

Ahhh ... Summer Holidays

# FINALLY TIME FOR ME!

by Claudette Coombs

Teachers have many natural talents; work hard to develop special skills; and, throughout their careers, acquire much knowledge and expertise. But there is one area where most of us fall short. We have not learned to relax!

We keep life at such a hectic pace. We're always planning one thing while doing another; feeling it's a waste to do just one task at a time; or, hurrying through one job so we can quickly get to the next. We've spent a career of creating habits which support this harried lifestyle. Maybe we were like this even before we started our teaching careers. However, for some people, relaxing just comes naturally. They have developed mental attitudes and behavioural patterns that are conducive to taking life gently. But for others, relaxing is a foreign concept. The lack of familiarity creates an awkwardness in even attempting to sit back and let our minds go blank and our bodies unwind. Despite this, learning to relax is not an impossible task but it does require consistent, deliberate and specific action. By creating and following a few personal rules we can incorporate behaviours that eventually lead to a more relaxed body and accepting mind.

## **RULE #1: SET (AND KEEP) LIMITS**

Too often we believe that we are responsible for everyone's well-being, each person's success and accommodating every request made of us. Being a little more reasonable about what we expect of ourselves will help us believe that we have a right to set personal limits; then identify what these limits are; then communicate them to others around us.

## **RULE #2: STAY WHERE YOU ARE**

That's the trick of keeping your mind and body in the same place at the same time. "You're not really here with me." "What's on your mind?" "Where are you?" Do any of these comments sound familiar? If so, don't argue or be defensive. Instead, accept them as a warning signal that you are being robbed of your present. Certainly, we need to plan for the future and reasonably prepare ourselves. We also need to review our past in order to get our best out of the present and create a future with positive potential. This reviewing and planning becomes an expensive activity, one which we can't afford, when it costs us daily contentment. Avoid being so caught up in past mistakes or future fears that we miss the pleasures available in today.

## **RULE #3: LIVE WHILE YOU LIVE**

Recently I saw this phrase and considered its relevance. You know the way it is "We can't enjoy life yet; we're too busy until after finals and reports." "We can't be happy now; our relationship is in turmoil." "We can't be satisfied with our bodies; we must get into a fitness routine and alter our weight." "I don't have time for myself; summer holidays will change that." You get the picture. But, when all of these important conditions are met, then we can be happy, content, satisfied, and can really enjoy life. Maybe you are willing to wait that long, in the hope that life can then be perfect. As an alternative, consider the gains if you look for the things which can be enjoyed right here and now! Putting life "on hold" until Christmas holidays, Easter break, the next long weekend or, summer vacation offers no guarantees.

## **Identifying Our Limits and Potential**

Common factors which we allow to interfere with our enjoyment of life include:

- Insufficient time. Therefore, reassess priorities. We cannot do everything for everyone. Start the pruning process now.
- Lack of energy. Being human, we have limited capacities. We must make decisions on where we want to expend the available energy.
- Finite resources. There are restrictions on the supply of money, "toys" and supports within our lives. Not every community has a recreational facility and not every teacher has the disposable income to pay the registration fee. Again, selectivity and creativity are keys to finding and using ways to bring pleasure into our everyday lives.

## **Options Within Our Limits**

Our goal is not to find ways to put more into our lives. Instead, it is to set personal priorities and permit ourselves to enjoy life without guilt. By reducing the demands we accept, then thinking more accurately about our responsibilities, finally we can do things differently and enjoy life's pleasures now.

**TIME:** With too much to do and no time for the extras, we can begin to look for quick pleasures which still give us satisfaction but don't require great time demands.

- Mental pleasures can include a quick e-mail to a friend; or a glance at a picture in your wallet; or a deliberate look at the evening, star-filled sky.
- Physical enjoyment can come from that early morning walk before anyone else is out of bed; or the mutual massage shared by partners; or listening to the breaking ocean waves as the breeze brushes against your body.
- Emotional satisfaction wears many faces. Acknowledgement of someone else's success, pain, or presence; or recognition of personal progress; or a sense of closeness with others or with nature.
- Positive social connections are essential to a feeling of well-being. They can be as brief as a greeting in the corridor or a visit with a neighbour over the garden fence.

**ENERGY:** A non-stop lifestyle with excessive demands can cause physical and mental fatigue. Being pushed too hard for too long sets the stage for exhaustion. We are all familiar with the unpleasant side-effects of not getting enough rest --; irritability, lack of interest in pleasures, cynicism, and you can add lots of your own symptoms. To deal with this limit we first want to maximize our potential then remove all unnecessary restrictions on our energy. To keep our energy at an optimal level, we try to keep our bodies healthy by getting the right nutrients, appropriate stretching and movement, and adequate renewal time. Then we eliminate the energy wasters. We all have too many of those. Take a minute to privately take an inventory of: the conflicts we carry with us; the guilt and anger we hold onto; the extra responsibilities that we assume; and the numerous things that rob us of the energy to enjoy today. We can't afford them. In the present, time and energy are too valuable to waste; we can't take them back and we can't make up for them once they are spent. We can choose how to use them. In the future, we can only reflect on the pleasures we have had in life if we make them now.

**RESOURCE ACCESS:** We sometimes use the excuse that we don't have the things we need or want and therefore can't enjoy life. Society is fortunate that not everyone feels the same way about the same things. We can learn many lessons from each other about personal abilities to find pleasures in what we have now. This certainly does not mean that we should be complacent about where we are in life, never striving to do or be better. It does mean that we should find ways to enjoy aspects of who we are and what we have, rather than focusing on what we believe is missing.

Summer holidays ... a great opportunity for me to relax? Yes. But don't be fooled into thinking that they automatically cause you to relax, rejuvenate and successfully prepare for the period that falls between summers. Every day and every season brings unique opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment. We have mastered many of the skills necessary to maneuver through daily tasks and responsibilities, now we owe it to ourselves to learn the skills and processes necessary to relax and experience the year-round pleasures of living.

I wish each of you a relaxing and enjoyable summer. Good-bye until September.

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