “games” called “Monster.” Played by very small children – almost as soon as they are old enough to waddle – and large adults. Somebody is Monster —usually it’s type-cast. That person, IT-like, chases everybody else. Everybody else runs and runs until the Monster catches them and eats, or tickles, them up. Then, everybody runs away again, and the Monster does his thing. The kids play the Monster to laughing exhaustion. And then wait to continue the drama the moment the Monster shows signs of readiness.

As a theater piece, it’s as profound as it is entertaining. It describes a relationship between pretend fear and its pretend victims. It is an irreversible relationship. It is enforced equally by

the pursued as well as the pursuer. By the time children begin playing tag, they are more interested in games where the role of authority is reversible, where the drama resides as much in the relationship as it does in the roles. Like any good drama, the game only works as long as there is conflict and as long as we are interested in that conflict. If IT never catches anyone, if the same person is always IT, the game is no fun. The drama of Tag is in the contest for position, even though the position is, in itself, untenable. The person in the role of IT is the Labeled One. The conflict centers on who gets to be what, how, and for how long. In some games, everyone wants to be the Labeled One. Everyone. At the same time, no one really wants to be labeled for very long. It's much more fun to be running away than be running after. The drama reaches its peak and, once having become identified as IT, the whole game depends on IT finding someone else to be IT. (Another variation of the game would occur if IT wanted to keep his position and get rid of his responsibility.)

And then within the Tag dramaturgy we find game theater pieces such as the one in which IT is given the power to decide when people can try to get him (Red Light). And the one where IT can even be able to tell people how they can move (Captain, May I?). And then there's the tag game where IT has the power to decide when the chase is going to start (What's The Time, Mr. Wolf?), and the one where IT has to publicly declare his intended victims (Johnny, May I Cross the River?), and of course Duck Duck Goose. And the one where IT might even be able to get people to help him (British Bulldog). On the other hand, IT might not have as much territory as everybody else (Circle Tag), or people might have an easy escape (Freeze Tag), or even substitute other players (Squirrel in the Tree). Sometimes there are people who are neither IT or NOT IT, but who are there just to make it harder for IT (Cat and Mouse). Sometimes, IT can try to touch people with an object instead of his hand (Ball Tag). Sometimes, IT has an object that he is trying to put somewhere (Steal The Bacon; Football).

Then there are the versions of Tag when there is more than one IT – when there's us and them. Sometimes, if one of us gets tagged, we lose the whole game (Guard the King). Sometimes, when one of us gets tagged, we join the other team (Lemonade; Crows 'N Cranes). Sometimes, we and they both have the power of tagging, and if we get tagged by the wrong guys (them), we are out of the game until we get tagged by the right guys (Prisoner's Base; 5-10-Ringo).

Though there is conflict between IT and NOT-IT, no score is being kept. Though you may really not want to be IT, and though you might find your self being IT much, much longer than you bargained for, you never actually lose. Or, for that matter, win. After spending so much time on Tag, it almost comes as a shock to discover how different those very, very familiar games are from the games we have come to think of as "real" – the sports and contests that make up the world of educationally and commercially-supported fun, the win-lose, zero-sum.

In the dramaturgy of play, Tag is a type of game in a continuum of games. In my published-

43-years-ago-no-longer-available *Interplay Curriculum*, I identified four different game types, looking at games not so much in terms of competition and cooperation, winning or losing, but rather in terms of the relationships they depicted. Tug-of-war, for example, went in the same volume as “Pit-a-Pat” (Pattycake) where nobody’s IT and everybody ultimately loses because it seemed to me that both games are really hard to quit – players are in a relationship to each other and have to somehow work it out to its conclusion. Tag and Hide and Seek went into the volume called “Locating” – because the focus is on finding oneself in relationship to the group. Two other volumes “Expressing” (more traditional “pretending” games) and “Adjusting” (games that involved the changing of rules or goals). Each of these volumes had further classifications – how “active” the game was, how it was configured (individual, individual-group, individual-team, team-group, and team-team. Then there was a classification I called “locus of control.” Despite the intelligence and practicality of my classification scheme, almost as soon as the curriculum was printed I was forced to admit that there was yet a more effective, and more fun approach. Play a game. Any game will do. And then, when you have the opportunity, play a different game. And the game that turns out to be the most fun for everyone will also prove to be the most healing. So play that one again.

## *The way of games*

The more I played with adults, and the more groups I played with, the more deeply I appreciated the power of children's games. I learned that, in less than a day, I could take a group of strangers, from virtually any background, and, playing children's games, create a community – a responsive, supportive, open, attentive, Play Community. And in five days, these total strangers'd be all over each other like kittens!

I discovered in the great variety of children games, games that could help people explore different ways of relating to each other. I learned that my repertoire of children's games gave me a kind of language of relationships – one that I could easily share and that could prove instrumental in helping people create truly supportive, mutually empowering relationships.

Having faith in the fun of it all is an important first step towards the effective use of children's games in almost any setting – professional, therapeutic or recreational. But, as most first steps, it's only the first. Here are some next:

Make and keep participation voluntary. The success of any game depends on the psychological and physical safety of its players. By keeping participation voluntary at all times, participants can safely regulate their level of involvement, almost regardless of level of trust. Sometimes, you can do this by establishing a “safe area” – an “out-of-bounds” place for people to retreat to as needed. Often, I find my self having to devote maybe a whole session to “quitting practice.” If people know it's really all right to quit (well, maybe you have to give a warning before you opt out of being say the base of a human pyramid), then they know that everyone is playing only because they want to.

Let the games be the thing. Children's games can reach very deep into the individual and collective adult psyche. They are full of lessons to be learned. When a game doesn't work (a.k.a. isn't fun), the lessons can all too easily become personal. The temptation to “process” begins to overpower the opportunity to enjoy each other. Here's the key: it's a lot easier to change the game than the people who are playing it. If a game doesn't work, change it. Or play something else. “Play,” as they say, “on.”

Don't let one game be the only thing. Even if people really like playing Duck-Duck-Goose, and are finding the drama so relevant that it becomes, in fact, the only game they play, having a choice of games is as important to the participant as it is to the group. It's the difference between a “game community” and a “play community” – in the game community, it's the game that ultimately decides who's good enough to play. In the play community, it's the players who decide if the game's good enough. Start something else going with the people in the safe area. Even if you're the only one there.

Invite invention. No game is as fun as the one the players are making up. No game is as well-adapted to the people you happen to be with, or where you happen to be, or what you happen to have to play with. The larger the shared game repertoire, the easier it is to find new ways to play together. It is a delicious circle.

The “best” games for creating this kind of collective sense of safety and openness tend to be those that are most intentionally designed to be fun. These games are often not even scored. Often there isn’t even a winner. These games are generally fun, and often make people laugh. I call them “Playful Games” not only because no one keeps score, but also because we play them for no purpose other than the fun they bring us.

I’ve used “fun” three times in the last paragraph. It is impossible to overstate how central the fun connection is to the healing quality of the game – as it is played and experienced. In fact, as you widen the group’s repertoire of games, fun turns out to be the best and most reliable criterion for finding just the right game for bringing the group to just the right place.

Most children’s games, and any of those Playful Games I’ve written about can be welcome tools, any time you need to set the stage for almost any kind of theatrical or role-playing relationship people want to explore. But it is important to remember that when you play for “fun,” games not only set the stage, but also become the stage – a stage where even the most fundamental of conflicts and the deepest of dramas can be played, with delight.

## *Games as a way of understanding*

Luckily, for the purpose of this particular conversation, all you need to know about “game theory” is that you can use what you understand about how games work to understand more about how people work – societies, cultures, economies, political systems, communities, families. I say “luckily” because game theory goes very deep into very obscure realms, obscure enough that people get Nobel Prizes for making sense out of it.

The thing that all this proves is that there is something about games that seems to reflect on something other than games – something that games mirror more clearly than other mirrors we try to hold to human nature. If you start thinking of all the games you know as a language, what you will find described in that language are the foundations of human relationships.

Once I published my *Interplay Games Curriculum*, I began teaching what I had learned about children’s games to adults. This is when I first understood the connection between games and relationships, and what led me to founding the Games Preserve<sup>ix</sup>.

I was teaching a group of teachers who, once a week, for almost a year, came to a place called Durham Child Development Center<sup>x</sup>, to explore children’s games with me. They were young, motivated, caring – inspiring to be with and play with and talk with. It was they who helped me understand the power of the game language. Because they began using it to explore their own lives – their relationships, not just to teaching, but to community, to family, to the people they loved and worked with and grew with. And when they did talk about teaching, they were describing not the children as students, but the children as community. We’d play something like Lemonade (a team tag game in which if you get tagged you join the winning team – similar to Rock-Scissors-Paper Tag) and after everyone caught their breath and stopped laughing, they would get suddenly struck by the difference between this experience of “losing” and the kind of losing that results in your having to stop playing. And they’d begin to talk about how such a redefinition of losing would impact so much of their lives, and the lives of the kids they teach, and the parents of those kids, and, well, everything.

And in the process, we’d begin to explore all the definitions of losing and winning, and all the ways we could redefine them, and we’d feel (OK, it was the 70s) we could, just by playing with the consequences of losing a game, redefine our world. It was game theory at its best, at its most revealing and most healing.

We could have just as easily talked about winning, or the sheer, panicky fun of not knowing which way to run, or the strange joy of sharing the ritual that led up to each encounter. And, eventually, we did. Unless another game interested us more. And as we continued, game after

game, we were experiencing, in the very ways we played together, the very alternatives we thought we might be able to create together. And we became remarkably intelligent, remarkably close, remarkably fun.

## *The wisdom of games*

Ever since I discovered the wisdom of games, I've suspected that they are more powerful than I guessed. I'm beginning to think that they may be, in their playful way, the kind of Jungian archetypes described as "primordial images and symbols found in the collective unconscious, which - in contrast to the personal unconscious - gathers together and passes on the experiences of previous generations, preserving traces of humanity's evolutionary development over time."<sup>x</sup> I've come to see them as mythical metaphors, as Joseph Campbell has come to understand myth and metaphor.

They are a theater without dialogue, a literature without words, each one revealing its wisdom in play. I have learned to see children's games as scripts for a kind of children's cultural theater. I see them as collective dreams in which certain themes are being toyed with – investigated and manipulated for the sake of sheer catharsis or some future reintegration into a world view. They are reconstructions of relationships – simulations – (myths) – which are guided by individual players, instituted by the groups in which they are played or abstracted by the traditions of generations of children.

For grown-ups, it's even more powerful – playing children's games again, rediscovering, reinterpreting, reapplying their meaning. It leads to an even more expansive kind of theater. Participating in a play community as adults, endowed with empathy and compassion and years of hard-won knowledge, with obligations and responsibilities and actually deeper freedom – we redefine our selves, and the world.

And what seems to happen when we engage in all these playful conversations is this: we rediscover our ability to play in the world, and to give each other the gift of play. We rediscover our unlimited selves. We reaffirm fun. We let our selves out to play and find our selves and each other once again on a playful path.



## *Cat and Mouse*

There's a kids' game called Cat and Mouse. I'm sure you know it. If you're German you probably know it as Katz und Maus. If you're from Afghanistan, Wolf and Sheep.

Anyhow, you get two kids playing tag. One is the cat or wolf, the other the sheep or mouse. And then you have the rest of the kids holding hands in a circle. The mouse or sheep finds safety inside the circle. The wolf or cat finds the circle basically annoying.

The kids in the circle are naturally more sympathetic to the needs of the mouse/sheep than to those of the wolf/cat. It could have something to do with childhood and the myriad opportunities it provides for one to feel prey-like.

Such is the nature of mice and sheep that they can't really stay still, or safe, for long. They just have to see how close they can get to the cat/wolf, because it's fun to tease, especially if you think you have a strong, vigilant circle of friends to protect you. The wolf/cat constantly tests the circle, looking for weak links, places where it can dodge under or leap over.

What I find especially interesting about the game itself is not so much the play between the cat and the mouse (by any other name), but between the ring and the two antagonists. The ring is the community, the village, the collective mediator whose responsibility it is not just to protect the cat/mouse (if it really succeeded the game would become interminably boring), but rather to keep the opposing forces in balance. Sometimes, for the fun and fairness of it all, it's necessary to let the mouse/sheep out, sometimes to let the cat/wolf through.

## *Hide and Seek*

The hider acts as if she might very well remain hidden forever. The seeker acts as if he will never stop seeking. They both know they are only pretending.

To succeed, they learn to lure each other out: the seeker pretends that he has stopped seeking, the hider that she might come out of hiding. The seeker feigns fury. The hider feigns fear.

The difference between a puzzle and a problem is that you know the puzzle has a solution. To solve either, you must act as if you will never, never give up, never stop seeking. Or you pretend to have given up in the hopes that the solution will reveal itself, will come out of hiding.

You never forget that you're looking for the answer, you just pretend that you have stopped trying to find it, for a while, for as long as it takes the answer to appear.

To seek well, you know that you are free to stop seeking. To hide well, you know that you are free to stop hiding. Sometimes, just to manifest that freedom, you pretend you've stopped for real, for ever; but even then you know you are playing. Because you are fundamentally that: a player. Because play is how the mind minds, and the soul soars.

## *Hot Bread and Butter*

Twenty children on a street in the city. It is Spring, just after dinner. Suddenly, something begins pulling them together. They cluster near a wide stoop. There is a cry of “Not It!” One body is released: a boy, about ten. He has a belt in his hand. He is running back and forth across the street; stopping every so often – near steps, a truck, an abandoned car, an apartment door. He circles around the group. I can hear some giggles, some “hurry-ups.” The boy is now walking on tiptoe towards the group. His hands are empty. I realize why the group hasn’t reacted to him yet – their eyes are closed. He is right next to them now. “Hot Bread and Butter,” he says, “come and get your supper.”

The children scatter like an exploding atom, screaming. Some stay close to each other. Others gallop into the frontier, probing the darkest secrets of the street. A scream. Someone has found the belt and is hitting everybody who dares be near. Now she is rushing around, twirling the belt over her head like a lariat. Everyone is running back, trying to touch base before getting beaten. The last one has been herded into the cowering mass. Silence. Eyes closed. Darkness. She hides the belt.

In school, I asked a group of children if they wanted to play “Hot Bread and Butter.” The response was enthusiastic and unanimous. I brought out a Boffer, which is part of a set of plastic foam swords. There were a few mutters of disapproval. I asked what was wrong and one of the boys told me that I was supposed to use a belt. In my best voice of adult wisdom, I expounded on the Dangers of Belts. I then rolled up a section of newspaper.

More mutters.

“All right,” I said, “we’ll try a belt. But first, whoever doesn’t want to play, whoever realizes how dangerous a belt can be, move up to the Safe Area.” No one moved. “You all understand what I mean,” I said. “It’s really O.K. to watch a game if you want. A belt can really hurt. I’ll just wait a little longer to see if anyone wants to change his mind.” I waited. “I’ll go out of the room and come back.” I went and come back. No one had moved. And then we played a game – with the belt.

This was the first and clearest lesson I learned about the nature of social games as simulations. I realized the belt was crucial to the game – not because of tradition, but because of the real power it represented. The possibility, the potential for danger had to be there for the game to be fun.

I was impressed, first of all, by the equilibrium of the game, the justice of the mechanisms for conferring power: whoever was brave enough to stray away from the base and lucky enough

to find the belt became the master of the game and the next hider. Whoever wished to be cautious could stay as close to the base as necessary. Some children never got hit. They also never got the belt.

“Hot Bread and Butter,” among other things, represents an idea of power. To gain power, you must 1) take certain risks, and 2) be lucky. To use your power effectively, you must not use it too strongly. Only on one occasion did I see a child hit others too hard. The next child who found the belt went after the tyrant – and for the rest of the game the offender never wandered more than ten feet from the base. Alliances didn’t seem to be of much help. The overcautious don’t have much fun. And, finally, when there are no more worlds to conquer, you set the sword in the stone and watch.

But why did they want to play that particular game? I suppose, without much interpretation, we could point out parallel methods for the acquisition and transference of power in various tribal societies and in certain industries.

But “Hot Bread and Butter” is not played to simulate or gain insight into other cultures. It is played because 1) it is fun, and 2) because it echoes a reality that is becoming evident to the society of children who play it.

In “Hot Bread and Butter” you gain power through risk and luck – not through direct confrontation – but only once the power has already been abdicated. As a child grows towards adulthood, he is approaching the time in which adult power is left to him – if he can take it. It is the opportunity that he must seize, not the person that he must confront. The power of the adult cannot be taken from an adult, it must be discovered within the person of the child.

Most children who play “Hot Bread and Butter” are between the ages of nine and fourteen. When I tried to play it with younger children, the equilibrium was lost. Many children didn’t leave the base. Those who found the belt either hit too hard or spent the round trying to keep the belt for themselves. I had to teach the game. I had to control. I had a lousy time, and so did most of the children. “Hide and Seek” however, which is related in structure to “Hot Bread and Butter.” was a total success.

In other words, when children choose to play a particular game – when they establish a contract for what they are going to play with – they do so because the game is related to other experiences, because it provides them with a platform upon which they can create and explore a model which helps them define their relationship to other experiences, experiences which they are beginning to perceive as themes in their daily lives.

They call this pursuit “Fun.”

They play with toys because toys are models in which they can explore their relationships to

their physical environment. They play with games because games are the only vehicle they have available to them in which they can explore their relationships to the social environment.

When the problem of the game is solved, when you know what to do to win, the social fantasy is ended and the game is no longer fun. Fun is present when the possibility of winning is as great as the possibility of losing; when the challenge is strongest; when opportunities to learn are widest. When a game is won, it is over. Winning and fun are not always congruent. When a game is won repeatedly, it is abandoned.

But what amazed me the most about playing children's games with children was that somehow problems were being solved. Most of the groups I worked with could be characterized as follows: The first session was always choked with tension. Children couldn't decide on a game to play. If someone bumped into someone else, there was a fight. The gentlest game I could come up with, even "Simon Says," ended in chaos, pain and tears for most of us. Only if I insisted on maintaining control at every moment of the session – if I never allowed a game to develop for more than a few minutes – was there any sense of joy. Eight sessions later, in almost every group I worked with, I was able to play along with the children. They made and reinforced the controls. Fighting was the result of only the most dire breach of trusts. Accidents were treated as accidents and not as invitations to confrontation.

And this transformation occurred no matter what games were played. There was no such thing as a better game, there appeared no logical scope and sequence; for violence didn't need to be explored again.

## *Braving the game*

It takes bravery to play a game. Like it takes bravery to love someone. Bravery, because the more deeply you do either, the more completely you give your self over to the other. It's what you have to do to love fully, play fully. Which is an unavoidable outcome of playing a game or loving someone in the first place. And the more profoundly you play the game and love that person, the more profoundly you can get hurt by it or him or her or them.

We put our selves in harm's way, we open our selves to the possibility that someone could choose to hurt us. Having fun with someone, loving someone, playing with someone; these are the gifts we open wide for, and I think knowing that we can get hurt is part of the fun.

I think a comedian, standing, alone, in a giant theater; a busker standing on the corner, acting like a statue; a street musician, an artist putting up a show in a museum, a professor preparing to lecture - despite how they act, they are not fearless. They temporarily set aside fear so they have the room they need to be filled with love, to be completely in play, to live meaningfully. They set it aside, temporarily, but it remains close, always close. Dangerously close. And as brave as they are, and as meaningful as their lives become, they are never so foolish as to let themselves forget their fears.

## *The Daily Game*

**“Laugh longer, live louder”**

- the Oaqui

Give us this day our Daily Game, and give us our playfulness that we may play together.

The Daily Game. The game that we find our selves playing from the moment we wake up, to the moment we go to sleep. The game we've been playing since we were old enough to be playful. A slowly changing game. Each day, each turn, each round slightly different, played with always somehow different players, in slightly changing places, for somewhat different reasons. But played, nevertheless, by us, and everyone we play with, every day.

It's you, your very self, playing passenger or driver, person in a crowd, person on an elevator, lover, spouse, parent, boss, salesperson, chief chef, child.

There are two schools here: The Play Fully school recognizes that the art of the Daily Game is to give your self over completely, playing more fully, more totally, bringing more and more of your self and boundless skills and growing power into the game. I attended this school when I wrote *The Well-Played Game*.

And then there's the other school. The Play Playfully school. The school that says maybe playfulness won't help you win. But it will most definitely help you have fun. And in having fun, you're more fun to play with, and in playing with you, we make the game more fun, and when the game is more fun, we all win.

And from time to time, sometimes timeless time, you find your self losing. Maybe not lost, but losing enough to remind you that, despite your best efforts, sooner or later, you'll lose the game forever.

Sometimes I get religious about the whole thing, sometimes I think of fun

and laughter as a spiritual experience. Our lives have become increasingly fragile, our world increasingly harsh. It is a miracle that we can laugh at all. And that's the whole point.



## *Winning: five observations regarding the Daily Game*

### **I. Me, More And Less**

Sometimes, I am bigger than my self. When I'm playing. Music, for example. Or walking along the bay. Or sometimes just because you say Hello to me. My very ego, my sense of self, my very ME grows beyond me.

Sometimes I am remarkably condensed, and can be found entirely defined by a single stubbed toe.

Sometimes I am so small in the world that I become only this body or mind or this infinitesimal thought. Me the self-image. Me the imagined.

Sometimes, I am very big. Sometimes, I am so big that I am virtually indistinguishable from the big WE. WE the lovers, WE the family, the team, the neighborhood, nationality, faith, the humanity.

Most of the time, though, I am a little too little to recognize the big, binding WE. I can almost always touch the WE that ties me to you. Less frequently can I feel the fleeting WE that unites me with family. And perhaps once in a great while, the WE neighbors, WE Americans, WE English-speakers.

But it's only when I am my biggest ME that I get to understand my self in the light of bigger WEs: WE human beings, WE the living, WE the World.

And then I explode into being. I get to be body and mind and spirit, idea and action, archetype and prototype, all at once. Then I get to be beyond belief.

### **2. The Big Deal**

The fun of games is that they let you experience that bigger ME.

That's what winning is about. That's why they invented it.

When you win, you get to be larger. Larger than the game. Larger than the day. Large enough, sometimes, to reach historic proportions.

Sometimes, in some games, you get to experience your very big self as part of a winning team. And when your team wins, the WE of which you are a very big part suddenly gets so

very much bigger, so very much more fun to be part of, that you your self become a bigger ME.

Some games you really don't have to win, and you still get to be a definitely bigger ME, part of a convincingly bigger WE. Some games, all you have to do is play.

ANY game that you play well, with people who are playing well, is a ME\WE: an undeniable and self-evidential manifestation of the bigger MEness, participant in and progenitor of the greater WEness.

### **3. Losing**

Apparently, for the vast majority of us, most of life and just about all games, provide us with only more opportunities to lose.

There is just so much to lose! You can lose a turn. You can lose a point. You can lose a whole game. And that's the least of it!

And despite your attempts to proliferate your days with opportunities to win, as your days accumulate, you keep on discovering more and more opportunities to lose.

And some losing is even worse than others. Like the losing you do when you're on a losing team. Where you stop working together. And you become as if broken. Fragmented. Where you lose trust. Lose confidence. Lose face.

This is what we might as well call the experience of "me\weness" as opposed to what we might call "ME\WEness." The meanest "me." The demeaning "we." Where anything, even love, becomes an object of fear and pain.

And even here, actually, there is a connection, a reinforcement, a kind of satisfaction that is not exactly fun, but certainly much more fun when you're not the reason the game was lost.

### **4. World Of The Lost**

Most organizations, businesses, governments, if not reinvented every now and then, encapsulate and perpetuate relationships based on loss.

These loss-focused relationships become cancerous, characterizing and consuming every conversation, between: employees, management, production, stakeholders, suppliers, customers; until there is no possibility of winning together anything at all.

Back and forth between ME\we and me\WE, between loss of community and loss of self, in

a cycle of perpetual disempowerment, spanning a chasm of infinite regress and regret. And it is everywhere endemic, in meetings and parties, sports and dances, ceremonies, festivals, where the only relationship we can sustain is based on our failure and belittlement, defeat and deficiency.

And it truly doth pith one off.

Forgive me if I dwell. This competition thing is bad enough. But this losing thing is really insidious, and it really takes our collective attention to some truly terrible places.

It is my re-considered opinion that I have no interest in losing, or in being part of a losing team, or in making anyone else lose, least of all you. I continually return to the conclusion that losing is not necessary or personally advantageous, no matter who does it. I really don't have to create a world where I lose or even worry about losing. And you don't have to, either.

We are actually allowed to have more fun than we can possibly imagine. Without anyone losing anything. Even at this very moment.

## **5. World Of The Found**

Because in the World of the Found (i.e., not the world in which you have already lost your self, but in the very world in which you currently find your self) there are actually three ways to win, and only one way to lose.

Yes, there's the "me\we" (little "me," belittle "we") of mutual disempowerment. But then there's the "ME\we" of competition where, ultimately, only winners are supposed to have fun. And then there's the "me\WE" relationship, where everybody is so together that you re-define your self.

In the World of the Found you find your self embracing the ME\we and me\WE, experiencing with the gain of community the gain of self, in a cycle of increasingly mutual empowerment, swinging you ever higher through worlds of infinite depth and capacities for delight.

I call this ME\WE. I also call this "coliberation." Or the well-played game. Or, in the World of the Found, the right boss, the good job, the long marriage.

## *Cooperation and competition*

So, let's talk about games first.

The key to the whole games thing is challenge. Challenge, as Csikszentmihalyi points out<sup>xi</sup> so clearly, is central to the experience of flow, it is the invitation for us to engage, for us to develop and refine our abilities and master evermore complex tasks.

In cooperative games, the challenge has to be flexible, negotiable, and always changing for us to sustain the experience of play: let's see how long we can volley the ball back and forth across the net, let's see if it's more fun (challenging) if we raise the net, play further away. Maybe you should stand closer to the net and me further. Maybe I should use my non-dominant hand. The goal is to play together, to have fun, to engage each other. If we're not having fun, we increase or decrease the challenge. Cooperative games are difficult to sustain - they require creativity and sensitivity in order for players to arrive at the kind of challenge that will keep them all in play, regardless of how different their abilities might be.

In competitive games, the challenge is non-negotiable and if we want to have fun playing the game together, we have to be close in abilities. The closer, the greater the challenge. In competitive games, if we're not having fun, we have to find other people to play with. This is everywhere evident in professional sports, from chess to football. In competitive games, we wind up playing with people who are like us in skill and capability. Who look like us, dress like us, act like us, with perhaps minor differences that are noticeable only to a judge with a split-second timer.

In cooperative games, we are able to engage an entire community into play, regardless of differences in age and ability, and more often than not, it is these differences that prove to be the source of the challenge, the very thing that makes the game inviting and worth playing. It is the differences between the actors that make the play worth playing.

Cooperative games nurture diversity. Competitive games lead to uniformity.

In most societies, the young play games that have both cooperative and competitive elements. Tag, hide-and-seek, jump rope, cats cradle. These games are found to be the most sustainable - through them, children build community and develop social competencies. Later on, depending on the society, the range of games tends to narrow, and those that become national pastimes reflect the nature of that society. Thus, in one culture, like that of the Eskimo, it is games like "Blanket Toss" in which people are placed on a blanket and then everyone else throws them up in the air, that become integral to the culture, while in other cultures, it is games like football and hockey.

Once games reach the status of “national pastime,” however, players, and even officials, have little or no access to the rules. Rules become official and inviolate, changeable only by committees of non-players. Thus, competitive games become almost purely competitive, standing completely outside of the players control. Conformity, uniformity becomes the rule. Uniformed players’ almost indistinguishable from one another.

OK. Now we can think about the connections between competition, cooperation and things like the Internet and the computer games industry, the military and the school system, government and religion....

## *Loving competition*

One of the games that George Leonard<sup>xii</sup> liked to teach was a game he called “dho-dho-dho.” (I later learned that it is based on a South Asian game called Kabaddi<sup>xiii</sup>.)

Two teams stood, facing each other, with one line between them and other lines behind. They would take turns, one player running across the line, trying to tag as many players as possible, and get back across the line to his own team. There were two obstacles to his completing his mission: 1) once he tagged someone, the rest of the players would do what they could to keep him from getting back across the line, and 2) as soon as he crossed the line into the opposing team’s territory, he had to keep saying “dho, dho, dho” without taking a breath.

As George taught the game, he would explain that it was a game of “loving competition.” The idea was to restrain the runner from the opposing team, hug him, hold him, but never, never to hurt him. To me, this game, more than any others we played, embraced the idea of loving competition as beautifully as players embracing each other in their attempts to keep an opponent from crossing the line.

I think the idea of loving competition embodies competition at its most mature. It is enlightened competition. It is a difficult concept to teach.

Another game George taught was the two-player game he called “Stand Off.” The players stand facing each other, about half-arm’s-length apart. They raise their hands so their palms face each other – but are far enough apart so that they don’t touch. Their feet are together. The object of the game is to cause the other player to lose balance enough to move one of her feet. It’s important to stress this point, so that people don’t think that they are trying to push each other or force each other. It’s all about relaxing your hands just enough so that you make the other player over reach. Competitive, yes, but in a loving way.

*Playing For Fun*

**“Might as well remove the doubt -  
fun is what it’s all about.”**

*-The Oaqui*



## *Games are for Fun*

As I might have heretofore mentioned, I have spent what others might deem an inordinate amount of time playing, talking about, teaching, thinking about, inventing, exploring, researching, writing about games: games of just about every possible description for every possible audience for every conceivable purpose. I've spent so much of my life doing this that I can't name anyone else alive, or not institutionalized, who has devoted him- or herself so thoroughly and for such a long time to games.

During my earlier years, I devoted much of my time to looking for permission, corroboration, sanity checks, opportunities, paid opportunities, offers of support, like minds – and now, at the age of 72 and-a-quarter, having achieved by virtue of nothing more than the years I've spent, an almost tangible aura of venerability. I have arrived at a certain elder perspective on this game thing. And, just recently, I have achieved the significantly institutional validation that comes from having a book that I wrote and published 35 years ago republished by M.I. T. (yes, that M.I.T.) Press.

All the aforementioned, lumped together, has inspired me to share with you the singlemost profound insight that I have been apparently placed on this planet to achieve:

- A) Games are for fun.
- 2) The more fun, the better.

One could easily extrapolate that observation to apply to phenomena far beyond the purview of mere games. The more fun, the better. One could say that about education. One could say that about love. And one, such as this one, could say that about life.

Those varied ramifications, however, go beyond the scope of this particular and personal exposition, insofar as my field of recognized expertise needs must remain within the clearly defined confines of the things we actually call games.

Games, I say, are for fun. And the more fun a game is, the better the game.



True, verily, many and varied are the reasons for games and playing them. More varied now, I dare say, than at any other time in recorded, and perhaps even unrecorded history.

There are games for learning, games for building community, games for building the body, games for healing, games for growth, games for solving complex problems, games for communicating; there are board games and computer games and serious games and role playing games and pervasive games.

But of all the purported purposes, what I am here to teach is this: the most substantial and consequential benefit of a game is the fun that you create and share playing it. The more fun, the more deeply you learn, the stronger you become, the more complete the solution, the communication, the community, the greater the growth, the more totally you heal. And yes, you could also say that about life.

## *The Fun-Focused game*

When we talk about a fun-focused game, we're generally not talking about the game itself, but about the players and their reasons for playing.

Some games are designed that way, to be played just for fun, to invite playfulness, laughter, spontaneity, creativity. I can think of three kinds, off-hand: player-designed games (more about these later) party games and drinking games. But even these games can fall flat, very, very, flat, if the players aren't in that fun-focused mood. The designer, at best, can only invite fun. It's up to the players to bring it with them.

Thing about fun-focused games is that they're not so much about the fun that any one particular player or team is having. Usually, no matter what game you play, somebody has fun. The thing that makes this whole idea so worth thinking about is that fun-focused games are all about everybody having fun, certainly everybody who wants to be having fun.

This kind of game, the fun-focused kind, is not about getting the highest score, even though points might be awarded and score might be kept. Getting the highest score is not the point. Winning isn't the point. The point is getting to share that special state of spirit, mind and body that we call "fun."

The "fun focus" can be applied to any game - anything that we play or do, actually.

The fun focus helps people get together, together. And energized. And nothing does this faster and more wholesomely than a game that you play for fun. Especially if the game is presented in such a way that it is:

- easy to understand,
- easy to play,
- easy to quit,
- short,
- safe,
- fun,
- fun,
- inclusive,
- voluntary,
- and clearly non-threatening.

## *The Play Community and the Game Community*

There are at least two different communities that form in support of playing together – one is what you might call a “game community,” the other a “play community.”

Every game and sport that becomes a cultural institution forms a community— a game community— and members of that community have only one thing in common, but very much in common – the particular game being played.

When you are part of a game community that comes together for a poker night, a game with the girls, or a football match; to some clear degree, it’s the mastery of that game that keeps you involved. At some point, your proficiency at the game, or at what you do in support of the game, determines your place in the game community. Playing is good. Winning a lot is better. In other words, it’s the game that determines if you’re good enough to be part of that community.

In a play community, it’s the players, you and everyone you’re playing with, who determine whether the game is good enough. If it’s not, you change it. You change something about the rules, or you discover a hitherto unknown variation, or you play something entirely else. It’s you who determines if the game is good enough.

Most informal games – street games, pick-up games, playground games – are played by a play community. Most formal games, like Little League Baseball and Lawn Bowling, are played by a game community.

Commercial and historical forces tend to embrace game communities, and vice versa. Little League Baseball and Lawn Bowling are not just games, they are cultural events, they are sports.

Ultimately, the majority of people aren’t good enough to participate in the kinds of games played by game communities, especially when compared to the skills of the masters and grandmasters of the game.

Ultimately in the play community, everyone is good enough. Because it’s not any particular game that people have come together to play. Because the reason they have come together is to play, not necessarily to win, or even to keep score, but to play together, and be part of an event in which anyone can play, in which everyone is a master.

In the play community it’s mystery, not mastery that draws people together – it’s the mystery of shared imagination, of spontaneity and synergy, of generalized laughter and much mutual

admiration, of shared fun.

When children are young, they first form play communities, and usually, if they can avoid formal intervention, they'll continue expanding and diversifying the play communities they support and that support them well into adulthood.

It is no coincidence that the Internet, though it serves both kinds of community (play and game), is so easily characterized as a play community, dependent on openness and trust shared by its players, succeeding to the degree in which it can respond to their constantly evolving, individual and collective interests.

Most often, game communities share characteristics with play communities, and vice versa. In both, members show mutual respect for play – for supporting fantasy, keeping rules, observing boundaries...

People who come together for a “friendly game” – the weekly mahjong game with the girls – are not about winning. What, you can win maybe \$2.00. They're about being with other people who know the game just about as well as they do, well-enough not to take it too seriously.

Once you've identified the principle members of a “friendly game” community, it becomes more and more like a play community. Even to the point of changing rules. It's not about the game any more. We're all good enough.

The same is true at chess clubs and bridge clubs. Those community members who are good enough get together to play for fun.

The rewards of participation in a game community are often highly tangible – statues and money even. Those for a play community are the experience of community itself, of affinity, membership, acceptance, mutuality, respect, appreciation.

## *Inclusive games*

Inclusive games. Contrast this to games where, if you make a mistake, you are “out” until the game is frackin’ over. Or games you’re not allowed to play because you’re not “good enough.”

