

## **Adults Are Nothing But Large Children Who Have Forgotten How To Play**

This chapter title is a quote from the following talk by Tom Robbins, one of the best-loved novelists of our time. Robbins is a tremendously creative author (*Skinny Legs and All*, *Still Life With Woodpecker*, *Another Roadside Attraction*, etc.).

Tom Robbins is a creator. He models what a creator does and how he lives. He is funny, and able to laugh at past and present tragedy and the pretentiousness of belief systems for all the world. He is a model creator who lightens us up before we launch into the hard work of life design and community building. This attitude of play and irreverence for all past tradition is absolutely essential for people who begin to make a life of creating.

He gave this speech to an alternative high school graduating class several years ago. When I asked him for permission to publish it, he responded immediately with a confessional letter, from which the following is excerpted:

“When, back around 1975, I was invited to deliver the commencement address at a small alternative high school in Oak Harbor, Washington, I accepted largely because I was enamored of a young woman connected to the school, and wanted to charm her into my bed. Having to write the speech in a hurry, and searching for a punchy way to begin it, I added to my shame by borrowing - nay, stealing! - the opening paragraph, and the two with which I closed it, from another, now forgotten, source.

“At the time, I was contributing fairly regularly to underground newspapers, and the underground press had a free-exchange policy. Nobody was proprietary and credits counted for very little. Therefore, I felt not a pang of guilt in appropriating three quirky paragraphs about life after death from one of the papers, especially since I had no intention of publishing my speech and never expected it to survive the evening that it was delivered.

“Now that it has resurfaced to haunt me (apparently one of the teachers surreptitiously taped the talk and later circulated it), I must apologize to the unknown author whose words I lifted, and say that I’m more than happy to give them back. Please be assured that all of the remainder of the speech was my own original work, and that I never made a dime from it - although I did get laid.”

Here is the advice he gave the graduating class:

“I am often asked whether there is life after death. Certainly there is. There is also death after life, and life before death, and death before life. It goes on forever. In fact, you already have.

“As for Heaven and Hell, they are right here on Earth, and it is up to each of you in which one you choose to reside. To put it simply Heaven is living in your hopes and Hell is living in your fears.

“In the traditional image, where hell is down and heaven is up, one escapes from hell by digging a hole in the ceiling. Though in an age of downers and uppers down and up no longer make

sense, it is still possible to think of in and out. Think of hell as in and heaven as out. To get out of hell you expand your soul until it is pushing on all the walls from the inside all the way around. If you just maintain a steady pressure, your soul will gradually filter out into limitless heaven beyond.

“One problem with the notion of Heaven and Hell, however, is that, although they are exact opposites, an astonishing number of people seem to be confused about which is which. For example, all over the United States on this very evening, commencement speakers are standing before audiences not greatly unlike yourselves, describing Hell as if they were talking about Heaven.

“Their speakers are saying things such as, “Graduating seniors, you have reached the golden threshold of maturity; it is time now to go out into the world and take up the challenge of life, time to face your hallowed responsibility.”

“And if that isn’t one Hell of a note, it’s certainly one note of Hell.

“When I hear the word “maturity” spoken with such solemn awe, I don’t know whether to laugh or get sick. There circulates a common myth that once one becomes an adult, one suddenly and magically gets it altogether and, if I may use the vernacular, discovers, where it’s at. Ha ha. The sad funny truth is, adults are nothing but tall children who have forgotten how to play.

“When people tell you to “grow up,” they mean approximately the same thing they mean when they tell you to “shut up.” By “shut up” they mean “stop talking,” by “grow up” they mean “stop growing.”

“Because as long as you keep growing, you keep changing - and a person who is changing is unpredictable, impossible to pigeon-hole and difficult to control. The growing person is not an easy target for those guys in the slick suits who want you to turn over your soul to Christ, your heart to America; your butt to Seattle First National Bank and your armpits to new extra crispy Right Guard.

“No, the growing person is not an ideal consumer, which means, in more realistic terms, he or she is not an easy slave. Worse yet, if he or she continues to grow, grows far enough and long enough, he or she may get too close to the universal mysteries, the nature of which the Navy and the Dutch Reform Church do not encourage us to ponder.

The growing person is an uncomfortable reminder of the greater human potential that each of us might realize if we had the guts.

“So society wants you to grow up. To reach a safe, predictable plateau and root there. To muzzle your throb, to lower the volume on the singing in your blood. Capers all cut, sky finally larked, surprises known: SETTLE DOWN - settle, like the sand in the bottom of an hour glass, like a coffin six months in the ground. ACT YOUR AGE - which means, act their age, and that has, from the moment they stopped growing, always been old.

“As for responsibility, I am forced to ask, “Responsibility to what?” To our fellow humans? Two weeks ago, the newspapers reported that a federal court had ruled that when a person’s brain stops functioning, that person is legally dead, even though his or her heart may continue to beat. That means that 80% of the population of the Earth is legally dead. Must we be responsible to corpses?

“No, you have no responsibility except to be yourself to the fullest limit of yourself, and to find out who you are. Or, perhaps I should say, to remember who you are. Because deep down in the secret velvet of your heart, far beyond your name and your address, each of you knows who you really are. And that being who is the true you cannot help but behave graciously to all other beings - because it is all other beings.

