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First Place

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Driving around in your little plastic car, with your little plastic family, as you hoard your piles of money and fight to make it to Millionaire Estates - that's what I call good old-fashioned family fun! 'The Game of Life' is a classic, light-hearted board game in which making a buck is the key to success. I played this game for the first time recently and found it to be fun, but depressing.

I can't deny that I enjoyed moving my plastic car from square to square and watching my piles of money grow. The depressing part came when I thought about the values promoted by the game. I couldn't believe how much the so-called 'Game of Life' was really the game of greed, finance and materialism. Sure, it's just a game, all in the name of fun - like Monopoly. I can accept that. What depressed me was how closely the board game mimicked the values and standards promoted in real life. Sadly, the quest for wealth really is the basis of many people's lives. Whether we blame the media or the government or (gasp!) our own selfishness, no one can deny that the lust for money is a driving force behind our Western culture. We seem to be blindly, even unconsciously, devoted to the belief that "He who dies with the most stuff wins". While it might be a fun little premise for a board game, this particular rule is destructive in the real game of life. If we let greed and wealth take priority we inevitably lose sight of what really matters. We're not pink and blue plastic people driving through happy board game land. In real life, our over-consumption and personal greed have direct and devastating consequences.

When personal affluence takes priority, life becomes shallow and unbalanced. By devoting our lives to the pursuit of wealth and material possessions, we are denying ourselves the joy and satisfaction of a balanced full life. We let ourselves become more consumer than human. We become obsessed with our media-induced desires to make more money and buy more stuff. We begin to feel that we absolutely need to buy that new car or DVD player. When this feeling of necessity takes over, there's no stopping it. There is always something more to buy, we're never satisfied and the cycle continues perpetually. Caught in the cyclone of never-ending consumerism, we begin to forget the true necessities of life, love, family, friendship and spirituality. By believing that money and possessions are everything and that 'time is money', we spend less and less time with our loved ones. Also, we devote very little time to ourselves, to do the things we really enjoy, to unwind. Some people would go so far as to consider it a waste of time to laugh, to play, to reflect, to think. Personal reflection and self-awareness are simply low on the priority list. It is more economical to live life on the surface, to remain emotionally uninvolved. As a result, we have lost touch with ourselves, with our loved ones and with Nature. This has not only led to a decline in personal satisfaction and happiness, but also, to a decline in compassion, accountability and morality. We would rather see our stock go up a point than stop a major industry from poisoning our air. We would rather save up to buy a bigger TV than support an entire family in a third world country. We would rather go on a shopping spree than spend a quiet afternoon with family. We consistently choose the momentary satisfaction of materialism over spending time with our loved ones, saving the lives of strangers and improving the fate of future generations. This mind set is hopelessly depressing. I admit that I play the game with everyone else. I, too am both victim and destroyer in our materialistic world - and I can't stand it.

I would like to propose a change of rules in "The Game of Life". I would like to suggest that money shouldn't take priority. In my game of life, money isn't the goal and life experiences are not simply a means to an end. In my game, you don't have to follow the right path - you can make your own. In my game, there is no 'Millionaire Estates' at the end of the road and the 'Life' experience squares don't come with cash reward. Instead of frantically hoarding money and possessions, the goal in my game is to enjoy the moment and recognize the relative insignificance of wealth. My game is truly the game of *life*, not the game of greed. It promotes the kind of principles I'd like to live by. In the real game of life, the person who dies with the most money loses. What good is all that wealth when you're gone? In the real game of life, he who dies with the least money - and the best experiences - wins.

By living for the moment, as opposed to the money, we can experience fuller, happier, more balanced lives. While making money may be a necessity in our society, it doesn't have to be such a driving force in our lives. Instead of being content with the shallow materialism portrayed in 'The Game of Life', we should aim to make every day meaningful, or, at the very least, enjoyable. Unlike the little plastic game pieces, we need more than money and possessions to make it through life. We need love, happiness and satisfaction. We need to realize that time isn't money. We need to take the time to appreciate our loved ones. We need to experience and enjoy the world around us. We need to consider what it is that makes us really happy. More importantly, we need to realize that it isn't a waste of time to pursue happiness. We need to let ourselves take a walk along a quiet lake, read a book or share a laugh with a friend. We need to find jobs and lifestyles that we find satisfying on a daily basis. So many lives are wasted by living and working towards some faraway financial goal: a high paying job, next year's promotion, a cozy retirement. The present shouldn't be simply a means to an end. Young people should be encouraged to pursue what they love, not what will pay off in the long run. If we only think about the future, we'll never be satisfied, because the future never arrives. What we need most is to live in the present tense.