Inclusive games. Games that everybody who wants to play, can play. Games where no one is ever in the mush pot or anything other that keeps them from playing. Games where anyone who wants to play who happens to be in a wheelchair, or blind, or young or old, or can’t speak English, or can’t speak at all – gets to play.

The idea of inclusion was the key to most of the games we played during New Games festivals. Just as key to what makes Playful games as genuinely fun as they are, and all the games you play for laughs as deeply funny as they are.

The games that are played by a play community are, by definition, inclusive. In a play community it’s assumed that you can change the rules if you need to. If somebody comes along who wants to play, and the game that’s being played is too hard, too confusing, too violent, too quiet for him to share in the fun, you change the game, or you find a different game, and if some of you still want to play the other game, you play two different games.

That way, the games we play can be competitive or cooperative, simple or complex, very challenging or just plain playful, depending on who wants to play what. That’s what was so new about New Games. And, sadly, still is.

## *The Slanty Line principle*

There's an elegant model, called the "Slanty Line" principle, developed by physical educator Muska Mosston<sup>xiv</sup> that puts the concept of individually negotiable challenge very clearly into practice.

If you're a Phys Ed teacher, one of the things you do with kids is help them develop their high-jumping skills. In "non-adaptive" Phys Ed, the way you did this was to hold jumping contests. You'd hang a high bar horizontal to a certain height and everybody would have to take a turn jumping over the high bar. If they succeeded, they'd get to the next round, and the high bar would be raised. The contest would continue until only one person was left, and that person would be lavishly praised as the one who established the high jump record for the class.

The problem with this kind of competitive incentive structure is that the kids who need the most practice are the kids who get to jump the least often. The worse they are at jumping, the sooner they're out of the game.

Make the high bar diagonal instead of parallel to the ground. And let everybody jump over any part of the high bar, and take as many turns as they want. And what do you get?

Instead of the teacher, each kid sets his/her own challenge. The jumpers who are not so good at jumping can still jump across the high bar as many times as anyone else, they just cross at a lower point. And, when they feel the need to increase the challenge, they can just station themselves at a higher part of the high bar.

No one is eliminated. No one is given prizes. Everyone wins. Repeatedly.

Slant the high bar and the authority rolls right out of the hands of the teacher, out of, actually, any one body's hands, into everybody's. The challenge (jump as high as you can, and then jump higher) remains the same, but the challenger has changed. It's not the Phys Ed instructor who increases the challenge, it's the kids, themselves: the kids as a group, and the kids, individually.

A challenge that is determined by the individual player is more complex, because it requires "reflective action." The player must evaluate not only his or her own success, but also the success of the challenge. And even though kids can get very competitive, the challenge is ultimately self-selected, ultimately guided by sheer fun.

Without an external evaluator, each kid can devise and revise the challenge. Of course, evaluation is going on, and whether the competition is inner-directed or outer-directed, the fact is

that the teacher, your fellow jumpers (both higher and lower), your inner referee; somebody is evaluating your performance, challenging you to challenge your self.

Ideally, each kid should be seeking out his/her personal level of flow, driven by the natural desire for complexity into a deeper and healthier engagement with the relationships between the human body and gravity. But, in fact, there's still something about the way the task is framed that draws the kids apart.

Even though nobody's eliminated, even though everyone's free to increase or decrease the challenge, even though you don't even have to take turns, the fact is that the challenge is directed towards the individual. With the focus on individual performance, on how high who jumps; the relationship is fundamentally the same.

And what's worse (or more complex), someone might be attaching meaning to your performance, as if how high you can jump says something about your character!

So, what if we completely redirected the challenge, away from the individual and towards the group? What if the entire class tried to jump holding hands? Or with their arms around each other's shoulders? Or each other's waist?

Shifting the focus of the game away from what they can do individually (ME), we focus, also, on what the kids can do together (WE) – on collective as well as individual performance.

To jump the Slanted Bar together, we need to make sure that each individual kid is going to make it. Even though the challenge is to the group, there are still plenty of challenges to the individual player. Each has to be stationed at the appropriate part of the high bar: too high and you might not get over, too low, you might make it harder for someone else. Each has to be able to ask for help, and provide help. Preparing for the big jump, synchronizing the preparatory, simultaneous squat, each individual is doubly challenged. And yet, not competing. Same slant, same task, but fundamentally shifted experience.

Raising the high bar, you intensify the competitive relationship between the diminishing few. The game, internally and externally, becomes one of increasingly isolated MEs (the “winners”) against an increasingly disempowered WE. Slant the High Bar, and the relationship relaxes, becomes supportive, empowering, healthy, ME\WE.

## *The friendly game*

When I think of a “friendly game,” I think about a game where, under the right circumstances, you get things like do-overs and even, if necessary, take-backs. And a card laid isn’t necessarily a card played. And you can have time-out whenever you need one. And you can change the rules if it makes it easier for everyone to play, or when it looks like it will be more fun for everyone. And if the game isn’t fun, you can all just quit and find something more fun to play. Or not.

I think of Scrabble games with rules like:

- you can spell phonetically
- you can spell backwards
- you can rearrange tiles (as long as all the tiles still spell words)
- you can turn a tile over when you need an extra blank
- you can make up your own word as long as you can define it
- transliterations are acceptable
- the goal is to get the highest collective score
- we can trade racks

Or chess where, on your turn, you can

- pass
- move two pieces on a turn
- change the position of any two of your pieces, or maybe just any two pieces
- change sides
- “revolutionary chess” where you can kill the king and keep playing until you don’t want to play anymore
- play with three players
- how about giveaway chess?

I think of playing solitaire, together. I think of playing poker as if we were playing solitaire together. I think of rules like:

- playing round the corner (you know, J, Q, K, A, 1, 2...)
- allowing sequences of alternating colors; odd, or even, or prime numbers
- with hands face-up (an odd concept, that)
- playing for a specific total (a run is a series of cards whose sum is...)
- swapping hands
- taking two turns at once
- not taking turns at all

Or playing marbles like this.

I think of a friendly game as a game where the only really important thing, the only rules that are either hard or fast or both being that the game is fun for everyone, that everyone can



play or quit, that we don't have to play the game until someone wins, or for money, or even for score. A game with friends that we play because of the friendship.

I mean, honestly, what's a game for? And what's a friendly game really about? What has winning got to do with friendship? Or keeping score? Or playing for money? Unless, of course, it's more fun that way. I ask my self, what kind of friends would want to try to make each other lose? Some kinds, apparently. Not my kinds, though. My kinds are about helping each other have fun.

## *The evolving game*

Some games evolve while you're playing them. They just evolve. You start out playing them one way, and by the time you're half-way through you're playing them a different way, and by the time they're over, they've become something different again – sometimes different enough to be a whole new game.

Of course, they evolve because you let them evolve, because you, in fact, encourage the players to try different ways to play them, just for the fun of it – especially when the way they're playing doesn't seem as fun as it was a few minutes ago.

Rollover evolved. I think that's the only way I can describe it – evolved. We were in a beautiful room at Esalen – a large yurt for dancing and moving around a lot in. And we were sitting on big, ever-so-welcoming pillows. Some of us were lying down.

One of the games I find myself teaching again and again, especially when a group is just starting to form, is a game I called Numbers.

You know this game, Numbers?

OK, I'll explain:

## *From the Game of Numbers to the Land of Hands*

We used to play a game called “Numbers,” with some rather bizarre variations, during a New Games Tournament. It’s played like this:

Everybody sits in a circle, and counts off, beginning, naturally, with me. I’m Number One.

As Number One, I get to start the round. All I do is call another number. And the only thing the person who has that number does is call another number. And that’s how you play the game. Simple?

### **The challenge**

See, if someone actually does make a mistake, that person goes to the end of the circle (to my right and take the last number. And, just as logically, everybody who had a lower number has to move up one number. Which of course means that all those people have a new number to remember. Which of further course means that they are ever so much more likely to make a mistake.

As the game goes on, it also becomes more incumbent on the person who gets called on to respond pretty much immediately. Which of course gives people yet another opportunity to make mistakes, and have to change seats, and numbers, and get more confused.

When new people come in, they get a new number, take up their position at the end of the sequence, and, since people rarely call the last number (what’s the point?) they are not really challenged to say or remember anything until someone makes a mistake. And, by that time, they pretty much understand what the game’s about.

The object, if there is one, is to get to be Number One, because Number One is the one who gets to start the round. Which means that the lower (closer to One) your number is, the greater the challenge, because the more often your number gets called.

### **Increasing the challenge**

The game stops being so much fun if nobody makes a mistake. So, you make it harder. Decrease the delay tolerance, for example. Especially after a mistake is made and people have to change numbers. My friend Charles Parsons tells me of a variation. He writes: “suppose the mistake-maker’s number is removed from the game. E.g. with 10 players: number Six makes a mistake and now becomes Eleven. Now there is no number Six. Everyone must remember this!”

Or, if you have a multilingual group, play it in, for example, Dutch.

### **Thumper, too**

There's an oddly similar game, called "Thumper." Very much like Numbers, actually. Frequently employed as a drinking game, in fact.

Instead of numbers, each player has a unique gesture. Go around the circle and give every one the opportunity to create a gesture (a physical gesture, like batting the eyes, sticking out the tongue, shrugging the shoulders, pointing the finger). Have everybody repeat that player's gesture in a genuine, but futile attempt to memorize each.

The game proceeds as in Numbers. Player Number One starts by making someone else's gesture. That player is then obliged, in the minimal reasonable time, to make some other player's gesture. And on, and on

Once people seem to understand this game, you can play both games, Numbers and Thumper, at the same time.

### **Names**

Who needs numbers? Saying each other's names is more than enough challenge. Especially when the group is "at speed" and you're expected to respond more or less instantly. Odd how many times people find themselves forgetting their own name.

For a little more insanity, try playing it in a handpile, where the person who just got named gets to put his or her hands on top.

### **Beyond challenge**

Or, if you're into bizarre variations and want to make the game a little more threatening and a lot more physical, you can try playing it the New Games way. Everybody gets on the floor and lies on their stomachs. Already more threatening. And, for the more physical part, when you make a mistake you have to roll your body over the backs of the higher Numbers. Last time I introduced that particular variation, we got on the floor all right, but everybody quit before anyone could really get, so to speak, rolling. It's really fun, though. Honest.

Then there's the "official" version of HaHa Numbers. People assume the standard HaHa position with heads on each other's stomachs. Instead of calling out numbers, people say "ha" for number one, "haha" for two, "hahaha" for three, etc. Just watching this game I laughed maybe harder than I've ever laughed in my veritable life!

## **Side note**

This art – adapting to the players and the moment – is what makes the evolving game evolve, and is key to everything I teach about teaching games.

## **Meanwhile, back to Rollover.**

But first, a little further back, to a children's game called Who Stole the Cookie from the Cook-cookie Jar.

There are several reasons the Cookie Jar game might remind you of Numbers: you sit in a circle, you say something that makes someone else have to say something, and if the person who has to say something doesn't say that something else soon enough, that person kind of loses. It's a fun game and a genuine challenge – keeping the rhythm, staying well enough in tune to respond when called, thinking quickly enough to decide whom else to call. However, in the Cookie Jar game everybody has to keep a rhythm, you have to call people by their name, and if you miss, you're out.

It evolved into Numbers because I wanted it to. First of all, I wanted everyone who wanted to play to be able to play, always. Then, I realized that, especially for beginning groups, and even more especially for me, it's just too much of a challenge to remember everyone's name. Finally, learning a rhyme and keeping rhythm was a challenge that proved, for my purposes, despite the fun of it, not quite inviting enough. Maybe it was because I was playing with adults.

So, instead of names, we used numbers (a lot easier than remembering names), as one does in some variations of the game Priest of the Parish, (a.k.a. The Prince of Paris – go figure, and closely related to a game called Big Booty, which we shall not address herein) which I somehow learned as “who sir, me sir?” And instead of using a song or a rhythm, even, we just made it the rule that you couldn't take too long to respond. And then, instead of losing when you miss, you just moved down to the end, taking the last number. That particular rule – the changing your number to the last number – makes everyone below your original number have to change their number as well, which adds significantly to conceptual delight and chaos, which is the way my friend learned how to play The Prince of Wales, not to mention (which I am about to do) Whales Tales.

Meanwhile, back at Numbers [which was the game we started out playing, the variation of some other game that either e- or de-olved into a game where you sit in a circle, everyone has a different number, the number one player calls any other number, the player with that number calls any other number, and the player who doesn't respond in a manner which we deem sufficiently timely (always a question of deeming, and, given the level of compassion at the time, which varies accordingly) moving to the end of the line (even though we play it in

a circle) and assumes the last number, etc.]. So we were sitting down on these pillows, some of us lying on the pillows rather than sitting as abovementioned, and then some others also wanted to lie similarly down, until, at some point, drawn by the apparent comfort of it all, it became the thing to do, lie down, that is. And, of course, once we were all lying down, when someone made a mistake and had to change position in the circle, it seemed logical, and proved much funnier, for us to roll into the new order of things.

And it was fun. And we gave it a name. And we played it again. And we saw that it was good.

Hence, Rollover.

### ***Meanwhile, Handland:***

So we reached a hiatus with the rolling and the overness. It was fun. We were fun. And we were also tired. So, for one of those reasons that require deeper inquiry than we wish to inquire into, we decided, all together, to roll over. Just once. Not over each other. But just over, from lying on our stomachs to lying on our backs. And for some other inexplicable reason, we sidled towards each other until we found our selves, heads together, ear-to-ear, like spokes in a wheel. And one of us started humming, which is something that lying ear-to-ear seems to make you want to do. Which led all of us to start humming. And then a couple of us raised our hands up, just kind of swaying and dancing to the tuneless tune we were humming into being.

And a few others joined in, and we couldn't but help note the weirdness of all those hands in the air, apparently without owners, like separate beings.

So we let our hands get to know each other. Kind of like puppets. Like maybe snake puppets or dragons or fish or swans maybe. And our hands started talking to each other, and greeting each other and loving each other and celebrating that we found each other in Handland together.

## *Games and playfulness*

Here's a thought to think about: most games don't encourage playfulness. Unless you're talking about the kinds of games kids play. Well, some games. Some kids. Maybe little kids. When they aren't involved in Little League, or toddler tennis or baby bowling.

If by games you mean sports, or games with official rules, or traditional games like shuffleboard and chess and bridge; playfulness is not what you'd think of as happening very much. Maybe between games. But not during, not when you're all focused and keeping score and things. Play is happening. O, yes. Sometimes even deep play, play of the immersive, transcendent, just-about-heroic kind might even be happening. But not playfulness.

"To be serious," Carse<sup>xv</sup> says, "is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for unlimited possibility."

"Specified conclusion," as in: winning or losing, as in keeping score and getting trophies and having official rules and officializing and spectating. "Unlimited possibility" as in doodling and dabbling and making art and playing around and mucking about and wandering and wondering and embracing the otherness of the other and the aliveness of life and having fun for the sheer fun of it all.

## *Of games and players*

One thing you learn from playing with children - especially the very young - is that the fun you are having together is more important than the game you are playing. This is equally apparent when you play with the very old. What good is it to win if it makes the other person not want to play with you anymore? Or if it makes the other player cry? Or get angry? Sure, you can blame it on their immaturity (or post maturity), but, still, if your goal is to play together, the game has to end with your being together. In fact, that's how you have to measure the success of the game - the more together you are at the end of the game, the better the game.

This is less apparent when you play with your peers. You tend to think of the game as being the ultimate arbiter of your relationship: "Let the best man win" and all that. When, of course, neither the game, nor your relationship has anything to do with who is the best person. Both, in fact, the game and your relationship are about your being better, together. Not better than each other. Better with.

On the other hand, for the sake of the game, we have to play as if one of us, or one team of us, will prove to be better than the other. It's called "winning." To make winning seem as important and meaningful as we possibly can - again for the sake of the game - we add officials and official rules, trophies and prizes, records and world standings. It makes the game seem more real (when we know it's nowhere as real as we are), more significant (when we know we're far more significant than a game could ever be), more permanent (when we know that neither the game nor any of us can last forever).

So, again for the sake of the game, we play as if it's not just a game, as if it's in fact more real, more significant, more permanent than we are. Which is fine. And fun. Unless we're playing with people who are much younger or older than we are. Because what they have to teach, all over again, is that when it comes to games, the people who are playing are more important. If it's not fun, change the rules, change the goals or the way you keep score or the number of pieces you get or the number of players you have on your team or where you play it or how long you play or what side you're on. Or try a different game.





Bradley Newman

Sometimes, this is a very hard lesson. Because we want to make the game as real as we can. And we forget who we're playing with or why. And we hurt each other. But as difficult as it is, it's probably the most important lesson we can learn from playing with the elderly and youngerly. It's the reason we need to be playing with them whenever we can. To be reminded what playing with others is all about, what the daily game is there for. Because otherwise, we forget. And the games get too important. And we play too hard. And we break.

## *Cooperative games*

There are basically at least two different kinds of cooperative games. There are probably seven, for all I know right now. But two kinds seems to be a good enough place to start. There are your endless games, like catch, that go on and on and on and then on again until everyone else gets too tired or bored or antsy to play. Then there are your ending games, like Prui and The Lap Game and Knots, where everybody tries to do something together (join the Prui, sit on each other's lap, get untangled). And, o, wait, there are cooperative games that don't really end, but could – I guess you could call them episodic, like clapping games and jumping games and ball-bouncing games, where as soon as you get good enough to feel like you're succeeding, you make it harder.

So, OK, there are three kinds of cooperative games. You can also play some ball-bouncing games by your self, don't you know. But then you're not cooperating, unless you're cooperating with the ball, which you probably are, even though the ball might not be interested in cooperating with you. But that's not the point. Or, at least, that's not my point.

My point is that there are probably three kinds of cooperative games, and regardless of how many there are, I really just wanted to think with you about one game in particular: "playing catch." Which could be called "playing toss," but it's not. It might as well be called juggling, because that's pretty much what you're trying to do, except there's only one ball. But it's the same idea – keep it going back and forth for as long as you possibly can.

There are a lot of things you can play catch with. There are baseballs and footballs and Wiffle balls and beach balls and balloons and bubbles (those games tend to be very short). And ping pong balls and volley balls, which you usually don't really catch, but you do something very much like it, cooperatively speaking, by trying to, well, volley the ball back and forth, ad, conceptually-speaking, infinitum.

So, let's say we're not playing catch. We're volleying. Playing ping pong. But not for score. Just volleying.

Actually, you could say that this is a fourth kind of cooperative game, different from the others in that it was based on a competitive game. But that's not the point nor particularly relevant given the observation that playing cooperatively, without score, for no other reason than playing to keep playing, can lead to an experience that is as profound and transforming as the best moment of any game you can think of, cooperative or competitive, game or sport or contest, in pursuit of fun or beauty or knowledge or power.

Sooner or later, all "keeping it going" kinds of cooperative games end. Or at least get interrupted. Usually because somebody misses.

So, there we are, throwing the ball back and forth, and we're, well, kinda good at it. Back and forth and back and forth with nary a miss at all. After awhile, despite our collective brilliance and our desire to go on and on for as close to ever as possible, we get, well, a little, shall we say, bored by all that brilliant nariness. So, we increase the distance between us, or slightly change the way were throwing or the way we're catching.



Dylan McKenzie, NYU Game Center

Something gets changed, by purpose or accident. You step back to catch the ball, and you stay there. And maybe next time you miss, but you don't move any closer. You still think it can be done. Until you miss and miss again. And then, maybe, you take a step closer. Until it gets too easy.

It's a game of balance, of fine tuning, adjustment, constant adjustment – adjusting to each other, to the changing levels of fatigue or energy, changes in the sunlight, temperature. At the same time there is this desire to perform and reach and share the spectacular. To go just beyond your limits. To return the throw with an accuracy that surprises both of you. To dive, to leap, to dance, not just in harmony, but with splendor. Something unsaid between us urging us forward towards the promise of something beyond us, the achievement of something extraordinary. Until, the inevitable befalls us, and we miss, and miss again.

In truth, it's often very difficult to determine which of us actually missed. Maybe the thrower didn't throw quite as brilliantly. Maybe the catcher wasn't totally present, if you know what I mean.



We've made it a rule that you're not allowed to say "sorry" when that happens, because: 1) stuff like that sometimes just happens, and 2) how do you know it's your fault? how do you know the other guy didn't return the ball the way he should have? what makes you so sure you were the one? and 3) it doesn't help. What helps is to pick up the ball and keep going. Unless you don't want to. Or the other guy doesn't want to. On the other hand, saying things like "sorry," even when you don't actually entirely mean it, is something people do to keep the game going. On the order of saying "OK, so let's pretend that last one didn't really happen." Or saying "that doesn't count." Or saying "that's a 'do-over'."

Better to admit that we need to change something about the way we're playing. We can change the distance between us, we can change the way we're catching or the way we're throwing.

Or maybe the best change of all is to play some other game, a different game. It might be more fun, next time, if we added more people. Well, maybe not more fun. Maybe as fun. Fun again. Fun in a different way. Maybe if the three of us, or five of us, or ten of us can keep it going long enough, maybe even more thoroughly, more powerfully, deeply fun.

### **Group Juggling**

When you get lots of people playing catch together, or volleying together, things tend to get more game-like, more organized, with rules, even. So a simple game of catch becomes something like a feat of group juggling. Which reminds me of a game I learned too long ago to remember who taught it to me. A near-perfect example of a cooperative, game-like experience, of the apparently endless variety. A game, coincidentally called "Group Juggling." Which explains why I was reminded of it.

You're going to need a lot of things to throw around. Like jugglers do. Preferably things that are as easy to catch as they are to throw. Nerf balls. Balls made out of rolled-up socks or plastic shopping bags. I really like the sock solution best because it makes my collecting singleton socks such an admirably practical activity.

You need a few fewer balls than players.

We've evolved I guess what you might call a ritual to start the game – especially with people who haven't played it before.

Somebody acts in the role of "Ball Captain." No, you don't have to call your self Ball Captain. Nor does anybody else have to. It's just that you happen to have all the balls. And happen to be the person who winds-up explaining the game. And sure, it'd be best if everyone were the captain of their own ball. But, if, like I said, nobody else knows how to play, it's best, like I also said, if one person has all the balls.

So, there's everybody, standing in a circle. And the Ball Captain asks everyone to raise a hand, and explains thus: "I'm going to throw the ball to somebody. Somebody not too close to me, and not too far, either. When you catch the ball (which I sorely hope you do), you, of course, first put your hand down so you can catch the ball, and then throw the ball to someone else who has their hand up – someone not too close or too far from you, who then lowers her hand to catch the ball, throws the ball to someone else who's not too close or too far but still has a hand up, and on and on, always throwing the ball to a person with a hand up, until no-one has a hand up. At that time, throw the ball back to me."

So now the ball has made a complete, if somewhat difficult-to-trace circuit, everyone having thrown the ball to one person and received it from someone else. As a final, and mildly amusing memory aid, the Ball Captain asks everyone to point, simultaneously, to the person to whom they threw the ball, and then, with the other hand, equally simultaneously, the person from whom they received the ball, further vivifying the path that the ball achieved.

Post-finally, the Ball Captain starts the game by throwing the first ball to the person to whom she had originally thrown the ball to, um, first.

During the first and subsequent rounds, the inevitable ball-dropping event usually evits itself. This is a good opportunity for adjusting player position – closer to the center, or perhaps to some other part of the circle. Later, as more balls are added, ball-dropping is no longer the game-stopper it once was. Often, it provides a welcome opportunity for reducing the number of balls in circulation. In any event, I always recommend that the focus is on how to adjust positions, if need be, rather than on ball-handling skills, or lack thereof.

After the ball has made a complete circuit or two, depending on how long it takes everyone to catch and throw without confusion or ball-dropping, the ball captain, deeply sensitive to the flow of the game and the confluence of the group, introduces another ball, bringing into stark and oft-hilarious focus the "juggling" nature of the game. And on and on and so forth, introducing yet another ball and yet another, letting missed balls fall where they may, until the group reaches such a state of mutual astonishment that they fairly curdle in collective awe.

And then, in full knowledge that the possibilities for further juggling marvels still abound; totally cognizant of how possible it would in deed be for people to, for example, start walking in a circle whilst juggling, or perhaps even to change places, perhaps even with the very person to whom the ball is being thrown or from whom received; in total recognition of the endless hilarity still to come; the Ball Captain, recognizing that the only thing standing in the way of the game becoming one of historical, or perhaps hysterical significance, stops the game, distributes the balls so that there's more or less one for each and every player who wishes to ascend to semi-captaincy. And then lets the game begin again — each player introducing another ball at the most precisely opportune moment so that both juggle-worthy surprise and conceptual delight are maintained.

Of course, there are still more variations, should more be sought. There's the possibility of creating yet another ball route, the equal possibility of using both routes simultaneously, of changing directions for one of the routes, of singing, of doing the juggling whilst collectively pursuing both the Hokey and the Pokey... Left to their own resources (which is always a good idea), people will always be able to come up with more ideas to make the game more, shall we say, challenging. The recommendation here is to try these ideas one at a time, on a first mentioned, first endeavored basis.

## **Knots**

The last two games were cooperative games of the endless variety – games that can just go on and on and on and also on until everyone is clearly ready to play something else. We now turn our collective attention to the contemplation of cooperative games of yet another variety – games that have a goal. Specifically, this time, a game called “knots” or “human knots” or “tangle” or, for that matter “untangle.” You need a bunch of people – a bunch being perhaps as few as say five and as many as maybe twenty. You gather together in a configuration mildly approximating a circle, standing somewhat shoulder to shoulder, facing, obviously, in, towards each other.

Everyone extends one hand towards the center of the circle, and selects a hand to hold on to. Clasp hands. Shake hands if need be. But do, by all means, hold on. If you find your self having accidentally clasped an immediately adjacent hand, de-clasp and find another, non-adjacent hand. Having accomplished this with sufficient aplomb, everyone then does with the other hand precisely like that which everyone did previously, except, as I implied, with the other hand – extending the aforementioned hand towards the center, seeking another hand to clasp, but this time making sure that the hand being clasped belongs to a person with whom you are not already clasping hands. Thus, each person finds him or herself holding on to two different, non-adjacent people, arms tangled in the attempt to stay connected to the clearly knot-like hand-tangle, having thus achieved the beginning point.

The end-point is to reach a state of mutual disentanglement similar to that of the starting point, without, of course, letting go of either of the hands to which your hands are temporarily affixed.

It is wise, before the deknottng becomes too devoted, to explain that people should maintain a loose, but continuous contact with the other hands – loose enough so that they don't twist each other's hands off (an enthusiasm dampener if ever there was one) in pursuit of collective knotlessness.

There comes a time, in fact, there can come several times of apparent unsolvability. 1) Sometimes, it is only apparently unsolvable, and, with a little deeper analysis and collective effort, extrication is at hand. 2) Sometimes a solution appears, but in unexpected form: you find your selves in two intersecting or totally separate circles. 3) Sometimes it is solved, but



certain participants refuse to accept the solution because some are facing in and others out. 4) Sometimes it is actually unsolvable. Should any of conditions 2-4 manifest, it behooves one to introduce the concept of minimal cheating. In this event, all attempts to de-knot are suspended, and the group, collectively, examines the entire knot in search for the one hand-clasp which, if temporarily de-clasped and then re-clasped elsewhere, would most likely result in group unknotting.



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On the other hand, sometimes it's best to give up and try again.

One more thing: should you find yourself with a group larger than 9 but less than 21, you can create a double knot. Ask players, before knotting, to find a partner. Partners now put one hand around each other's waist. This gives each pair two hands free – a left, and remarkably, a right hand – exactly enough for them to play as if they were one person, and pursue the game precisely as above described.

And yes, should further complexity prove desirable, Knots can, at least purportedly, be played with eyes closed.

So, even though the game has a fixed endpoint, at least in theory, it isn't that fixed. The challenge can be increased or decreased, just like we can increase or decrease the challenge when we're playing catch or group juggling. In fact, it's a lot easier to make a game more challenging than less. Often, almost too easy. And when it gets too challenging, well, it just isn't fun any more. Is it?

Playing any cooperative game is an exercise in sensitivity: sensitivity to each other, to what's fun for you, to the fun you are sharing, to the game you are playing together, the rules you're playing by, the place you are playing in, the objects and bodies you are playing with. It's that sensitivity, shared, that makes it, and keeps it fun.

### **People Pass**

There's yet another kind of cooperative game, typified by the iconic New Game of People Pass, in which a group of people work together to transport each other, one at a time, from the beginning to the end of a line. This is one of a large collection of what became known as trust games - often for a very good reason. These games were most often developed by people involved in what was called T-Groups or "sensitivity training," the objectives of which were often a little more hidden from the participants than they might wish.

Played for fun, these games can be wonderful, as I hinted at, "transporting" experiences of caring and being cared for, of support and supporting, of somewhat intimately sensuous sensitivity – all for the sheer joy of it. Played for other purposes, like teaching people about their "true nature" and stuff, these same games can take on a bit too much intimacy.

To keep these games fun, you have to focus heavily on individual safety, and the freedom to quit without consequences, and with impunity. If it's your turn to get carried over everyone's head, and you aren't sure you really want to, it's just fine. It doesn't say anything about you. It doesn't mean anything about your character or caring or feeling about the group or sense of responsibility to the group or who you really are. Would you mind, however, staying in line and helping to pass other people overhead?



People Pass, properly facilitated, is great fun, for everyone. Players start out in two lines. From then on, the people in front, one at a time, are carried to the back of the line, where they position themselves so they will be ready to carry the next person. Facilitators usually station themselves at the front and back of the lines, to help the people being passed so they can easily climb on to the front of the column and safely off the back. It's good to have a third facilitator, especially in large groups, to walk the proverbial line with the person being passed, just to keep things comfortable and safe.

To keep the people who are doing the passing sensitive to the person being passed (sometimes, they get carried away, so to speak), you might want to ask them to hum or chant or whisper sweet nothings. The passee, aside from worrying about being dropped, might also spend a lot of her time worrying, more rightfully, about being touched, as they say, "inappropriately." Again, to keep the game fun for everyone, you might need to spend some time focusing the passers' attention on how to keep the game fun, and help the passee feel safe.

There are many ways to play the game. You can play standing up or lying down. Lying down feels safer for everyone. And, since the passee knows that if the passers aren't taking appropriate care, she may very well land on their faces, there is an added sense of safety – at least for the person who most needs it.

You can pass big people, little people, people with disabilities, and they all get to feel loved, and so do you. All in all, at its best, an experience of a playful path.

Sensing and sensitivity are key to this kind of cooperation. They form the background assumptions for all cooperative games, but in games of the People Pass ilk they are more self-evident. For these games to be fun, players need to be sensitive to each other, and, especially when playing with strangers and/or teens, the people who are facilitating the game have to help make sure that that sensitivity is maintained throughout the game.

As, not necessarily, but often manifestly contrasted with crowdsurfing.

## *All games are cooperative*

Each game we described represents a particular type of cooperative game, some more profoundly cooperative than others. None of the games focus on winning or losing. In none of the games do people keep score. No one is ever out. The only reason to play them, the only reward, is fun, is having fun, together.

The fact is, every game is at some very basic level cooperative, whether you keep score or not. There are rules, conventions, understandings, agreements that have to be maintained throughout the game, or the game doesn't work, no matter who, if anyone, wins.

Many of the games I call "Playful" can also be called cooperative, others border on being competitive. The one thing that they all have in common is that no one keeps score, or if anyone does keep score, no one really cares. Because the one thing, the one goal that transcends all others is to have fun, together.

This is true of all the games described in this book, of all the games I advocate, teach, demonstrate. They are all for fun. They're all for having fun together. You can play anything for fun. You can play baseball, football, hockey, you can even wrestle for fun.

It's a different way of playing, apparently. But it's just as natural, just as satisfying as any other way to play – whether you play for score or for money or national standing. All this talk about cooperative games is useful, because it highlights a certain kind of game. But the truth is it doesn't matter what kind of game you're playing when you're playing for fun, together.



Kurt MacDonald

The fact is, every game is at some very basic level cooperative, whether you keep score or not. There are rules, conventions, understandings, agreements that have to be maintained throughout the game, or the game doesn't work, no matter who, if anyone, wins.

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## *On being IT*

Take tag, for example.

Depending on which version of tag you're playing (and they are legion, these tag versions), you either want to be IT, or you don't want to be IT.

When you're IT, and you don't want to be IT, you have to make someone else be IT, and the only way you can do that, is by, eponymously, tagging someone.

And then you're not IT, and someone else is, so you run away.

So the question, then, is "if tag is a game" (which it certainly is) "how do you win?"

And the answer?

Well, it seems you don't really quite exactly win. The game just goes on and on. You're either one of the many, running away from IT, or IT, running after the many.

Sure, when you're IT you can go after one or several people in particular, for whatever reason you can give your self: revenge, friendship, vindication. And if you manage to tag them, it's almost like winning. Except, when you succeed, all that happens is that person becomes IT, and they get their turn at revenge, or demonstration of friendship, or whatever. You still don't win. And neither do they. And when you're not IT you can look at every moment of your not-IT-ness as a personal victory. But, sooner or later, you'll be caught. And if you're not, it's almost like you lose, because the only real object of the game is the fun you have playing, and after a while, being not IT is just not fun enough.

If being IT is winning, then why are you trying so hard to make someone else IT? If being NOT-IT is losing, then why are you running away?

Because it's fun.

And if it's not fun enough because, for example, IT doesn't stay IT long enough, you make rules like "no tagging back." Or, if people are getting too tired or not tired enough you change the size of the play area, or you declare certain places "off limits" or "safe" or "home." You're not changing the game. It's still tag. But you're fine-tuning it, because it's yours, because it's for fun.

So many ways to play tag: freeze tag and circle tag and cat and mouse tag and ball tag and

hospital tag. You'd think there'd be a point to it, a way to keep score, to win.

Which reminds me...

## *Funny Games*

**“...for the truth will make you laugh”**

- the Oaqui

Football players don't laugh much. At least the professional ones don't. You could say the same thing about most of the people who play professional sports. Generally speaking, these people aren't playing for laughs. Nor can the way they are playing be characterized as “playful.”

The games that are most helpful for those of us who wish to travel a more playful path are the games that we play for fun. The games that make us laugh. The funny games.



## *Everybody's IT Freeze Tag*

So here's this game. It's a tag game. Except everybody's IT. Momentarily.

To start the game, you decide on where the boundaries are, because everybody has to stay inside of them. Then you spread out so there's ample running room inside of the boundaries. And then somebody says "start" (or something of that ilk). And, since everybody's IT, everybody runs after everybody else, tagging anybody.

If you get tagged, you're frozen. Just before you freeze, you kneel, or get on one knee, or sit down.

And you remain that way until the game is over, which is perfectly fine because the game takes maybe three minutes.

The last person standing is the winner. Except usually what that person does is start another round, as close to immediately after as immediately after can happen.

And if it takes too long, you make the boundaries smaller. And if it doesn't take long enough, you make them wider.

Round after round, whoopin' and hollerin' each other into exhaustion, and nobody really cares who wins because as long as you keep playing, everybody wins, because it's fun.

Which says something else about winning: just because somebody wins, it doesn't mean the game is over.



## *Hug Tag*

Somebody's IT. Maybe even several somebodies. Everyone else isn't. If you get tagged, then you're IT.

There are two ways to keep from getting tagged: run very, very fast for a very long time; or hug someone. Because this kind of tag is called Hug Tag. And as long as you're hugging someone, you're safe (if safety means that you can't get tagged).

Before you start playing, you can decide, together, how many people are IT and how many people you have to be hugging in order to stay, so to speak, safe.

