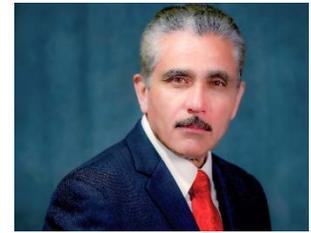


Beyond Virtual Reality

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I watched her very closely. My little sister, Nenita, had just scampered in through the wobbly screen door with a shopping bag bursting with Halloween candy. She was returning from a solo night excursion on this All-Hallows night. Disheveled with a sheen of sweat covering her plump little face, her cheeks glistened under the glare of the bare bulb overhead. They reminded me of a couple of freshly glazed donuts. My older sister Cris and I had refused to take her on the proverbial trick-or-treating jaunt. However, my little sister would not be denied. So, on her own, she patched together a crazy looking costume and valiantly ventured into the night to face ghosts, vampires, and Frankensteins. She was only 8 years old.



I watched intently as she now poured the night's take across the bed that doubled as our family sofa methodically categorizing the sweet loot. Bite-sized Snickers, M&M's, Reese's cups, and Charleston Chews were highly valued, while miscellaneous hard candies were relegated to the lower tiers. Scanning the vast array of goodies before her, she selected only two, and quickly scooped the rest back into the shopping bag, shoved it under the bed, and went to bed. *Huh?!!*

What sort of 8yr old kid has the self-discipline to stop at only two candies? Well, my little 'sis had a plan, a vision. During the following weeks, long after other kids had exhausted their own candy stash, she would come home from school jingling with coins in her pocket. Apparently, she was selling the candy at inflated prices to other students during lunch and was making a killing. Now that's capitalism, in a weird sort of way.

If there is one key aspect associated with building resilient and confident youth, it would be exposing them early to experiences that foster mental strength and self-initiative. And I'm not talking about 'virtual realities' here. To be sure, electronic media does present tremendous possibilities for learning, especially during these times of COVID-19. But viewing life and creating realities through this convenient prism, either purposefully or by default, can also isolate and absorb youth. Just think of how many times parents have had to deal with children who can't put the iPhone down at the dinner table or while attempting to engage them in the car?

Real-life experiences do not come with an 'off' or a 'refresh' button. They help youth build initiative and purpose in life. In turn, they also become more adept at dealing with rejection, risk-taking, ambiguity and stress.

One of the defining characteristics of successful youth is their ability to see opportunities where others see failure or possible loss of face. Indeed, initiative is a stronger common factor among achieving (purposeful) youth than G.P.A. or test scores, according to studies. Which brings me back to my little sister, Nenita. Her willingness to venture alone into the darkness on that Halloween night long ago reflected an entrepreneurial attitude and ability to problem-solve. And boy, did it pay off.

Entrepreneurship, broadly defined, really represents a constellation or cluster of traits that a person can bring to a given challenge. It represents a set of attitudes and dispositions. Parents can help their children develop these capacities by encouraging them to take on challenges and healthy risks. Reading out loud, making a class presentation, or volunteering for a community event can foster this positive approach to risk-taking and help overcome timidity. Embracing challenges, rather than avoiding them, can teach a child a great deal about real-life and help build their self-confidence.