I'm not saying that it's bad to make money. I'm not even saying that it's bad to work hard and become wealthy. We live in a Capitalist system and we have to make money to survive. It's what so many people do with their money that I don't agree with. It is the frantic accumulation of wealth and 'stuff' that is bad. We need to find a way to survive in our society without becoming consumed by greed. Even though our social structure is based on money, it is up to us to keep it in perspective and remember that 'money can't buy happiness'. To achieve happiness and fulfillment there has to be a balance between the necessity of money and the necessities of life. Money doesn't have to be 'the root of all evil'. Money is a tool, a necessary tool, but that is all it is. Money should be used to buy the things we need and to help us enjoy life. It should be used to bring happiness to others. Money is powerful and it can do a lot more than accumulate in a bank or buy useless products.

If I was rich, I would try not to buy more than I needed. I would use my money to do things I wanted to do and go places I wanted to go. I would travel (and not just to Club Med). I would travel around the world, experiencing different landscapes and cultures. I would go to plays and concerts and museums. I would go on adventures. I would read novels. I would learn how to kayak. I would make the most of every day. Also, I would share my wealth with my family and friends. I would invite them to explore and experience my adventures with me. I would resist the temptation to buy ten cars or 200 pairs of shoes and I would use my money for the greater good. I would give to charity. I would fund environmental initiatives. I would build schools and libraries and homes. If I had money, I wouldn't surround myself with meaningless possessions. It would

be my goal to make the most of my wealth before I died. In doing this, I would remember that unlike the plastic game pieces in 'the Game of Life' I could die tomorrow. When I leave this world, I want to leave more than a house full of stuff behind. I want to know that I've lived life to the fullest. I want to know that I've been happy and brought happiness to others. I want to know that, somehow, I've made a difference.

I would like to follow the example set by the famous American industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. The richest man of his time, Carnegie gave away the majority of his wealth, about \$350 million, before his death in 1919. Carnegie believed that wealth should be used for the public good and claimed that 'the man who dies rich, dies disgraced'. He set up numerous trusts around the world. His primary concerns were public education and international peace. He founded the Carnegie endowment for International Peace and funded the creation of 2,800 public libraries. While many other wealthy men die with millions to their name, very few are nearly as respected and admired as the legendary Carnegie.

While Carnegie exemplifies the idea that 'he who dies with the least money wins' I find that it is my Grandpa George who best demonstrates that the 'winners' are not only those who die with the least money, but also the best experiences. My Grandpa George was an adventurer. All his life he was on the move, working in various jobs, moving from country to country. In the sixteen years that I knew him, he lived in Africa and Venezuela working as an agricultural economist. Grandpa George was curious and friendly and his photos and stories of his travels would always include the many people he'd taken the time to talk to along the way. My Grandfather was an intelligent man who was ahead of his time in his assessment of the environmental and social implications of over-consumption. He was proud to say that he could carry everything he needed to live on his bicycle. Once, he confused the locals in a village in Nigeria when he rode his bicycle everywhere, even though the company he worked for had given him a car (which he never used) and a chauffeur (whom he still paid). My Grandfather was in exceptional physical condition and, at the age of 70, began embarking on extended bicycle trips. He successfully rode from Ottawa to Mexico, cycling an average of 75 km a day. In 1996, at the age of 72, he left Florida, on his way to Victoria, BC. Sadly, Grandpa George was hit by a truck on a highway in Wyoming and killed. Although my Grandfather's death was tragic and untimely, his life ended while he was doing something he loved. He hadn't wasted his life in a job he didn't like only to have a hard-earned retirement cut short. He had lived a rich and exciting life. It was sad to lose my Grandpa George, but I will never forget his inspiring energy and adventurous spirit. When it comes to the game of life, my Grandpa George was a winner - hands down.

It is the people like my Grandfather and Carnegie who inspire me to enjoy life and recognize that wealth and property are nothing without experience, humanity, friendship and a passion for living. They should inspire all of us to look at ourselves, listen to ourselves and examine our priorities. We need to realize that living well doesn't have anything to do with getting rich. So much could be gained by a simple change of perspective, by realizing that this isn't a race - there is no finish line. No one is going to add up your assets when you're gone and give you a score. Success in life is based on who you are, not what you own. We have to learn to become complete human beings, not shallow consumers. By doing this, we will begin to appreciate life for the exciting journey that it is. My goal is to make my own journey as joyful, exciting and fulfilling as possible. I hope to live up to the principles I set for myself and resist the temptation to become a consumer zombie. I hope that one day, I'll be able to play that classic family board game of wealth and materialism, laugh and say 'It's just a game'.