“Yet, we are constantly reminded of our ... “responsibility.” Responsibility means obey orders without question, don’t rock the boat, and for God’s sake, get a job. (Get a job. Sha na na na.) That’s the scary one. Get a job. It is said as if it were a holy and ancient and inviolable law of nature. But the fact is, although cultural humanity has been on Earth for some 2 million years, the very concept of jobs is only about 500 years old. A drop in the bucket, to coin a phrase. And with advent of an electronic cybernetic automated technology, jobs are on the way out again. Jobs were just a flash in the pan, a passing fancy. There is no realistic relationship between jobs and work - work being defined as simply one of the more serious aspects of play - any more than there is a realistic relationship between jobs and eating. It is curious how many people believe if it weren’t for jobs they couldn’t eat. As if it weren’t for Boeing their jaws wouldn’t chew, if it weren’t for the Navy their bowels wouldn’t move and if it weren’t for Weyerhaeuser, that great destroyer of plants - plants wouldn’t grow. Technocratic assumptions about the identity of humanity, society and nature have warped our experience at its source and obscured the basic natural sense of things. Rabbits don’t have jobs. When was the last time you heard of a rabbit starving to death?

“Ah, but we must be responsible, and if we are, then we are rewarded with the white man’s legal equivalent of looting: a steady job, secure income, easy credit, free access to all the local emporiums and a home of your own to pile the merchandise in! And so what if there is no magic in your life, no wonder, no amazement, no playfulness, no peace of mind, no sense of unity with the universe, no giggling joy, no burning passion, no deep understanding, no overwhelming love? At least your ego has the satisfaction of knowing you are a responsible citizen. Responsibility is a trap.

“As a matter of fact, the entire System into which you were born and which now, upon completion of high (high?) school you must perhaps face more directly, is a System designed to trap you - and manipulate you as a co-operating slave, a System designed to steep you in Hell.

“Hell is living in your fears, and it is through fear, both subtle and overt, that the System traps you: Fear of failure, fear of social rejection, fear of poverty, fear of punishment, fear of death.

“For example, we once were taught to fear something called Communism, and millions of Americans have gone to sleep each night wondering if Mao Tse Tung is under their bed. Conversely, on the other side of the world millions of Russians and Chinese have gone to sleep

wondering if Henry Kissinger is under their bed. Our Totalitarian government used the hoax of the threat of Communism to control and enslave us, just as the totalitarian communist governments used the hoax and the threat of capitalism to enslave their people. It's an extremely old and obviously effective trick.

“You see, the powers behind Communism and the powers behind Capitalism are virtually the same people. We might also include the powers behind the Vatican and the powers behind Islam.

Their main function is to mystify the popular mind by creating illusions of omnipotence and omniscience with which to command docility from their subjects, while at the same time creating illusions of health, happiness and fulfillment for their subjects - although it does not require much thorough investigation to discover that few of the peoples of the world are healthy, happy or fulfilled.

“But never mind, there are ways out of the trap, ways, as I earlier suggested, out of Hell.

“The only advice I have for you tonight is not to actively resist or fight the System, because active protest and resistance merely entangles you in the System.

“Instead, ignore it, walk away from it, turn your backs on it, laugh at it. Don't be outraged, be outrageous! Never be stupid enough to respect authority unless that authority first proves itself respectable. And, unfortunately, there is no officially sanctioned authority today, from the President of the United States down to the cop on the beat, that has earned the right to your respect.

“So, be your own authority, lead yourselves. Learn the ways and means of the Ancient yogi masters, Pied Piper, cloud walkers, and medicine men. Get in harmony with nature. Listen to the loony rhythms of your blood. Look for beauty and poetry in everything in life. Let there be no moon that does not know you, no spring that does not lick you with its tongues. Refuse to play it safe, for it is from the wavering edge of risk that the sweetest honey of freedom drips. Live dangerously, live lovingly. Believe in magic. Nourish your imagination. Use your head, even if it means going out of your mind. Learn, like the lemon and the tomato learned, the laws of the sun. Become aware, like the jungle became aware, of your own perfume. Remember that life is much too serious to take seriously. Remember to never forget how to play.

“In times of doubt and chaos, it has been the duty of superior persons - artists, poets, scientists, clowns, and philosophers (certainly not statesmen or military heroes) - to create order in the psychic vibrations of their fellow beings. But in times such as ours, times that are too carefully ordered, too strictly organized, too expertly managed, thoroughly programmed and carefully planned, times in which too few control too many, it is the duty of all feeling, thinking, humanitarian people to toss their favorite monkey wrenches into the machinery. On second thought, you do have some responsibility to your fellow beings. To relieve the repression of the human spirit, it is your sacred duty to screw things up royally.

“Looking at you tonight, I know you're going to do just fine.

“Let me wrap this up with a few short questions I am often asked.

- Will we be eaten by bugs and worms? We ought to be. We have eaten, and we ought to be eaten. This is the Justice, and there is no stopping it. If you have your body burned, starving the earth to glorify a memory, you are asking for trouble.
- Does your soul fly out of your body at the moment you die? No, this is a foolish superstition. Your soul is constantly flying out of your body in just the same way that energy is constantly flying out of the sun. At the moment your body dies, the soul stops flying out.
- Is Jesus coming back? Yes, all the time. And so are you. All the souls echo forever throughout the universe. I hope you have a wonderful trip."