

Back to Summer Vacation – My Story

Parents, it is time you begin planning, if you have not done so yet, how your children will utilize their time during the summer holiday. Think of the summer holiday as a time for growth and learning. Every student attending elementary to high school needs proper supervision and guidance during this time. Let it be your goal that by the end of the summer your children would have learned a new skill that they can take throughout their lives.

Most students will have about ten to eleven weeks (2.5 months) away from structured school activities. This is a total of 77 days or 1,848 hours. For adults, this is almost the same number of working hours for one entire year (40 hours a week totaling 2000 hours). This is enough time to forget the knowledge learned the months before and to acquire negative social habits. This is a very serious subject for me because far too many parents let their children “run wild” during the summer holiday. My parents knew the importance of making summer holidays constructive. My sisters and I were not allowed to waste time. Today, in my 60s, I am reaping the benefits of what I’ve learned during summer vacation times decades ago.

MY STORY

I went to college in Jamaica when I was almost nineteen years old (1973). All the years before were packed with learning and lots of fun time. My parents made sure that my summer times were productive. No one was going to be lazy and everyone must learn a manual skill before leaving home.

My father was a building contractor. He was usually building at least three homes at one time with scores of employees. When I was old enough, he would take me with him in his truck riding all over the island of New Providence, from one hardware to another and then from one home he was building to another. During the beginning years of my summer experience, I was too small to work on the construction sites, so riding in the old, hot truck with my dad was my job. Believe it or not, I got paid just doing that. However, when my dad stopped for a few hours on a particular job, that was when I followed him by his side around the construction site. He would take his time to explain to me what was happening and sometimes showed me how to use a tool. Or he would ask me to observe a worker using a tool because I would have to use that tool when I got older.

In the sixties and seventies when I went working for my dad, the fifteen-mile long Carmichael road area was a ghost town. I could never forget the sizzling summer when my dad and I were driving on that long, lonely road, when the truck engine failed. What do you think my dad did? He left me in the truck and he walked miles to the nearest place for help. He returned within four hours. Those were the days. What did I learn? I learned patience and all that nature could teach me – birds chirping, wild orchids, and ant hills, etc.

I could never forget those early years. There was one outstanding A-1 Carpenter I called Mr. Minus, who worked for my father. He was known to be one of the best in finish carpentry in the country. He taught me how to hold a saw the proper way and how to cut a piece of wood. He taught me about the diverse types of saws--the finish saw, rip saw, hacksaw, coping saw. Today there is also the wallboard saw, panel saw, keyhole saw, crosscut saw, etc. He also taught me how to hold and swing a hammer – 8 oz. to 20 oz. hammers. There is the club hammer, sledge hammer, joiner's mallet, soft-faced hammers, etc. Wow! Look what the hot summer months did for me.

In 1965 my dad brought home a special instrument he used to survey and measure properties and lay out foundations. He showed me how to use it. My father was a very meticulous builder. The foundations had to be perfectly square; walls straight; cement browning, perfectly even, etc. I could never forget the times my dad left me to assist two other men to mix cement that was being used to pour the footing of a foundation. I did learn the power of cement and sand with pea rock. I also learn painfully the skill of staining ceilings and painting them.

By the time I was in my mid-teens my father would leave me on the job just like any other worker. I could remember by the time I was seventeen years old how strong I was (but not now). I could lift, at one time, two 90-pound bags of cement or four eight-inch concrete blocks, or two sheets of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood used to mix cement on. If you ask me to do that now I can't even budge it. But I accumulated a lot of skills that I am using today. During the summer months, I also learned how to install flush toilets, light fixtures, dig trenches, putty, sand and paint wood and walls, shingle roofs, and lots more.

I can go on and on about what my father taught me. However, I must also briefly share what my mother taught me during the summer months. In 2015, shortly after my mother's death, I wrote an article entitled: "My Dearest mother and me" where I shared these thoughts: "I could never forget the day Mom called me to sit beside her at the Singer sewing machine. That was the first day of many days she began patiently teaching me the various kinds of stitches, how to hem, put on buttons, install a zipper, knit, pom-pom, thread a sewing machine, etc. She would lovingly show me the chain stitch, straight stitch, underhand stitch, and overhand stitch. I am happy she did that. She taught me that a man need not depend on a woman to do simple things or anything if he has the skill to do it. She taught me that I must not treat my wife as a maid by demanding that she do things for me. Today, although I am not able to truly craft a dress or pair of pants, I am really good at making adjustments and mending."

Dear readers, I am a proud product of positive summer activities. I do not need to call a plumber, electrician, painter or carpenter to do elementary tasks. In our home there are cabinets, shelves, painted walls, mended clothing, button hole repairs, hot meals, clean dishes, etc., all made possible because of positive summer experiences during my school years. That's good for a psychologist and preacher. Teenagers, go and have a sizzling summer learning time. Enjoy!

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, JP, is a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980 or 242-477-4002.