



Introduction

“Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Remember childhood? Remember when meetings were held under a tent made of couch cushions and blankets, and candy was worth more than any mutual fund? If you think really hard, I bet you can. When we were kids, we had an innate ability to tackle life head on. Everything seemed so simple and uncomplicated. Although *we* were messy, life didn't seem to be. As children, we each held

the secret answers to a happy, fulfilled life. The bad news is that when we grew up, most of us completely forgot those answers.

What the heck happened? If things were so great and we had such a wonderful way of handling life, why did we ever abandon these little nuggets of wisdom?

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complexity of adulthood, and I don't think any of us wants to relive that portion of our lives. (High school gym class, anyone?) Perhaps in our rush to actually get beyond the uncertainty and uncomfortable

horror of that phase, we quickly embraced all that adulthood had to offer. When we were kids, being grown-up seemed so fun and exciting and mysterious. "Adulthood" was like a secret land filled with boundless opportunities, every one of them off-limits to kids. As children, we spent a lot of time playing dress-up, imagining what we would be. We couldn't wait to shave, drive, date, and drink beer. Then, eager to get past the pimples and awkward points of puberty, we cast aside everything that was childish in order to be accepted as grown-up. And in this process, we begin to lose sight of the secrets that we once knew by heart. The reality and responsibilities of life begin to weigh on us, and the burdens of work, bills, and family life cover over these childlike traits. We become jaded, dull, disillusioned, and depressed, with super-high stress levels. We suddenly have too

much to do, but never enough energy to get it all done. This condition is called “Adultitis.”

ADULTITIS

A common condition occurring in people between the ages of 21–121, marked by chronic dullness, mild depression, moderate to extremely high stress levels, a general fear of change, and, in some extreme case, the inability to smile. Patients can appear aimless, discontent, and anxious about many things. Onset can be accelerated by an excess burden of bills, overwhelming responsibilities, or a boring work life. Generally, individuals in this condition are not fun to be around.

It doesn't take long before we all come to a realization: adulthood sure isn't what it was cracked up to be. It's way more complicated than advertised. Technology was supposed to make our lives easier. Perhaps it has, to some degree, but can I get a show of hands from anyone whose life is simpler? Or who has more time on their hands thanks to this blazing technology? Anybody?

Things like e-mail and junk mail, deadlines and divorce, mortgage payments and car payments, taxes and heart attacks, have dampened all of the unbridled fun we were supposed to have when we grew up. The whole “living on your own” and “living by your *own* rules” dream hardly materialized the way that we imagined it would.

But where is it written that we need to succumb to all of these external pressures and be so serious all the time? Most of us will agree that life *can* be just a tad overwhelming at times. I mean, wouldn't it be nice to go back to the days of afternoon naps with a warm homemade cookie waiting for you when you woke up? Those days are long gone. Or are they? Is there a way to actually escape this thing called "adulthood" and return to childhood?

That's where the good news comes in. I think there are eight ways to escape "adulthood." You see, these traits from childhood are not the exclusive property of children. They are inherent in all of us, placed there by our loving Creator. It's kind of like how birds have natural instincts built in that remind them to fly south for the winter, and where to look for worms. Birds depend on these instincts to live. We, too, have certain natural instincts that help us to live our lives to the full-

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est. All children have them. We're born with them. They come naturally, and they never really go away, even if they're a bit rusty.

For some people, they're *really* rusty.

Throughout this book, I'll be discussing the eight qualities that all children are born with, and you'll see how

you can dust them off and start using them again. Once you do this, you'll begin to see some immediate changes in your life.

Besides having a lot more fun, you'll break free from the stress of the high-paced rat race to find *real* happiness. You'll make a profound difference in the lives of people around you. You will accomplish things in your life that you once thought were impossible, while uncovering opportunities to solve unsolvable problems. What's more, you'll melt away built-up stress and fatigue, becoming more energized and productive at home and at work. By resurrecting these childlike traits, you'll be able to gain peace of mind about the things that worry you most, and overcome your greatest fears and challenges. It may be hard to believe, but it's all true. This book is filled with examples of people who've done just that.

I was abundantly blessed with a great childhood experience. I grew up in a middle-class home in a small midwestern town of ten thousand. My dad worked hard as a carpenter and at a lumberyard, and my mom worked hard as a mom at home. I enjoyed lazy summers with my brothers playing baseball in the park and swimming in those little plastic pools. We didn't get everything we wanted, but we had everything we needed. Outside, I went on dangerous missions as Han Solo, explored the ravine behind our house, and created extravagant snow forts in the front yard. It is these experiences that I've been able to draw from to create my comic strip, *Kim & Jason*.

I first drew the characters Kim and Jason when I started dating a girl named, you got it, Kim. She had an amazing childlike spirit that captivated me right from the start. The start happened to be Christmas caroling, and she was wearing red thermal underwear under reindeer boxer shorts with a Santa hat and combat boots—plus, she was cute. So, needless to say,

she stood out. Being an artist—the poor, starving kind at the time—I used some old childhood photos and sketched cartoon versions of us. They were a big hit, so I kept it up. Before long, I started getting positive responses from other people, strangers even, and I decided to begin developing a comic strip that celebrated those unique qualities that all children share. Since then, the characters have taken on lives of their own, and the strip has evolved into a microcosm of childhood, offering readers a brief respite from the harried perplexity of adulthood.

