



## *message from the director...*

Does anyone else remember those joyful days of youth when your imagination ruled the day? Boredom never set in because a stick could spark our creativity in a heartbeat. A couple of tea cups for a girl would become the social event of the neighborhood with hats, gloves, and imaginary guests.

So, what happened? There are still tons of sticks lying around. Girls can still borrow mom's hats and gloves.

What's disappearing rapidly is the imagination part. It's being systematically stolen from our children.

But who would do such a thing? Who would steal imagination and creativity right from our homes and not be detected or caught?

It's the demon electronic specter. Television, computers, cell phones, video games, and a rapidly expanding array of gadgets and gizmos are being set before our children like a buffet of tantalizing temptations.

But, with what seems like ten times the toys that I had as a child available to them, why do parents still hear "I'm bored, there's nothing to do!" from their children? Maybe it's because parents have come to depend on these gadgets as easy solutions to occupy their child's time and attention.

If you're in your early sixties like me, TV played that role increasingly as you grew up. But with only thirteen (13) channels, it didn't take long for boredom to set in and off we would go to find that stick. Still, our young minds were filled with TV shows, many with family familiar themes – the Beaver, Andy Griffith, the McCoy's, Ozzie and Harriet, and of course Ralph always threatening Alice with a trip to the moon.

Our parents never saw it coming, however. The barrage of technological creations was only beginning. Little did our parents know that what was beginning was a war to overtake the minds of children that would gain enormous traction as the years wore on. New screens were developed for us to stare into as if we were looking at windows into the future.

What appeared on these screens – the TV, the computer, the cell phone and now the iPad, notebooks, etc. – could have been educational and filled our minds with knowledge.

But middle America just wouldn't buy that sort of thing, so what we got was shallow entertainment for the most part. And did we ever buy it.

So the companies that filled our screens with virtual reality and filled our children's minds and time with cheap entertainment also stole their imaginations.

It's not all their fault. We Americans can be sold, sometimes rather easily. Think of Vince and the ShamWow! or Billy and OxiClean. So the billions to be made with virtual babysitters that kept our kids quiet and occupied were there for the taking.

But the unintended collateral damage of the theft of our children's imagination and creativity has been destructive, and continues to be. Just give a ten year old some markers and a blank piece of paper and ask them to draw something. Fifty years ago this would have been a challenge any child would have taken on with joy. Today, most children are stumped. They need an idea, a starting point. They lack imagination.

As parents and grandparents it is our responsibility to restore our children's natural curiosity, imagination and creativity. The schools certainly are not doing it. Shortsighted elected officials and school board members ignoring massive research data that show that the arts improve a child's cognitive abilities continue to chase increased math and reading scores by providing more math and reading activities (teaching to the tests) – and are baffled when more of the same produces, well, more of the same.

So, parents and grandparents must step up. Ask why your children and grandchildren are not getting quality arts education in their school curriculum everyday. Then, take the initiative to engage the children in after school arts programs (art, music, dance, drama) of high quality like those offered at the Fitton Center for Creative Arts.

The imagination thieves will not go away. Make it harder for them to succeed.

**Rick H. Jones**  
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