It's fun to stay safe, because you get to hug and be hugged. Which makes you try to find the people you want to be hugging with, even if it's only for the moment. On the other hand, it's also fun to run around. So, after a while, your fun-focused players will stop hugging each other, just for the, well, fun of it.

People who are new to the game might miss that part – the “stop hugging when it stops being fun” part - because it's not a rule, as a rule, it's just what you do. So, if needed, you can make it a rule. Like “you can only stay hugging as long as you can sing a note without taking a breath.”

Sometimes you need rules like this. And this one is especially good, because it's kind of easy to cheat, if you have to. Especially if someone in your hugging group is singing really loudly.

O, yes, the hugging group, that's another rule you can make. You can decide how many people have to be hugging in order to attain the status of safehood. If all you need is one other person, it gets maybe a little too easy for the NOT-ITs to stay NOT-IT, and probably a little too, shall we say “challenging” for the IT(s). If there's a specific hug-number, then it's a little harder for the unhugging NOT-IT to find that specific number of fellow NOT-ITs. And when hugging, and reaching the agreed-upon limit of acceptable breath-duration, especially when a not-yet-hugging NOT-IT is breathing over your conceptual shoulders, the game breaks up into another moment of shared hysteria when everybody in the hug has to find another group. And if you make yet another rule stipulating that you can't hug someone you've just been hugging with, well then all the more merry mayhem.

None of these rules is essential to the game. Their only purpose is to keep the game fun. Usually, someone suggests a new rule, or a way to change an existing rule. And, if it's a well-timed suggestion, there's no further discussion, unless people feel it'd be more fun to talk about how to change the game than to continue playing it. Which might be the case, de-



pending on how tired everyone is.

Because the players decide which rules to change or add, and when, Hug Tag becomes a player-made game, even though it didn't start that way. Probably, the next time they play, they'll play the way they liked it best last time. And it'll stay that way, as long as it continues to be fun.

## *Roshambo*

Then there's Roshambo, for another example, or, as more commonly known, Rock, Paper, Scissors, a.k.a. Paper, Rock, Scissors, etc. It has nothing to do with Tag. But it tells us a little more about winning and losing.

Paper beats rock, rock beats scissors and scissors beats paper. You'd think that playing is all about beating, about choosing the symbol that beats the other guy's. So you play once. And it's over. And either you win or the other guy does. And then you can go on. Except that it's so quick, so decisive that you don't have enough time to feel the fun of it. So you play it again and again, keeping, more or less, score. Which turns out to be more fun, because then you think it's all about outsmarting, even though it probably isn't. You try to think like the other guy, or, thinking that the other guy is trying to think like you, you try to choose the one thing you wouldn't choose to do if it were you choosing. And on and on and over and over again – best two out of three, four out of seven, and, OK, five out of nine. And you'd think it's ultimately impossible to predict, given the circularity and infinity of the regression, until you meet someone who seems to win almost all the time.

And even though it's what they call a zero-sum, and if-somebody-wins-the-other-guy-loses, ultimately competitive kind of game – you are always agreeing, in a way, making sure that you manifest your choice at the same time, absolutely together; renegotiating how many times you have to play before you can decide anything about anyone, losing- or winning-wise.

It's not a win-and-it's-over kind of game. It's a play-again-and-again kind. It's not a win-because-I'm-smarter kind of winning, or win-because-I'm-better, but a win-because-I-know-you kind.

And what if you make it the objective to tie instead of to beat someone? What if every time you tie you hug each other, and every time you don't, you throw again? Same game, right? Still Rock-Scissors-Paper, yes?

And yes, you can make the game more complicated. There's Rock-Scissors-Paper-Lizard-Spock, for example. There's even a way to play Rock-Scissors-Paper in teams. Several ways.

## *El Hombre, El Tigre, Y El Fusil*

I first learned of this game from an organization called the Eastern Cooperative Recreation School<sup>xvi</sup>. It's a game of Rock-Scissors-Paper, for two teams. Each team acts as a single person. They meet, separately, and decide what symbol they want to display. In this case, they can choose to be "El Hombre" (the man), "El Tigre" (the tiger), or "El Fusil" (the gun). The gun shoots the tiger. The man controls the gun. And the Tiger kills the man. If they tie, neither team wins.

Much of the fun of the game comes from making the decision (secretly, attempting to out-guess the other team), acting it out (being the man, the tiger or the gun), and seeing which team won. The game should be played in several rounds.

As I continued to teach the game, I, of course, continued to modify it to make it into the kind of game that would give people access to the kind of fun I most wanted to share – infinitely playful, loving fun.

I started playing it with three teams instead of two. This way, there were more opportunities to be "strategic." It was less confrontational than the two-team version. And there were two ways to tie (if all teams chose the same symbol, or all teams chose a different symbol) – adding yet another opportunity for tension and laughter.

I then decided that instead of keeping score, the losing team (or teams) would lose a player to the winning team. So, the players changed teams, and allegiances as the game progressed, which invited them to identify with the entire community rather than any particular team, and also de-emphasized winning. Thus, the game of Panther-Person-Porcupine.

Next, I made it the rule that when all teams chose the same symbol, they would hug each other, patting each other on the backs and saying something endearing to each other. Again, emphasizing community, lightheartedness, and playfulness. If all three teams chose a different symbol, one player from each team would change teams.

Finally, instead of starting with predetermined symbols, I would invite the players to invite each symbol, its pose, and whatever noise it would make. This increased their sense of ownership over the game.

## *Rock-Scissors-Paper Tag*

Which brings us, inexorably, to Rock-Paper-Scissors Tag, core to the New Games games repertoire. It's tag. It's Rock-Scissors-Paper. But it's played between teams. And if you're caught you don't really lose. Instead, as in my version of Tiger, Man, Gun, you become part of the winning team. And, in theory, at least, it's not over until everyone has won.

So there are two teams. And three lines marked on the ground. One line is in the middle, the other lines are about, what, 20 feet on either side of the middle line. They could probably be only 10 feet apart. Or 50, if you wanted to run a lot.

The space behind the end lines (maybe another 5-10 feet wide) is Home for each team.

So, you go to your Home and you meet, you and your team, while the other people, and their team, are meeting in their Home. And together, quietly, so the other team can't hear, perhaps even surreptitiously, so the other team can't even see you, you decide what sign you're going to throw, all together, all the same sign, at the same time. And when you're ready, you march up to the center line and make noises of confidence and victory-preparedness.



Dylan McKenzie, NYU Game Center

When both teams assemble, they line up, facing each other. At a mutually agreed-upon signal, each team in unison and both teams together do their Rock-Paper-Scissors thing.

Yes, it's possible that both teams throw the same symbol. In that case, it's a tie. And when that happens, just for the, you know, fun of it, again as in my version of Tiger, Man, Gun, both teams hug, patting each other on the back while whispering sweet nothings.

On the other hand, if they don't tie, one of the teams wins. And everybody in that team, without further ado, races across the middle line and tries to tag as many people from the other team as they can while everybody in the losing team flees screamingly across their Home line.

As players take their positions in line, each player has the opportunity to decide precisely how close to the opposing player she wishes to stand. If it turns out that she a) throws the winning symbol, and b) is closer enough to the opposing player, she c) stands a very good chance to catch and tag the opponent before he can turn and flee. If, on the other hand, she a) throws the losing symbol, and b) stands far enough away from her opponent, she optimizes her chance to escape untagged. And then there's a) standing close to the opponent and b) throwing the losing symbol

There is just enough space for each player to determine how much risk to take. You can play safe and stand at a distance from your opponent. You can play aggressively, increasing the likelihood of your being able to tag the opponent, while, at the same time, if, by chance, you haven't thrown the winning symbol, increasing the likelihood that you'll get tagged.

At this moment, the moment immediately after the revelation of the chosen symbol, and just prior to the running and screaming, there ensues a chaos of such absurd proportion that something similar to hilarity ensues. The victors are often as surprised at their victory as the temporarily defeated are at their temporary defeat. Hence, for a brief moment, you find yourself running away, screaming fearfully, when you should be running towards, yelling menacingly.

As mentioned previously, anyone caught joins the winning team for the next round, so, like what's the deal? You lose, you win.

And on and on, decision-by-decision, the game continues until everyone is on the same side. As mentioned also previously, this end-state is theoretical. But it's a conceptually lovely end-state, this idea that we'd all ultimately end up where we started – all on the same side.

## *Something That Beats Something Else That Beats Something Else That Beats Something*

Yes, it's Panther, Person, Porcupine again. Only not.

You play it with as many people as you want to. I first played it with more than 100 people, but that's neither here nor there.

So, everybody stands up and gets in groups of three or more relatively immediately adjacent people. Together, they decide on three somethings. Each something makes a noise and a gesture (as in the aforementioned Panther, Person, Porcupine – but they can be anything, e.g.: flute, toaster, chicken coop). So, now that they've chosen their somethings and the gesture and sound for each, they decide what something beats what something else, as in the more traditional game of Scissors/Paper/Rock (a.k.a. Rock/Paper/Scissors).

They are then ready to play the game. First, they meet (in the case of more than two players) and decide what they will be. Then they count off and simultaneously manifest their choices. If they tie, they hug and pat each other on the backs making sounds of "isn't that sweet."

And then they play again.

In the case of more than two teams, you have yet another opportunity to hug and make sweet sounds when everyone happens to choose the same or different something to be.

Many and multiple are the delights of this variation of the variation. It's fun. You can keep score, but it's basically pointless. It's like something else.

## *Of Spoons And War*

After dinner with my son and his wife and me and mine and my daughter and her then candidate...

It started out as the straightforward game of Spoons.

You know the straightforward game of spoons?

You place a bunch of spoons in the center of the table (ofttimes one fewer spoons than spoon-grabbers) arranging them in easy-grabbing distance from any player. You deal everybody four cards. And then the dealer starts pulling cards from the deck, one at a time. Whatever card the dealer doesn't want is passed to the next player, and the next. Each player taking and discarding, always leaving only four cards in their hand. As soon as someone gets four-of-a-kind, that person, and everyone else, grabs a spoon. Until then, while everybody's try to collect four cards of the same kind, what you really try to do is to remember to grab a spoon when it's spoon-grabbing time, because the only way to lose is if you don't have a spoon, and there's no particular way to win, actually.

Well, it wasn't that straightforward of a Spoons game, actually. We didn't have any cards. So we had to use rummy tiles instead. You know rummy tiles. Like playing cards morphed into mah-johg tiles, two decks of cards, actually.

And it all turned out to be at least as amusing as if we had been playing with cards, passing and arranging tiles and trying to keep track of the ones going out and the ones coming in, and then the suddenly well-timed spoon-grab. All very jolly.

For a while. Several rounds, at least.

And then for some reason we men divided the tiles into three piles. And each of us, as if in response to a genetically cellular call, began to build forts out of our tiles. We men, that is. As our forts got more intricate, the women became more otherly engaged.

And just as our forts were near completion, we suddenly knew exactly what to do with the remaining tiles: Slide them into each other's forts. Carom loose tiles into the enemy's towers. And, when all else finally fails, launch them. Toss them. Drop them. Catapult them.

Oh, we learned a lot about fort construction that evening. The tall and the imaginative do not survive. Only the short, the thick, the ugly.

And when those fail, grab as many tiles as you can. And then grab each other's. Continue until there are no free tiles. And then build new forts, under the table, behind chairs, in the living room. And don't worry. Nobody really dies from laughing.



## *Prui?*

I introduced this game to the New Games Foundation back in the 70s. It rapidly became part of the New Games repertoire and was featured in the first *New Games Book*. I thought I found it in a book on children's games around the world. I haven't been able to find it since. It might have been transmitted to me by the great Prui, him- or herself.

Here's how to play:

Clear the dance floor (living room, kitchen, back yard). Get more or less everyone together. (For any game to be fun, participation has to be optional).

When the mass is about as critical as it will get, choose someone to start the game. Everyone closes their eyes and starts milling around. In the mean time, the game starter secretly appoints someone to be Prui.



Dylan McKenzie, NYU Game Center

When people bump into each other, they shake hands, while saying “Pru” (pronounced “proo-ee”). If the person they encounter is not Pru, they each go off to find someone else. On the other hand (as it were) when someone bumps into the actual, pre-appointed Pru, shakes hands and says pru, the Pru shakes hands, doesn’t say anything, and doesn’t let go.

Now both people are Pru, remaining Pru until the end of the game. If either of them is encountered by anyone else, more people are added to the collective Pru. The game continues until more or less everyone has become Pru. Then, at a signal from the pre-selected Pru appointer (who has her eyes open during the game so she can help steer people away from miscellaneous environmental hazards) lets people know that they can at last open their eyes.

There are some exceptionally fun moments as more and more people feel their way towards Pruness. It gets quieter and quieter. The plaintive sounds of the unPrued few mingling with the invisibly giggling many.

This is a light-hearted, and loving game that you can play several times during the evening, and it will get better each time.

Like all good games, it is, at its core, profound. Wandering around in the dark, seeking the touch of another human being, joining, being joined, becoming one, waiting in silence for those who are still lost to find you. Waiting for the silence of oneness, completion, peace. A life’s journey, which, should it ever end, ends in laughter.

May we each find the Pru!

## *A What?*

The game A What is traditionally played as follows:

Players are sitting in a circle. One player, who has two objects that she has named, starts the game. She passes one object to the left, engaging in the traditional “a what” exchange.

Player A turns to player B and says “I give you a “frabjous” (or whatever else player A decided to call one of her objects). Player B then turns back to player A, hands the frabjous back, and says “a what?” Player A then returns the frabjous back to B and again says “a frabjous.” Upon which B takes the object from A, saying “O, a frabjous!”

B then turns to C, saying “I give you a frabjous. C then turns to B and asks “a what?”

And B, as if struck by sudden amnesia, passes the frabjous back to A, and asks “a what?”

A, turning B-wards, says, once again, “a frabjous.” B, now reminded, turns C-wards, and says “a frabjous.” C, taking the frabjous from B, then says “O, a frabjous.”

C now turns to D, handing D the frabjous, saying “I give you a frabjous.” D, of course, turns back to C, and asks “a what?” C then hands the frabjous back to B, again asking “a what?” B then gives the frabjous to A, also with the “a what” question. A turns to B, returning the frabjous to B, saying “a frabjous” B then to C, also with the frabjous. D then exclaims “O, a frabjous!” And then turns to E, saying “I give you a frabjous.”

Each time the frabjous is passed, the “a what” has to go all the way back to the person who named the object, and all the way back to the person who is now receiving the object. Once the first object has been started, the object-originating player launches the second object in the opposite direction. All is orderly, in a playful kind of way, until one player gets both objects, and much hilarity ensues. When I played it in Israel, in Hebrew, the frabjous became a “Me” (which, in Hebrew, means “who”), the second object “Moo,” and the Hebrew word for “what” just happened to be Ma - creating a “Me, Moo, Ma” kind of thing) and even more madness ensued.

There is, however, another A What. This one even sillier and, if possible, more fun. In this version, nobody gets laughed at/with because they find themselves confused and bemused. Instead, everyone is bemused and confused at the same time.

Again, everybody sits in a circle. This time, they each have a thing in their hand (anything, really: a shoe, a set of keys, a piece of candy) and have given their thing a name (any name,

really: a Fred, a Pizza, a Furblik).

When the game starts, everyone turns to the person on their right, and says “I give you a...” (“...” being the name they decided to give their thing).

For example, let’s call one person “Person Number One” and the person to Person Number One’s right “Person Number Two.” And let’s say that Person Number One has named her thing “Furblik” and Person Number Two has named his thing “Gumdrop.”

Person #1 simply turns to person #2 and says “I give you a Furblik,” while, at the same time, Person #2 has turned to the person on his right, saying “I give you a Gumdrop,” while #3 is telling #4 “I give you a Schnitzel,” and on and on.

If you think about, it would seem that if everybody is so focused on telling somebody else what their thing is called, nobody would be able to hear what anybody is telling them. And you’d be almost exactly right.

Which almost explains why everyone then turns back to the person on their left, and says “a what?” (Person #3 saying “a what” to person #2 who is saying “a what” to Person #1). And then, almost immediately, the people who named the thing then turn back to the people on their right and say: “a “...” (Our friend #1 saying “a Furblik” to #2 while #2 is saying Gumdrop to #3 who is saying Schnitzel to #4 who is saying something else to #5 and on and on and also on).

This is repeated three times, and on the third time, everyone finally gives their thing to the people on the right, who must, upon receiving the thing, even though in all likelihood they have close to no idea what anyone said to anyone, say “Oh, a ...!” (the “...” being whatever they think they actually heard the thing being called).

The goal, purportedly, is to pass all the objects completely around the circle, without changing the name originally ascribed to them. The actuality is that it is nothing short of miraculous when any of the objects retain their name.

There is a recommended technique. If you were, for the sake of argument, person #2, and were addressing person #3, telling that person what your what is called, you would be, at the same time, leaning towards person #1, hoping that, despite the relative impossibility of it all, you might actually, by the third time, have heard what that person said.

These are both wonderful games. Wonderfully, deeply fun. Genuinely funny. But as funny as they are, as much laughter as they produce, there’s something deeply familiar here, and often not so funny. Something that reaches into the heart of communication, education, training.

In the first version, there's this guy with the What. The rules stipulate that only the What guy really knows what's What. You have to keep on referring back to him. And if that's not confusing enough, the What guy's talking about two completely different Whats. And if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you have too much information to process, you don't know which way to go, which person to say What to.

This is very familiar. Familiar to anyone in the clergy, or the pews, the office or the classroom. Despite the efforts of the establishment, the teaching gets separated from the teacher, the vision gets separated, the spirit gets separated, the meaning separated, and all that is left is confusion. Because we're just playing, the confusion is what makes it so much fun. When we're not playing, it's not so much.

In the second, everyone has a What, everyone's trying to tell the next guy what to call the What, except that What was given to them by someone else who was trying, at the same time she was telling you about the What she was giving you, to figure out what the What she was getting from the other person was supposed to be called.

I think they call this crowdsourcing.

## *The fun also rises*

Fun is our most important product. Well, maybe not our most important. But the pursuit of fun, and the invention of new ways to have it, has been something we've done on a personal, family, tribal and national level throughout our history (and pre-history, probably, too).

Since Greece and Rome, sports have reflected the nations that nurture them. Wrestling, track and field, baseball, football, rugby, tennis, golf, competitive sailing and the like model societal norms, holding the promise of great wealth, honors, and dominance for the fortunate few. Despite the ubiquity of basketball courts, football and baseball fields, even in the poorest neighborhoods, and the promise that even the poorest can become superstars, the truth is what it has been for practically ever – spectators vastly outnumber players.

The parallels between sports, government, military and banking are too many to disassociate one from the other. All, despite claims of inclusivity, are played and officiated by an elite minority. Spectators and citizens have, for the most part, only indirect influence on outcomes, and even less of the benefits.

In the early 70s, I had the privilege to be part of a “movement” called “New Games.” It was started by a few people who were, at the time, the seeds of what became, for at least two decades, a new culture (notably, Stewart Brand, editor of *The Whole Earth Catalog* and George Leonard, author of *The Ultimate Athlete*) – one that manifested itself through public celebrations of community. We played games like the Lap Game, where thousands of people stood in a giant circle, turned 90-degrees, and sat on each other's laps, and People Pass where people lovingly carried each other from one end of the line to the other. Or Knots, where people made a knot out of each other's joined hands, and tried to figure out how to untie themselves.

The New Games Tournaments were playful, creative and inclusive, where the only rules were “play fair, play hard, nobody hurt.” And, as such, they were also profoundly political. They manifested an alternative that was diametrically opposed to the dominant culture. There were no spectators, only players. There were many games, played simultaneously, that anybody could join or quit, and no one game or player was any more important than any other. There was music and art and invitations to play at any level for any age with any ability.

The New Games movement eventually spread across the globe. It changed, adapted, and its influence can still be found in youth programs throughout the world. For these children, New Games is a collection of fun activities that make them feel better about themselves and each other.



For much of contemporary culture, the New Games message remains more a reminder than an influencer – a moving, joyful reminder of what we are capable of, and what we have forgotten. The closest equivalent we have to the gentle delight of People Pass is the chaotic and often dangerous frenzy of Crowd Surfing. Fortunately, there are those who are still listening to the New Games message, and even more fortunately, some of those who are listening are in positions of cultural influence.

One such group has led to the creation and presentation of what has become known as “pervasive games” – play events that bridge virtual and physical realities, that build the groundwork for the emergence of play communities without boundaries: political, geographical, intellectual, economic, social, and physical.

Pervasive games build on the emergence of the iGeneration – of whole connected cultures, where people in buses and on trains, in public squares and office lobbies and hallways, engage with their personal, invisible community, pausing to take a photo and mark their physical trail in a boundless virtual playground. Pervasive games engage participants in computer augmented physical encounters that are dominated, not by technology, but by the spirit of fun and community.

Others are performance artists, using technology to coordinate and direct what has become called “flash mobs,” public celebrations of playful creativity in public spaces. Dances, operas, parades in grocery stores and train stations, shopping malls and subways. Like New Games, they are creating events that dissolve the distance between public and performer, providing intimacy and access, sharing delight for delight’s sake.

Still others are exploring the iPad and iPod as a medium for new forms of interpersonal play. Fingle<sup>xvii</sup> for example, is a kind of Twister game for fingers played on the iPad. Or Johann Sebastian Joust<sup>xviii</sup> a game demonstrating a computer/human interface that engages whole-body, social interaction.

Finding precedents in what we once called “New Games,” people are creating Newer Games, newer and ever more relevant manifestations of what New Games, and its many precedents, also renewed: the spirit of play, the celebration of community, the restoration of faith in our common humanity.

My point? The deep fun, the real fun, the renewing fun, the fun that makes us new to our selves and each other, the fun that can become for us a spiritual path - it’s always there, not, maybe, mainstream, but there in the tributaries, near the edges, off the beaten path, in the liminal spaces between, now in the shadows, now, briefly, in the light, but always near, and with the dawning of each new day, the fun also rises.





Play





## *Play*

**“Play is the bridge between  
mastery and mystery  
chaos and control  
the foolishly brave and the bravely foolish.”**

*- the Oaqui*

There are two kinds of Childhood Truths, and one of them is eternally true, true as any other kind of truth, adult or divine. It's that kind, the childhood kind that is true forever, that forms the basis for a playful path.

It's during childhood that we learn what fun is for and games are about. It's during childhood that we follow a playful path whenever we are allowed to, without having achieved professionalism, or certifiability, or even permission. It's what we do when we don't hurt. When we're not crying. When we feel so good that we giggle.

It's also during childhood that we contact and develop our “Inner Adults” – making promises, pretending we're not playing. And as we got to grow up and up, we got better and better at this dialogue, until everyone believes it of us, almost all the time, and eventually, we believe it, believe we're not playing, too. And that's the second kind. The kind that leads us to believe that all those truths we discovered in play have nothing any more at all to do with us.

So I, as an adult, have become a teacher of the childhood truth of the first kind - the kind that believes in play. And day by day my commitment to teaching a playful path grows stronger, simply because we have so much to benefit from playfulness, at this particular time in our history, now that we are all so officially grown.

The path is playful, the Player sometimes not so much.

The other day I found my self writing about what it means to follow a playful path. I was working on the PR piece, listing all the “callings” that could

benefit from following such a path – you know: the playful teacher, the playful architect, the playful gardener, the playful therapist. And then I thought of firefighters, and then of the police and military, and then of doctors and dentists. And I wasn't so sure I wanted them to be following this playful path.

Playful Firefighters?

On the other hand, I spent a week with firefighters exploring a playful path, and we reached genuine heights of playfulness, and we saw that it was very good.

Because, I guess, there's so much more to firefighting than holding down a high-pressure hose. There's living together and working together and the profound joy of risking together and winning together.

And then I realized that it's the path that is playful, not necessarily the player. That to stay on a playful path, you merely have to play, fully.

## *The Sense of Play*

The sense of play is a sense in every sense of the word. It is a sense, like sight is a sense, like hearing, like touch. If we tried to make a list of all the things we play and play with, the list would probably be as long as a list of all the smells, all the sounds, all things we touch, taste, feel, see.

We play with our bodies, we play with ideas, we play with toys, we play with pets, we play with each other, we play games.

Play brings us into the world. Play brings us the world.

Play connects us. It is what we do to connect, to relate to each other, to build relationships, to strengthen the connections between us, to create community. Our understanding of each other, the love between us, grows deeper when we play together.

Play helps us understand how things work, how we can work with things.

At play, we create new things, new ideas – even when we don't speak the same language, don't come from the same neighborhoods, don't have the same abilities, aren't the same age, same family, same color, same gender, don't think the same, don't believe the same, don't act the same, don't wear the same uniform.

Because we can play we can imagine, we can pretend, we can make each other laugh. Because we can play we can make art, dance, song, music, we can make up stories, make jokes, music, songs, peace.

In play we explore, experiment, examine, express our very selves, we strengthen our bodies, our minds, our understanding of our changing selves, our changing relationships, our deepening love. Playing, we change, adapt to change, create change.

I rhetoricize:

Without this sense, the sense of play, what would we be? Would we be less than our selves? Other? Would we lose our selves, each other? Would it would be like being blind, deaf, multiply disabled? Would we become alienated, isolated? Would we be able to learn, to love, to raise our children, to appreciate them, to savor our lives, to delight in the world? Would we make our gardens beautiful? Would we be at war, forever? Without this sense would we find life, itself, senseless?



## *Life is play*

We know that play is fun. And for some of us, that's all the purpose we need. But, as many scholars, theorists, psychologists, anthropologists and the like have noted – play seems to be beneficial, not just for the individual player, but for the entire species.

Brian Sutton-Smith has used the term “adaptive potentiation” to describe the value of play from an evolutionary perspective (he wrote about it most recently in his book *The Ambiguity of Play*<sup>xix</sup>). Playing seems to nurture the development of a whole vocabulary of skills and arts and social forms. Many of these have no immediate value, neither to the survival of the player, nor of the species. But some do. Rock throwing, for example. Juggling, maybe not so much. Brian's example: a guy who's good at throwing a baseball would be equally good at throwing a hand grenade.

OK, this is just me thinking, and I'm not sure how I feel about all this, speaking of ambiguity and things, but it seems to me that this idea of adaptive potentiation is manifest in our very genes. Here, let me quote from a scholarly article on variation and adaptation.<sup>xx</sup>

“Natural selection does not produce uniformity or perfection. Instead, it generates variability that persists when it helps a species to adapt to, and thrive in, its environment. It acts on phenotypes, not on genotypes, and it is not a process that always discards individual genes in favor of others that might produce traits better suited for survival.”

See. Variability. Adaptive potentiation in action. It's like genetic. Like these guys say when talking about, forgive me, cancer:

“When cells in our body change their genome and develop into cancer, we blame it on genome instability. When novel species conquer inhospitable environments, we credit it to genome evolution. From a cellular perspective, however, both processes are outcomes of the same fundamental biological properties-genome and pathway plasticity and the natural selection of cells that escape death and acquire growth advantages. Unraveling the consequences of genome plasticity at a cellular level is not only central to the understanding of species evolution but also crucial to deciphering important cell biological problems, such as how cancer cells emerge and how pathogens develop drug resistance.”<sup>xxi</sup>

So, what I seem to be conjecturing here is that this instability, this variability built in to the very structure of the genome, this rampant proliferation of alternatives, is the very essence of

play. It's what we do when we pretend, imagine, create, play around. We create alternatives. We generate variability. Not out of necessity. Out of whim. We proliferate games and stunts and skills no one needs. Not out of the need to adapt to change. But rather out of the need for fun. And if play is all about adaptive potentiation, and, at least from the perspective of cancer cells and the survival and evolution of our species, and probably every species, variability is what makes the whole thing work – then all of it is play. All of it. Play is in our very blood. Literally. All of it, of life is play. At its most fundamental level. At the smallest and highest expression of its evolution.

## *Master players*

Many people have come into my life, played with me, and left me happier, healthier and wiser.

There's Bill Doran:

There we were, up in the barn, playing with our brand new, thoroughly researched, ultimate ping pong table. That barn was the center of what we were calling The Games Preserve. We wanted to fill it with not only every game on the planet, but the very finest manifestation of each. And Bill chose that particular table, and those particular paddles and balls, and installed that particular kind of lighting for precisely that reason. It was not just a ping pong table. It was table tennis.

Bill knew that I couldn't really play ping pong. And I knew that he could really, really play. And because we wanted to play together, we just more or less volleyed (he more, me less). After a while, Bill suggested that I just try to hold my paddle still enough so that he could get the ball to hit it. Apparently, that was more than challenge enough for him. And for me, every time the ball actually crossed the net, hit my paddle, and got back to Bill was sheer magic. After a while, we managed to get an actual volley going, Bill exercising the depth and fullness of his ping pongly skills, me magically holding my paddle where it needed to be. And after a longer while, we got a very, very long volley going. And during that volley, the ball seemed to take on its own, almost internal light, as if it were inhabited by our spirits, Bill and mine, combined. And it was, for an instant, as if we were seeing God. Honest. When we left the barn, we were like two Buddhist monks having just achieved enlightenment.

Then there's Mick Greene, one of the two playful brains behind Streetplay.

*<http://www.streetplay.com/>*

I had led a brief session of tabletop golf for about 150 teen-agers and associated adults. For some reason, it just didn't work. (These kinds of sessions, the ones that don't work, have proven very formative for me, in hindsight. Unfortunately, when I receive that particular gift, I am generally too shaken to acknowledge how much I have profited from it, even when I do get paid.) I had invited Mick to come see me at play. And, clearly, what happened was not what I had wanted to share with him, or anyone. I looked at Mick. He at me. And the next thing I knew we were walking out of the conference room, meandering into the parking lot. We didn't talk much. He understood that I needed quiet and space. As it happened, the parking lot was almost empty.

As we were walking across the clearly delineated parking spaces, Mick produced one of his



favorite therapeutic devices – a spaldeen. “Hey, Bern,” said he to me, “ever play fivebox<sup>xxii</sup>?” I didn’t remember the game. And my interest was significantly piqued. So we started playing. Just like that. We stood five parking spaces apart. He bounced the ball into the space closest to me. And I tried to catch it. Only he tried to throw it so I could catch it. Then I did the same for him.

It was another ping pong-like experience for me, given the difference between skill sets – he clearly proficient, I vividly not. And, like my friend Bill, Mick managed to get the ball to bounce right into my hand. Having accomplished that, it was my turn to throw into the space two spaces in front of him. Eventually, I found my self playing at a level that appeared to me as something approximating competence. And the more we played, the more distant the disappointment of that tabletop golf game became, and the closer Mick and I came together, and the more vivid the fun.

Then there are kids. Not all kids, but some certain kids who seem to understand exactly what they need to do to keep other kids, and even adults, in play.

In all cases, there’s a sensitivity, an empathic connection, a deep understanding of the game, and, even more profoundly, of the connection between players. In every instance, there’s a willingness to adapt the game to the players – to let go of things like having to win, having to demonstrate your competence, having to keep to the rules – so they can hold on to the spirit of play, share in the playfulness of the spirit.

I’ve decided to call people like Bill and Mick “master players.” They are skilled in the game, and they understand, at a deeper level, that a game is for keeping each other in play.

I’m concluding that this idea, this term “master player,” is a very useful one for us to share. And I further conclude that you, your self, could be such a master player, or have in any event played with one or several such. And that you also realize how valuable it might be to think even more about the healing value of being such a person, or playing with such a person, or child, or pet.

## *Play and getting paid to play*

### **On getting to play**

Play makes things new. Even the oldest games, even the most rule-bound, traditional, ancientest of games are made new again each time they are played. Otherwise, they wouldn't be fun.

They're made new by the way in which they're played, by the individual and collective genius of the players. In sports, it's a new strategy, or even better, a new expression of physical excellence that renews the game.

But the newness is limited, significant only to the professional player and dedicated fan. New enough to sometimes make the game spectacular, but not new enough to go beyond spectacle.

Even New Games (those described in the New Games books and carried forward by teachers of New Games) are not by themselves really New enough. Alternatives, definitely. And joyful ones at that. But not new enough to redefine, undefine the players. Not new enough to bring us to the edge of individuality, to cross the boundaries of personhood. Not new enough to touch the mystery, to reach through to the ridiculousness of all those things that separate us in the first place, and the second.

Because, no matter how new the game, a game can be no more than an invitation to play. It's not the game itself, it's play that renews us. Play without goals, rules, reasons. Play per se.

And the quality of the game, the well-playedness of it all, frequently has little to do with the game itself, little to do with the goodness of the players themselves, and everything to do with the unqualified goodness of being in play.

Play is a taste of health. A momentary engagement in the natural exuberance, exhilaration, ebullience of life at its liveliest. An affirmation of our boundless power, limitless capacities.

And when play is especially good, transcendentally, transformationally good, it's because of the people with whom we are at play, in play. The community of players. The people with whom we play community. The people with whom, when we are at one with our selves, we are at one.

## ***On getting paid to play***

It has always been my personal goal to get paid to play. I think that money is in fact the most genuine form of recognition our culture has to offer, that volunteerism results most often in token recognition, leading ultimately to token efforts. Systemically speaking.

I think that most of us who are similarly driven by our faith in fun are similarly driven, similarly aware that most organizations seem to systemically disregard the singular importance of joyful work.

Yes, yes, yes, the rewards of trust and friendship are without measure, and cannot be equated to the crass material joys of financial reward. And yet, as I go about marketing my various consultancies, I find my self, despite my occasional financial successes, despite the effectiveness of my trust-building team-building efforts, saddened, deeply, by the knowledge that the very system that is rewarding me for my playfulness is systemically punishing others for theirs.

It is precisely because of our systemic lack of recognition for the value and contribution of play that I am so intrigued by the possibility that there be extrinsic recognition and support for having fun. It is indeed often painfully confusing to be materially rewarded for what is already spiritually rewarding. I have often written about the insidious nature of trophies and prizes, and their profoundly negative impact on play and spontaneity. But what I am referring to here is my observation that we have built a system that rewards people for doing what they don't like doing, and that only gives passing recognition to any connection between enjoyment and productivity.

My quest here is for a system that recognizes and supports intrinsic reward. Recognizes it by providing the conditions for playful interaction, supports it by providing a reasonable salary for the fruits of those interactions.

Far too few of us are actually getting paid to play. Far too many of us are getting rewarded for joyless, self- and other-destructive "work."

Where are there systems of reward that are effective in recognizing and supporting the productive power of play? What systems reach beyond the fortunate few to create a generalized state of affirmation of personal happiness?

If we can find no precedent, may we be able to create our own.

## *Playing like a grownup*

You know people who, when talking about play and playfulness, seem to always hark back to childhood and children's play and the endlessly joy-filled days we gloried therein?

I find my self spending a lot of time reminding those very people of the kinds of fun that our inner-child couldn't have when we were children, simply because we didn't know enough, we hadn't seen enough, we hadn't brought our own children into the world, we hadn't learned enough, experienced enough, discovered enough of our strengths, loved as strongly, worked as passionately.

Sure, we can play the same kinds of games we played when we were children, but experiencing those same games as adults, weaving them into the context of what we have since learned and experienced and dreamed, the games become something else, we become something more. We care for each other differently. We appreciate each other differently. We play with each other differently.

When we were children, we could only play as children. We couldn't really choose to be childlike, to be playful, to have fun, because it was what we did whenever we could, with or without permission or even intention. We didn't even know, let alone think of what we were doing as being particularly playful. But as adults, given the opportunity, finding the permission to come out and play together – we can bring all those years of power, experience, compassion, all those competencies and strengths, all the stories and histories, all our sophistication and post-pubescent powers into play. We can release the inner-adult. We can set it free to weave its majestically playful path into the fabric of the daily game.