The number one question people ask any cartoonist is invariably, “How do you come up with your ideas?” Many people assume that because my wife has been a kindergarten teacher, she provides me with an abundance of ideas for the strip. Perhaps surprisingly, nothing could be further from the truth. Kim often tells me stories about the goings-on with her students; but as far as I can remember, I have never gotten any strip ideas directly from her. Other people assume I must have children from whom I derive inspiration. As of this writing, I do not have any children. I usually crack some joke about the benefits of Mountain Dew or buying ideas on eBay, and sometimes I’ll even concede that having a wife as a kindergarten teacher is not a bad thing. Why do I do that? I suppose because there are no easy answers. I wonder if people always ask Michael Jordan how he got to be so good at basketball? Sure, he worked hard to be the best; but a big chunk of his ability was something he was just born with. Above and beyond my fairly idyllic upbringing and creative talents, I believe one of my gifts¹ is the ability to see life from a childlike perspective. I can’t explain it, really, but when I put my characters into a

situation, I just instinctively know how they would act or what they would be thinking. I guess you could call it a talent; but if I weren't able to utilize it as a cartoonist, I'm not really sure where else it would come in handy. The best way to describe it would be that if my head were a radio, the station would be tuned into childhood and the tuning knob would be missing.

Even my favorite story from the Bible has to do with childhood. It's one of the times Jesus is hanging out with His pals. I don't imagine He was signing autographs (could you image what THAT would be worth?), but I'm sure everybody was clamoring to hear and be a part of all of the miraculous and important things that followed this man around like white on rice. Then a little child approached, perhaps pulled like a magnet to this easy-going guy who smiled a lot and seemed to be so much fun. Of course, as grown-ups are prone to do, the disciples admonished the little kid, probably starting off on some lecture about how "the grown-ups are talking, we're busy, now go play." (I've heard that more than a few times in my life.) But then, surprisingly for all who were present, Jesus admonished *them*.

I imagine Him bringing the child close, running His fingers through his hair, and looking deeply into the eyes of the disciples around Him. Then He said, "I tell you the truth, the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Unless you embrace the kingdom of God like a little child, you will never enter it."²

Wow...*never*?

That is unquestionably my favorite Bible verse, one that has inspired me for years. On the surface it's quite a challenge and

something to think about. What does it mean? Does it mean we're supposed to shirk all responsibility and skip work to go build snow forts? Start paying our bills with Monopoly money? Begin limiting our diets to chicken nuggets and macaroni and cheese?

Just a wild guess, but I'm thinking that *wasn't* His intent. I've spent a long time pondering those words, and I've spent a long time observing kids, trying to figure out exactly what He meant. I've discovered that children have a lot of wonderful things to teach us. Some are obvious, like the idea that it's probably not a very good idea to stick things up our nose or in our ear.³ But, after much reflection, I've been able to nail down eight really important qualities that kids naturally exhibit. They are the traits that I think Jesus had in mind when He issued the challenge over 2,000 years ago to His friends. The very same challenge He issues to us today.

These are things I've incorporated into *Kim & Jason*, and things I think are important to dwell on. I believe they are hidden keys to live more fruitful, less stressed, more enjoyable lives. Hidden within children are almost magical universal secrets, hinted at by Jesus long ago, and, thankfully, still planted (sometimes deeply) within us.

This book is my humble take on what Jesus was talking about. My hope is that it might shed some light on your life and enable you to get more out of it. In each chapter, I share some anecdotes from my childhood, as well as some observations of children, to bring alive the eight secrets I've uncovered. I know that some of you may be a bit skeptical and perhaps worried that I'll encourage you to quit your job and muck around with

Play-Doh all day long. With that in mind, I've also included many stories of real live grown-ups who have exhibited these time-tested childhood qualities and have enjoyed a measure of success that exceeds anyone's standard.

As you read, these secrets should start to make a lot of sense; because, remember, they're already inside of you. Just like a mother's natural desire to care for her young, these traits were baked in from the very beginning. And even if your childhood was less than stellar, or downright horrible, don't despair. Sadly, due to circumstances beyond our control, not everyone is fortunate enough to fully develop all of these qualities throughout their entire childhood. Abuse, poverty, tragedy, and neglect are just a few of the things that cause children to grow up way too fast, resulting in some of these values to be hidden or neglected. But they are never destroyed. They are always there, waiting to be discovered and utilized. Who says we can't have a second childhood? One that's even better than the first! As I said earlier, these hidden qualities are not exclusive to children. In fact, throughout this book, you'll see examples of people of all ages who have embraced these ideals and become extremely successful, living happy and fulfilled lives. You'll see that Adultitis is completely curable.

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Let me take this opportunity to admit that I hate books that provide tons of idealistic theory but no "meat." Ideas are great and all, but they are useless unless acted upon. That's why, besides explaining the eight concepts in depth, my prescription for Adultitis includes 88 real-world,

practical, and tangible ways to begin incorporating some of these ideals into your life right away. Today.

I am well aware that no matter how well I've arranged the words on the page, I can't *make* you do anything. The step to a more fun, more fulfilled, less stressed existence is entirely up to you. I pray that this book will be your spark. Above all, I hope you'll find this book to be entertaining, encouraging, and a little inspiring as well.

I am fond of a story about a young girl having lunch with an older friend. They could overhear an argument between two people sitting near them, and the younger girl proclaimed that she could help them get along with each other. Surprised, and keenly interested, the friend asked for some clarification. "You see," said the little girl, "I'm little. The littler you are, the more you know. Little babies know everything, and when you grow up, you get stupider and stupider. It's too bad that they have to fight, but they're old and stupid and can't help it."

Without further ado, let's discover the cure for Adulthood by uncovering the eight secrets from childhood, and end the stupidity.

Note: I have a propensity to make asides when I write. Lots of them. Rather than muddle the main text with mildly interesting thoughts that have very little to do with the actual points I'm trying to make, I've included them in the endnote section at the, um, end.