

## Editorial Opinion The Garden Party April 28, 2020

By Mike Workman

Publishers note: **Mike Workman** is amongst many things, host of The Garden Party radio show that airs at 5:30pm on KFSR 90.7 FM, Fresno State's college radio station. [www.kfsr.org](http://www.kfsr.org) Each week before the show he emails a list of songs and an essay that I've come to look forward to. I thank my friend Mike for allowing us to reprint his latest missive.

Hello Friends of the Garden!

The term “stir crazy” is an American addition to English language lexicon. At the turn of the twentieth century “stir crazy” was coined as a prison term. The word “stir”, was and is still used as a slang term for prison. Morphologists suggest that “stir” originates from the Romani word “stariben”, often shortened to simply “star”. In today's usage, “stir crazy” may describe any situation in which a person has become mentally disturbed due to a long confinement, such as during a blizzard or because of illness.

As a child, whenever I would show the symptoms of being “stir crazy” my Mom would say, “Go outside and play.” I believe her solution was intended to alleviate her frustration with my behavior more than anything else. I think a lot her frustration came from making suggestions of things to do that were summarily rejected without much or any consideration by me. There was huge disparity between what she thought would appeal to me and what I thought was fun or interesting.

On long car trips to visit my Grandmother, my sister and brother and myself would lose our patience with the lack of activity. While the setting was different the behaviors were the same as well as the solutions. I can hear my Mother's voice now saying, “ Why don't you look at all the beautiful scenery? You know if you lost your vision you would miss all this! Just relax and enjoy it rather than fighting it!” Shortly the scene would devolve into my Dad saying, “Don't make me stop the car! Just do as your Mother says!”

I didn't understand that my parents had a lifetime of experience with the reality that life is filled with moments of intense activity and other times of idleness. Their perspective gave them a greater appreciation for idleness. My lack of perspective had prevented me from considering the benefit of idleness. I believed that being busy meant doing something fun and doing nothing meant was the opposite of that.

Once I had reached an age that would allow me to adequately do chores I learned that “busy” was not limited to fun. I particularly remember a house that we lived in in Florida. The house was on a



cul-de-sac and the lot was in the shape of a wedge, like a piece of pie. The entire lot was just over an acre. It was deceptive because the front looked minuscule and the back looked like a vast grassland.

The humid, sunny weather of Florida was an ideal environment for rapid plant growth. We had a walk behind mower that was like most mowers, hard to start and hard to keep running. During the summer months it was impossible to complete the job in a single day. It seemed to me that by the time I made my last pass at the back of our lot that the front already looked like it needed mowing. The reality was crushing me as I understood that this was a never-ending task.

Thus began my lifelong learning that being busy was not always good! I began to appreciate idleness. When my family moved to upstate New York we once again lived on a one acre plus lot. This time, in addition to the lawn a new unforeseen chore became an

undesirable task. The harsh winters of the North required houses to be painted every other year. I discovered the joy of scraping the old flaking paint from the wooden shiplap siding that was on homes built there. Yet another seemingly endless job!

I was introduced to a new exercise in futility and as a consequence my appreciation for idleness grew. My perspective for a balance of busy and idle was growing imperceptibly. I was developing my own understanding that both had good and bad sides. The urgency I once had to declare, "I'm bored! There's nothing to do!" was now tempered by the knowledge of the undesired activities that could potentially fill that void.

At this stage in my life I now possess that understanding my parents had when I was a child. I have a much greater appreciation for the balance of busy, idleness, responsibility, and recreation. I learned that when any of those four things are not in proportion it skewed my perception. That lesson stuck with me.

When I was free to go the pub everyday I grew to have less appreciation for it. It didn't have the draw as much as it did when I was too busy to go. It became a predictable routine and not a departure. The time I had to examine the both the good and bad was dominated by the latter. Gossip, drama, predictable behaviors of regulars, cliques, the drive and distance all became thoughts that obscured my appreciation. I witnessed in myself and even more so in the behavior of others that the saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt" was true.

The ridiculous statement by my Mom in the car about being blind and missing the sights I took for granted now had substance for me. I have a much greater appreciation for things now, much greater! My experience has taught me that the current imbalance will not be corrected with narrowly focusing on the missing piece. I've learned that forsaking the balance leads to under appreciation.

Being stir crazy is a prison of your own design. All of the objectionable solutions of my Mother to my boredom were a reflection of my inability to find my own personal satisfaction. Her solutions worked for her but not me. I had neglected seeking the things that would occupy my time in a sustained way. This will always be a struggle, as it is now and will be after this virus. This notion speaks loudly to me and motivates me to prevent a "second outbreak" of boredom.



The balance of responsibility and recreation gives value to the latter and the necessity of the former. Re-opening bars, theaters, restaurants and bowling alleys won't change my need for balance, nor will it prevent me from overcompensating for my inaccessibility to them. Only perspective and balance will give me the proper place from which to determine the value I give them.

Ask anyone that is on the road for a living all the time about how they feel about eating out every night or sleeping in hotels more than their own beds. I think you know the answer already. The convenience is offset by the void. A void that is amplified by imbalance! An imbalance that disregards causation and is centered in the individual.

Yes, re-opening America will be welcome! Re-opening our minds will be much more powerful and have much greater impact. Re-examining ourselves will have even greater implications as to our boredom. Re-invigorating our activity based on balance will sustain us substantially more than filling a void that is easily filled. Sure, I'm anxious to get back to my bar buddies but I know that is just a small, small part of what I really need!

Peace and love to you all!

Mike

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