## *The play between*

I watched my son-in-law play with my grandchildren, wrestle with my grandchildren. And he, like a truly professional wrestler, filled with feigned fury, holding them all the while lightly, keeping them safe in his strong arms, always leaving them room.

This how I like to play with everything, with everyone. Leaving room. Leaving play between us. Play in the touch, in the reach. Connecting loosely, holding loosely. Because it is the play that we leave between each other, the play between, that the truth of us reveals itself to us. Not in the holding. Not in the letting go. But in the keeping safe.

It's a fine art, this playing between.

Out for a walk, you meet a stranger: a mother, wheeling a baby carriage. And because you are who you are, you want to taste that love, bless that love. So you say something light, something kind, something about the innocent beauty of the very young. You say it in such a way so there's room between you – room for the love to show itself, share itself, make itself felt. Room for the safety to be sensed. Room to hold closely. Room to let go. Room to let in the light.

And in that safe, protected space between you, the play between you takes place. Facing together the fragile, ephemeral, intricate complexity of a new human life, you shape and share a moment of awe. And then you walk on.

Of all the spaces in which we find each other, this space, the space between, the moment lightly held, where we face each other freely, is where the play is deepest. And when we turn away, as we must, the sense of play, of lightly held love, holds us lightly, releases us, lightly.

This is the way we hold each other in the play between us, like the violinist holds her bow, like the strings release their sound, lightly.

## *Innocent intimacy*

I'm especially interested in the innocent, intimate, safe, funny, profound kind of fun that we can achieve as adults. Unlike the innocence of childhood, this innocent, adult fun is based not on ignorance, but on informed openness. It's an intimacy that goes beyond sexuality to create moments of physical, emotional and spiritual union that make us larger than life. The kind of intimacy that is built on trust, respect, on our abilities to keep each other safe, to make each other laugh, to hold each other close, to touch each other gently deep.

## *Play, laughter, health and happiness*

In the process of growing up, most people lose touch with the sources of their personal power. Those sources: play and laughter, especially when they are whole-hearted, whole-minded, whole-bodied. When people play and laugh, and play and laugh fully, and especially when they play and laugh playfully, they are engaged, involved, in charge.

That's it. That's all you need to know. As long as you are playing playfully and laughing playfully, a playful path is more likely than not to be the path you're on. And as long as you stay on a playful path, you make even the daily game more fun.

That's the thing about a playful path. As soon as you stop playing, or stop laughing fully, or stop playing playfully, suddenly you're somewhere else, on some other kind of path, a path that is most definitely not a playful one and ultimately not particularly fun.

There's a direct connection between the experiences of alienation and stress and the amount of enjoyment people have. Simply put, the more alienated and stressed people are, the less fun they seem to be having, the less playful they seem to be.

Whoever chooses to respond playfully can be said to be a "traveler on a playful path" – someone making, having and being fun.

What is odd, especially to those of us who have, from time to time, walked that very same playful path to which I herein allude, is that people would choose any other way to experience the world. Why would you not want to follow a playful path? What other path is better designed to take you to happiness? What more reliable guide to happiness than fun and creativity, spontaneity and responsiveness, laughter and playfulness?

### **Laughter**

It seems to me that the whole idea of "laughing for no reason"<sup>xxiii</sup> and all the documented good that comes from doing just that, is exactly that – an invitation to return to a playful path.

I have one more such invitation. Today, I'm calling it "playing for no reason." Because, like what happens when we laugh for no reason, when we play for no reason we are reminded of how easy it can be for us to bring a new level of vitality to our selves and each other, to our significant others and all they signify, to those we care for and care for us.

Playing for no reason, playing what we're calling "Playful games," we rediscover:

- the art and science of fun
- how we can make things more fun for our selves, and everyone around us

Playing and laughing together, especially when we play and laugh in public, for no reason, is a profound, and, oddly enough, political act.

Political, because when we play or dance or just laugh in public, people think there's something wrong with us. It's rude, they think. Childish. A disturbance of the peace.

Normally, they'd be right. Except now. Now, the peace has been deeply disturbed – everywhere, globally. And what those grown-ups are doing, playing, dancing, laughing in public is not an act of childish discourtesy, but a political act – a declaration of freedom, a demonstration that we are not terrorized, that terror has not won.

A Frisbee, in the hands of people in business dress in a public park, is a weapon against fear. A basketball dribbled along a downtown sidewalk, is a guided missile aimed at the heart of war. Playing with a yo-yo, a top, a kite, a loop of yarn in a game of cats' cradle, all and each a victory against intimidation. Playing openly, in places of business, in places where we gather to eat or travel or wait, is a gift of hope, an invitation to sanity in a time when we are on the brink of global madness.

Yes, I admit, I am a professional advocate of public frolic. I am a teacher in the art of fun. I hawk my playful wares every time I get a chance, with every audience I can gather.

But this is a unique moment in our evolution. America is no longer bounded by its boundaries. We are tied into a network of terror that crosses national divisions with such consummate ease that we are as unsafe in our office towers as Israelis in a supermarket. We have been told that we are at some kind of war against some kind of terror. We are cautioned, daily, that none of us is safe. We have to protect the peace.

And I believe that we have far more powerful weapons than any military solution can offer us. And I believe that those weapons can be found in any neighborhood playground or toy store.

Public play and laughter are political acts, declarations that fear and terrorism have not won. Incontrovertible evidence that there is hope.

## **Health**

Playfulness is one of the signs scientists look for when trying to determine the health of a herd of animals. The healthier the animals and the safer the herd, the more they play.



## *Playfulness, fun and happiness*

As far as I understand playfulness (not far enough, yet, not far enough by far), it has something to do with being open, responsive, yielding to the moment, catching hold and letting go. You might not be playing at the moment, but you are willing to play, at the drop of a hat, the bounce of a ball, the wag of a tail. You are open to any opportunity. You are loose. Responsive. Present.

You have to be present to enjoy the sunrise, to delight in the light of your child's delight, because otherwise you simply aren't there to catch it. It goes by you as if it and you aren't even there.

Playfulness means presence, but not just presence. Responsiveness, but not just responsiveness. Presence and responsiveness, lightness and attentiveness, improvisation and creativity, a willingness to let go and become part.

We are surrounded, constantly, by invitations to fun, to play, to joy. There's nothing hard about finding fun. The hard thing is being present for it, the hard thing is recognizing it, the hard thing is accepting the invitation, even when you're the one that's doing the inviting.

When you are playful, you're like that. You see fun everywhere. Not just inside, but everywhere. You see the opportunity. And you take it. You see possibility. And you acknowledge it.

You definitely don't have to be playful to enjoy the sunrise or your baby's first smile. But if you are, chances are you'll see it when it happens.

I also have been known to quote the Oaqui saying "a playful path is the shortest road to happiness." I quote that because that particular path, the playful one, takes you to where the fun is. And if you are there, with the fun, the sheer fun of it all, well then, there, too, is happiness.

The same is true of the human herd. Especially herds of children. As long as the kids are healthy and feeling safe, left to their own resources, play is the thing they do.

Adults of the herd play less, at least observably, because for the most part they are not as healthy and definitely not as safe as they were when they were children. And when they are being playful, they tend to feel healthier, safer, almost like they did when they were kids, and maybe even better. Simply by playing, they reclaim their health, their community, their well-being, the energy of their youth.

Adult human beings are different than the adults of any other species I can think of, in that they can choose to be playful, even when they don't feel safe or particularly good.

## **Happiness**

Happiness happens

Like rain happens. And the tide happens.

Happiness has little to do with you or me or my thoughts or your thoughts or anything we can do about them. And the only way we have to find happiness requires us to be there when it happens. Fully present and at our best.

The more we laugh, the more playful we become, the more likely it is that we're present enough to recognize happiness.

The more fun we have the more likely that we'll embrace happiness.

The more profoundly playful, the more deeply fun, the more thoroughly we laugh, the more likely we are to be fully there, fully at our best, so happiness happens with us.

Play and laughter are the gateways to health and happiness. As my friend Dr. Brian Sutton-Smith, Defender of the Playful, notes, the opposite of play is not work, it's depression.

Playing together, we discover trust. Laughing together, we discover harmony. Through play and laughter we transcend tragedy, we challenge our physical limits, we celebrate health, we create community, we redefine the daily game.

## *Play and love*

The only time we can truly play together is when we play together as equals. What especially interests me is that we can do this even though we are not equal at all. When the old are playing with the young, the abled with the disabled, the expert with the novice, the human with the animal – as long as we share the same rules, as long as we can somehow agree that we will treat each other fairly, that, despite any “real” differences, we will not allow the inequalities to surface; we can play as if there were nothing dividing us, nothing separating, nothing differentiating.

When we are playing together, despite our differences, we celebrate a transcendent sameness, a unity that underlines the illusion of our separateness. You could call this an act of love – an enacted love that lets us keep the game going. Many acts of love, in fact, many acts of compassion, caring, trust, assurance.

This is the kind of play that takes place between all kinds of lovers: parent and child, between the older and younger, between you and your pets, between animals of different species. And it seems to me that it is this kind of play that has been the center of my awakening, for all these 45 years I’ve been playing and talking about playing; this kind of loving fun, this form of play that is, in its very essence, love.

It doesn’t seem to matter what kind of game we’re playing – competitive, cooperative, planned, spontaneous, new or old – if the game is played between beings who are not equal in power or ability, and if we can keep it fun, it is almost as if we play in defiance of each other’s differences.

This is very different from the kind of play we find in formal sports and games, where players are professionals. Under the competitive contract, it is a struggle between near equals – the nearer, the better. People of almost equal strength and build, knowledge and skill. People who are so much the same that we can tell them apart only because they are wearing different colors, or because they stay on their own sides of the field or board.

But when we play in acknowledgment of our differences, it is never the game that really keeps us together. It is always and only our desire to play with each other, our need to keep our selves and each other in play. It is merely an act of love.

It never was a question of who wins or loses, as the cliché has it. The truth and marvel of any game has always been found in how, despite everything that divides us, we manage to play it, together.

## *Play and death*

Dying isn't fun. Being dead, in all likelihood, is not fun. Someone else's death, even a pet's death, is not fun. And yet, and yet playing dead is immensely fun. Fun of such immense immensity that we have managed to immortalize it in games like Ring Around the, you know, Rosy. Rosy, as in if you see a rosy splotch on your bod, and ring, as in if there's a ring around it, then, ashes is what you're way to becoming, ashes ashes, and we all ultimately fall, like, down. And, you know, laugh.

And there's playing dead. You know, just plain playing dead. And pretending to die. That's the fun of playing Cowboys and Indians (or whatever the more currently politically incorrect version might be): the pretending to die part. Clutching the imaginary arrow as it penetrates your core, falling back into the arms of your fellow defenders, or not, "ya got me," you moan, foamingly swooning into momentary oblivions. And how about all those shoot-'em-up computer games where the only way to figure anything out is by getting killed by something.

And we grow, and still we need to play with death. There's, for further example, one of my favorite dying games, J'Accuse, and countless Vampire-themed games of death and resurrection. And Mafia and Werewolf. And so very many video games, oh yes.

Like anything else we need to understand, especially when it comes to big, hurting things that are too big, too painful to grasp, death and dying are things we need to play with. Over and over again. Not because we need to understand them. But because it's the only way we can even begin to accept them as real.

## *Confluence*

As we get deeper and deeper into the flow state, more and more of our capabilities are engaged, we become more complete. To be more complete we need to be involved in a task that is complex enough to engage us completely, to engage all our attention, all our capabilities.

Sometimes, as in a well-played game, we are engaged with others who are also engaged. We, as a community (WE), are completely engaged – body, mind, senses – in flow. And so are those with whom we are playing. And (here is what makes confluence such a useful concept) we are each (ME) also engaged with each other, in each other, to such a degree that we each increase the other's engagement. The very experience of completeness becomes expanded. We go beyond our selves.

Confluence is an experience that seems to be almost universal in the fun it brings us. It's a common experience – common not only to us, but to other species. It has a lot of different names: harmony, togetherness, flocking around.

Confluence means “flowing together.” It is used to describe where streams flow together to create a larger stream.

We experience something like confluence when we're just by our selves, talking to our selves, reflecting, and all the various voices, awareness, and abilities that we have to engage with our selves all seem to be in accord, in harmony, balanced in an easy-going, natural familiarity. It's like what happens when an artist lets the materials she is using have a say in what she is creating. Her art becomes a dialog. And, during that dialog, she becomes immersed, engaged, attuned, until she and the materials arrive at something new.

We sometimes experience something like confluence when we are at work, or at play, writing something, drawing something, building something, and the dialog between what we are making and what we are hoping to make seems very relaxed, easy going, materials and intentions fitting together like dancers improvising to a new music.

But when we dance with someone else, that experience takes on an added dimension. We are, as Martin Buber<sup>xxiv</sup> would say, immersed in a relationship with the Other.

Confluence runs very deep in the core of our being. It is something we share, not only with each other, but with birds, fish, mammals and maybe insects, and who knows, molecules, atoms, even.

OK, so maybe (just maybe) molecules and atoms and insects and animals don't exactly find,

well, joy and comfort in each other. But they find something. They most definitely seem, shall we say, attracted to each other. But because we can't be sure, let's, for the sake of agreement, think about confluence as a human experience – a shared human experience.

There are many ways in which we human beings share experience. Some are more fun than others. The most fun seems to involve the deepest sharing, sharing on the most levels: physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social. And within each of those there are levels. From casual to intimate, light-hearted to whole-hearted, wondering to wonder.

It's everywhere we are. Breathing together, hearts beating together, clapping hands together with each other, jumping rope together. And singing together, marching together, fighting together, and, don't get me wrong, thinking together – even if we're thinking against each other, sitting down, playing a game of chess or scrabble, or even when we're not physically together, playing online, playing Words with Friends, drawing something.

Over time, over space, we reach a gradually deepening attunement, a leveling, a drawing together, even when it's so deeply in the background that we are only remotely aware of it, if at all, when we're online, even when we're in line, waiting together, or we are standing in a pasture, browsing over the next clump of grass, hovering between hunger and satiety, the connection between us comforts us, enlarges us.

Music helps. Rhythms. They synchronize us. Sometimes very deeply. Our bodies. Our awareness. Our breathing. All moving as one.

... and yes, sleeping together, and even more yes, making love... where we reach perhaps the deepest confluence, the most total.

I like to think of confluence, naturally, as a river. Well, as a meeting of rivers. And us...there are those of us just touching the rivers' edge, standing on the banks. And for those of us, there's a sense, a sound in the very background of our beings, of harmony, of unheard voices, rivulets of consciousness joining the rhythms of the water. Connected, by the merging rivers, to those of us who have gone deeper to be moved together by the crossing currents until the sheer power of their collective presence washes away all fear, all distinctions, all the things that divide them one from their selves from the other, and they become so deeply immersed in the rivers, and in each other's presence, that it seems nothing is left of them but their laughter, and the whole river is set alight, and even the people on the shores sparkle free.

Confluence. As hidden or fragile as we be, should that connection break, so would we.

Unlike the experience of coliberation, there are no fixed boundaries to confluence. You find your way to that place where you are in consonance with everyone else, when you are all in flow together, and, inevitably, because the equilibrium is constantly changing, you find that

you are not there, not experiencing the same thing. The only warning you get is a sense of becoming increasingly distant – either from the community or from your self. The problem is, you usually can't tell which.

Once you experience confluence, you are as completely there as you can be, at one with your self, at one with the community, at one with the game, making magic.

To achieve confluence, you need to be freed from the constraints of ego and identity, and to be freeing others from being judged by anything other than their performance in the game. Once this is achieved, you are free to experience confluence. To maintain that connection, because people are constantly changing, everyone needs to be responsive, to be playful. That is why you play together.

You're at a party.

Everyone is having a simply marvelous time. Dancing, talking, nibbling, chatting, laughing, being everso amusing and amused, simply loving each other and themselves.

You, on the other hand, are feeling out of it. They're all so noisy, so self-involved, so insensitive to, well, you. You are not your self. And the longer you stay, the less your self you seem to be.

Then, sometime later, there's this other party. You've napped, composed one of your best poems, had a remarkably full-emptying bathroom experience, bathed, eaten a light but filling meal, and dressed, if you must say so your self, impeccably. In sum, you are remarkably together. You open the door, and people are just milling around, not really talking to each other. Some are carrying around plates of food, not eating. Others are standing by the bar, drinking, seriously. There's no music. No games.

Confluence is a connection (one of many) between a community and another entity: another community, or, in this case, you. When you and the community are in confluence, you are in flow together.

There are many different arts and organizations that are devoted to making confluence more available to us. For example, there's the theater where we find rows of theater-style seats facing a theater-style stage surrounded by a theater-style proscenium arch and hidden by a theater-style curtain. By creating a physical separation – an actual boundary between the community (actors, director, technicians, etc.) the community of watchers (audience) – by appointing other individuals (the director, conductor, announcer) to act as liaisons between the community of performers and the community of spectators, by establishing clear conventions to guide the conduct of the audience, physically reinforcing the distinctions; we make it possible for the performers to reach for confluence, and the audience to share in the perform-

ers' and each other's.

Rules and conventions that maintain a distinction between audience and performers make it possible for people to experience confluence while at varying degrees of personal involvement. The demands on the performer are far more complex than those on the audience member, but so are the expectations. Moments of confluence between the audience and performer are equally powerful for both audience and performer. From time to miraculous time, the performers are in their moment of confluence, the audience is in its moment, and both audience and performers in confluence with each other.

Then there's the sports arena with its clear and inviolable divisions between spectator and players. Official referees and announcers, official marching bands playing the officially national anthems, halftime performances, special lighting – all making it possible for the spectators not only to spectate, but to participate in, and even to influence the experience shared between the players, between the spectators, and between the spectators and the players.

In less formal situations, like parties, we use food, games, music, dance, dress; we create distinct areas dedicated to particular activities, we rely on the hosts and the friendship between participants – all to establish and maintain a more general, varied, and accessible experience of confluence.

Party games are particularly effective at inviting confluence because their rules and structures are easily distinguishable from less structured experiences. They invite people to act as players (narrowing their range of behaviors to a rule- and role-bound relationship). They provide a specific goal. They create a distinction between players and audience or observers. And they have a special meaning, divorced from other purposes or interpretations, that allows players to act playfully in ways that are unique to games.

Like the audience at a performance, non-players can both participate in and influence the experience of those who are involved, but only to a minimal degree. Non-players are free to observe, encourage players, or to wander off and join other activities where they might participate in or create a more confluent (for them) community.

Dancing, on the other hand, seems to lend itself to less structured, shifting moments of confluence between different partners, while remaining open enough to embrace a partyful of people in a moment of deeply shared spontaneity.

And it's not all fun and games. Confluence plays a central role in the effectiveness of the military, and is supported by the wearing of uniforms, the hours of marching and months of shared, strenuous exercise. Protest movements are similarly nourished by moments of confluence, and similarly structured so that these moments are likely to arise (living together, marching together, carrying signs, braving the authorities together). In the courtroom, jurors



are assigned their own area and confined to a special set of rules. In like manner the judge, lawyers, witnesses, the courtroom observers and even the accused and accuser all have roles and rituals which help establish a sustainably focused, confluential community.

Casinos, coffee shops, courtyards, clubhouses, and cruise ships; restaurants and night clubs; hotels, resorts, arcades, classrooms, playgrounds, cafeterias, assembly halls, recreation centers, retreat centers, kitchens, parks, family rooms, conference rooms, movie theaters, child care centers, fitness centers, museums, hotel lobbies, libraries, shopping centers, public squares, food courts, hospitals and fire stations; our culture rests on institutions that foster confluence.

Confluence plays an equally central role in family and marital relationships, and is also supported by very clearly defined rituals and occasions. Celebrations, outings, eating together, playing and working together, even lying around in front of the TV together; all make the experiences of confluence more accessible to those participating in the relationship.

Confluence plays a similarly central role in animal life. Ants and bees, herd animals and monkeys, fish and birds are all drawn together by the transcendent joy of confluence, even when they're only flocking around.

Then there's education, politics and religion: the rituals, officials, costumes, ceremonies, edifices... Don't get me started.

The experience of confluence is the glue that binds us to a social setting, the promised reward that keeps us seeking each other out. Being involved in something together, feeling something together, experiencing togetherness, we feel safer, stronger, we transcend the limits of self.

## *Coliberation*

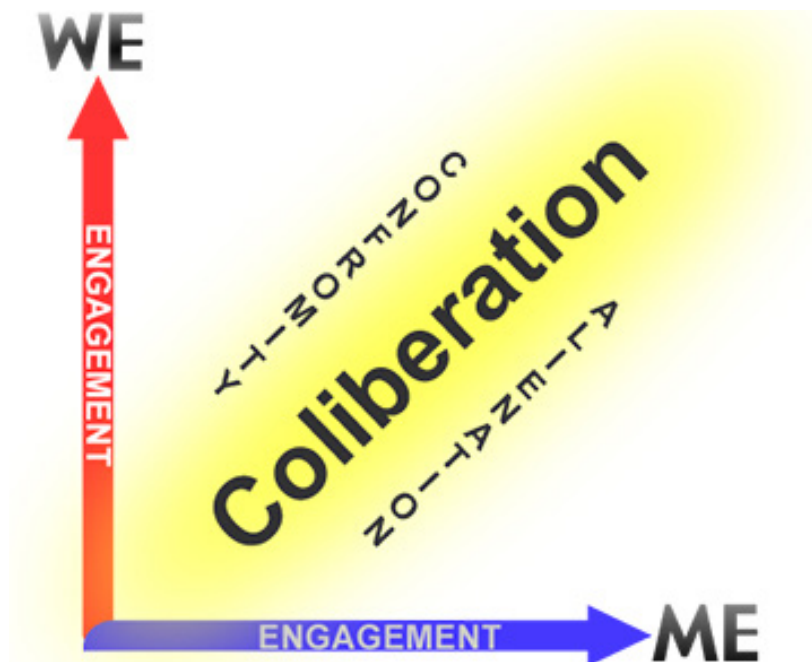
When we play or work or do anything very well with others. I mean really, extraordinarily well together - like on a basketball team or in an orchestra, when we actually experience our selves sharing in something bigger than any one who is present. This is what I call the experience of the “Big WE.” It’s a corollary to the “Big ME” experience of self-transcendence. If the Big ME is the “peak experience,” “coliberation” or the Big WE, is like becoming a whole mountain range.

Big or little, the experience of WE is something found in a different dimension than the ME. It’s the oddly tangible experience of relationship, of connection, of community. Oddly tangible, because it can’t actually be found in any one of us, but only in the experience of both or all. It’s a collective consciousness of which we may be only dimly aware, and yet completely embraced by, identified by and with. And when this WE is so engaged as to form a solidarity, a oneness, and when the will of the one is one with the will of the many, it becomes transformed, and we with it.

I know I’ve experienced it in games and sports and the performing arts. And, what makes me especially hopeful, I’ve also experienced it in business meetings.

Coliberation is a shared transcendence that makes you feel just about as big, ME-wise and WE-wise, as you can get. Larger than life. Enlarged by each other’s largesse. Beyond time.

Allow me to illustrate.



The higher or farther out we go on each line, the more fun, the more complete it feels to be a ME or WE. The closer in, the less.

When the WE and ME are in balance, there is mutual empowerment, what we might as well call the state of “coliberation.” Imagine that this is indicated by a channel, diagonally equidistant between ME and WE. Make the channel sparkle for illustrative purposes. Here the good meetings, the well-played games, the fun things happen.

Fun is the background, the context, the steady state. Games are the rules that help us move up or down the channel, towards and away from the Bigger ME or the Greater WE.

And speaking of those exceptional experiences of playing together or working together when we’re really playing or working and really together; as deliciously distracting as the philosophies and technologies of collaboration may be, when collaboration is at its best, so are we.

The experience of coliberation is beyond confluence. it becomes more powerful as each participant becomes more thoroughly engaged, more wholly involved, and as the group itself becomes more unified, more engaged. Given the wholeness of the self and the group, we approach something beyond cooperation, beyond the game or meeting itself. Some coincidence of selves that undefines the limits of our capabilities. A coincidence having almost nothing to do with the game or meeting, and everything to do with the human spirit – shared moments of unusual clarity, vivid communication and spontaneous combustions of understanding.

It’s almost silly even to have a word like this, because if you’re having fun you’re already experiencing coliberation. You can’t have fun with others if you’re the only one playing. You can meditate, but you can’t separate. You can become one only if you become “one with.”

## *The shared Whee*

What am I doing when I'm pushing you on a swing? Are we competing? Are we cooperating? I think we're doing something else entirely. I think we're sharing the whee.

I'm not sure if this is one of your typical flavors of fun. It's more like the very essence of fun, like fun itself, when it's shared. And I wouldn't be surprised if there are as many kinds of whee as there are flavors of fun, the shared whee being only one of many (or several of many). And in all likelihood there are whee degrees, all the way from the mini-whee to the really, really big whee.

We do a lot of whee-sharing: with kids, pets, lovers. Sometimes, one of us is the prime wheeer. Sometimes, we whee together, at the same time, for the same reason, feeling the same thing. And sometimes – and these are the best of times – we can't really tell who started the whee, or who's wheeing more.

Whee-sharing is why we find our selves at concerts, dances, in amusement parks, sports arenas, playgrounds. Why we play games. Any game. Even solitaire.

Even the solitaire whee, the whee that you find on a surfboard or mountain top, feels like a shared whee. You don't feel alone. You feel like the wave or the wind or the light itself is wheeing with you. Even on a slow stroll through the neighborhood it can get like that.

But me, I'm especially interested in the whee we find our selves together in. The you and me whee. The whee that comes from the core of something very much like love. The we-whee.

## *For Realing*

Let's not call it "playing" for a while. Let's call it "realing" instead.

Really. Games aren't just pretend. They are also quite real events, shared realities. In fact, they are realities that we have created together, alternate realities, absolutely as real as we can make them be.

My best playmates have been those who made the game more real for me.

All right, now let's call them games again, knowing that what we really mean are "reallies."

As long as we are using games to mean "reallies" we could actually think of every reality as yet another game - the daily game.

This is very handy.

As intimate as we may be with our personal realities, we do tend to get lost in them. But, if we think of our many reallies as games, well, we can at least assume it's all right to try to have a little more fun.

We can make even more useful assumptions about the real existence of things like rules and roles, losing and winning, cheating and quitting.

We can also ask some very liberating questions. Such as, if "life" for example, is (or might as well be) a game, why, actually, isn't it more fun? After all, what's a game for?

So, all right, every "really" is a game, and vice versa, and when I say one I mean the other. Which means that every Really we can name should and can be more fun.

Let's test this idea out on some "reallies" that are really Big, but at least a little smaller than Life:

Death, for example, is one of your Bigger Reallies.

Everybody knows that death is really a Really.

Even death should and can be more fun.

We are fortunate in having many authorities on the play value of death: the sky-diving,

hang-gliding, bungee-jumping, rock-climbing death-defying people who actually risk their lives to play with death (but are still winning).

For these people it's so much fun to 1) think you might really die and 2) not die, that they spend enormous efforts and fortunes to experience item 1, only to eventually be proven wrong about 2.

Life, on the other hand, doesn't seem to have produced very many people who can attest to its ultimate play value. It might be because it's just too big of a Really to describe. But, enjoy life? Have fun? What else is there?

And yet, despite our wanting to have fun in life, for many, for most of our lives, well, the fact is, there's a lot about life we just don't like.

Which makes us very unwilling, as mature adults, to play life, or to pay much attention to those who try to tell us that we can make the Big Really more fun.

And so, our most popular games, and, oddly, our most popular religions all seem to defy (deny) 1) death, and 2) fun.

And if that's not silly, what is?

Really.

## *On being loose*

When I first met him, Bill and his wife Linda had a pizza and sub store in northeast Philly. Later, he not only helped me conceive of, develop, realize the Games Preserve, he lived there. He and his family with me and mine. And we built together and grew together. And what we grew, grew into the Games Preserve. For ten years.

Then my family and I moved away from the farm, sold it, literally, to the person who sold Bill and family that same farm. And then Bill and family eventually built a hugely successful (ask anyone in Mertztown, PA) restaurant called “Snuzzles.” In the mean time, my family and I moved to the heart of Silicon actual Valley. And lo, it was the beginning of the 80s, and I was one with the very thin ranks of people who designed new play principles for computer games, designing games in 4- or maybe even 8K for Commodore, Coleco and Atari and the PC. A world at least a way from the Games Preserve and Bill.

And one day, I think Rocky and I were on the front lawn of our Palo Alto house, Bill drives up, from, basically, nowhere, having crossed the bulk of our considerably bulky country, and he’s just there, with us, suddenly part of our lives again, unannounced, for no reason, not even to to be a walk away from Stanford actual University. But just to hang around.

And when ever I asked him if there was anything he wanted to do or see or talk about, he’d say:

“I’m loose.”

“I’m loose.” As in “Whatever.” As in “I’m here, ready to play, or not, with you...to be with you playing whatever we play together.” “Or not.”

And (could it really be in 2007 that he died?) I’m thinking about that particular flavor of fun he brought to our lives, teaching us what it “tastes” like to be “loose.”

In a way, in Bill’s way, to “be loose” is to be in a state of something like perpetual play, it’s the path itself, the playful one, the genuinely playful path that I have for so many years been teaching and learning.

“I’m loose,” he’d say. As if he were saying: “I’m that taste of fun that you get from being free, at no one’s beck or call other than whoever or whatever happens to beckon. I’m living that deeply freeing fun that comes with feeling free.”

Bill taught me this. Was this. A flavor of fun called “Loose.” The kind of fun that tastes like freedom.

And now, when I think of it, this idea of letting my self be “loose,” when I feel my self feeling the fun of feeling it, Bill is still with me even though he isn't.



Flee





## *Fun*

**“In the beginning it was fun.  
In the end, it was all for fun.  
And in between is where it tickles most.”**

*-The Oaqui*

“I don’t need to talk about serious games, and gamification, and how games build bodies and teams and minds and make you endorphinful. I think that fun is enough. I think that if we have fun, allow our selves to have fun, to define what is fun is for us, we don’t need to have another purpose. Fun itself is a guide to live fully in life; to bring your whole self into the world.”

Fun, of course, is everywhere you look for it, outside, inside, all around. Granted, sometimes you have to look a little harder. But it’s there, always, wherever you are.

You don’t have to go on a vacation to find it, you don’t have to buy anything, or go anywhere, or prove your self worthy, or win anything or pay anything. You just have to step outside and give your self to it. And then let it take you.

I’m not saying remembering is easy. I’m not saying letting your self have fun is easy, either. But fun? Fun is easy.

## *Finding Fun*

Fun is wherever you are, in whatever you are doing or sensing or thinking. It's between you and the person you're with, or the machine you're using, or the table you're sitting at, or the path you're walking down, or the things you and your self are pretending into being. It's not something to strive for. But something to melt into, to sink into, to open up to. Listen. You can almost hear the laughter. Breathe. You can almost taste the joy. Listen a little more closely. Breathe a little more deeply. And there it is again. Fun. Real fun. Deep, forever fun.

So, look, I'm sorry if all these essays about how important fun is, and how many games there are to play and learn and how you can learn to lead games and how you can help other people have more fun and stuff and things – I'm sorry if I somehow gave you the impression that fun is one of those things you have to study (though studying fun can be great fun) or teach (same with teaching fun) or coach people in (ditto with the fun potential).

Fun isn't the hard thing. The hard thing is letting your self out to play. Even when you spend your lifesavings on something you think will be the most fun you've ever had or will have, you stay inside and think about how much more fun it will be when you land, how much more fun it will be when you finally unpack, and how much more fun than that it will be when you finally get back home. Or you start believing that you're not supposed to have fun, maybe because someone told you, that you have to earn it, or deserve it, or get wise enough or enlightened enough or have sacrificed enough or been good enough.

No, no, no. I say again, no. Fun is easy. It's the most natural feeling there is. It's life. It's living. It's being a being. Don't let me or anyone else make you think other. Letting your self out to play might be hard. Believing that it's really OK, that people will actually want you to have fun might be hard. But fun? Fun is easy.

## *Fun is more important than winning*

Early in my explorations of play, I observed that people have a different way of playing games that they have themselves designed or modified. They would play with the game as much as play the game itself. They would play with the game together, as a shared thing, that somehow managed to take precedence over who won or who lost, who was the better competitor, who was more or less able.

It was especially evident in games played in informal settings, like backyards, streets, vacant lots (as so beautifully described by Iona and Peter Opie<sup>xxvi</sup>) where the choice of game, and the interpretation of rules, would always be in response to the environment, materials at hand, different skills and changing play preferences of players. Bases would be moved, boundaries redrawn; when things didn't seem fair, players could rely on the semi-magical power of playground law, shouting out things like "interference," "time out," "no cutting," "do over" or "no takebacks." Here, in the States, this kind of game became known as Street Games. Played during the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, in streets and vacant lots, informally, with sticks and aluminum-foil balls, these games created and nurtured the urban community.

Much later on, I came to characterize this kind of game play as "playful."

Playful behavior in games is especially evident when everyone involved in the game had some influence over the way the game was being played, or at least over the person who was leading the game at the time. As the influence is removed, the game formalized, the nature of the play experience also changes, becoming markedly less playful, more competitive, less responsive to individual differences and far more determined by the success or failure of one's participation in the game.

It seems to me that this less formal, more playful way of playing was not only more fun, but often more compassionate, responsive, creative, supportive.

In the 1970s, I had the opportunity to be part of what became an International movement whose purpose was to exemplify and advocate that kind of informal, supportive, player-controlled, playful play. It was called "New Games<sup>xxvii</sup>." Most people experienced New Games as a collection of games, many of which were cooperative, humorous, creative. Some could involve hundreds, even thousands of players. From our behind-the-scenes perspective, New Games was not only a collection of games, but a method of play leadership and organization. We were playing with large, diverse crowds. People of all ages and abilities, who came together for all kinds of purposes – for the games, the socialization, relaxation, the playfulness, the freedom. Deciding what game to teach, when, with whom; explaining and starting the game before people got tired of listening to us, helping people play, keeping people safe,

knowing when to start a new game somewhere else, knowing what game to start, knowing what particular version of the game to introduce, keeping a balance of games (active, quiet, large, small, creative, competitive), keeping it fun, keeping it inviting to people who were just watching, changing the rules when things weren't as fun as they should be – all this was central to the success of the games.

The people who led New Games were not “officials.” They didn't keep score, they didn't decide what was fair. They did what they could to keep the game fun. We wound up calling them “referees.”

Central to the success of leading New Games was the transfer of the responsibility for keeping the games going from the leaders to the players. The giving over of control and responsibility was the true test of effective leadership, and the heart of the experience of New Games. They were accomplished not by a set of rules or procedures, but through playfulness. And it was that playfulness that kept New Games new.

This kind of leadership was almost invisible to the players. In part, because the leaders would often join the game, as players, helping the game become more fun by the very way they played it. In fact, the less noticeable they were the more effective it became.

As a body of games, New Games proved very successful. Many of the games have become part of elementary school physical education programs in countries throughout the world. The games that have remained “new” in spirit are those that are the most creative or cooperative. Those that have proven more successful in penetrating the culture, at least on college campuses, like Ultimate Frisbee, have struggled endlessly to incorporate the kind of playful leadership that was the “spirit of the game” into the ways in which the game is actually played.

