

By Ruth Ostrow

At this time of year, as we usher summer in, I always remember my childhood and the incredible excitement I felt coming home from school on those endless nights. We'd find many adventurous things to do. My favourite was collecting rocks and stones from a nearby paddock. Most produced a pigment when rubbed against pavement, and my sisters and I would draw colorful shapes, animals and hopscotch squares outside our modest brick-veneer.

There were bike races up and down the cul de sac, trees to climb, grapes to make into wine even though they were really only poisonous berries. There were "green things" to catch, those insects that lived in the long grass, and lizards to trap in bug catchers as we'd run wild in the undeveloped fields behind our homes.

The point of my reflection is that I'm saddened by what seems to be a trend in post-school activities nowadays. My friends and I have noticed kids coming in, plonking themselves down, and immediately belting out: "Mum I'm bored!" which is fast becoming the catchcry of an era.

"Go out and play" doesn't seem to cure it. The only fix for a case of boredom seems to be the endless diet of complicated electronic gadgets, computer games, iPods, and high-tech thingos like tamagotchis where children rear and feed whole tribes of virtual-reality pets while their real-world pets die of starvation.

I'm not against high-tech gadgets. I have quite a few of my own. It's just that I am wondering why suddenly being bored is the worst thing known to civilisation. The mere mention of the word "bored" has parents darting into cars to drive Kiddie somewhere entertaining, or switching on the latest electronic device in case the child's brain idles and stalls. Probably because we adults are the same. Overstimulated, undernourished, we jump from one distraction to the next and forget how to think.

But boredom is a brilliant thing. It's the winter of the soul, a fallow time in which we ruminate, contemplate and often come up with fantastic song lyrics, great creative ideas, or discover amazing books to read. It's the reason we seek out cubby holes in hidden forests, and create new worlds from cardboard, plastic and old bits of furniture.

Of late, I've started to sit quietly with the lost artform of boredom, and I'm trying to teach my daughter to do the same. Because out of fallow times comes regrowth.

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