

## ROSEBUD: CHILD'S PLAY REVISITED

Bernard F. Natelson, Psy.D., A.B.M.P.  
Licensed Psychologist (PSY #6745)  
docallegro@aol.com

Rosebud! This is the last spoken word by Citizen Kane as he lies dying. An investigation ensues with the intent to find the meaning of this word in his life. Those close to Citizen Kane are interviewed but the meaning of the word, Rosebud, is elusive until the final scene when the label, Rosebud, is seen on Kane's sled as it goes up in flames with the rest of the dying man's paraphernalia. Aside from the fact that Citizen Kane is perhaps one of the best American films ever made, I think the idea conveyed by Welles in his classic production is essential to what parenting is all about.

Kane comes from a wealthy privileged family where his own parents do not spend a significant amount of time with him. Familial continuity is non-existent in his early childhood life. As an adult, Kane loses the innocence of childhood in becoming a mogul owner of a newspaper chain. His morals become corrupted by the taste of power and his life is colored with sordid affairs and relationships. As Kane is dying, he utters "Rosebud" to resurrect the more pristine less complicated times he experienced as a child. His sled represents the joyful times he had as a child that were lacking in later times as a "successful" entrepreneur. In point of fact, Kane's sled fills the vacuum left by his parents that never spent a sufficient amount of time with him as he was growing up.

When I see parents who complain about their children's behavior, what I frequently discover is that these parents have forgotten to praise their children. It is incredible how long parents and children can go without communicating anything positive to each other. But on a more fundamental level, many parents I see have either forgotten or never learned to play with their kids. In a typical family session, I may give all the members a simple board game, a puzzle, or perhaps some lego to play with as a family unit. Often the child will feel quite familiar with these articles but the parents will be hopelessly lost. Sometimes, in fact, the children will have to explain to the parents what the rules are and how the game is played. Some parents will look at me dumbfounded and wonder why I am suggesting that they play with their children. After all are they not bringing their children to me so I can uncover what the problem is with these children. I would maintain that reactions like these by parents--to the task of playing with their child or children--is often one source of the problem.

The complexities that Kane faced in his adult life have unfortunately become a part of what many parents face in their everyday lives today. Now in many families, due to economic necessity, both parents have become an active part of the employment market and, consequently,

©2009 Bernard Natelson, PsyD, ABMP. All rights reserved. You may redistribute this article, "as is",  
i.e. without modification or fees of any sort.

Visit <http://www.realpsychsolutions.com> for more information and articles.

are away from home more than ever. Moreover, until very recently, the divorce rate has continued to increase, placing a further strain on the amount of time parents have to spend with their children. The unfortunate reality is that children neither understand nor are the cause of the changing economy or social conditions that produce financial difficulties or divorce. I don't think that the video games that children can play with themselves are any better or any different in quality than Kane's boyhood sled that he recalls so vividly as an adult. These modern games are diversions but not answers for what a child needs.

Perhaps we as adults need to remember what it was like once for us to be a child. Hopefully, we can have this recollection many years prior to our demise. Even if for one reason or another we cannot or will not recall what it was like being a child, the idea of playing with one's child or children at their developmental level is extremely important to a healthy upbringing of any child. I recommend that parents structure some form of free play with their child or children as a routine part of their daily schedule. Obviously, it would be much easier if these parents enjoyed play; however, even if they do not enjoy childhood games, the carrying out of such activities have the potential for therapeutic value.

Parents that are willing to take the time to play with their child may be shifting the nature of their relationship from a purely punitive role to a more nurturing one. Many parents have gotten into the habit of attending to their children only when the latter misbehave. By creating a time when parents can interact with their children, the attention these children now receive takes on a much more positive light. Naturally, it is essential that the children enjoy the time spent with either or both parents.

If the children view the play with their parents as fun, then they will look forward to these "play periods." Furthermore, if the children misbehave they could lose the opportunity to play that particular day or days. The efficacy of such a disciplinary procedure would depend on the consistency and regularity that the child or children participate in play with their parents. Naturally, it would be difficult to tell a child he/she loses the privilege to play today if that same child has not played with either parent in the past few days, even when his/her behavior had been appropriate. Finally, structuring play with their children, into a parent or parents' respective daily schedules may actually allow these parents the time they themselves need to escape and relax from the cold reality of having to make a living.