Ultimately, it was the style of leadership that kept New Games new.

In many ways, the purpose, concept and leadership of New Games were all influenced by the experience of informal play, informal games, informal sports. In other words, New Games, at its most successful, reintroduced the concept of playfulness to organized community celebrations, leading to the creation of play communities in which fun became more important than winning.

## *Fun is at the heart of things*

Fun is at the heart of things – of things like family, marriage, happiness, peace, community, health; things like science and art, math and literature; like thinking and imagining, inventing and pretending.

Fun is not in the wrapping, but in the unwrapping; not in the skill, but in the practice; not in the frame, the design of the package, the goal, the purpose, the reward. They each may lead us to the heart of things, may invite us, encourage us, tease us. But they are not where the fun is.

Play and playfulness, in all their various manifestations (laughter, fascination, delight, spontaneity, wonder, openness, exuberance), resonates to the beat of the fun within. It is the way in and out.

You can't really make anything fun that isn't already fun. The fun of work is what happens during the experience of working. The fun of art happens during the making of art. The fun of science is in the doing of science. A game can't make work or art or science fun. Nor can a toy or a joke or a playful costume. In playing with a toy, though, we can sometimes touch, and be touched by the fun at the heart of science or work or art. A toy can let us touch the pulse of wonder that drives the scientist, the builder, the performer to do her work. A game can lead us to feel the breath of the life-bringing joy that the mathematician finds in the dance of numbers, the artist in the play of color.

The fun is there, at the very heart of things. It is not ours to create. It is ours to discover.

## *The laws of fun*

Let's divide everything we do into two categories:

- 1.0 The things we have to do
- 2.0 The things we want to do

Over-simplistically speaking, fun is why we want to do the things we want to do.

Sometimes, all too rarely, if you ask me, the things we have to do and the things we want to do are the same. Then the fun we have can get very deep, in deed. Often, those of us who pursue the playful path deem the merging of 1.0 with 2.0 our personal apotheosis.

Now, let's divide the things we want to do (2.0) into two more categories:

- 2.1 The things we want to do because they will lead us to the things we really want to do
- 2.2 The things we want to do because we O so really want to do them

The things of the 2.1 variety are often endorsed by social and cultural forces of great purport. Frequently, they come in the guise of jobs and community service and good citizenship and generally all require what the psychologists understand as the ability to "delay gratification."

These other things (2.2) are what we do for fun, what we think of, what we mean when we say "fun." We're not talking about awards or rewards. Just doing them is all we ask. Just experiencing them. Just feeling them. Jumping in them. Lying in them. Rolling in them.

Sometimes, also all too rarely, the things that we want to do because they lead us to the things we really want to do (2.1) are also fun (2.0). They may not be as much fun as what we really want to do, but they are more fun than the things we really have to do (1.0). Like joking around with strangers in the dentist office. Or trying to meditate while the dentist is getting the needle ready. These things, whilst not exemplifying the sheer delights of fun of the 2.2 variety, often characterize the more mature approach to the fun available to the more, shall we say, mature.



## *Deep fun*

Sometimes we forget. But at one time or another, one of the things that drew each of us to getting involved with whatever work we do is that we thought it was going to be fun of the deep kind. I'll get to why we forget in a moment. But first, I'd like to acknowledge the fun thing. That it's in fact why we're still here. Each of us. Because we want to have fun. Because we want to share fun. Because we want to create the opportunity for fun. For our selves. For as many people as we can reach. For all playkind.

The thing about fun is that most of the time we never really know we're having it until we're not. So usually we can only tell when something was fun. And then we forget about it. Unless it was really fun, so much fun that it was unforgettable. That's what I call "deep fun." It's like what other people call being in "flow," only deeper. I like to think of deep fun as those times when we get totally present. When we are exactly where we most want to be. Every aspect of our selves – mind, heart, muscles, breath, senses – is completely engaged. Involved. Not because we make our selves be present. But because we totally, absolutely, entirely want to be doing what we're doing, in this place, in this moment, in this body. Because we are wholly, completely, exactly where we want to be. And then we find our selves beyond.

The experience of deep fun is a spiritual thing. It speaks of the times when we become gifted, when everything we experience is a gift – the day, the people, the ability to experience. When every word we can manage to form is a word of gratitude, praise.

## *Fun, happiness, joy, bliss*

When you have fun, you're happy. When you're deeply happy, you're joyful, joyously. When you're truly, deeply, and profoundly joyful, you reach a state of bliss.

Joy and bliss are experiences that you can get religious about and for. Happiness, not so much. Fun, not at all.

Joy is overwhelming fun – fun so big that it overflows your mind, heart, body – as if all of life and love were spilling into you and you were spilling out.

Fun, happiness and joy are part of the daily game. The winning part. Bliss, you're not playing any more. Or you're playing some other game all together. The game of life, perhaps. All of life. Death, too.

Fun, happiness, joy, bliss – things of the spirit. Each is a reflection of the others. Fun an intimation of joy, happiness of bliss. Fun, just a little easier to find, to reach, to grasp, and, when necessary, to let go.

## *The Fun Assumption*

Suppose you supposed that the only reason birds sing was the sheer fun of singing, of having songs and the ability to give them voice. Or the fun of discovering themselves suddenly landing on a moving branch in a swaying tree in perfect balance. Or the fun of knowing that whenever the wind or whim took them, they could take off, and fly.

Suppose you supposed that the only reason you laugh is because it's fun to laugh. Not because of the endorphins or the health benefits. But only because of the fun. Only because it's more fun than you can contain.

Suppose the same about squirrels scampering around and inside of trees, or bees buzzing or flowers flowering.

Then every bird you hear, every squirrel or bee or flower you saw would be an invitation to have fun, too. To share the fun. To celebrate the fun.

Suppose we just assume that it's all for fun, all about fun.

Scientifically, the fun assumption could be shown for what it is. But assuming the birds sing to claim territory? What makes that assumption any more relevant or insightful or useful than the fun assumption? Assuming the squirrels are fighting over potential mates, the bees struggling to be first to sip the nectar, the flowers' only purpose propagation? What makes those assumptions any more valid than the fun one?

Why not, really, why not fun?

## *Becoming Gifted*

On my way to work I stop my car, and look.

It's dawn, and the full moon is setting, the light more intricate than I could possibly describe, more real than you could possibly imagine.

And I actually ask my self:

"Why now?"

"Why such wide beauty?"

"Why such an especially glorious present?"

"Why such a gracious gift?"

Or is it really always so? Is such grace really always given?

And is it just that I suddenly have become gifted enough to perceive this moment of light, gifted enough to receive this moment's present?

And

"Who, exactly, is the Giver?"

I ask my self, stunning my self with theocentric implications.

And

"What really is being given?"

I ask my self again, slapping my self with scientific significances.

And

"Who am I that I suddenly get to receive all this?"

The moon pales in the breaking day.

"Why ask?"

I ask.

## *The Kinds of fun*

**“All for fun, and fun for all”**

-The Oaqui

This book, as well as I, is/am not here to talk about just any old kind of fun. In fact, I'd go further, and say, quite narrowly, that we are particularly interested in just one kind of fun – the kind of fun that we experience when we are part of a well-played game.

That kind of fun is, of course, not restricted to games. We can experience it when we are dancing, or making love, or playing with children or pets, even. This is probably what makes it so powerful, and so vivid, when it happens in a sport where the only stated objective is to win. Where the only tangible reward comes from winning. And still we manage to create moments of profound, often mystical harmony, spontaneity, shared excellence<sup>xxix</sup>.

This kind of fun, the well-played-game kind, as notable of an achievement as it is in sports, is just as notable, but even more achievable in games – especially in my kind of games - games whose sole purpose is to keep you in play together because in that laughing together we are sharing the wonder of the fun we create, the love we manifest, the mind-body-soul-deep wellness we share, the momentary lowering of the divisions that separate us.



## *Just plain fun*

Of all the many kinds I've so far identified, there's one that doesn't seem to be any particular kind at all. Plain fun is what you might call it. Just plain fun. Fun with no particularly redeeming quality: not necessarily community-building, or body-building, or brain-building; not especially spiritual or transformational or educational; not significantly rational, or emotional, or social, even. Just your plain, every day, ordinary. Just something you happen to enjoy, for the moment. The sun. The breeze. On your skin. In your hair. A joke. A story. A book. Running down a hill. Blowing dandelions. Finding a bird's egg. Watching a flower. Trying to listen to the slow, serene, slime-smoothed slide of a snail. A child's touch, a game of solitaire, a magic trick, stacking coins, flipping cards.

This kind of fun is common to all kinds of fun. It's the medium in which all other kinds of fun gel. It's just fun. It has nothing to do with anything else. And yet, like all kinds of fun, it heals, it brings us back from wherever we were to where we actually are. It brings us, as they say, back to our senses, to our bodies. It brings back wonder, awe, peace, fascination, love, stillness, harmony. Pure, plain fun.

This is the kind of fun that, now that I play for life rather than for a living, I have come to savor. O, I love every taste of fun, every taste: the taste of fun when it's loving, in deed I do; and the taste of fun of the healing kind, and the learning kind, and all those kinds of fun that build us into more completely human beings. But lately I've come to appreciate the gift, the simple presence of fun, the glorious wonder of being able to have fun, feel fun, of any flavor. Fun. Just fun.

## *The kind of fun that makes you laugh*

I like it best when laughter hits me “accidentally on purpose.” I like to teach silly games – games that make people laugh. I like the sound of that laughter, how it seems to take people by surprise even though the whole reason they are playing together is so that they can laugh like that together. I like funny fun – the fun of being funny together – that comes when people try to sit on each other’s laps, and don’t quite succeed. That laugh that releases us from the fear of failure because we do fail, and we don’t care, because we fall into laughter. Not laughter at. Laughter with. With the playfulness of the game. With each other.

Sometimes, even when we play silly games, the laughter takes on a different tone, like, well, love. We’re playing a game like Hug Tag (where to be safe you have to be hugging someone) and amid all the screaming glee there’s a laugh that sounds like a celebration of the discovery that we are, in fact, safe in each other’s arms. Even when we’re playing hide and seek (my favorite variation being Sardines where when you find someone you hide with them) there’s a laugh like that, a laugh celebrating community.

Lately, I’ve been exploring what you might call “spiritual laughter,” but it is actually no more spiritual than any laughter that springs from joy and love and community. I play a game where the whole idea is for people to bless each other. Each blessing is supposed to be as heartfelt as a blessing can be, but, at the same time, even more of a blessing than the previous blessing. Someone says something like “may the fruits of your labor never spoil.” And then the next person says: “may the fruits of your labor not only never spoil, but may they be available at a grocery store near you.” And then the next: “And may they be non-GMO.” And people laugh. Meaningfully.



## *Loving fun*

There's fun, and then there's love.

I am a lover of love.

I love loving.

I love being loved.

I love loving my lover.

I love fun, sure. But not like I love love.

I have the most fun when I'm loving. When I'm loved. When I'm doing the things I love.

Fun without love is never fun enough for me. Love without fun is impossible.

All of the things I do in the name of fun are about love.

I am a fun lover.

The fun I teach, the fun I share, the fun I seek, the fun my life is for is what one may call "loving fun."

Love is fun. Love, freely given. Love received.

Sometimes love is so much fun it makes you cry. It actually hurts. Beautifully.

It can come from a child, from a friend, a relative, a stranger, an animal.

It is precious, and like the most precious of precious things, it can't be owned, it can't even be counted.

Such fun, such deep fun is love that it changes you, connects you, makes you whole, happy, heals you, frees you.

Not all fun is love. But love is. Loving is. It is fun to love. As fun, at least, as it is to be loved.

Your love is fun. Loving you is fun.

## *As fun as fun can be*

As fun as fun can be, as central as it can become to a healthy, healing relationship, it is remarkably hard to take seriously. Even though fun is the experience that binds, the purpose that shapes, the phenomenon that leads into and out of body, most organizations and institutions insist on pretending that fun has nothing to do with it. Even though, if they took it seriously enough, they could heal themselves and probably the world.

Here is a suggestion: give each other a weekend, a day, an hour devoted to fun – to thinking about fun, practicing fun, expanding your abilities to create and share fun with each other. In other words, to playing, games even – fun, funny, loving games that help you laugh and love with each other – word games, walking around games. Playful games in which nobody keeps score, where the only point to playing is the loving fun we can give each other for a moment, for forever.

Play with each other, play with strangers and neighbors. Play games that make you want to play lovingly. Games that are fun, gentle, touching, safe, freeing, and in some very real, very unthreatening way, intimate.

In between games, talk about the fun you shared, the fun you created for each other, the fun that truly made you feel free. And then, during the next game, see if you can bring each other more fun, liberate each other to some higher plane of fun.

Play some more. Love some more.

## *Intimate fun*

Intimate fun is a dance between two very big mysteries.

The first is the mystery of ME. This is the mystery with which each of us is most truly intimate. The mystery of self, of mind and body, of oneness and separateness.

The second is the mystery of WE. Of an intimacy that is beyond body. Of an embracing of minds and spirit, of ME plus.

Me on one side. We on the other. The rest is choreography.

Maybe I've been spending too much time on my computer. But whenever I migrate from flash to flesh, I am increasingly amazed at how other each of us is. How other you are. And how other I seem to be when I'm with you. I've been focusing especially on how other we both are when we are having fun, and even more especially how other we are when we are having fun together.

Like how, when we're laughing together, it's as if there's another being laughing with us. Another will. A will not totally in our control.

There's something very personal about this being we create, something intimate about this kind of fun.

Intimate Fun: the joyous being that we create by our being joyous together: the WE that we become when we are having fun together. The Tickled WE.

Intimate Fun only lasts as long as we are each ticklish. My being tickled in turn tickles you, which in turn tickles me. Our periodic rediscovery of how tickled we each are in turn gives life to the Tickled WE.

It is not about becoming the Other, or realizing the We of the Me or the Me of the We. It's about how often we cross the line. It's a frequency thing. When we transcend our selves and affirm each other often enough, something else happens. Something other is created. I think it's called "love."

## *Funny fun*

Probably one of my favorite flavors of fun is the taste of what happens when we get funny together. It tastes just like laughter. Spicy. Embracing the full geography of your bio-conceptual landscape.

Sometimes, we are funny together. All of us. At more or less the same time. Singing a silly song, maybe, playing a funny game. Walking a funny walk, talking in funny voices, in foreign accents, in slow motion.

For me, being funny together with my wife, my kids, my grandkids, is almost always the funniest, the deepest, the most deeply funny.

We're not being silly. No way. We're being funny together. Magically funny. Even when we are doing playful things, it's not at all about being silly, it's all about the funniness that we're creating together. The magic of it. All about the laughter we are sharing.

I think those times when we are funny together, those amateurish, funny together times, we are funnier than comedians and clowns. Funny beyond clever. So funny, we are taken by surprise by how funny.

That's funniest fun, it seems to me, the fun of being funny together.

It's hard sometimes to remember that. Especially if you're in the funny business. Like a comedian or clown or something. You get so much into making people laugh that it gets to be you vs. them. Comedians say that about their acts, how they "slayed" the audience, how they "killed." So you stop getting very much out of it. You burn out trying, because making people laugh is not like laughing with them, not like when they're making you laugh. You get funny with no fun. Just —ny.

Then there's being funny with strangers, which I consider some kind of miracle, some kind of blessing. When I'm funny with, not funny for. When I'm being just funny enough to invite someone totally new to me to be funny, too. And that person, that stranger, invites me back, and maybe we are not so funny, but we are good, surprisingly good, witty, both of us, responsive, smoothly creating funniness together, in a theater so private there's really no room for audience, funny for each other alone. Strangers, together, engaged in a kind of intimacy that is funny beyond laughter.

That's funniest fun, it seems to me, the fun of being funny together.

## *Fun beyond funny*

There is fun, and there is funny. There's funny fun. There's funny that isn't fun. And there are yet other kinds of fun, some sometimes deeper, that are just as much fun, and yet not funny, really, unless you have reached maybe enlightenment or godheadhood.

I'm writing about this because I have the very good fortune of having some deep, sensitive thinkers in my community, who think deeply and care deeply and have fun deeply. And one of them asked me, on a now deleted Facebook post, about wanting to have fun, because it appeared to her, quite rightly, that if you want to have fun, and aren't, you probably won't. Because want implies lack. And as long as you hold on to that lack, well, your emotional arms will be too full to receive the gift of fun when it is presented to you.

And that led us to a video chat – she in a coffee house, me in my dining room – about fun and how it can happen even when you are crying and in pain and finding your self near death. And then to this, because I realized that somewhere, somehow in all my funny wittiness, I might just have misled us, you and me, into thinking that fun is all about laughter or playfulness.

Fun, since you ask, the kind of fun that I call “deep,” is the fun of finding your self (yes, you, yours) as large as, well, life. Embiggened, as some might say, by, oh, anything – a glance from a baby, a smile from a stranger, a dog's lick, someone skipping, dancing, singing for the sheer because of it. By a breeze, or a squirrel or a moment of sweet quiet. You, suddenly feeling as large as life itself.

Joy is fun. Ecstasy, o, so much fun. Feeling present, feeling alive, feeling awe, feeling loved, embraced, touched, feeling beauty, beautiful. And none of these experiences has anything to do with laughing, though you might laugh. And all of them have something to do with fun, though you might not think so at the time.

## *Naughty fun*

When we've talked about fun in the past, we (royally speaking) divided the conscious universe into two parts: the have to, and the want to, the want to part being where the fun is. And then, of course, there's the area of miraculous overlap, where the have to coincides with the want to, is probably where the fun is deepest.

There's another factor to all this – the should do – which we find our selves having to contemplate now that we're talking about fun of the naughty kind.

Being naughty is fun because it makes you feel, however temporarily, free. You are heading towards the arena of pure want to – outside the boundaries of both have to and should do. Heading, but not quite there, because for naughty to be fun you have to be close enough to should do and have to to feel their frowning presence.

There are, of course, degrees of naughtiness, ranging from the cute to the criminal. Make, as they say, no mistake about it. Naughty fun is genuinely, and sometimes profoundly fun. But you have to be a little more careful with fun of the naughty kind. There's not getting too naughty. And then there's not getting caught.

## *Dangerous fun*

There are things that we learn, and we learn to forget. Until we forget that we've learned them. And we get to learn all over again

Like: fun can be dangerous.

You can get hurt having fun – you, other living things. I mean you can get really, really hurt. Skiing, jumping off of things, running downhill.

Because fun is a living thing, like you. And no matter how important it is, how wonderful, how blissful it can be to have fun, you can get hurt even in the apparently simplest of fun pursuits. Which, for some people, apparently, is one of the things that makes fun fun.

For some people, fun is all about danger. There would be no fun without the thrill, and no thrill without the risk, and no risk without the danger. Real danger. Pretend risk isn't enough. It's a real parachute and you're really 15,000 feet in the air, and it has been known and documented that sometimes the parachute doesn't open. Which is why there is a spare. Which has also been known not to open. And that very thought, that very genuine, deservedly frightening thought, makes the whole thing so gosh darn fun you could die for it.

But the thing is, no matter how hard you try to remember the consequences of all that glorious danger, you can, barreling down a playful path in the innocent pursuit of fun, get hurt harder. And, if you don't do your self permanent damage, you will forget about the hurt, and do that dangerous thing again and again. Because it's fun.

## *Nachas and Mechaiyeh*<sup>xxx</sup>

In my attempts to understand fun, and especially to convey that understanding, I find myself very often using two Yiddish words: nachas and mechaiyeh.

The word mechaiyeh describes the experience of soaking in a hot bath. Not too hot, of course. But perfectly hot. Quietly soaking. Not scrubbing. Not even necessarily soaping. Effortlessly afloat in the embrace of penetrating warmth. Finding yourself, from time to time, saying, to no one in particular, except maybe the entire universe: “Ahhh, such a mechaiyeh!”

Of course you can have mechaiyeh-like experiences almost anywhere. A shower, maybe. Even, you should forgive the reference, on the toilet. Of course, you don't need water to experience a mechaiyeh. You can be lying in the sun, on the beach, on your porch. You can be having a massage. You can be sitting still on a hot day in a cool breeze. And then there's that first sip of tea or soup, especially in cold weather or in the morning. And then, in the evening, the simple acts of opening your belt, taking off your shoes and socks, putting on a bathrobe or a soft sweater.

Mechaiyeh comes from the Hebrew word “chai,” which means life. To experience a mechaiyeh is to experience yourself becoming more alive, your being being enlivened. Listening to music. Dancing. Holding hands with your spouse, your friend, your children or grands. Ah, such mechaiyehs!

So, if you understand the meaning of mechaiyeh, you understand something else about fun.

Then there's nachas. Nachas is fun of a very different kind. It's the kind of fun you have when you're watching your kids at a school play. A funny kind of fun, because you can have it even when you're not doing anything. Fun of the nachas variety is most often attributed to the fun you get from your kids and grandkids, and sometimes even your spouse and parents and friends. You can be playing a game with your kids, and get beaten, both fairly and squarely, and also totally and entirely, and feel good about it. Because it gives you such nachas.

Nachas is the kind of fun where you find yourself actually feeling happy for someone else. Because of someone else. It's the opposite of schadenfreude. It's freudenfreude.

There are many kinds of nachas. You can get a sense of nachas from walking into your kitchen after a particularly grueling round of cleaning and putting away, and just noticing how everything is so clean, orderly. You can get nachas just from appreciating things – your self, your spouse, your kids, your car, even.



Nachas comes from the Hebrew word “noach” – which means “rest” or “peaceful” or “comfort.” It also means a sense of satisfaction, contentment, gratification, of feeling accomplished. It’s a kind of fun that feels good, like a mechaiyeh. But it’s not the body that gets the good feeling. It’s more like nachas is a mechaiyeh for the soul.

So here we have two kinds of fun, both penetrating very deep into the core of being: the fun of great physical comfort, and the fun of great spiritual comfort. They are the kinds of fun that enrich our lives, whether we are young or old, healthy or not so much. They are gifts, and the more we receive them into our lives, the more fun our lives become.

## *Fantastic Fun*

It's fun to fantasize. It's even fun to fantasize about fun. It's an art, don't you know. Something you get better at.

You can fantasize all by your self. You can fantasize with other people. When you fantasize with other people it can feel at least as real as it feels when you fantasize alone. And the fantasy can get more complex, more detailed, more encompassing. But it must never be more real than that. It must always remain a fantasy. That's the fun of it. That's what keeps it fun.

Fantasy frees us. Not totally, but enough to make the daily game more fun.

Fantasy changes the meaning of things. It even changes the meaning of us. Fantasy creates meaning. Its own meaning. Meaning nothing else or more than we need it to mean. Those who make meaning out of it for us make it into something else than it is.

Fantasy is never as real as we pretend it to be – as if it were possible to follow the outline of a dream or fill the fractals of the imagination. But it can get awfully close.

## *Sacred fun*

Some kinds of fun are sacred. Like the fun you feel when a baby smiles at you. Or the fun of seeing a rainbow in a puddle. Or the fun of a first kiss and the more fun of a second. They are moments that you hold close to you, that cherish you. Many of them are fragile, temporary, like a silence you share with a gathering of meditators, or a two-year-old. Some you greet with awe, like the fearsome thrill of thunder, like the deeply silent darkness of the dark, like the ringing of a chime. Some moments are too intimate to share, like the fun of a baby's touch, or a lover's, or the dance of a falling leaf.

Sacred fun. Fun that has become holy. Sanctified fun that you carry with you like the penny you put on a trolley track, like the memory of something so deeply fun that you and all those who made that memory with you speak of it as they would speak of something almost holy.

Like the time you all peed into the Grand Canyon.

## *Beauty*

There's something fun about beauty. Something that touches us deeply enough to bring us from wherever we are into the very center of the moment. Unlike other kinds of fun, beauty doesn't invite play. Rather, like awe, it invites presence.

Like fun, beauty transforms us. We are struck by it, moved, transported, caught in it, our whole attention taken up to a different plane of awareness, all else vanishing before it. Like fun. Like what happens to us in a good game, or in a moment of deep laughter, or child's smile, or a loving glance.

Like fun, beauty is something the world makes and something we make, something we make of the world and the world makes of us. It delights us like fun does. It transforms us like fun does. In its light, as we are in the light of fun, we are beautiful.

## *Practical fun*

No, not practical jokes. Practical fun. The fun of collecting practical advice, hints, tips. Vast collections thereof.

It's not important why it's fun to collect all those truly practical, time-tested pieces of exceedingly pragmatic advice, insights, shortcuts, recipes, helpful hints, how-tos and when-tos. What's important, at least as far as I'm concerned, is that collecting bits of practical wisdom is fun. Practical fun. Real, genuine fun.

As my granddaughter Lily explained, it's all about "knowing things that you will probably never have a use for, but having an excuse for learning them anyway."

And, who knows? There could always come a time...

## *Cruel fun*

I'm not sure if it's the same thing as "mean fun." I mean, I'm not sure if the practitioners of cruel fun mean to be mean. Or even if they're particularly aware that they're being cruel. The point that needs to be made here is that they, for all their cruelty, are having fun. Actual, genuine, regardless of what else you might want to believe they deserve, fun. Fun of the cat-and-mouse-type, of the killer-whale-and-seal-pup-type. And it's natural, this kind of fun. As natural as nature.

Scientists and other play apologists like to attach meaning or at least purpose to this kind of fun. They say that the animals are "practicing skills" that they need to survive. So it's not bad or anything. It's survival.

Human animals are also practitioners of cruel fun, examples of which are plentiful, excuses for which only slightly less plentiful.

But the thing is, the thing we need to acknowledge is – it's fun, it's play, and it's cruel.

I so much want to tell you that fun is good, that all you really need to find happiness is let your self have more fun. But the truth is that neither play, nor fun, nor even happiness is a moral or ethical choice. Choosing fun is choosing life, to embrace life, to be alive. It is not necessarily choosing to be a good person, or a wise person, or the kind of person you are when you are at your best. That kind of person chooses the kind of happiness that is most meaningful to him, the kind of fun that resonates most fully with the fullness of his human being. And even though you are always and only you, and even if you might be having fun, you are not always that kind of person. You are not always that kind.

## *Tragic fun*

Evidence of our fascination with the darker side of life goes back at least as far as the first performances of the Greek tragedies. There is something utterly absorbing, something deeply engaging, something, well, entertaining about the tragic. We have elevated it to an art because we enjoy the tragic at least as thoroughly as we enjoy the comic. It appears to be as fun being moved to tears as it is to laughter.

We witness our fascination with tragedy on almost a daily basis, every time there's an accident on the highway, and the traffic slows to a crawl as we rubberneck our way past the scene. Call it compassion. Call it schadenfreude. It engages us beyond reason.

There's something fun, something entertaining, something genuinely enjoyable about witnessing someone else's tragedy. Getting to watch the agony of defeat is at least as stadium-filling as witnessing the thrill of victory. Go to any of our more gladiatorial contests – like, for example, car racing. Note how there's a certain unspoken disappointment if, at the end of the whole thing, no car crashes.

Sports, and, to a lesser degree, games, have a tragic element to them. Losing is tragic, especially for the losers. Having to stop playing is tragic. Getting hurt is profoundly tragic. If the hurt is serious enough, it's a moment of high drama. The players in both teams, and even the spectators, unite in genuinely shared grief. And, though we would be loath to admit it, that, too, is very much part of the fun. We enjoy that moment of grief. We momentarily transcend all divisions, all roles, and are moved together towards each other, and in our shared shock we touch the confluence that makes us all one. And it is fun.

## *Good fun*

Good fun is a healing kind of fun. Healing itself is fun of the good kind, whether you're healing your self or the world. The fun that characterizes much of the experience of those who volunteer to be part of things like Doctors Without Borders. The fun of doing good.

Then there's my kind of fun - the fun that comes from playing well together, or from games that just make you laugh together, or from anything at all that makes you laugh, together.

And loving fun - the fun of loving, the fun of playing lovingly.

These are all good kinds of fun. And the more you think about it, the more kinds of good fun you'll discover. Like the fun of caring for someone you care about, the fun of teaching and learning, of listening and watching and tasting and smelling good air and feeling clean clothes, of touching and being touched, of glee, exuberance, accomplishment, of remembering your childhood, of wrestling with your children, of making a list of the things that are fun for you.



## *Meaningful fun*

So I find my self thinking about doing “meaningful” things. Things like being engaged in meaningful work and doing meaningful deeds and having meaningful relationships, like the connection between meaningfulness and happiness. And, after significant intro- and extro-pection, I’ve come to a natural conclusion: meaningful stuff is fun. Saying, doing, thinking, acting, working, learning almost anything actually meaningful, is always fun. Really fun. Deep fun.

Even if you’re cutting potatoes in a food kitchen for the poor, it’s fun. It’s a feel-good fun that comes, not from what you’re doing, but who you’re doing it with and for.

But when the thing you’re doing is itself fun, like, for example, batting a balloon around, and you’re having fun batting the balloon with the people you’re batting around with, and they’re having fun, with you, with each other, and they are people who need to have this kind of fun almost desperately – children, the hospitalized, the institutionalized, the people of countries at war, the less-abled, less-skilled, less-lucky – well, that’s a unique kind of fun, a life-fulfilling fun that really needs its own name.

For the time being, I’m suggesting calling this specific kind of fun, and equally specific kind of meaningfulness, “deep fun.” Because it reaches not only into your very own personal core, but all the way into the core of human being. Because it’s a healing thing, a spiritual thing already.

## *Minor fun*

Let's pretend that there are only two kinds of fun: major fun, and everything else, which we shall call "minor fun."

Major fun is the kind of fun that is so intense, so engaging, so total, that you really know, when you have it, that what you are having is fun.

Minor fun is the other kind of fun, the kind you are barely aware of as being fun. Like the watching TV kind of fun, or the eating potato chips, or the day dreaming kind. Minor fun is generally pleasant, mild, kind of euphoric, kind of like flow. Minor fun is what we have when we're doodling, making paper clip chains, twiddling thumbs and other twiddlables, getting comfortable, feeling well-fed.

Minor fun is smelling something good, seeing something pretty, hearing something nice, tasting something tasty.

Major fun is the fun that people write books about, that people risk their lives for. Minor fun is the kind of fun that people spend most of their time having or wanting.

Some times, minor fun can get close to major. Like when you taste something exceptionally, surprisingly delicious. Or when you really, really make love. Then you find your self feeling all those kinds of things they talk about when they talk about flow. You get timeless. You get completely engaged, totally in the "now." You get larger than life.

But most of the time, minor fun stays minor, in the background, barely noticed.

I'm thinking that minor fun is something we might really need to pay a lot more attention to. I'm thinking that for every 10 minutes of major fun, we spend maybe 10 days having the minor kind. I'm thinking that when we go without minor fun long enough, like maybe 10 minutes, we start getting into some major misery.

I'm thinking that when we are at our most natural, we are having minor fun most of the time. But downtown and in the office and family room what we hear most of the time isn't so much fun. Horns blaring, copiers copying, the TV.

I'm thinking that major fun, as fun as it is, isn't enough fun to last us through the hours and days and weeks of hardly any kind of fun at all. And that maybe the only way for us to find our way back to happiness is for us to spend a lot more time paying a lot more attention to fun of the minor kind.

Beginning, for example, with your very desk and the hitherto-unknown art of Fun Shui achieved through the cunning and often haphazard placement and/or removal of photos, toys, plants, miniature fountains, candy jars, pithy sayings, etc., as practiced in office cubbies around the official world.

Continuing, I suppose, with the wearing of comfort clothes to go with the eating of comfort foods, the frequent exchange of greetings, jokes, email, the use of humor, smileys, and other signs of ongoingness.

## *Dizzy fun*

I started thinking about how a simple thing like getting dizzy, which kids seem to love doing so much, could ultimately become a spiritual practice. Searching for deeper significance, I learned that the word *ilinx*<sup>xxx1</sup> (Greek for “whirlpool”) was used by Roger Callois to describe something very similar to dizzy fun, here called vertigo, where he says: “based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consists of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock that destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness. The disturbance that provokes vertigo is commonly sought for its own sake.”

“Ah,” said I to my self, “voluptuous panic” in deed. “Surrendering,” of course. Destroying reality, as one often needs do, with, what else, “sovereign brusqueness.” An archetypical religious experience, at least.

And then, two clicks onward, we find each other reading about Fell Running in which the author notes: “To get a notion of fell running, picture your self a typical running enthusiast, then imagine running over the roughest ground and in the worst weather possible.<sup>xxxii</sup>”

I leave you for the nonce to your own running, and the fellness thereof, and the spinning grip of your own personal momentum.

## *Public fun*

There's a flavor of fun that we get when we're not the only one having it. You can call it "social fun" or "shared fun" or even "loving fun." It's a kind of fun that often leads to public fun.

As I said earlier "Playing and laughing together, especially when we play and laugh in public, for no reason, is a profound, and, oddly enough, political act."

Political, because when we play or dance or just laugh in public, people think there's something wrong with us. It's rude, they think. Childish. A disturbance of the peace.

And what those grown-ups are doing, playing, dancing, laughing in public is not an act of childish discourtesy, but a political act – a declaration of freedom.

That kind of fun, public fun, when applied to human affairs in general, can prove a most reliable socio-political guide to human ethics, which we shall, for current purposes, call "the More Merrier Multiplier."

The More Merrier Multiplier, in a mathematically articulate manner, expresses the true relationship between the Merrier and the More. If no one else in this meeting is making merry, OR if you find your self clearly lacking in measurable merriment, OR if nobody else will be the merrier because we are having the meeting, the whole thing is pretty much worthless. Or, saying the same thing in just about the same way: If you're having fun, and if everyone else is having fun, and if just about the entire world will have more fun as the result of what you're having fun doing, you can be pretty sure that what you're doing is, in fact, a very right thing.

And if there's such a thing as public fun, there's definitely equally such a thing as private fun: the fun we have all by our selves with our selves often within our selves; fun that we share with our selves only, demonstrating for our personal freedom. And of course there's semi-private fun, like the fun we have with kids and pets and ocean waves and sand and water....

## *Fun with your self*

Some games we play by our selves. There are two kinds: puzzles (word puzzles, picture puzzles, moving piece puzzles, chess puzzles) and games (solitaire card games, solitaire computer games). You could think of them as one kind. They're all puzzles. They're all games we play with (or against) our selves. Playing any of them, we learn about the fun we can think our selves into. Some of them also involve us in the fun of reacting quickly, or the fun of manipulating things, balancing things, fitting things together. But, for the most part, we play with our expectations of our selves. It's fun to find out that we can do more than we thought we could do, or do it faster, fun to discover that we can solve puzzles, that we can figure things out, that we can make mistakes and learn from them. That we don't need any help. We can do this all by our selves, if we have patience and time. And we can, when we need to, cheat.

There are lots and lots of computer games that we play by our selves. There's even a kind of computer game that we play by our selves against others. All these games let us explore our relationship to our selves. In all of them, we learn how we can make that relationship fun.

## *Fun with an other*

There are a lot of games we play with just one other person: card games, board games, computer games, word games. Then there's walking together, dancing together, touching together – and all those other games implied thereby. I mean the ones done for fun.

Playing these games, we can explore the art of having fun together, one-, as they say, on-one. The more we play together, the more clearly we will understand that we can't really explore what's fun for us alone or what's fun for our partner all by himself, because we're together. And we can't really explore what will be fun for both of us a year from now or even an hour from now, because we're playing only now. And the way we combine with time, place, and each other are as unique as we are.

