

The Cost of Leisure

Adam Stammer

Leisure activities are a consistent goal across cultures and ages. Kids are known to play games and such as a primary pastime. Even eating and sleeping seem less important than the game you're playing. It's almost a rite of passage to reach a point where you decide that something else, something not fun, is more important than playing. As adults we look back at that time with longing. We could get away with ignoring responsibilities because we hardly had any. Even now that seems like such an alien concept, and I'm hardly an adult myself. I recognize the need for leisure, and do my best meet that need, but it has become increasingly difficult to do so, and I expect it will only become more so.

When I was still an infant my parents separated, leaving my father with 4 children, the oldest of which was 5. He didn't go to college, and he didn't have the time to try to market the skills he did have, so he got an office job, on top of the retail job he already had. This still wasn't enough, so another retail job became a part of his life. By the time I was 5 he was down to just 2 jobs thanks to food stamps. Even then he was working at least 70 hours a week. Sometimes he even had to bring me with him to work overtime on the weekend and I'd sit there and play the gameboy color my cousin gave me. At the time, I barely understood it but the only reason I got to play was because he didn't. I never had to worry about food or clothes or shelter because that's all my dad ever had the time to do: work and worry. He never played. The closest he got to it was watching TV but he wasn't really interested in that. He was just too tired to do anything else, and needed to relax while he had the chance. This is how a lot of people are forced to go through their lives. It's easy to say play is necessary, but, for many, it's much harder to actually do it. That's not even considering that leisure activities often cost money.

Today, my father is working one full time job, and he's just a couple years away from retirement. I always thought he'd have some fun when he finally had the time and money. Retirement was always the light at the end of the tunnel for him, in my mind. A chance for it to all pay off for him directly, not just through his children. Instead, he sits in his chair and he watches TV, not because he enjoys it, but because he doesn't know what else to do. It kind of reminds me of some of my peers. All they do is get high and watch movies. They skip class too often, they don't do their homework until the very last minute, and then complain about how little time they have; how they don't have enough time to have fun, and how that's not fair. I look at myself, with school taking 40-60 hours a week and another 10-20 hours at work, I'm lucky if I get close to enough sleep. Every hour I spend doing something fun, is an hour I could've spent doing homework, or studying for my next exam, or preparing for a presentation, or sleeping, or building a new skill or networking to help me get a job when I graduate. It's so so easy to forget to have fun, and if you go too long without it you might even just forget how to.

It can all make a person just want to give up. "The game is rigged so why play it?" But you need money to eat so you have to play. So they play the game but they drag their feet, they grump about it all the time and in the process spoil what little fun they do manage to scavenge. I've seen that enough to know that I refuse to do that. The game is rigged, yeah, but if you're gonna play it, play it right. Just don't play it more than you have to. That's why I'm here going to college. So I can survive off of one job, and still have enough money and energy to go and have fun at the end of the day. So I can find leisure and fun in the job that I'm forced to work. So TV and weed don't become the only things that get me out of bed in the morning. So that my life has meaning beyond the next paycheck. So that maybe, just maybe, I'll have enough time and resources to try and fix the system; fix this rigged game that we all have to play whether we want to or not. My father gave up his play time so that maybe I would have some of my own. I don't plan to let that go to waste.