

# **In the Name of College! What Are We Doing to Our Children?**

**By Michelle Rose Gilman**



Kelsey is an 11th grade student at a local private high school in San Diego, California. She is taking a total of six classes of which three are honors classes -- to boost her GPA, and not because she is totally into Chemistry. She volunteers twice per week at a local animal rescue facility - because it will look good on her college application, and not because she really wants to be there. She plays on the girl's golf team, because her private college admissions counselor told her a sport would make her more attractive to her top choice colleges. She takes private SAT prep over the weekends, while the Southern California weather beckons to her like a magnet to a paperclip. Her mom brings her dinner in her bedroom because she

sometimes spends up to 6 hours per night doing homework. Kelsey often falls asleep sometime around 1 a.m., with the lights on and with her notebooks scattered around her on the bed. Sometime between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. her mother tidies things up for her, so that when Kelsey opens her eyes the next morning she is ready to do it all again.

The above story is not an exaggeration. I have been a Head of School in San Diego for over two decades and the stories I have heard, ones just like Kelsey's, are heartbreaking to me. And to be honest with you, I am angry about it!

Have we lost our collective consciousness? Have we forgotten what childhood is? What it's for? Why it even exists at all? Have we, as parents, educators, counselors and even students, bought into some asinine idea of what the years 15 through 18 are all about? I can only answer yes, we have lost our collective consciousness, and we are making one of the largest mistakes we can make while hurting our children in the process. For many of our kids, we have stopped childhood at around 14, if not younger, and have replaced the rest of adolescence with something completely artificial. I grew up on a very small island in the Florida Keys. We biked everywhere (and we were unsupervised while riding), we swam in the ocean, we had sand ball fights, and we stayed out until dark and then even later. We had relationships, real ones - not ones that helped us "Get Somewhere In Life". We had jobs because we wanted them and the money, and we helped baby turtles hatch by turning our lights off so as not to confuse them on their way to the ocean. We laughed a lot, we cried a lot and we explored secret spots with names like Shady Grove and Calusa. We had pig roasts and Budweiser. We had fights with friends and figured out how to make up and then make out. And through all of these experiences we started to learn what being a human in the world just might be like. We were curious. We started sentences with the words, "What if we..." and then we did (much to our parents' dismay). We navigated the world, our feelings, our

friendships, and our internal dialogue. We made huge mistakes and then we corrected them. We learned to fail, often, and then we picked ourselves up, and when we couldn't our friends helped us. And not a single one of these experiences was had so we could write a great college essay and look better on paper when we were being judged by a stranger. Just in case you were wondering, yes, we all got into college.

So I ask you, what is childhood for? And yes, 15-18 years old is still considered childhood. It's for cultivating our curiosity and coming up with original thought. It's for playing in nature and discovering things about us, and others, through that playing. It's about learning to break free from our parents' ideas and starting to form our own. It's a time of questioning everything around us. Childhood is for learning about relationships, the outdoors, and sometimes breaking the rules so we can learn our own edges and boundaries. This precious, innocent time holds so much limitless potential - unless of course we squash it. And we have.

So, Kelsey, I apologize to you. I'm sorry that you didn't get to experience yourself being wild and free and learning about the world on your own, through your own eyes and heart. I am sorry that in the good name of college admissions, we have stripped you of having original ideas and even remotely having the thought of, "What if I...." and then doing it. I am very sorry for your lack of sleep that didn't even involve the fun that should have been attached to it. But most of all, Kelsey, I am sorry that you will never be able to get the last 3 years back. They are now gone forever and sweet 16 was not as sweet as it could have been for you.

It is time for parents, guidance counselors, and students to speak up! Demand that childhood is important, that play is important and that relationships with our families and friends are important. Raise your voices regarding this ridiculous competition to get nowhere fast! It isn't serving anyone, and our children are hurting. Go outside today and play--yes, you

too parents. In fact, tonight at the dinner table or while bringing your child her food to her bedroom, why don't you say, "What if we..." and then go do it!

Oh, and did I mention the six hours per night of homework? You know what you can do with that!

Source; [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-gilman/in-the-name-of-college-wh\\_b\\_6912914.html?ir=Parents&ncid=fbklnkushpmsg00000037](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-gilman/in-the-name-of-college-wh_b_6912914.html?ir=Parents&ncid=fbklnkushpmsg00000037)