Practicing the art of fun with one other is infinitely richer than practicing it by our selves, which is already infinite in its richness. There are so many more variables, so many more things that can change or be changed. Between us, there are rules. And within these rules are the rules we know are rules and the rules we have to find out if they're really rules at all. And the more we explore these rules, the more deeply we will be practicing the unique art of fun that we can practice uniquely together.

And there are skills, only some of which belong to either of us, and others of which belong only to us together.

And this fun we are having together can get quite profound, surprisingly intimate, deeply spiritual – even in a game of ping pong, doing nothing more than volleying the ball back and forth.

## *Fun with a bunch of others*

Then, there are games we play with a whole bunch of people. With four people, maybe; maybe twenty, maybe a hundred, maybe a quarter-million. There's playing playfully, there's playing passionately. And every variation and version is a vehicle for exploring, learning, developing the art of fun. These games, with all these people, are so complex, so potentially freeing, that even the simplest and silliest of them, like, say, the exceptionally simple and silly *Estray Bonajour*, could result in sudden collective enlightenment, the experience I've been known to call "coliberation."



## *Estray Bonajour?*

About 30 years ago, I met Richard Nessen, who taught me a game I thought was called “Estray Bonajour,” and that the words were something like:

*“Estray Bonajour and a wannee, tashee ta, Cheeta, Voya Zigee Escaroo, Kayva, Kayva, kehaygeza, kehaygeza, keziggy, ziggy, za.”*

I loved the game and dutifully taught it, year after year, exactly as I thought I learned it.

I played it like this:

Each participant holds a shoe or object of similar heft in the right hand, and, as each line is chanted, passes the shoe to the right. The chant goes something like this:

*Estray Bonajour and a wannee tashee tah*

*Estray Bonajour and a wannee tashee tah*

Chanting continues as participants pass the shoe to the right, again one pass per line

*Cheetah*

*Voyah*

*Zigee Escaroo*

*Kayvah*

*Kayvah*

Still passing to the right, these lines are spoken, usually loudly, while shoe-passing continues.

*Kehaygeza*

*Kehaygeza*

Again spoken, rather than chanting. But here the shoe is not actually passed, but held on to, whilst placed first in front of the player on the right then in front of the player on the left, and finally released in front of the player on the right, whilst shouting “zah!”

*Keziggy*

*Ziggy*

*Zah!*

Repeat:

*Kehaygeza*

*Kehaygeza*

*Keziggy*

*Ziggy*

*Zah!*

About thirty years later, I learned another, remarkably similar game that, in the hand-ing-down, had become so significantly other. I correct my self entirely, and present with similar aplomb, the Brazilian game “Escravos de Jó,” played very much like this:

Each participant holds a shoe or object of similar thereto, in the right hand, and, as each line is chanted, passes the object to the right, while singing:

*Escravos de Jó*

*jogavam caxangá*

This is done twice.

Players lift the object , singing:

*tira*

then put the object down, singing:

*põe*

then shake their fingers twice at the object, chanting:

*deixa ficar*

Continuing to pass to the right two more times, chanting

*guerreiros com*

*guerreiros fazem*

And now, without letting go of their object, players put it in front of the player on the right while saying:

*zig*

Then put it in front of the player on the left while saying:

*zig*

Then put it in front of the player on the right, while saying:

*za*

Then, without stopping, they begin the second round, this time just humming. When the second round is finished, they continue the movement, but silently.

Sooner or later, someone makes a mistake. Tradition has it that that person is out for the rest of the game, the game continuing, the rounds going faster and faster, until only one player is left.

Played by children, families, and sometimes played by the college-inclined as a drinking game.

I, however, play it for laughs: encouraging people to sing in gibberish if they can't follow the words, continuing until someone has most of the shoes, and then starting over.

Loosely translated from the Portuguese: Slaves of Jo (or Job) played Caxanga. Take it out, put it back, leave it on. Warriors with warriors do zig zig za.

You may draw your own conclusions.

I've learned of similar games in Israel and Italy. In Israel, the game is called "Avanim Ovrot m'yad l'yad." In Italy, I was told of two similar games: "Salomé Son Letre" and a faster version called "Tu stai sempre intorno ame." The game is frequently played with shoes and in the sand.

I think, perhaps, I've made my point.

Now, with any luck, you'll make yours.

## *The Fun of Fun*

**“Don’t let the humor escape you.”**

- the Oaqui

So, let’s say you’re playing something – a game, a musical instrument – or, you’re working on a puzzle, or taking a walk or daydreaming – for fun, you know. Not because it’s good for you or you feel you’re supposed to, or you need to do it, not for exercise or relaxation, not even for the health of it. You’re just sitting on a tire swing somewhere, spinning your self around, rocking back and forth or forth and back, watching some kids maybe. Beyond purpose. Beyond necessity. Led to this particular place and time, neither because of the lure of a carrot or the fear of a stick, but by your own free will. Freed from consequence. Freed from necessity. Freed from temptation or worry. Completely at play, swinging and turning, for no other reason than the fun of it.

Forgive me for asking, but what, precisely, is the fun of it? What’s so fun about doing nothing special, about sitting in a tire swing, about doing something just because you feel like doing it, about the feeling of it, about the free will, about being free from necessity, free from worry, from fear, free from thinking about hunger, free from worrying about illness, free from dwelling in pain or fatigue.

Maybe, I’m asking, maybe it’s the freedom itself that’s fun. Like people sitting in the street, playing dominoes together in the aftermath of a flood, just because they can, just because it frees them a little from the vicissitudes of it all. Not just that you have the ability to free your self like that – which is gift enough, amazing enough...but maybe because freedom itself is fun. Maybe fun itself is freedom. Maybe that’s why it’s so much fun to watch kids at play. Maybe that’s why we think kids are having so much fun. Or puppies for that matter. Because they seem so free from fear and worry and hunger and illness. Or young springboks springing the way they do, seeming freed from gravity. Maybe it’s the freedom.



When we are playing together, for no purpose, improvising, unscripted, spontaneous – maybe the fun we’re having together is freedom. Shared freedom. Freeing each other.

## *Whee!*

When you find your self in the Whee! of things, you have gone somewhere beyond your self, joined something or body outside your self. You are not your self. Not just your self. And, at the same time, you are more your self than usual.

Sitting on a swing, for example, doesn't quite make it to Whee!land. Swing on a swing, and you're there. Beyond your self. Your self, writ big.

Every Whee! is shared. The Whee! you experience when you're swinging is a Whee! shared with gravity, with your body in the world, with space, with movement, with the rhythm of back and forth, with the leaning forward and back, the looking around and up and down, the people on the swings next to you, the people near the swing, the ground, the shadows, the air, the trees, the sun, the clouds, the sky.

Walking is sometimes Whee! Running maybe more times. Dancing almost always. Because more of you is involved, engaged, in play. Even if you're dancing by your self, you're not dancing alone. There's the music, even when there isn't. There's the rhythm of hands, arms, feet, hips. And when there are others to dance or not with, the Whee!, when it comes, seems bigger, seems to fill the mind, the heart, the body, the spaces between, the room.

There's always a Whee! to be part of. It's just that you're not always there to be with in it. You're somewhere else. Inside. Hidden. Smaller. Sometimes smaller even than your self.

There's a Whee! right here, in the reading of this, in the joining of rhythms (rhythms of your dancing glances, of your pulse, breath, of images, words and the silent hearing of what they speak to you of, taking you somewhere beyond your self, to a joining).

Come out, the words say, come out, come out, wherever you are.

## *Fun, pleasure and enjoyment*

I was speaking with Lynda, my son-in-law's mother (how come there isn't a word for that in English? she's not my mother-in-law? but she most definitely is family!) about fun. "Isn't that the same thing as enjoyment?" she asked.

"Hmmm." I responded, stalling for some deep rumination time. They sure are close. Fun. Enjoyment.

Clearly, whenever you're having fun, you're enjoying your self. And vice, probably, versa. It's certainly the case when you're talking about minor fun. Like when you smell something sweet, or delicious, or just plain good. That's something you most definitely enjoy. And going somewhere or doing something just so you can experience those wonderful smells, well that's even more obviously fun.

Maybe the fun part of enjoyment comes from making the choice to do something you enjoy. Just knowing you're about to do something enjoyable makes it feel like fun. Especially when it's the only reason. "I think I'll go to the bakery and just stand there and smell things for a while." "I think I'll stop walking and bend all the way down just so I can smell that flower." Choosing to enjoy something is fun. Choosing to do something you enjoy is fun. Choosing to do something fun is fun.

Then there's pleasure. Pleasure is enjoyable. Pleasure is also fun. Like enjoyment is. And like enjoyment, the more you choose to do something for the sake of the pleasure you find in it, the more fun.

When you are following what I call the playful path, you choose to do things that are pleasurable and enjoyable. So it becomes difficult, if not silly, to make a distinction between fun, pleasure and enjoyment. As far as you're concerned (and me, too), it's all fun.

## *The sense of fun*

People talk about “humor” as if it were a “sense” – like the sense of taste and touch and such. They also sometimes talk about the “sense of play” and “sense of fun” – and though it has nothing immediately to do with what we’re about to play with, there’s also the “sense of self” and “sense of community.” And then of course there’s nonsense, which I guess is also a sense.

These senses – the senses of humor and play and fun – are, as far as I can understand, genuine sensitivities. A person with a “good” sense of humor or play or fun can somehow sense just the right thing to do or say to make things fun or funny. When their sense of humor or play or fun is off, when they are “over the top” or seem too serious, they stop being fun, they just aren’t that funny.

Then there’s the senses of self and community. These play an important role in our senses of fun and play and humor. The better our sense of fun, play, humor, the better our sense of self, and our sense of community.

One of the easiest ways to sharpen your own sense of fun is to have it with others – when you and your friends, or your family, or your colleagues, are all being fun together. And, of course one of the easiest ways for you to be fun together is to play games, especially playful games. You’ll find examples of games of the playful kind pretty much wherever a game is mentioned in this book.

All of which is simply to help you start thinking about fun, because it has been my experience that the more often I think about it, the more often I notice my self having it.



## *The fun intelligence*

You know how they talk about all these “intelligences” – like the “creative intelligence” and the “emotional intelligence” and the “mathematical...”?

Well, today I’ve been wondering if maybe “fun” is one of those “intelligences.” Maybe our whole ability to perceive fun and create fun, the whole complex of rational and emotional and physical processes is part of an Intelligence.

You know how you sense something is possibly fun or you sense the fun possibilities...you know how we talk about the spirit of fun or the feeling of fun...

So I’m thinking maybe there is this Fun Intelligence, and that those of us in particular who are particularly gifted with this Intelligence have in fact found it to be central to our survival: socially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, spatially, mathematically...

Which also leads me to think that this is an Intelligence we can foster, nurture, exercise, develop, teach.

As with any Intelligence, I guess the first question in determining its value and relevance is to ask if it has any contribution to make to our survival.

Good question.

On a social level, the Fun Intelligence is frequently all that stands between you and getting beaten to death by a gang of bullies. If your FI (Fun Intelligence) isn’t high enough, you tend to make fun *of* just when you think you’re making fun *with*. In the locker room or sports field, failure to perceive the fun intention of a slap on the ass becomes a slap in the face, which frequently leads to a punch in the nose.

On the inner playground your FI is often all that stands between you and catatonic schizophrenia. Your ability to laugh at your self, to decide not to take things so seriously, to make light out of your darker suspicions...

Intellectually, your FI helps you toy with problems that are simply too big to grasp, to keep your self alive to the possibility of unanticipated solutions and resolutions. And when it comes to your body, your FI leads you to new sensations, new levels of engagement, new ways to experience the world. It takes you into the deserts and the mountains and beside the still waters. It restoreth the freakin’ soul.

Which makes you think of course about FI and your spiritual development: how it strengthens your ability to perceive the play and interplay of the planetary consciousness; how it brings you into communion with dogs and cats, porpoises and pelicans; how it allows you to share in the play of the infinite wind on the eternal water....

For the fun of it, let's pretend that we have conclusively concluded that the Fun Intelligence plays a vital role in personal growth and the evolution of the species. And let us further pretend that we have similarly concluded that there is a high correlation between the Fun Intelligence and adaptability, creativity, spirituality, physical, mental, and social health.

Now we are free to address the all-important question: how can we foster the development of the Fun Intelligence? How, we ask further, can we help people whose Fun Intelligence is in danger of atrophy from prolonged misuse? How do we cure the chronically somber?

Can the Fun Intelligence be exercised, restored, expanded upon?

As a matter of fact, yes. It's through a practice I call "following a playful path." You could call it "Mindful Fun," but that might make you too serious about the whole endeavor. Following a playful path is playing for the purpose of having and sharing fun.

Which is pretty much what these games are played for - not for score or trophy or world rank, but for the sheer fun of it all. I call these games "playful" because there's no other reason for playing them than the sheer playfulness of it all. We're not playing them to prove how profoundly we trust each other or to demonstrate our bravery or reveal our inner depths. Playful games are purposeless practices, not a few of which have their origins in college drinking games.

It's a useful thing, this notion of "playful" when applied to games. The idea of "playful games" repositions the experience of play, realigns it to the spirit of play itself, to the spirit, itself.

The second component is the conversations we have between the games. These conversations are devoted entirely to the experience of fun. We talk about what it was like when the game was most fun, about how we might make the next game even more fun. We don't focus on individual performance. We don't try to find out who had the most fun or played the best. We focus only on the experience of fun, and how it can be deepened. As the practice continues, each game becomes like a laboratory for evoking, exploring and refining the experience of fun.

And the third is all about the conversations we have on our Inner Playgrounds, where we contemplate the "inner we," invite our deepest selves to play, free our selves to meet our selves in joy.

For most of us, the last time we exercised our capacity for generating fun was around the end of the first week of first grade. This is why when we do experience something really, deeply fun, we attribute it to the “inner child.” It takes time to rebuild the Fun Intelligence to full, adult capacity. Some of my classes were as long as five or six days, and still not long enough to help people fully recover from years of fun deprivation. And yet, it is my experience and conviction that by introducing the practice of following a playful path, we can reach even the terminally dour.

## *The spirit of fun*

Fun is a spiritual thing. It is often a healing thing. It changes our perspective: on our selves, our bodies, our relationships, our community. It changes our energy, our mood, our world-view. It brings us moments of happiness, of peace, freedom. It frees us even from our selves.

Some games seem to call to the spirit. They can move you and your friends and the people who understand such things closer. Closer to each other, and to your self. They can make you better, healthier. They can make you a better person. For a while, at least. As long, of course, as they are fun.

On the other hand, if you really understand this (and I'm sure you do), you also understand all games give us this opportunity. Some just make it more obvious.

## *The art of fun*

You know how they tell you that you “learn to appreciate” art? Like abstract art, classical music, even wine? Or maybe you don’t so much learn to appreciate as “come to appreciate.” Things grow on you, I guess. Or you on them. You develop a taste for things like Bach or Mondrian or french fries with mayonnaise.

One of the things I find my self doing, when I’m trying to help people have more fun in their lives, is this very one – helping them cultivate a taste for fun things – especially things that they don’t usually even think of as having a taste. A taste for fun. A sensitivity to the taste of fun, you might say. And so might I.

Others call this endeavor “the art of enjoyment.” It’s fun to think of it as an art. I mean, you’d think that if something is enjoyable you’d just automatically enjoy it. Like if a joke were indeed funny, you’d know it right away. You wouldn’t have to develop anything. You’d just laugh. On the other hand, your sense of humor does, in fact, develop. You can, actually, find humor in things that maybe you never looked at humorously before.

Like art. People who listen to classical music a lot sometimes comment about how a piece of music is funny. Did you know that a “scherzo” is a musical joke? I mean, are you supposed to laugh when you hear one? Then there’s Victor Borge and P.D.Q. Bach. They’re funny, all right. But the more music you know, the funnier they get. Actually, it’s not so much that they get funnier. But more like you get them.

So, the enjoyment of art, and, in deed, the art of enjoyment is predicated on some kind of learning. There’s art appreciation. And then there’s wine appreciation. And hot sauce appreciation. And, in general, just plain life appreciation. The more you learn about any part of it, the more you can appreciate it, the clearer the sheer fun of it.

This leads us to the art of fun, a.k.a. the art of enjoyment. It has a lot to do with appreciating, which has a lot to do with learning. Like riding a bike, catching a frisbee, skiing, skating, dancing. And also like, oddly enough, eating. There is an art to appreciating food. To practice that art, you pay attention to taste, you experience the textures, you differentiate between the smells, notice the presentation, the sensation, the effect on your energy, your body. And by paying attention, I mean appreciate. And by appreciate, I mean enjoy, and by enjoy, have fun with.

Unlike some kinds of learning, the kind of learning you do when you’re learning the art of fun is, in itself, fun. It may not be as much fun as you think you’ll be having once you come to master all the nuanced profundities and profound nuances and things. But if you’re doing

it right, you're having as much fun doing it as the fun your having learning about the fun you are going to have, if you know what I mean. It's what you might call anticipatory fun – like the smile that comes to you before you quite get the joke.

One of the deepest and most fun things to learn about when you're learning the art of fun is learning about the art of having fun with other people. It's an exponential thing – when you're having fun having fun with people who are having fun having fun with you. As it were. This is what games are for, and, coincidentally, so am I.

Every game is an opportunity to practice the art of fun. Every game we play, if we so desire, is an invitation to fun, and more fun, and deeper fun.

## *Enjoying my self*

I enjoy my self enjoying the wind, the sun, the malted milk shake. I enjoy how I am, how I feel, how I act. I enjoy my self rapt, enraptured, wrapped in all of a moment's glories.

I enjoy how I am when I witness animals and children enjoying themselves, each other, the light, water. I enjoy how completely I can enjoy them enjoying a moment of the world so completely, so completely without me.

I enjoy how I am able to enjoy you. Just you. Even when you are enjoying something that has nothing to do with me. I enjoy knowing that I can enjoy your grace, beauty, laughter, clumsiness, playfulness, your person, your self, you.

I enjoy how we can enjoy each other's enjoyment, each so completely other, and yet completed by each other – me enjoying you enjoying me enjoying you.

I enjoy my self joined with yours as if my self were something that I am not, someone other, separate enough from me that I can enjoy it for what it is with you and does with you and enjoys with you. I enjoy my self like I enjoy yours.

## *Not having fun, or having not-fun*

With the apparently unlimited opportunities for fun offered to us every moment, it is often puzzling that there are times when we actually choose not to have it. Fun is so, well, fun. Why, when we could so easily be having fun this very minute, would we choose to have anything else?

Sure, there are many, many things to be worried about, to be angry about, even – poverty, injustice, callousness, selfishness, greed, disease, the myriad of miseries. But none of those preclude fun. As so many people who have devoted so much of their lives and times to helping people attest to – the work, as hard and sobering as it can be, is most often fun of the greatest, deepest, and most profound ilk.

And yet, from time to time, we get grumpy. We get so grumpy that we reject rejoicing, deny delighting, and all but celebrate suffering.

The worse thing one can do when one feels the need to be grumpy is to deny the grump – privately or publicly. The best, not only to acknowledge it (again both privately and publicly), but to embrace it. Letting people know that you are feeling grumpy helps them give you the space you need to wallow, and gives them the permission to acknowledge the existence of the not-yet-fun in their own lives and loves. Letting your self and the world-at-hand make it more fun.

Just as the easiest way to have fun is to start with the things that are already fun, the easiest way to develop the art of making things fun is to start with things that are meant to be fun in the first place. Since games and toys are purportedly for that very purpose, they are the best tools to use in your exploration of fun-making.

A next step would be to make games from things that aren't meant to be either games or toys. For example, you can make a game you know out of things that really have nothing to do with that game.

Then there's making games out of things that aren't games at all. This is close to the ultimate way to create fun, generally engaged in by those who find themselves on what I seem to be calling a playful path. For an especially tasty example, there's dessert-sharing, which is actually a game-like, playful thing friends and families might do together at a restaurant, ordering a bunch of different desserts, and then giving each other tastes, as requested. Which could lead one almost inexorably to the aforementioned game of Dessert Roulette.



## *The fun threshold*

Let's once more consider two different funonema.

We'll call one "major" and the other "minor."

Major fun is, well, major Fun that is so much fun that we are willing to risk life and limb to taste it, even if only for a second. It's the fun of sky diving, bungee jumping, rock climbing, snow boarding.

Minor fun is the chewing gum kind of fun, even the washing dishes kind of fun that comes with the warm water and emerging sparkle and the meditation-like expanse of timelessness that ends when the sink is empty.

The problem is that it's the major kinds of fun that get all the press. That's the kind of fun that soft drink commercials are made of. The other, the ordinary kind of fun goes for the most part unnoticed, barely felt.

Which is precisely why so many of us think that we aren't having fun. Which is precisely why so many of us really aren't having fun – because even when we are, we think we're not, if you know what I mean.

So all the commercial dollars that go into making it perfectly clear how this car or these shoes or those sunglasses lead inevitably to the ultimate expression of all-consumingly major fun – leave us, for the most part, in the shadows of despair, feeling that everything else we do is dreary, funless.

Which has the effect of raising the fun threshold to the point that hardly anything ever feels fun enough. Which is fine for the commercial powers, but not so good for us, the fun-seeking many, who buy and buy in to the belief that minor fun is not fun enough to be considered fun at all.

So we need to take back the fun that we are given on a daily basis: the fun of crunchy cereal, of cold milk and hot coffee, of birdsong and dog wag, of smiles and waves, of warm blankets and light reading, of bringing someone breakfast in bed, of holding someone, of being held. The fun of loving anything, of caring about anything, of caring for, of helping, of healing.

We can start with making a list, an enumeration, of the things we do for no reason. The things we do for fun. The things that give us pleasure. The pleasures we give and get. The slight things that bring us moments of light. Sure, we can include the big things, the major

ones. In fact, bringing the minor together with the major enriches our understanding of both, our embrace of all.

## *Making things fun*

**“For every Way,  
there’s a way of following that Way that’s fun.”**

- the Oaqui

If fun changes the way that we do things... how can we add more fun to what we do?

What more could I do if I looked for ways to add more fun to the everyday?

How can I make things fun?

My first suggestion: start with the fun that is already there. Before trying to add more fun, slow down enough to see the fun you are actually already having. When you were a kid, you could have fun going down stairs on your bottom or rolling a ball down the stairs or trying to bounce a ball up the stairs or trying to go up the stairs backwards or walk down the stairs two-at-a-time. Same with reading and running and counting and painting and dancing and hugging. That fun never goes away.

What goes away is our willingness to choose to have the fun that is offered us. We have too many other things to do. We're not in the subway because we want to play. We don't take the escalator because it's more fun. We are there because we want to get somewhere else. So we aren't, in fact, totally there. And because we aren't, we don't see the fun.

Or, you could find other ways to remind your self. Keep a ball in your purse. A super ball, just in case.

Or a yo-yo. Or better yet, a paddle ball – you don't even need the paddle, just the ball and elastic.

Or make your self a list of games you could play on the way – on the stairs, in the subway, on the sidewalk.

## *Seven ways to make almost anything more fun*

1. If there are two sides, add a third or take one away.
2. Every now and then, change sides: when someone is ahead by two somethings or when someone throws a 9, or when somebody has to go to the bathroom.
3. If there are turns (checkers, gin rummy, serving the ball in ping pong or volleyball), take them together, at the same time, as in “1, 2, 3...go,” or every now and then skip a turn.
4. If there is score, keep playing until you discover who’s the second winner, and the third, and the next, and the last. Or give each other points, or play pointlessly.
5. If it’s not fun, change it: add another ball, or a rule, or a goal, or take a rule away, or change a rule, or borrow a rule from another game, or add a whole game and play them both at once, or do something playful.
6. If it’s still not fun, change your self: try it with your eyes closed, or with your “wrong” hand, or tie your self to someone else.

If it makes the game better, for everybody, cheat.

## *The forgetting*

Fun things are always fun. But we aren't. It's a beautiful day in a beautiful part of a beautiful place. You're beautiful. The people you're with are beautiful. And you see this piece of garbage on your potentially pristine path, and all of a sudden it all gets ugly. The place is really just as beautiful as it was before. And yet, the fun drops out of life as if the whole world were nothing but one big dark hole.

Sometimes forgetting is a good thing. Sometimes it's better that we forget how much pain hurts, how much hurt we have given or received. Sometimes forgetting is part of forgiving. Sometimes, we even forget our selves.

Unless we find some way to remind our selves, we stay inside, and outside things stop being fun, we stop being fun. Even our jobs. Even our lives.

## *The reminding*

Which brings me to the purpose of this book, and my general life. So we can remind each other why we got into this in the first place, and what we can be getting out of it, as well.

See, I happen to believe that it really is fun. I mean just about everything. What we do. Why we do it. I think that fun is the natural state of, um, nature. And the only reason that things stop being fun, is because we don't let our selves out to play.

## *The list*

**“Ask not what fun does for you.  
Ask rather what you do for fun.”**

*-The Oaqui*

Finding and following your playful path is all about letting your self out to play. This explains why if you were to ask me to help you bring more fun into your life one of the things I'd most likely suggest is that you start making a list of as many things as you can think of that you already do for fun - *start* making, because this is the kind of thing you can do for the rest of your life.

Rocky, my very significant other, and I, in keeping with my oft-given advice, decided to create such a list, just for, you know, fun. It was the first time we tried to do this as and for a couple - as a couple, who, by chance, happen to be married for more than 47 years. It turned out to be a remarkably loving, far-reaching exercise – helping us surface aspects of our relationship that, even though they are central, are as subtle as they are profound in keeping us as close as we have become.

Here's our list (to date):

## Between us

Paying attention to each other

Thanking each other (we do this a lot)

Admiring each other's talents

Encouraging each other to do what each of us most wants to do

Accepting each other's differences, limits

Listening to each other, asking questions, getting clear

Appreciating each other

Sometimes, just because

Sometimes, for the help, support, caring, effort

Making each other laugh

Being funny

Doing playful things

Little acts of improvisation, spontaneous skits

Doing things together

Helping each other

Making bread together

Dancing – spontaneously, sometimes without music

Sharing memories

Touching each other

Planning

Trusting each other

Respecting each other

When one of us looks happy

(singing, humming or smiling) it makes the other happier

Playing games

Generally, not keeping score

Appreciating each other's success

Being kind to each other

Changing the rules

Surprising each other

Who ever gets up first makes breakfast in bed for the other

When Bernie finishes using the electric toothbrush he replaces his brush-head with Rocky's, and vice versa

Making meals for each other

Making a face out of raisins and bananas

Appearing in an outrageous outfit

Leaving notes



## Between us and the world

Learning something new together

Solving household dilemmas

Experimenting

Inventing

Trying new spices, fruits,  
foods, etc

Trying out new restaurants,  
grocery stores, parks,  
neighborhoods to visit,  
roads to travel

New ways to "make do"

New uses for common  
objects

Walking together

Speaking in accents

Pretend conversations as we  
walk by people, e.g.: "Where  
did we leave that body?"

Exploring different paths

Walking and talking

Building junk sculptures on  
our walks

Noticing flowers, smelling,  
touching

Listening to bird songs,  
trying to sing along

Sharing chores – keeping things fair,  
in balance

Being with the kids and grandkids

Helping together

Being kind to others

Pointing out things to each other that  
we think the other would enjoy

To other people (family,  
friends, strangers)

To animals, insects, plants

Bringing new people into each  
other's lives

Deciding together about how to  
spend and save

Pretending

## *The School o' Fun*

Let's start with something like a nursery school – a place of learning where, as far as the students are concerned, you spend all day having fun. I would have suggested that we start with a kindergarten, but, sadly, the fun part is not so true any more.

Let's imagine that this something-like-a-nursery-school is a high school, or a college, or an elementary school. All for fun, and fun for all. Taught by people who are having fun teaching. Attended by people who are having fun learning.

This place that we're imagining probably has no grades – there's no K-12, freshman to post-graduate, there's no A-F, failing or magna cum summa. Kids, students of all ages can be found together, talking, painting, building, reading, writing, experimenting, playing, even. There aren't any teachers – but rather people who have found deep, profound fun in doing whatever it is that they do: artists, scientists, mathematicians, healers, thinkers, each brought to their station in life by the fun they find in their work.

Let's dare to imagine that the whole school isn't even about learning, but about fun. Not even about games or play or art. And if there's a learning component to it all, it's about having fun, finding fun, creating fun, discovering fun. About discovering what is really fun for you – really, really fun. And then discovering what is really fun for other people. And then about discovering what is really fun for you and the people around you.

Suppose that the closest equivalent you can find to a math class is a conversation you have between you and someone who loves math, who spends as much time as she can find playing with numbers and theories of numbers and, OK, so maybe she does have a Nobel Prize in, what, topology? But she's in it for the fun, entirely. And when you talk with her about math, she talks with you about the fun of it all.

And the people you do art with, and read literature with, and explore dance with, and science with, and politics, and, well, you get the picture. All for fun.

I think this would be a place where a lot of learning would happen. A lot more than the learning that supposedly happens in our accredited institutions of learning. I think this kind of learning would be far more profound than the actual topics or disciplines that people play with together. I think the learning would be about our selves as much as it would be about the world, about each other as much as about a field of study. I think it would be a place where a lot of inventing would be happening – inventing of new fields of study, of new ways of teaching and learning and sharing, of new paths to play, new definitions for what it means to become a fully functioning human being.

I think that the people who graduate this School o'Fun would achieve new levels of awareness and compassion, happiness and devotion. That for them fun would be a spiritual thing, a guide to greater consciousness, deeper humanity. It's not that they would transcend fun, but that they would realize fun, in themselves, in their friendships, in their community. Fun in its fullness.

It's difficult to imagine. Primarily because we don't have fun like this. Not as adults. We had it for a few years, maybe, if we were lucky enough to be loved and cared for and well fed. And then we graduated nursery school. And then, day by day, year by year, fun became something else. Just as learning became something other than play. And art became something other. And work became something very much other.

It's worth imagining though. Even if it's just for pretend. Because if we imagine hard enough we just might get a glimpse of what fun can become, of what we can become, being fun.

## *Fun work*

I'm not convinced that efforts to make work fun are destined for success. I think the same thing about efforts to make learning fun, or writing fun, or just about anything else that we want to make fun fun.

Because, now that you ask, most human endeavors are already fun. Because the thing that keeps the best of us as good as we are is the fun we find in doing what we do, whether the thing we are doing is building a house or a game or a community, making plans or music or medicines, fixing the plumbing or a computer network or a school system, writing poems or proposals. Engineers, mathematicians, surgeons, dancers, architects, so many of the truly accomplished many readily confess to how much fun they are having doing whatever it is that they do. Gamification? They don't need no stinkin' gamification. They don't need to keep score, to get trophies. What they need is the opportunity to do the work they do best. It's not the teambuilding, not the motivational lectures, not the causal dress day, not the snacks in the break room. It's the fun that comes from doing the work you are good at. Of doing good work. Of the work you do when you do it well.

These people, the ones who are already having fun, these are the best people to teach us how to make work more fun, because they already know what it's like when work works. They know what it means, this idea of work being fun, because they're already having it. They can tell us about the things that help them have the fun they are having, and the things that keep them from it. About the leaders that give them the chance to work at their best and the leaders who keep them from it. About the good meetings, the good teams, about the good job, the genuine joy of the job well-done.

We always need fun – in the workplace, in the meeting place, by the fireplace... (actually, any place you can think of). But in the workplace, the absence of fun is more telling, more, shall we say, costly. In the not-so-good times, it's not so easy to have the kind of fun we have in the very good times. Hard to invest in a spiral sliding board – especially right after you've had to downsize again. So a different kind of fun is needed.

As things have slowed down for so many of us, there's a kind of fun whose value and benefits becomes ever vivid, the slower things get. This fun is the fun of having a job, at all. In a sad way, it's a good thing, because it points us to something even more sustaining. It's what I call "the fun of work."

From time to time, at any time, really, work can actually and honestly feel something very much like fun. When you are working well. When you are engaged, involved, challenged, interested. When what you are doing becomes so interesting to you that you lose track of time,

that you stop thinking about all those crazy things you think about when you're bored and worried, and find your self thinking totally and completely about the job at hand. This may not be fun of the haha kind. But it is fun, genuine fun, deep fun.

We all know people who find fun working. Sometimes it's a janitor or secretary, sometimes a foreman or manager. We all know times at work when we are actually having fun working. Like when we're part of a really good meeting, and everyone's really listening to each other, and everyone who has something to contribute has a real contribution to make.

So to make work more fun, we need to follow those people, and make note of those times. Those are our guides. They can show us the way.

When we are having fun together, especially when we are having fun working together, we are taking part in a mutually supportive relationship. Whether we are making a plan or getting a room ready for a meeting, if we are doing it together, and having fun, we feel together, individually and collectively.

We are at our best, together. We even look nicer, together. We listen to each other more closely, less critically, and we listen to our selves more closely, less critically. We increase each other's productivity, confidence, abilities. We increase our team's productivity, confidence, abilities. We increase our company's productivity, confidence, abilities. And when we extend that relationship to our customers, when we have fun, together, with our customers, we all become more successful. Because we enjoy the relationship we have created. We enjoy working with each other. We enjoy the things we do together and the way we do them together. We succeed more often. And when we don't succeed as much as we had hoped to succeed, we just get a little closer to each other so we can figure out how to make the game better, more fun.

## *Of fun and games*

The world that we think we understand today has changed, fundamentally, from the world we thought we understood 50 years ago. Fundamentally.

Much of that change has been driven by technology and those who drive technology, which, by now, has become just about all of us.

Now, when we talk about “social games,” we’re not talking about the kinds of games we play with our friends or families in the playground or street or family room. We’re talking about games we play, together, sure, like the social games we used to play, only now we play them online. And online, they’re something fundamentally different. And so are we.

It’s the same for most of us when we talk about community. We’re not talking about our neighbors, our neighborhood. We’re talking about the people we are connected with online.

And, for more and more of us, even when we talk about work, real work, we’re talking about a kind of work that takes place somewhere else – not in any particular office, but everywhere and anywhere we connect with, we are connected by. And not the kind of work where you have one job and one team and one boss and a regular paycheck with benefits, even. But more like the kind of work musicians call “gigs.” A little job here, a little job there, working for and with different people on different things, sometimes for a day, sometimes for maybe a couple years, off and on. Like games.

Like games, the institution of work has changed, fundamentally. In retrospect, what we had once defined as business, as sustainably cooperative ventures characterized by a collective identity, has become more characterizable as a condition of codependence, cooppression, of tribalism, fragmentation and internal rivalry. As the pace of change has increased, the institutions of business have become truly profitable only for a dwindling few. And what was once understood as a cooperative venture has, for the most part, become riddled with internal competition, sabotage, stratified, unresponsive to the individual, where oppression has become institutionalized and, as Paulo Friere observed in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “the oppressed oppress each other.”

We can’t predict what work, or the societies that sustain that work, will become. Working harder won’t help. Just like we are learning to play differently, we need to learn how to work differently. To find work differently. To think of our selves differently.

While we go about redefining and being redefined by our technologies, what we call games and what we call work and what we call community is changing at an increasing pace.

As the pace of change increases, games become an increasingly attractive occupation, playfulness an increasingly valuable asset. Play is how we have learned to learn. Instructions? We don't need no stinkin' instructions. We play our way to understanding. We learn how to use a new browser, not by reading about it, but by using it, playing with it. That's how we learn how to work our smartphones and iPads, microwaves and multi-function thermostats. We use them, we play with them.

