

Playthings soothe a complex mind



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The more complicated the mind, the greater the need for the simplicity of play.

I'm not sure who originally coined this sentiment, but I came across it in the original Star Trek TV series. Thanks, Spock!

The episode featured a "pleasure planet," where guests' minds were scanned and the images were manufactured in an underground facility and literally came to life. Of course, one had to be careful with one's thoughts, especially if you were thinking about World War 2 fighter planes, white knights or samurai warriors!

But the idea is captivating ? an amusement park for adults, where literally every dream or whim comes to life.

In the last few years, we've become a society of "instant gratification," a species preoccupied by entertainment, the Internet, electronic games and gizmos ? literally all the fun the law allows at our fingertips.

The modus operandi of today's teens has also changed. They seem to love music, videos, social networking and just "hanging out."

I'm fortunate in that my teenage daughter Lexie loves sports and physical challenges of any kind. She loves new experiences and she's quite the social critter. She's also a deep thinker at times.

She's always been a big movie fan, and enjoys poignant, sentimental stories and messages about love, family, sacrifice. She also enjoys a good laugh.

While I may be speaking out of school, she's been seen sneaking into the basement and digging out some old toys and getting down to plain, old fashioned "play."

Some say how we play is a very good indication of how we think. It's also a great way to release those pent-up frustrations, emotions and simply to blow off some steam.

My pre-teen boy is a typical male, and spends a bit too much time on his xbox, blasting aliens or enemy soldiers.

I missed the video game revolution ? my hours were logged on Sega Genesis and prior to that on pinball machines at the arcade.

Unlike me, my son is not a model builder or Word War 2 buff. I remember my dad helped me with one particular model ? a

Hercules transport plane. We worked on it for a good week, and his paint scheme was totally off with all the wrong colours. But you know, I'll never forget the experience. I'm not sure what happened to it, but it likely got lost or damaged during one of our moves.

But Liam and I found a few things to do together ? the majority of which are testosterone-laden. I always had pellet or bb guns as a kid, and in those days, in the country, my dad also let me use the .22 rifle in the back 40. Today, "airsoft" has become the new pastime of choice for a couple of reasons. The guns are largely plastic, battery operated so they can fire fully automatic, and ones sold by places like [Fox Airsoft in Colorado](#) resemble modern-day firearms. My wife doesn't share our interest in weapons, so we try to abide by her "guidelines."

Due to the nature, and today's realities, such activities are restricted to the basement or nearby private forest.

Personally, I like weapons ? firearms, military aircraft, swords ? because of their craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities, not their destructive capabilities.

I'd love to get my hands on an ancient samurai sword; genuine roman short sword or Sherman tank. I hear Arnold Schwarzenegger

has one that he joy rides through his property! And Tom Cruise owns a P-51 Mustang fighter plane. The perks of fame and fortune! But again, given today's harsh realities, I settle for the miniature versions.

I've been collecting 1/144 scale model planes for roughly five years. They're made in Asia and can only be ordered through the Internet. Most cost \$10 and come fully painted and assembled. Several rare models can hit the \$100 price tag. I buy and sell them, so I can feed my thirst (otherwise known as an obsession).

I recently discovered Shapeways.com, a website where anyone can submit 3D designs for anything and put them up for sale. From figures of famous actors, to jewellery to sci-fi ships, it offers it all, for fairly reasonable prices. So, a couple of shelves in my bedroom are lined with roughly 100 of these tiny treasures, which range from Star Trek starships to experimental aircraft from the 1940s.

What I like about these are that no two are alike, since they're custom made and not mass produced. There are only a few others like them in the world.

My youngest enjoys painting with her dad and even our yellow lab puppy is fixed on the sky whenever a plane flies overhead.

My "hobby" is a perfect way to unwind at the end of the week. I'm literally in another world as I paint these creations, and again, admire the creativity that went into their design.

My wife thinks I'm childish. Haven't wives been thinking that for hundreds of years?

I will admit that like that popular toy store ditty, "I don't want to grow up ..." Boys and their toys. There is no truer sentiment.

Unlike coin collecting, it isn't cost prohibitive. It's healthy ? everyone should have a hobby of one kind or another.

Again, I think it's all about mental health ? taking some time to simply get away from it all and shelve daily stresses for a while.

What's wrong with having your head in the clouds?