



## Playing for Keeps

While I was writing last week's story - about the difficulties of finding a good balance when giving praise to the workers here - I was reminded about being in much the same sort of situation some decades ago. Back then, it wasn't woodblock printmakers I had to keep watch over, it was my children!

I have read a number of newspaper and magazine stories recently that have discussed the difficulties of managing this situation; it seems there is a feeling in the air these days that parents in recent years have been overly praising their children, with the result that once the kids get out into the wider world, they have difficulty coming to terms with the fact that not everything they do is actually 'Wonderful!', as their parents have led them to believe.

This is not a trivial matter; we all understand that it is important for children to grow up with good self-esteem, and yet if we inflate this artificially during their developing years, no good will come of it. It is - as with most things - a matter of balance.

I have been chatting about some of these points with the printer trainees here as we work, and some of the things I said have shocked them a bit. The most vivid difference of opinion came when I explained to them my custom when playing games with my daughters when they were little; I never - and I mean *never* - 'let them win', no matter how young they were.

Now our home was full of games and puzzles of all types, both commercially produced and those that I had made myself. Some were 'solo' activities, and others were competitive. When we were playing a competitive game at first, we would play in 'rehearsal' mode, where 'all the cards would be open' as it were, and we would discuss together the best strategy for each of us to take, at each step. Once the general understanding was there, we would play 'for keeps'. I - of course - always won.

Now when I explain this to you now, I have to admit it certainly does sound a bit cold-blooded and harsh. But please understand that it was all done in a very friendly and playful manner. Simply they understood that in order to beat their dad, they would have to get *good*. And also please note that the two of them endlessly played with each other and with other kids who came into our home, and everybody had plenty of opportunities to win against one or another of these opponents.

But in this environment winning *meant* something!

Just yesterday, before sitting down to write this, I had a (video) phone conversation with daughter Fumi, now 26 and running her own business in Vancouver. I wanted to ask her if she remembered a particular episode - one that I myself will never forget. The two of us had a particularly favourite game, one we had played many times. It was a puzzle-type of game, requiring both logical thinking and the ability to think ahead a number of moves.

The episode I remember well is the day when she first beat me. Perhaps she was about ten or so, I'm not exactly sure. At one point in the play, I could see that she had a winning position, and I held my breath, won-

**David Bull**  
**Seseragi Studio**  
**Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City**  
**Tokyo Japan 198-0052**  
**<http://astoryaweek.com>**

dering if she would pick up on it. She did. And then, realizing that the game was hers to win, she looked up at me. Shock. Disbelief. And of course, triumph!

We played it out to the end, where she placed her final tile on the board to seal my fate. And then as we looked at each other, our eyes filled up. There we sat, tears rolling down our cheeks, both full of mixed emotions.

I was so proud to have a little girl who could navigate her way through the complex logic to outfox me, but of course I had lost! And she was proud of her victory, yet also kind of sad for me ...

I mentioned that I had asked her on the phone if she also remembered this episode, and she did indeed. It seems to have been an important moment for both of us. To some extent, competition between parents and kids is a natural part of life, and I think that it can play a large part in the development of the self-esteem that is such a necessary part of a healthy psychology.

But remember, they have to be 'down' before they can climb 'up' - so go for the jugular!

**David Bull**  
**Seseragi Studio**  
**Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City**  
**Tokyo Japan 198-0052**  
**<http://astoryaweek.com>**