When we play, especially when we are playful, we are most able to respond to change, to changes in our selves, in our community, in our environment. When we play playfully even failure becomes part of the game. Just like when we were kids playing with blocks, we keep building, block-by-block, until it all falls down, then start over. Sure, you can build on what's still standing. Sure, you can knock them down, too.

This is why play is traditionally identified as childish, as what children do. Childhood is a state of continuous, rapid change, of having to adapt to a changing body, a growing mind, with changing needs, changing purposes, changing abilities. Of falling down and getting up again and falling down again. Of making messes and sometimes even breaking things on purpose just so you can see what's inside.

Children seem to be almost always at play, because this is how they can best engage with a world they don't understand, because this is how they have the most fun.

Fun itself hasn't changed. What's fun might have, but the fun of fun, the attraction, the need for fun is the same as it has always been. And neither has the fun of playing changed. And neither has the fun of playing alone, nor the fun of playing together, nor even the fun of work, even. Games have changed and will continue to change. The nature of work has changed and will continue to change. But fun is fun, as much fun now as it was then. Forever.

By understanding fun in all its many meanings and manifestations, we can build a solid foundation for understanding games, in all their meanings and manifestations.

By examining games, as they were, and as they are becoming, in the light of fun, as it has always and will always be, we can build a better understanding of how games help us adapt to the increasingly rapid pace of change.

## *If I were the One and the One were me*

What I'd want from My creations – especially the conscious ones:

A) Appreciating. Not of Me, per Se, but of the world I make for them. I don't think I'd be the kind of One Who'd need thanks. I'd be the kind Who'd want to see My creatures enjoying My creation. As much of it they can possibly enjoy. As many moments and movements of it they can perceive. I'd want My creatures to be more and more intelligent so they could perceive more and more of My creation, and delight in it, completely.

B) Enjoying themselves. As deeply, as thoroughly as they can possibly perceive My creation, I'd want my Creatures to enjoy it. I'd want even more for them to enjoy themselves. That, for me, would be all the praise I'd require, all the prayer I'd want to hear. Not sacrifice. Not ceremony. Not even thanks. Just enjoyment.

C) Enjoying each other. In the same way that they enjoy themselves, I'd want them to enjoy each other. As many and much of each other as they can embrace. In fact, the wider their embrace, the more they'd be fulfilling My purpose. Embracing family, friends, neighborhood, community, strangers, people of different abilities and languages, cultures, traditions, values, status.

D) Enjoying the other. As much of else that is not their selves as humanly possible. All My creation. My clouds and lightning bugs. My mountains and mud puddles. My wildness. My tameness. Appreciating. Enjoying. As much as they possibly can.

No, of course not, I don't expect all of them to enjoy all of it, or all of themselves, even. But the more they do, the closer they'd be to being the beings I made them to be.

E) Loving. At least loving themselves. Loving the intricacy, the harmony between the parts and the whole, the mind and the body. Loving even the selves they find themselves with. The selves of animals, of trees, grass, even. Enough to keep themselves healthy, make themselves healthier. Enough to heal themselves. To heal the others.

So, all right. Maybe that's expecting too much. So maybe if they were just having fun, being fun, creating fun – it would be enough for Me. Better than gratitude or sacrifice or prayer.



## *The Oaqui Tales*

**“When the fun gets deep enough, it can heal the world.”**

- the Oaqui

Sometimes, even if you have no authority, no permission for believing in the things you do, you make up your own, and suddenly everything is fun again. As the Oaqui like/s to say: “Do what you think you should be doing long enough, and you, too, could become a self-fulfilled prophet.”

The Oaqui (“oa” is probably pronounced “wa”, “qui” is most likely pronounced “cky”, as in “wa cky”) was or were first introduced to the world through the virtual writings of the person currently identified as “the author.”

For all he actually claims to know about the actual identity of the Oaqui, Oaqui could refer to a singular and/or plural, male and/or female, person, group, and/or cosmic being. This is because: 1. the Oaqui communicate only by email, and 2. the Oaqui language makes no distinction between singular or plural, masculine or feminine, young or old. It is the Oaqui apotheosis to be seen as not only one with the many, but also many with the one. In this manner, the Oaqui is/are oft considered the true manifestation of me\we-ness.

And for all we know, there might be no such person or group as the Oaqui. This author person might have made the whole thing up, just for the fun, and the depth of it.

Your friend and mine/ours,

The Oaqui<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## *The Oaqui explain(s) fun*

According to the Oaqui, originally, before it all got started, before the big banged, everything was, in its total entirety, dimensionlessly and unadjectivably fun. Hence, any attempt to distinguish one form or dimension of fun from another invariably leads to excessive playfulness, like the following.

But, that's neither here nor there.

The Oaqui currently distinguish/es between 613 different kinds of fun. Curiously, Partial fun is considered a kind of fun (#417), even though it can never be as Total or Complete or Entire as Whole fun (#423), synonymously speaking.

There is Loving fun. One of my favorites, you know — the fun of loving, the fun love makes of the world. Which, corollarily means that there is also the Fun of Hating. And you know what that makes of the world. There's Good fun, which is nice, and Bad fun, which isn't nice, and yet is just as much fun.

Don't let me forget DEEP fun, for gosh sake, or, in a connected or perhaps the same vein, shallow fun. I suppose there is such a thing as Vertical Fun, the conceptual mirror of the more widely known Horizontal Fun.

This is all apparently rife with implications beyond the scope of this medium. And yet, somehow, not. Vertical or Horizontal, Deep or Shallow, it's the fun of it all that we should probably pay closest attention to: That it's fun at all. That it's all fun. That all these different kinds of fun, regardless of how much we hope to embrace or avoid them, are fun. They all do the same thing for us. They bring us life.

More than the different kinds of fun, it's the different ways of having it. More than the best kind of fun, or the kind of fun you are best at having, it's how many ways you have to have it.

Once you experience what and how whole fun is, you basically know what to do with the rest of your life.

Your mission:

To bring fun into the world. As long as you are in it.

Whole fun.

In as many ways as you possibly can.

According, at least, to the Oaqui.

Which reminds us of a query from a fellow employee who, while engaged in a particularly playful game, discovered that she “laughed so hard I cried,” asking, “What, apparently, is the connection?”

And why does one evidently lead to the other but rarely vice versa?”

The question profoundly struck our authorial plurality as something we should be writing about, so we posed this very conundrum to the Oaqui. The response was something like this:

“As soon as it was certain that the Big was about to go Bang, I/we, immediately set about to capture the essence and wholeness of Original Fun.

“Which is why today, at no additional cost to you, you can read the ultimate answers to such questions as the mysterious oneness of laughing and crying and the true nature of the Allfun-ness, written in easy-to-read DNA (you have to remember this was before there was such a thing as paper, or eyeballs), right there, always handy, printed on your very genes.”

## *The Not-Yet fun*

Fun is the key. But the lock is not-yet-fun.

According to the Oaqui, our world apparently came into being during The Billion Years of not-yet-fun, which was billions of years after the whole idea of not-yet-fun was considered at all funny.

Fun in our world, the Oaqui show/s us, is the exception; not-yet-fun the rule. This is why making anything lastingly fun frequently requires a combination of lifelong commitment, spiritual heroism and a multi-million dollar marketing campaign.

I have seen both the awesome and awful done in the name of fun. Despite my faith in fun, I haven't really trusted fun. Not as the ultimate arbiter of ethical being. Not in this world.

But now, thanks to this revelation of the origin of the not-yet-fun, my faith in fun is restored. Because now I understand how new of a thing fun really is. And how big of a job we really have. And how patriotic!

That's the other thing about the latest Oaqui revelation that I find particularly liberating. Aside from my few years in ROTC, I've never really had the opportunity to think of my self as a patriot. But, yes, now that I think of it, fun is the most American of all things I could have ever wanted to make or be.

Fun is my country's real innovation. We Americans have carried the consciousness of mankind so far beyond the dark depravities of survival, that today most of us can spend most of our days bathed in the clean light of soap opera and awash in the sweet regularity of major league sports.

Fun is our most profitable export. Our movies, our TV, our sports, our millionaire players. Fun is our actual revolution. Fun is the ultimately inalienable right we have been trying to establish in an ultimately alienating world. Fun is what our founding fathers secretly hoped to find, and built a country in the pursuit of. Fun is all we want to have. Fun is what we are here to make. Fun is our singlemost greatest contribution to the evolution of the species. Fun is the American way!

## *Why we age, according to the Oaqui*

In the beginning we were ageless.

We had no age.

We were neither young nor old, adolescent nor decrepit.

Without age.

Ageless.

And great fun was had by all forever.

A little later, somebody noticed that it was even more fun to be ageless when we were also pretending to have age. We pretended all the fun parts of infancy and youth, maturity and old age. We especially liked to pretend the fun parts of being grown up.

Because to pretend to be grown up we had to pretend that we weren't pretending. And that is the hardest and most fun of all.

So we devoted year after decade to it until we got so good at pretending to be grown up that only drugs and enthusiastic charismatics could get us to pretend to be children again.

...In the mean time almost completely forgetting that we are all each ageless in the first place.

## *Two Players – a Oaqui tale*

I asked the Oaqui if they/he/she could entertain me with a profound-seeming, instructive-like story.

“TWO PLAYERS,” the Oaqui eventually responded, almost without hesitation.

“There are two players in the heart: Serious and Silly,” the Oaqui began in a tone bordering on instructive glibness. “At least.”

“From time to time they play games.”

“Which one wins?” I innocently inquired.

“It depends,” responded the Oaqui, “on who’s keeping score.”

## *The Truth Will Make You Laugh*

The Oaqui is/are quoted to purportedly have said that “the truth will make you laugh.” This, coincidentally, is closely, but inversely correlated to the insight that led me to concocting Oaqui Meditation. The underlying premise of Oaqui meditation is that when you laugh, you are the truth. The purpose of the meditation being to reflect that truth back into the world.

Laughter, claim/s the Oaqui, is a Oaqui invention. The Oaqui explain/s:

“For example, it is likely that the sound people make when they laugh is a genetic memory of the actual sound of the Big Banging: reminding them thereby of the infinite humor of it all when it was all for fun.

“We/I also believe that the real reason I/we invented laughter could very well have been to remind humanity as a whole of something.

“Then there’s theory that laughter is the sound of the energy that is released when the not-yet-fun finally becomes fun: a quantum releasing of fun to yet another level that is more fun than that.

“It also could very well be the sound of the soul applauding, of the whole body clapping, returning to a state of primal health, resonating with universal glee.

“Then it occurs to me/us that I/we might have very cleverly created laughter so that we/I could leave humanity with a spiritual Heimlich Maneuver: whenever the spirit gets blocked by the not-yet-fun, a little laughter is all it takes to resuscitate the soul.

“In sum, I/we don’t exactly know why, or when or actually if we created laughter or even what laughter is for.

“In the beginning it was fun.

“In the end, it was all for fun.

“And in between is where it tickles most.”

## *The Therapeutics of Primal Glee, according to the Oaqui*

No one ever said it's easy to be Oaqui. Even if one is totally Oaqui, totally immersed in a totally Oaqui-saturated environment, being a totally-actualized Oaqui — there are, in sum, times when it's just too hard to maintain the correct Oaquitude. And things just generally fall pretty much apart. Totally.

These are the times when sanity becomes a definitely attractive option, even for the Oaqui.

For Oaqui and non-Oaqui alike the return to some version of relative sanity frequently requires the assistance of a full-time expert — a Professional Therapist who is intimately familiar with the practice of the therapy, who has spent a life time in its pursuit, and has made it a life's work.

Fun, as we know, is endemic to the nature of any Oaqui enterprise. Thus, unlike the non-Oaqui forms of therapy, all Oaqui therapies are Fun Therapies. Amongst the Oaqui, the term Play Therapy is redundant.

It is interesting to note how parallel, yet non-intersecting are the practices of Oaqui Therapy and non-Oaqui so-called Play Therapy. Whereas amongst the non-Oaqui, Play Therapy is for children, Oaqui (inherently fun) Therapy sessions are for adults. Whilst amongst the non-Oaqui the goal is to help patients confront primal pain, betwixt the Oaqui nothing is more therapeutic nor more primal to confront than fun.

A typical Oaqui Therapy session may involve hours of intense playfulness punctuated by moments of sheer hysteria, until it is generally agreed that the patient/s has/ve been able to recover another moment of absolute fun.

Through marathon sessions, sometimes attended by a whole team of Oaqui fun Therapist/s, the Oaqui is ultimately given the opportunity to relive those truly primal moments of rapturous laughter which are so central to the formation of the Oaqui character: to the first total tickle, the first wet-your-pants giggles, the first ecstasy of achievement. Amongst the Oaqui, these early and momentary experiences are the most powerful examples of what the non-Oaqui classify as trauma. For the Oaqui Therapist, these are the moments of Primal Glee.

The Oaqui Therapist is greatly admired for his/her mastery over a wide variety of Glee-evoking techniques and tools, but even more admired for his/herself/ves'/s personal capacity for Glee. Amongst the Oaqui, none is more continually and reliably Glee-prone than the Oaqui Therapist.



Another significant deviation between Oaqui Therapy and the kinds of so-called play therapies practiced amongst the non-Oaqui is age factor. Whilst amongst the non-Oaqui it is the adult and most senior therapist who commands the greatest respect and salary, amongst the Oaqui, the younger the Therapist, the more highly his/her services are valued. In truth, many of our most cherished and revered of Oaqui Therapist/s is/are known to be /a/ mere child/ren, often merely in the early twenties: months, sometimes weeks, sometimes days, even.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

*Appendix*

**“Play is how the mind minds, and how the soul soars.”**

*-The Oaqui*



Rocky DeKoven



## *Playing Inside*

A playful path takes you wherever you want to take it.

A few years ago, I decided to find out if I could take it inside the same way I took it out, playing with my imagined selves like I play with others, reaching playfully into my very soul.

The older we get, the more we have to play with, inside. Memories upon memories, books, songs, movies, TV shows, things we've seen on the computer, games we've played. No wonder we don't want to leave. And now that we have computers, there's still more to play with, still inside, screened off, but connected to worlds and worlds.

So many things to play with, to remember, to think about, to bring back to mind, so much to play with that it sometimes seems that there is hardly any room, anywhere, to imagine anything else.

But a playful path, no matter where it takes you, must, ultimately, take you beyond remembered things, beyond the familiar, the recognizable, beyond the screen, even when you're playing inside.

Luckily, your imagination is at least as big as you imagine it to be. There's always room. You can build a new place. A playground. A sacred ground, wholly your own, where even the most intricately delicate of imaginary delights are as permanent as you are.

So, that's what I did. I pretended a playground. My own, personal, inner playground. You might consider taking a similar journey, but, of course, your own, in your own inner playground - the one that you imagine into being. I started my journey in a dentist's office, and ended up making it the appendix for this book. To be taken as an example. And then to be taken wherever you want to go with it.

## *My oral coronation*

There I was, lying on my back listening to something Bach-like, my mouth locked open while a masked man and woman probe my major orifice with tools of intimate discomfort. Utterly absorbed in the rites of oral coronation, unable to speak or swallow, incapable of cracking joke or smile or voice appreciations for apparent acts of cleverness, and I found my self saying to, well, my self:

"O mighty one, let us find something to do with our impeccable mind that will take us away from all this.

"Let's see, for example, if we can imagine an elephant. An elephant with very long, white tusks. Tooth-like tusks. That are being cleaned by a uniquely adapted elephant tooth-pecker bird. Peck. Peck. Peck.

"Or perhaps we can contemplate the truth that can be extracted from this experience, like a tooth.

"No, let's instead meditate on the bizarre mating practices of dental hygienists. Of potentially libidinous purposes that might be pursued by one trained in the use of a saliva-sucker.

"On the other hand, maybe a game of hide and seek might be best. I'll go hide.

"Or perhaps I might find some more obvious way of indicating my interest in the effects of additional doses of Novocaine."

And there, my body stretched flat and open by the incapacitating machineries of modern medicine, the state of my numbness reaching vivid questionability, I rediscover that most blessed of all mental abilities: my Inner Playground.

For, even there, under certifiably physical duress, my mighty mind can take me away from the all too personal now. I can, instead, should I so choose, talk to my self, joke with my self, fool my self into some semblance of squirmlessness, even when the world wherein I found my self proves so profoundly squirmworthy.

And I realize now that this skill is something upon which the continuance of my veritable sanity sometimes depends. That without this ability to play with my self, to amuse my self, to surprise my self, I could lose my self utterly.

## *Let's call it our Inner Playground*

On the one hand there's nobody there but you. On the other, for example, when you're just sitting there thinking about nothing in particular, there's the distinct impression that there's at least one other you there: the you you think is doing the thinking, and the you you think you're thinking about.

This is not such a profound revelation. It's a quite common knowledge. Inside your head there are at least two completely equal, and only somewhat fictional selves. And each of your selves is you.

Playing for real.

We all talk about it. We surprise our selves. Love our selves. Beat our selves up. We fool our selves, laugh with our selves. Laugh at our selves.

We talk to our selves. Sing with our selves.

We remind our selves. We don't let our selves forget. We drive our selves harder. And we drive our selves crazy.

We punish our selves, arouse our selves, abuse our selves, delight our selves.

We stop our selves, deny our selves, reward our selves, deprive our selves. We are proud of our selves, ashamed of our selves.

And all the time we are just playing that there's somebody else there. Each of us.

This is what I'm referring to as the Inner Playground, where everything we can think of can happen, where any of our selves can be pretended into being or not.

This is where we find our selves playing when there is no there there. Where there's nobody there but us, our self.

## *The Inner Inner City*

Amuse my self, abuse my self, entertain my self, scare my self, heal my self, applaud my self, enjoy my self.

And not just my self.

It's not just the two of me in here, you know.

Least case scenario, there's:

- 1) the "I" I'm thinking about and
- 2) the "I" that's doing the thinking, and then there's
- 3) the third "I" -- the "I" that's thinking about the both of us.

The discovery of the Third "I" leads to two very useful conclusions:

There's an inner "we" that is really "me," and v.v.

and

all we/me really want/s to do is play.

There's my entire consciousness, created and inhabited by an all-encompassing, all knowing Me/We.

An alternate reality. Vivid as thought. Elaborate beyond belief. Built by me for my self for one reason, and one reason only: so I could have more fun.

So I could, when necessary, transform the world.



## *My own private Hollywood*

So, I ask, what else do I do to keep it fun here in the inner playground when the elsewhere isn't as much fun as it should be?

Sometimes, I reply, I just count.

How many steps between this and that? How many breaths from here to there?

I count people, I count cars, I count whatever will count enough to keep me counting.

If that's not fun enough, I estimate. 67 steps to the bench. 24 chews to finish the salad. 138 heartbeats from here to the end of the article. And if that's not fun enough, I place my bets. An ice cream cone or similarly unjustifiable expenditure if I make it to the door of the store in exactly 100 strides.

Sometimes I talk to my selves.

I personally have had ornate lecture halls built wherever my selves gather so that I might, when need be, astound my self with my wit. Make my self laugh, wherever I am. Give my self standing ovations whenever so moved.

Deservedly so. Because on the inner lecture circuit I am widely known for my motivational speaking. I talk with a clarity and fluidity and practiced elegance that can capture the heart and mind of my inner audience. My words sound as well-rehearsed as a long-running play, and it's all improvisation! I can speak with equal authority, about truth and God, money and power, love and sex, sex and sex -- and I don't really have to know what I'm talking about until I hear my self saying it.

When I'm not speaking to my selves, I sometimes find it absolutely hilarious simply to attend to one of my many open rehearsals, with my self ever so versatilely starring as actor and audience and everybody I need to be talking to.

I have become a big time entertainment industry, all by my self.

Billion dollar summer blockbuster? I can illustrate my lectures with spectacles whose production values make Hollywood seem like a cottage industry. Million-acre amusement park? What Disneyland can compare to the attractions awaiting me in my Inner Playgrounds?

## *Building your inner playground*

As wonderful as it is to have a whole mind to play with, sometimes it helps to have a small, fenced-in place to play in – a private, very personal space designed specifically for playing with which ever of my selves happens to drop by. Sometimes, even games won't work. They take too much organizing, they make me think too much. Sometimes I just need something to play with, something where I can take my selves for a ride, something like a see saw or swing set.

Having these around allows for a particularly meditative kind of play, where my selves can reflect and relax, listen and loosen, play and be played with.

This part of the inner playground is in a deeper, more protected part of my psychological geography.

If you want to come there with me, you first need to put your self in a place where your body is safe and you can lie back and close your eyes and let you mind drift along, without worry, without attention, without interruption.



## *Your inner SeeSaw*

Breathing is an especially fun thing. Especially on the inner playground. Inner-playground-wise, breathing is just about the mother of all rides. Breathing can get you so high that purportedly perfect peace awaits you for doing nothing else but.

Listen to your self breathe for a minute or day or year or two.

Listen to your self breathe.

You, the listener, you the breather.

Listen to your self breathe without disturbing your self.

Breathing in exactly as much as you would if you weren't paying attention.

Breathing out. Noticing, but not controlling.

Noticing for example the moments between, when the in-breath becomes the out, the inhale the ex.

Noticing the sound wash through you, the hushed ushering of the air entering, exiting.

It's like being on a see saw with your self. Your breathing body on one end. Your noticing mind on the other.

You see your self up. You see your self down. You get all the way down and see the other of you get to be all the way up. You and your self get off on each other.

And as you teeter-totter your selves up and down, breath by breath, you are your self, one body, one mind, seeing and sawing in time with the moving breath, getting high off each other.

## *Your Inner Swingset*

Congratulations on your acquisition of Your Inner Swingset. It's better than anything mere money can buy.

As you know so well, all Your Inner Playground Products are guaranteed for your entire lifetime. If it's quality you want, nothing beats the quality you've got.

And what a perfect addition to the Inner Playground. What, after enduring the enthusiastic hubbub of your personal multitude, can be more exhilarating than to find your self finally by your self, quietly swinging on your very own Your Inner Swingset?

You will notice that Your Inner Swingset, as is true of all Your Inner Products, comes only partly assembled. This is to allow you to build exactly the kind of Inner Swings that can swing you precisely as high as you each and all are ready to be swung.

Your Inner Swingset comes with a Build Your Own Base. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO USE THIS SWINGSET UNTIL IT IS FIRMLY ATTACHED. Attach the Base to something as permanent as you are. Like, as in the following example, your very breath.

Sample operating instructions:

A) Breathe deeply.

1) start your swing

Imagine that you are just about to launch your self, just getting ready to push your self back.

And as you deepen your breath, you spring backwards, kicking your self up and back as high as you can breathe in.

2) continue your swing

Exhale your self into the ride.

Breathe your self out and down. Inhale your self in and up.

Shallowly. More and more shallowly. Breathing easily, evenly. Pumping lightly. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale.

And then,

B) Breathe deeper, pump your lungs fuller, kick your self higher, deepen the swing, and then exhale into the ride.

C) Again, and again. Deep breath, then shallower and shallower. Deep breath, and then shallower and shallower. Deep breath,

And then let go.

## *Your Inner Tire Swing*

Imagine your self sitting in it right now at this time, a tire swing, and it and you are just swinging back and forth, exactly as you want it and you to, with the air feeling just like the air feels on the edges of your lips or nostrils when you breathe in and you breathe out. And as you swing, the breeze caresses your body like a mother or a lover, now your back, now your face.

Try using your breath to kick off and pump your tire swing back into the air. Inhale your Inner Tire Swing as far back as it can go, then exhale it down until you find your self almost stopped. If you want, you can even hold your breath, freezing the swing in mid-air. And then let out, and go. The breeze on your imagined body should feel exactly like the air on the edges of your lips and nostrils when you inhale extra hard, or exhale extra hard, when you drink the air in or blow the air out.

And just like the air that passes through your lips and nose, the air that caresses you when you're on the tire swing never really stops for long. It just reaches the end of one direction, and then goes in the other. The ride back starting just when the ride up ends.

And unlike the ride you get from any imagined commercial swingset, the ride on your All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Tire Swing can take you almost any direction – not only back and forth, but in circles and arcs, spinning and twisting, lines and spirals. So you could be just spinning on your tire swing if you so desired, back and forth, with each breath, spinning, and maybe lying back at the same time, with your head so far back you can see the sky underneath you and the ground overhead. Turning in the breezes of your breath. Without any effort at all.

And because it's in your pretend playground, your tire swing is on a surprisingly long rope, hanging surprisingly high off the ground, from a surprisingly tall tree on an amazingly long branch. A tree on the edge of a cliff, surprisingly high above the ocean and city, sparkling in the sunset light. And no, no, you can't fall off, unless you want to or have to. And if you did fall, you'd probably fly. And no, no, the rope can't break, and neither can the tree and neither can the branch. And yes, the branch swings too, sometimes so low that it seems like you're actually going to scrape the ground. But you never do. Not the tire. Not your feet. Not your head. Unless you want to.

Imagine your self swinging and spinning, the air going past you just like the air going in and out of your nose, in and out of your mouth, in and out of your lungs, caressing your whole body like it caresses the edges of your nostrils, the edges of your lips.

And this time, to get higher still, you give the air an extra push, pumping the tire swing far, far back, as long as you can breathe out. And then you let the air come back into you, and the swing arc down and over the cliff and up into the evening sky. Not like you're actually breathing the air in, but more the air is coming into you, filling you. And then, again, you push the air out, pumping the tire swing back and up, so high that you can see the whole tree, the whole city, the whole ocean, the whole sky.

And then you just let your self ride, your breath the only thing that moves you, until...because it's just a playground and you're just a player and you're only playing...you find your self somewhere else, completely at play with something else or someone else, not at all aware that there is any breath there at all.

And you forget that you are swinging and forget that you are breathing. And you just let go, let go, entirely, tirelessly, and the tire swing is nowhere around, and you are breathing without you, not even thinking about breathing. Not even thinking about tire swings. Not even swinging.

Breathing, but not noticing. Forgetting utterly that you're even supposed to remember. Until you find your self floating elsewhere entirely, drifting, toying with this or that or this and that, this dream or that, this playground.

Until, magically, you notice it again, your breath again, and again you find your self, back in your tire swing, exactly where you left off, swinging back and forth, freely, unstoppably. Higher than you thought possible and higher still. Back and forth. The air touching, caressing you. The sounds of your breath coming and going along with the creak of the rope as it twists in the imaginary breath that suspends you.

Congratulations. You have completed the Installation Procedures for your All-Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing and are now completely ready to explore all ten of the very personal comfort control buttons only available to owners of the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing.

Please activate your Tire Swing. See if you can imagine your self playing with each control as it is described:

**Control Button one: The Whim Activation System:** Whim-Activation is built in to every component of your All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing. The factory default setting for Whim-Activation is "slightest." First-time users experiencing any discomfort with the sensitivity of the default setting may need to give themselves time to get used to the system, but they can easily override the Whim-Setting completely, and directly affect any All Weather Tire Swing capabilities as indicated.

**Control Button two: Changing location and placement:** All All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swings are delivered pre-suspended. This is to maximize your Inner Swinging pleasure by minimizing set-up time entirely. If you do wish to change locations, you will quickly discover that Your All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope has all the physical properties you can imagine necessary for installing it virtually anywhere.

**Control Button three: Auto-Attach:** With built-in Auto-Attach, the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope attaches itself immediately and securely to virtually any inner object you can think of: corner of a building, telephone wire, the highest tree in a rain forest, attached to a glass precipice hanging over the grand canyon. It just as quickly detaches and repositions itself as long as you could imagine it doing so. The control button varies the nature of the attachment.

**Control Button four: On demand rope length:** In a similar manner, your All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope-length varies according to your specifications, the moment those specifications are made manifest.

**Control Button five: Elasticity:** The All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing rope responds instantaneously to any and all ad-hoc elasticity specifications, from cast iron to bungee and beyond.

**Control Button six: Tire composition:** Tire shape, size and material are all completely and instantly variable. Like the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope, the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Tire can change elasticity and width. It can also change shape. Thus, it is surprisingly easy to re-imagine your All Weather Tire Swing tire into anything from a hammock to a hot tub.

**Control Button seven: Gravity Factors:** The Gravity Factors determining one's sense of personal ensconement in the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Tire are entirely Whim Activated. It is impossible to fall off or out of an All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Tire regardless of your imagined position within it, unless you want to.

**Control Button eight: Rope/Swing balance:** The All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope and All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing are generally installed as a unit. Thus, the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire is similarly preprogrammed to change shape and properties as required by the dictates of any rope change, and vice versa. The control button changes the balance between the versa and the vice.

**Control Button nine: Tire Auto-Positioning:** Which, in turn, explains why it is so

easy to change the position of the tire on the rope itself, from vertical to horizontal, as needed or imagined.

Once you have mastered the nuances and sensitivity of the onboard Whim Activation System, you will find that the All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing is as easy to play with as it is to make it play with you.

***Control Button ten: Auto-Positioning and Totally Responsive Sensing:***

With both engaged, the tire changes from tractor tire to inflated tractor tube, or swinging donut-shaped cloud. By factory-set connection between The All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Rope and The All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing Tire controls allows one to shrink or expand the entire, as it were, tire-swing-and rope-set, as well as everyone in the tire at the time. Thus, should you need for any reason to completely and immediately transform both size and position, you could find your self, instantly, snugly swaying on a honeysuckle flower, with a butterfly or two, hanging from a dew-bejeweled cobweb.

Phase One of the installation of your All-Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing and Sandbox Kit has now reached its logical conclusion.

## *Your Inner Sandbox*

Before we go any further, we must once again express our sincere congratulations and commendations to you, dear owner, for having the wisdom, foresight and funds needed to purchase our favorite and only Inner Playground Building Kit, which, as advertised includes not only your very own All Weather Inner Playground Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing, but also your entirely personal, portable and professional All Weather Inner Sandbox.

Now, with the Quick Guide to the Installation of the All Weather Inner Sandbox, we begin Phase Two.

Installation of the All Weather Inner Sandbox is easy and immediate, but the full extent and variety of what you can do with and in your Inner Sandbox would understandably take you many years to discover.

As all good quick start guides, the following quick start guide was written to help you get a quick start, without your getting overwhelmed by the unimaginably many controls and fine tunings available to the experienced user. Which, of course, you, at this time, so soon after installation, are not necessarily.

All All Weather Inner Sandboxes come with Amper-treated, Multimodal Sand, a Boundaryless Sandbox, and a Full Line of Imaginary Sand Toys. We recommend that you begin by exploring each component separately, as follows:

Multimodal Sand. Imagine sand that can take on any color, any thickness, any texture, any weight, any polarity, any smell and any mood you can imagine it taking. Imagine sand that can turn into water or steel or rich black loam or an ice cream sundae or hot fudge. Precisely as you would imagine!

Now with AmperSand®! If you are thinking of what it'd be like to have an infinite supply of the very sand that holds everything together, you're thinking about AmperSand®. Worried about something breaking something? With a generous supply of AmperSand® added to every All-Weather Inner Playground Sand Box, breaking something is just the first step towards putting it all together. AmperSand®, the one true glue.

Boundaryless Sand Box. Imagine a sand box that can, at will, take on any shape, at all. It is almost too much to imagine your self imagining. Imagine a sand bubble in zero gravity half-filled with warm, fluffy, gently buzzing, nuzzling sand. Imagine a seashore of semi-self-forming sand that shapes itself into impossible architectures: palaces and ranch houses, cities and villages, joined by an Escher-like network of tide-filled moats, canals, waterways, and thrill-rides.



Imaginary Sand Toys: Also included, a limitless collection of imaginary sand vehicles and sandmovers, tunnel-makers and action figures that are fully consciousness-capable. These Sandbox Surrogates – mental mannequins, as it were - have enough memory to contain your entire imagined self, and be just the right size to walk and work in the sand castles of your very own design, in your very own imaginary kingdom, where you, you living doll, you, are endowed with power to build or destroy anything at any time for any reason.

Imagine all the really personally controlled sand carriers and sand diggers and sand movers.

Imagine the profoundly personally controlled airplanes and dirigibles and sand boats, and holographic clouds.

### ***All Weather Inner Sandbox Guarantee, Fine Print***

We do hope you took the time to imagine what it might say in fine print on the All Weather Inner Playground Sandbox Guarantee. Because, as you would imagine, the Guarantee, as generous as it truly is, simply doesn't apply if more than one of you use the Inner Sandbox at the same time. This is for your own good. The All Weather Inner Sandbox can be made big enough for all your imagined selves to play together. Creatively. Peacefully. Even cooperatively. And when that happens, well, there's simply no telling what might happen.

For the fun of it, imagine what it would be like if you really got a bunch of your pretend selves together with your self in your Inner Sandbox, imagine how completely surprising things could get, things that you really never imagined happening, the sand taking on new shapes and properties, configuring itself into working models that can be played with in such an informing and inspiring manner as to result in the creation of totally unanticipatedly surprising events and inventions whose very significance and practicability, as you can ever so plainly see, are clearly beyond the scope of this policy.

## *Preparing your Inner playground for your players*

Even though we said that the installation of the All Weather Inner Playground Sandbox was the second phase of the full installation, the actual second phase doesn't come until now, when we, breaking all implied Inner Playground Sandbox guarantees, decide to imagine Silly and Serious at play, together, in our Inner Sandbox, and let them run around as they so often do.

In preparation for the arrival of both Silly and Serious, some of us might want to be sitting, alone, in a very quiet place, with a mirror. Others might just want to pretend that they are doing that.

Let the Preparation for the Return of Serious and Silly to our Newly Expanded Inner Playground begin.

Take out your two-sided mirror (not included). If you can't find a two-sided mirror, you can use a one-sided mirror (also not included) and a double-flip (see following). If you can't find a mirror or anything at all anywhere around that you can see your self in, try using your Playful Path Imaginary Mirror (included).

Look into your mirror and make a face that is definitely Serious. Take your time. And give it time. Until the face you see is inarguably, indubitably, and indeed, the face of you, being Serious.

Now flip your mirror over, and do the same thing until the face you see there is, most typically and unmistakably you, being Silly.

(Here's where you, if you have a one-sided mirror, must use the aforementioned double-flip.)

Now flip the mirror over and see if your Serious face is still as unmistakably Serious as it was when you last saw it.

And flip the mirror over again, and check out your Silly self. Just look at that silly self being silly! And again flip and again flip, randomly, seeing you can catch one of them off-guard.

OK. So that'll be the way Silly looks. And that, Serious.

Go it? Silly? Serious? Silly? Serious? Serious again? Silly? And again Silly?

You are now ready for Silly and Serious to play, together. With each other. In your own, personal, All Weather Inner Playground.

## *Enter Silly and Serious*

At last, here come Serious and Silly. At least at last you know what they look like. Now imagine them at play in your Inner Playground. Both of them, in your new All Weather Inner Sandbox, at the same time.

Let them start off, as they always do, playing as far apart from each other as possible. Well, they could possibly be further apart, but “possible” here means without being so far apart that they can’t see or hear or feel each other.

They really seem to need their own space, to be in their own place, where the sand is clearly theirs, and they can exercise total control. Without conversation. Or eye contact, even.

And at the same time need to be just close enough so they can catch a glimpse of what the other is making. And, if they so desire, they can be completely free to make their own sand do something that looks and functions and smells in a remarkably similar manner, yet is clearly an improvement. Or not.

After a while, imagine Silly and Serious inexorably having to draw closer, to find out what kinds of roads and bridges and canals and borders they can draw together, between their creations. Imagine them drawing together.

Imagine how, given long enough, their bridges become the foundation for something surprising. Surprising to Silly. Surprising to Serious. Surprising in a remarkably surprising way. More surprising than either of you had even dreamed possible.

So surprising, that even the All Weather Inner Sandbox doesn’t have enough sand, isn’t big enough.

Imagine Silly’s expression when that surprising thing gets born into the world. Imagine Serious’s face when it gets made for real.

Now look in the mirror.

## *Inviting God*

Now that your swing and sandbox set is installed, tested, and all guarantees, implicit or impossible, are void, it's time for the grand opening of your newly installed Inner Sandbox and Tire Swing system, time to invite the Inner Superstars. Silly and Serious, of course. But how about imaginary somebodies even more fun to play with? How about the people you love to play with, how about all the people you've ever loved to play with. How about god?

Imagine that you are in a room full of people, real people, sitting in a circle. Better yet, don't imagine it. Find a room full of real people sitting in a circle. Imagine, if you need to, holding hands with the people on either side of you, playing some playful game. Like the one where you pass a squeeze. So if someone squeezes your hand, you use your other hand to pass the squeeze to the next person. Imagine that you've done that for a while, watching the squeeze pass from person to person. Round and round the circle. And then you close your eyes. And try to imagine the other people in the room. With their eyes closed. Passing the squeeze. Open your eyes now and see if the squeeze is where you imagined it to be. Close your eyes again. And then open them. Close and open. How close is the squeeze to where you thought it was? Keep score if it helps. And then close your eyes and keep them closed.

Next time your hand gets squeezed, imagine that it's not your neighbor, but, well, so maybe it is really your neighbor, but you're pretending that it's not. You're pretending it's god. Not the real hand of the real god, but the hand of the god you're imagining.

Since you're pretending that a hand squeeze is the touch of god, you might as well pretend it's a kind of cosmic touch, a touch from your very own, unauthorized version of god. Not necessarily an angry god, and not just a Just god, but a god that's, for example, fun. Really fun. A god that's incredibly, majestically, supranaturally fun, and is there for you, just to have fun with you. A god that greets you with every smile, every laugh, every moment of joy.

So, there you are. Your eyes closed. Sitting in a circle. Holding hands. And every now and then, your hand gets squeezed. And you're imagining that it's getting touched by an imaginary god - god, the Ultimate Player. And that touch just passes through you, like a tickly shiver, to the person holding your other hand.

And in between squeezes, you and G, the UP, are off, just day dreaming. You, sitting in a circle, holding hands with a circle of day dreamers, dreaming with together, each with the god that is Fun. All of you, and the Fun god, cloud-shaping, sand-playing.

Imagine that you and god are day dreaming together in a Ten Button Breath-Activated Tire Swing. Swinging together, holding hands, attached by a touch, the Ultimate Player swinging

you from all to nothing, from infinite to infinitesimal, from here to there.

Serious and Silly, of course, would clearly love the idea. Really. Both of them. Having something like Divine Fun to play with. In their personal, imaginary sandbox, as it were. Serious thinks about the Serious fun to be had building new worlds with the Ultimate Player. Silly about infinite silliness, silliness on a cosmic scale. Both imagine a real lot of fun. A real big lot.

Now that you think about it, this Ultimately Playing god is familiar. Very familiar. As in Main Squeeze familiar. Familiar all along, hanging out with you in the Inner Playground, since the beginning, so to speak, since you first imagined it into being.

It was then we first imagined a god we could be truly intimate with - talk with and have fun with and dream with and pray to and thank. It was there that we imagined a god we could play with. An imaginary god, maybe, but with imaginary powers on a cosmic scale.

This time, we are imagining that same god, only this time that Imaginary god has not only an infinite imaginary capacity for love and forgiveness, kindness and acceptance, goodness, joy, but also a deeply compassionate sense of humor. A god whose powers are very much like the powers of the very god that we imagined into being when we were children. Only better.

A god that is Fun. A god we can be closer to. More intimate than we were as children. Closer than angels. A god we can join with, and become infinitely intimate with, in laughter, with love, for fun. A god we can breathe with. A god that can become us. A god that we can become.

All-powerful, maybe, but this time, a god that is a lot more fun to play with.

Do you still know where the squeeze is?

If your eyes are closed, open them. If they are not, imagine they were. Find the squeeze. Give your self a point if it's where you thought it should be.

## *Serious and Silly play hide and seek and find God*

Of all the players on Your Inner Playground, Serious and Silly are the best known. They've played together for years. They understand each other intimately. They can play the most complicated games you can imagine. And, from time to time, they can really play beautifully together. There's one particular game that they can never play particularly well. Yet they play it almost all the time, and seem to really enjoy it. It's a variation of hide-and-peek and peek-a-boo and achieving enlightenment.

Typically, Silly suggests the game. Serious always wants to be Seeker. This, actually, is a good arrangement. Serious is an expert at keeping rules and being fair and defining what's off limits. Silly, on the other hand, is remarkably good at hiding.

Next they decide on Home Base. The Inner Playground is full of potential home bases and hiding places, from Toe to Tongue, Throat to Lung. Silly usually picks the Nose.

Silly will play Hider, and Serious, as we already predicted, will play Seeker. Serious focuses all attention on being the breather, the nostril, the sensor of the air. And then begins to count (backwards, by primes, from 97). Silly is supposed to be hiding by the time Serious reaches zero. Despite years of practice, Serious just can't ignore Silly for the whole count. So, as usual, Serious has to start over again several times before Silly is really ready to hide.

Finally, Serious completes the count. At last, the moment of truth. Serious, in a blink of the inner eye, reaches the unavoidable conclusion that Silly is definitely hiding. At this point, the game almost always breaks down. It's just too much for both of them. For Silly, hiding is fun, but only for a little while. And for Serious, just the thought of being all alone, leaving Home, without Silly...it's almost too frightening. Even Serious doesn't want to have to be that serious.

Fortunately, both Serious and Silly have had a lifetime to play. All it takes to get Silly out of hiding is someone to say "Allee Allee Oxen Free." I don't know why they keep on playing Hide and Seek. Tag is a much better game for both of them. They'd never have to be apart. And, together, they could even find other players to play with.

I tried to ask them once, when I thought they were between games. And they started running after me, yelling "You're IT."

## *Silly and Serious get scared*

Silly and Serious were the two most opposite characters that ever had character. Serious and Silly were identical as identical twins. Silly and Serious were as real and actual as you or I can be. Serious and Silly were as imaginary as you or I can imagine.

One day, as Serious and Silly were walking home, when they were approximately almost exactly two blocks from the doorknob on their front door, they both noticed, at the same time, that there was really nothing else to do – nothing else, that is, except walk home. It wasn't really that they were bored. Just that they'd gone on that very same walk so many times before. It wasn't really that there wasn't anything to do. There were all kinds of things to look at: the sky and the clouds, the street lamps and the telephone poles, the houses and the people walking by, the cars, the birds. It was just that they needed something new to do. And everything, even the things they hadn't ever noticed before, seemed, well, old. All they needed, really, was something else to be doing while they were walking – something else to do or think about, just until they got home.

About half a block later, Silly came up with a Silly idea. Wouldn't it be fun, Silly thought, to pretend that something, something really scary, is following us? Something really, really scary. Something that could catch us and eat us, in some kind of pretend way, completely up!

For the next half-block, Serious thought very hard (which, for Serious, was just about as fun as possible). Serious thought about the implications and ramifications, about being scared and about scary things and about the effectiveness of pretending to be afraid as an antidote to boredom. Serious thought about the pros and cons, the ups and downs, the ins and outs. In the meantime, Silly thought about the scariest possible things, and how fun it could be to pretend them into being – big things with lots of teeth and very, very bad breath.

And, at the very moment when they were each exactly one block from home, Serious made a decision. Yes, Serious decided, pretending a scary thing into being would indeed be an effective distraction and simultaneously a meaningful exercise of the pretend muscles. And, by sheer coincidence, Silly had decided exactly what the pretend thing looked like, precisely what it sounded like and absolutely how it smelled.

When they were a quarter of the way home, they could almost see the Pretend Thing's teeth and eyes and claws. When they were half-way home, the Pretend Thing was exactly twice as close and the Pretend Thing's teeth and eyes and claws were twice as big. When they had only a quarter of the way to go, the Pretend Thing was four times closer, and the Pretend Thing's teeth and eyes and claws were four times bigger, and the Pretend Thing's breathing was four times louder and the Pretend Thing's breath was four times smellier. And, when they had



only an eighth of the way to go, they could hear the Pretend Thing's toes scratching on the sidewalk. Eighteen toes. All on one horrible foot that smelled even worse than its breath which now smelled eighteen times worse than it did before. They could even tell exactly how horrible its horrible smell smelled!

And, by the time they were in front of their house, they could hear the Pretend Thing's terrible growl – like the growling of a big, angry, hungry, and very upset stomach. Just as they got to the door, Silly was almost not pretending at all. Silly was almost really, really scared. And Serious, even Serious was getting Seriously scared. Very Seriously.

And, just as they finally got the door opened, and the Pretend Thing had dug all of its eighteen pretend toes deep into the front step, and scrunched itself into one big angry, smelling, gurgling coil of very mean muscle absolutely and totally ready to pounce and grab and bite – Serious and Silly jumped into the house and slammed the door completely shut right in the made-up face of the horribly pretend Pretend Thing.

“Wasn't that,” said Silly, shaking and sweating and breathing hard, “fun?”

“Most,” answered Serious, holding on to Silly as tight as Silly could be held, “amusing. Most amusing, indeed.”

“Well then,” said Silly, with a particularly silly grin, “how about if we open the door and invite the Pretend Thing in?”

Serious thought for about one-half of a half-second, and said “I don't think so. No, come to think about it, I really, actually, genuinely, honestly and totally seriously don't think so.”

*Serious And Silly meet Naughty and Nice  
and learn to play Kick The Can*

One day, Serious and Silly were playing Hide and Seek. Actually, it was the 17,534th day Serious and Silly had been playing Hide and Seek. But who's counting? Which, of course, is a whole other question.

So there they were, as usual, Serious once again trying to get the rules clear. Silly once again being, well, silly.

Only this time, Silly clearly stepped out of bounds with this silliness thing, and did something that could only be called naughty.

“That’s naughty,” exclaimed Serious. And so it was.

Naughty, it turns out, was with Nice at the time. Who immediately introduced everybody to everybody else and proceeded to organize a game of Kick the Can.

And Kick the Can, as only someone as nice as Nice would know, is a game that would attract Serious, Silly and especially Naughty, with whom Nice was. Because it’s like Hide and Seek, the very game Silly and Serious had spent a lifetime playing.

And it’s just different enough to be a New Game.

In Kick the Can, the Can is Home Base. A different kind of Home Base, though. A kickable one. A moveable, pick-up-and-throw-away-able kind of Home Base.

And just like in Hide and Seek, you hide and try to get back to the base without being seen. And if IT sees you and tags you before you can get to the Can, you become a Prisoner and you have to stay at the Can and do pretty much nothing. But if someone else can sneak in without getting tagged by IT and kick the Can, everyone is free and gets to hide again and IT has to be IT another round.

Oddly enough, everyone thought this would be fun.

So, guess who winds up being IT?

Serious? I don’t think so. By the time Serious got ALL the rules down, everybody else would have found something else to play.

Silly? It? You can't expect Silly to play by one set of rules long enough for anybody to figure out the game.

So Nice it is. That is, Nice is IT. As for Naughty, nobody, not even Naughty, wanted a Naughty IT.

Not for the first round, at least.

And guess also what becomes the Can?

Something in your personal landscape as actual as a Can, as common, as kickable. Tangible like a Can, but evanescent, like a Can being kicked. Like hearing the sound of the surf? Feeling the sand between your toes? Seeing the outline of a cloud?

Remember, it has to be something everyone agrees to, but Nice gets to decide.

Guess where everybody goes to hide.

Guess who gets his Can kicked by whom.

Guess what happens when Nice gets Serious.

Guess how long Nice has to be IT.

## *Silly plays grownup*

One of the big differences between Serious and Silly is that Silly likes to pretend to be Serious, while Serious hardly ever likes to pretend to be Silly. As you know, both Serious and Silly are very good at pretending.

One morning, Silly and Serious were playing around the house. Actually, they weren't playing "Around the House." They were playing "House." You know, the pretend game when you pretend to be a baby or a mother or father.

Up until this time, Silly always got to play Baby. Silly could goo and gaa and drool and drip and crawl and kick, and be more of a baby and have more fun than even a real baby could have. And Baby Silly was more than silly enough to make this into a game Serious could take seriously. While Silly was playing Baby, Serious could try and try to get Baby to eat some pretend custard,. Or Serious could try to make Baby sit still, or be quiet for more than 10 seconds. Because Baby was always moving and making silly noises, trying to make Baby do anything was a serious enough challenge even for Serious.

Today, at this very time, for some probably very serious reason, Serious decided that playing House really wasn't very fun after all. Even though Silly seemed to be having more fun than a box full of self-rattling rattles, and even though trying to get Baby to do anything required Serious to exercise great skill and cunning and things – even though the game really was fun, Serious just wasn't having any.

So Serious harrumphed gallumphed and up and quit. "I will play Grown-Up no more," explained Serious in a deep and serious voice.

"OK," answered Silly, while trying to make a hat out of the bowl of pretend custard. "You play Baby, and I'll play Grown-Up."

A most interesting turn of events, thought Serious. A most significant reversal of roles, thought Serious again.

Well, as you can guess, Serious was just as good at playing Baby as Silly was. In fact, Serious was very, very good at playing Baby. Serious could cry and get angry and throw tantrums and be stubborn and cranky and make messes and knock things down – all so well and convincingly that everybody really thought that Serious was acting just like a big Baby.

Here's where this story starts to get somewhat sad.

Once Serious discovered how much fun it was to play Baby, that's pretty much all Serious wanted to play, ever. At first, Silly thought that maybe this whole thing wasn't such a good idea, after all. At first, it really wasn't that much fun for Silly to play Daddy or Mommy. It was hard for Silly to look busy all the time, and full of reasons for doing anything, and really, really hard to learn never to smile and only to laugh at TV and never with Baby, and to knit and furl one's eyebrows and keep them furled and knitted all the whole day.

After a while, Silly finally got really good at playing Grown-up – so good that people thought Silly really was almost as Grown-up as Daddy or Mommy – a very hard working, very serious Grown-up who would never do things like making a hat out of a bowl of pretend custard. After a similar while, Serious discovered how seriously one could play Baby and how many seriously baby-like things there were to do: whining and nagging, screaming and crying, throwing toys and tantrums.

Soon, Silly was even better than Serious at playing the very serious Grown-up. Because, unlike Serious, Silly could forget that it was all pretend. And Serious was even better at playing Baby than Silly was, because even though Serious knew it was supposed to be all for fun, Serious could be stubborn and cranky, loud and selfish, messy and irresponsible, spiteful and sometimes even mean – without looking like any of this was even the least bit fun, at all.

So Silly would act Grown-up all the time. All the time. From breakfast to dinner, from getting up to going back to bed. Even playing games, Silly would never laugh, and always look as if each turn and each move were things that had to be taken as seriously as bed time or teeth-brushing time or school time. And Serious would stay Baby-like all the way from breakfast to bath time. And even though there were for real things that only Serious could take seriously enough – things like taking care of pets and learning the alphabet, like helping people and making friends, like growing up – Serious was too busy being too much of a baby to think about anything else at all ever.

The somewhat sad thing is that even though Serious really wasn't having fun, and Silly really wasn't having any fun either, they both kept playing the game. Hour after hour. Day after day. All the way until Silly and Serious grew really up – so up that Serious and Silly had a real house with a real spouse. And all that time, Serious never got to play Grown-up, ever. And Silly kept on playing – well, not really playing, not really even pretending, but truly almost believing – to be all grown up, and full of very important reasons with no time left. No time to play. No time at all.

You would think that a story that is as somewhat sad as this one is the kind of story that can only get sadder. Well it actually isn't. Because one day there was a baby in Serious and Silly's house. A real baby. A baby that really cried and really played and really ate and really needed to be dressed up and cuddled and cared for and looked after. A baby that wasn't pretending to be Baby. A baby that was even more real than even Serious could pretend to be. A baby

that was as good at being silly as Silly was, as good at being serious as Serious ever hoped to be.

And this baby was so good at being Serious – at crying so really hard and needing so much to be held and fed and changed – that Serious started to wonder if there might be things that were even more important than getting to play Baby. And day by day the real baby showed Serious all kinds of reasons not to play Baby, or even to pretend to play Baby, or even to pretend to be playing to play Baby. Until all that Serious wanted to take really seriously was the real baby.

And this same baby was so good at being Silly – at, for example, giggling and gurgling and blowing spit bubbles all at the same time – that Silly started to remember how fun it used to be to play, how fun it once was to have fun. And day by day the real baby reminded Silly about the fun of making someone laugh, the fun of tickling and doing silly things and making silly faces and silly noises,. Until finally Silly thought how silly it was for someone who could be as silly as Silly to pretend to be too grown up for fun.

So, at the end, this really isn't a sad story at all. Silly got to be Silly again, in a way that was more fun than Silly could ever have had by playing Grown-up. And Serious got to be Serious again, in a way that was even more fun than playing Baby. Until everything was finally exactly as it should be.

One day, while Baby was all alone, playing one of Baby's favorite all alone games – a game Baby called "House," Baby wondered: wouldn't it be even more fun to play "Grown-Up?"

## *Hearing Silly*

Whenever I want to hear what Silly has to say, all I have to do is talk to my self out loud – not so loud that other people might think I'm being, well, silly, but just loud enough for me to hear Silly talking out, as it were, loud.

Actually, it's more listening to the out loudness of it all than it is listening to Silly. In fact, should Silly so choose, I could even be talking nonsense and/or gibberish.

## *Your Inner Thespian*

So there you are, encapsulated, on a nine-hour flight, sitting in a middle seat between two women, neither of whom expresses any interest in exchanging pleasantries or profundities. In front of you, a screen promising a mind-numbing selection of proven paths to mind-numbness. And your headphones aren't working.

You wait patiently, as one of the fleeing flight attendants suggested, to see if, in fact, once takeoff has taken off, the sound will sound. Nothing. So you sit, trying to watch a movie you can't hear.

And suddenly, from the very wings of your psyche, you hear your inner-thespian, wording and re-wording what to say should someone happen to respond to the call-light. Yes, the plane is completely full. Yes, those who were there to respond to your every concern are fleeing by in a flurry of otherwise-engagement: meal carts, drink carts, carts of freedom from duty.

And during that hour of vain rehearsal, your inner-thespian, for lack of alternative, entertains you. You realize, of course, that it is you, doing this to your self, this framing and reframing of the yet unsaid and unanswered, in the name of something like fun. You, doing this (a tad compulsively), to keep your self entertained, occupied, otherwise engaged.

You are reminded of other encounters with your inner-thespian, waiting in line at Starbucks, repeating words like "latte grande, non-fat, extra hot" in preparation for your performance in that momentary, yet all-consuming Encounter with a Barrista; of other times spent preparing for your bit part with a waiter as you sit alone in a restaurant, or with a policeman as you sit in your car reviewing speed limits, or with a nurse as you sit in the waiting room with last year's issue of Health Now lying unopened on your lap. You, entertained only by the imagined voice of your inner-thespian rehearsing words that will, in all likelihood, remain unspoken, forgotten.

You funny person you, doing this to your self, rehearsing as if you had the leading role. "No small parts," you say to your self. You oddly funny, genuinely lovable, inner-theatrical person.



## *On being wrong*

Having done something stupid and embarrassing again – and I'll tell you it was so stupid and so embarrassing that I really don't want to talk about it, at all, ever – I found my self really punishing my self for having done what I did. And after about half hour of surprisingly brutal internal rhetoric, it became obvious to me that what I needed more than anything else was some kind of recess. I just had to take my self away from all this. It was something we all needed.

From having hung around the internal playground for so many years, I suspected that there I wasn't the only one who needed to go out for recess. That's the way it seems to work. Usually, wherever I find my self, there's at least two of me there. And the fact of the matter was, it wasn't just me that I was so embarrassed about that needed to get away, it was also me that was trying make the other me that I was so embarrassed about feel more embarrassed, or stupid, or guilty or just basically and completely wrong.

So I decided to send them out together.

For the sake of recall, I called one "Wrong" and the other "Right".

Before I go any further, I want to make sure that you know that I knew it was only me all along, and that each of those "me"s was really only me, playing. Me playing Mr. Wrong, just as surely as it was me playing Mr. Right. That's what makes it fun, don't you see, that, from the very beginning, it's me, playing.

By the time we got to the playground, Mr. Right agreed that he would always be Right, regardless.

And Mr. Wrong, with odd intimations of glee, agreed to always be wrong, also regardless. So the only thing Mr. Wrong never felt wrong about was how completely Wrong he was being. So there we were, Mr. Right and Mr. Wrong. And we were still feeling kind of rotten about each other. Mr. Right telling Mr. Wrong that he could do nothing right. And Mr. Wrong agreeing, abysmally, gleefully.

There was still so much tension between them that it really seemed to them, given they were on the inner playground now, that they were playing something very much like a game of Tug of War.

Now Mr. Right, who, as we know, is, by necessity of convention always Right, instinctively knew that if he tried to play a game of Tug of War with Mr. Wrong the game would just nev-

er end. Wrong would simply keep on doing something wrong. Without meaning to cheat, Wrong would probably just let go of the rope, or try to push when he was supposed to pull, or run in circles when he was supposed to stay in position.

So, if they were going to play a game of Tug of War at all, they really needed to find some other players to join them. Which is exactly where Silly and Serious came in.

See, Mr. Right, who was simply, according to his very nature, taking the game seriously, immediately thought of inviting Serious to come and play on his side. And Silly, quite naturally, wanted to play on the wrong side, which, in this case, was manifestly self-evident.

So there they were, two very powerful teams, Silly and Wrong vs Serious and Right. Serious and Right always had the superior position, the superior strength, the power, the correctness, the solidity of purpose. And Wrong just kept cracking Silly up.

Remember, this whole game started because I did something embarrassing, and I had to get away from all that punishment I was dealing myself. And I thought maybe I'd try taking an inner recess. And now I discover I'm four different players.

So Wrong, just when he was supposed to offer the strongest opposition, simply let the rope go. And Silly was yanked so hard by the combined strength of Serious and Right that he landed on top of them both, causing all of them to fall into a pile. And just as Serious and Right were about to express the equivalent of moral indignation, Wrong completely doubled over in laughter. Doubled over so completely that there were, for a brief moment, two Wrongs, which, with an unseen flash, made another Right. And suddenly, there were no Wrongs at all. Just two Rights, either of whom, by all rights, could have felt deeply wronged by all this playfulness, but didn't. Instead, both Rights also doubled over in laughter. Which turned out to be exactly the right thing to do, because neither Silly nor Serious could be found. And everything was all right again. For everyone. For, especially, me, alright, all right.



## **Note of Gratitude**

To: Richard Garcia, Chris Collins, and a wise friend in the Netherlands  
Drew Davidson and Shirley Yee at ETC Press  
Julie DeKoven

For: their generous and painstaking efforts in making this book as proof read and intelligible  
as it hopefully appears to you

Find me on the web at **deepfun.com**

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Almost everything you need to know about the Oaqui can be found in the last section of this book

<sup>ii</sup> Infinite games, is described by James P. Carse in his *Finite and Infinite Games* (Free Press, 1986) as follows: “A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play.”

<sup>iii</sup> There is a great deal of science attached to the pursuit of fun. The study of fun, the psychology of fun, the anthropology of fun, the psycho-biology of fun, the theories of fun, the theories of games, the design of games, toys, playgrounds, parks, public spaces. I find my self most at home in the art and spirit sides of fun.

<sup>iv</sup> a crossword tile game where players must continually incorporate new, randomly drawn letters into their crossword array - see Bananagrams.com

<sup>v</sup> my five-volume curriculum based on children’s social games, used in helping elementary school children develop social skills, School District of Philadelphia, 1971

<sup>vi</sup> The traditional prayer recited upon leaving the bathroom.

<sup>vii</sup> playwriting, actually, from Villanova University

<sup>viii</sup> Northwestern University Press, 1963. Available for download from Archive.org

<sup>ix</sup> a retreat center in Eastern Pennsylvania devoted to the study of games and play then under the direction of Don and Lore Rasmussen

<sup>x</sup> *Psychology Encyclopedia* - <https://psychology.jrank.org/>:-

<sup>xi</sup> see *Flow: The Psychology of Optimum Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008

<sup>xii</sup> Cofounder of the New Games Foundation, author of *The Ultimate Athlete*, Viking Adult, 1975

<sup>xiii</sup> See <http://www.kabaddi-games.com/>

<sup>xiv</sup> See his *Teaching, from Command to Discovery*, Wadsworth Publishing Co Inc, 1973

<sup>xv</sup> *Finite and Infinte Games*, Free Press (Janaury 5, 2013)

<sup>xvi</sup> Teaching cooperative recreation since 1940. More information is readily available on the web.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Fingle* is a cooperative two-player iPad® game about the thrills of touching each other on a multi-touch device. Two players drag up to five buttons of one color onto their matching targets; their movement makes it impossible to avoid contact, creating intimate moments with intertwined hands.

<sup>xviii</sup> “a no-graphics, digitally-enabled playground game for 2 to 7 players, designed for motion controllers such as the PlayStation Move” by Die Gute Fabrik

<sup>xix</sup> Sutton-Smith, Brian, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Harvard University Press, 2001

<sup>xx</sup> <http://www.libraryindex.com/pages/2227/Genetics-Evolution-VARIATION-ADAPTATION.html> *Genetics and Evolution - Variation And Adaptation*

<sup>xxi</sup> *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: role of aneuploidy in cellular adaptation and cancer*, Pavelka N, Rancati G, Li R. Stowers Institute for Medical Research

<sup>xxii</sup> *Fivebox* “Five box requires a row of five decent boxes and two players, one at each end. For your first turn you have to throw the ball into the box closest to your opponent (your fifth box, his first), without him catching it on the fly. In other words, the ball has to take a bounce (and only one bounce) before he catches it or it leaves his box. If he catches it on a fly, or if you missed the box, it's the opponent's turn; if he didn't catch it, you throw again. This time you throw it to your fourth box (his second), where it had to bounce once (and only once), then bounce once or more times in the fifth box before he catches it. If he catches it before it bounces in the last box, then you don't advance but continue trying for those two bounces. If you get it, your next attempt is to get one bounce in the third, fourth, and fifth boxes.

“Ultimately, you get it to a point where you've made the ball bounce once in all five boxes. At this point you reverse, trying for four bounces in four boxes, then three bounces in three then two and finally just throwing it into his closest box on a bounce before he catches it.”  
via Streetplay.org

<sup>xxiii</sup> As described by Dr. Madan Katarian, founder of Laughter Yoga

<sup>xxiv</sup> Martin Buber is the author of *I and Thou*

<sup>xxv</sup> Peter Gray sheds more light on this phenomenon, which he calls “informal sports,” in his book *Freedom to Learn*.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Children's Games in Street and Playground: Chasing, Catching, Seeking*, Iona and Peter Opie, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970

<sup>xxvii</sup> “New Games” was a term used by the New Games Foundation (1973-1983) to describe games that were, by design, playful, adaptable, focused on the experience of community.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Dr Arvind Gupta exemplifies this in his website <http://drarvindguptatoys.html>

<sup>xxix</sup> Bill Russell has a beautiful account of this experience in his book *Second Wind: Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*

<sup>xxx</sup> Mechaiyeh is pronounced me-chai-yeh, with the “ch” in “chai”, like the “ch” in “Nachas” sounding like you’re trying to clear your throat

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Âgon, Alea, Mimicry and Ilinx*” - [http://www.homodiscens.com/home/embodied/ludens\\_sake/caillois/index.htm](http://www.homodiscens.com/home/embodied/ludens_sake/caillois/index.htm)

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Journal of Play* <http://www.journalofplay.org/issues/229/234-fell-running-and-voluptuous-panic> -

<sup>xxxiii</sup> this is not a footnote

<sup>xxxiv</sup> OK. You got me. I was having fun. In all likelihood, there is/are no such pe/rson/ople as the Oaqui. It’s been me, all along. I think. So, sure, the Oaqui is/are made up, probably. But the wisdom isn’t.







## *About Bernie:*



Sebastien Gendry

### **Second Grade**

One day, when I was in second grade, I remember thinking to my self: “this could be a lot more fun, Bernard.” I mean, really. I remember thinking how even workbooks used to be more fun than having to sit here, at my desk, still, silent, with all these kids around me, listening, when we could be mucking about with some marvelously educational materials, inventing physics. And I’m pretty sure it was then that I began to devote my self to the pursuit of what I have decided to call “the Playful Path.” Because the very next thing I remember was me, Bernard, joking. toying. playing, talking a lot. Even sitting in the hall, waiting to see the principal, I was always on the alert, always looking to make it fun, for me, for anyone I could get to play with.

### **Teaching And Playing**

By the time I finally graduated college, and graduate school, I was pursuing a playful path, professionally, even though I never called it that. I taught fifth and sixth grade everything. Reading, math, science, physical education, whatever. It was me and them. So I began making games out of everything. No, I began with the fun of whatever it was that we were

supposed to be doing, with the fun of it. We didn't just read, we played reading games. And we played with reading. With the sheer fun of reading, o, I don't know, braille, perhaps. Or Morse code. Or chemical symbols perhaps.

And fun was had. And learning was had. And we definitely weren't had. Except for once. In one class I taught. Sixth grade. And all of a sudden I learned that the kids were going to be subjected to a test that would determine whether they would make the academic track in high school. It was what they call "the little death." No, wait. That's something else. But it did feel like something died because of that test. Like, because of that test, we had to stop working on inventing our own hieroglyphics. And suddenly the whole thing, even teaching, didn't seem like very much fun.

### ***The Theater Of Children's Games***

It was 1969. We, me and my degree, found our way to an experimental, remodeled-factory, magnet elementary school called "The Intensive Learning Center," and the title of Curriculum Development Specialist, with our own parquet-floored, carpeted-risers, theater-in-the-round light and audio booth, within which to develop curriculum for the entire school district, in deed. Me, I had to do something fun. So I had these 45 minute sessions with kids from all over the 5th and 6th floor of a factory building in not-so-upscale Northeast Philadelphia. First grade kids. Fifth grade kids. The lot. And I decided that me and the kids, we'd reinvent theater right then and there. True to my understanding of the playful path, I wanted us to start from scratch, from what we know, from the collective scraps of the lives we can share with each other.

And the kids taught me their theater. And I played with them. And we called it "games."

A curriculum is what everyone else called it, fortunately. Finally, in 1971, the *Interplay Games Catalog*. Five volumes. One thousand games. Coded according to an elaborate system, so that if the kids liked a particular game, the teacher could find another they'd probably like as much.

And that was it. That was my theater curriculum. And they didn't fire me. In fact, they funded research. And I taught it to teachers. Games. I did these classes with teachers, and all we did was play kids games, and talk about it all, and it became, well, deep fun. Sometimes profoundly moving fun.

### ***The Games Preserve***

By then, the curriculum in my hand, we, me, my wife and kids, moved to the country and built "The Games Preserve," a retreat center for the study of play, where I, and anyone else willing to brave the rural realities of my 25 acres in Northeastern Pennsylvania, could play

with an actual barn full of games – board games, table games, puzzles, flying rings, a sliding board... And there I began to learn and teach, not so much games, even though there were thousands, but what I came to call a playful path. And I had my wife and kids and 25 acres as teachers. And guinea fowl, and sometimes millions of these bugs.

This is where I explored everything I could about the path I was on, this playful one. And where I discovered that I not only “channeled” playfulness, but also that I knew how to teach it. It was easy. It was what I’ve been doing all this time. What tool could be better tuned to the experience of playfulness than games? Especially the games I liked to teach, and make up. Playful Games.

This is where Dr. Brian Sutton-Smith used to bring his University of Pennsylvania classes. The Games Preserve. Where we built a peaceful, profound place for play. In the middle of the country. 90 minutes from Philadelphia. 2.5 hours from New York. Where year after year I thought about, played with, explored, studied, discussed, game after game after game. Kids’ games. Family games. Games for one player. Games for the masses.

### **New Games**

Like the approximately 250,000 people who attended the last day of the Bicentennial celebrations in Philadelphia. Like the millions of people I eventually reached after 1975, when I was invited to be co-director of the New Games Foundation, to consult on the design of the New Games Training, and help create an alternative to competitive sports that now is taught at almost every elementary school in the world.

### **Computer Games**

And our family flourished. And it was 1981, and just when we ran out of money, I found a job in California, as a professional game designer, for a computer games company called “Automated Simulations.” This gave me the chance to try out my understanding of playfulness in a virtually virgin computer jungle.

I created designs for what we wound up calling “Mind Toys.” Jim Connely programmed my first game, Ricochet. It proved to be the first abstract strategy game designed specifically for the computer. Jaron Lanier programmed my next game – Alien Garden – now known as the first “art” game for the computer.

### **Coworking**

From 1985 to about 1992 I began exploring the connections between games and meetings. I had discovered a computer tool called the “Outline Processor.” I began using it for my own purposes, to help me design games. With the outliner, I could conduct my own brainstorm-

ing sessions, organize ideas and develop them into completed concepts. I could also easily work on several games at the same time. Essentially, it helped me keep ideas in play. I reasoned that I could do the same thing with meetings – helping business teams work together more productively.

The success of this approach led to my publishing a small booklet called *Power Meetings*, and, four years later, *Connected Executives*. I started a website devoted to this process and called it Coworking. That site still exists as the Coworking Institute. Much later, the term Coworking became redefined. My associate Gerrit Visser and I were both so impressed with the similarities between my Coworking concept and their implementation of it, that we offered them the use of the domain.

While I was using the outliner and designing games, I also got to work with Children's Television Workshop. In fact, Dave Winer, the inventor of the outline processor, and the products ThinkTank and MORE, helped me develop the prototype for a game I modeled after the children's game of Streets and Alleys. I designed it so that it could be played with one key, hoping to establish some sort of precedent for games that kids with limited mobility could play.

The 2004 publication of my book, *Junkyard Sports* proved to be just the opportunity I had hoped it would be – an invitation to the sports and physical education establishments to come out and play. Based on the tradition of backyard, street, and sandlot sports, Junkyard Sports are traditional sports, reinvented. Sports redesigned, where the players make their own equipment out of whatever they can find, and adapted so they can be played wherever the players happen to be, with whomever happens to be there. In other words, sports, like new games, get played for fun, for everyone. Played playfully.

And all the while I was involved in designing more games for some more companies. Did I mention Ideal Toys, Children's Computer Workshop, CBS Software, Time-Warner. And I worked with Mattel Media.

Recently, more than 25 years after the first New Games Tournament, I found myself on the adjunct faculty of the Multimedia Division of the USC School of Cinema-Television, teaching the principles of New Games, watching my students create what had to be the world's first Giant Human Card game/event.

My book, *The Well-Played Game*, was originally published in 1978, and republished in 2013 by MIT Press. It is now required reading amongst the computer gamerati thanks, in no small part, to excerpts published in Salen and Zimmerman's *Game Design Reader*.

A game I designed to accompany the publication of *Junkyard Sports*, Tabletop Olympics was debuted in 2004 at a conference of the North American Simulation and Games Association.

It is currently being offered by HRDQ, publishers of business games, as a “serious game” for helping business teams develop insights into the processes of innovation.

I also consulted with LEGO to help them in the development of their ground-breaking LEGO Board Games.

Today, through this very book and my programs and publications on the DeepFUN.com website, I do what I can to help people from all over the world reclaim their playfulness.





