

# AP Literature Pieces

## 2015-2016

### My Modest Proposal

by Ben Crogh

Kids usually progress in dangerous sports like skiing, biking, or skateboarding the hard way. Action sports have a high level of risk: injuries are common, so fewer people participate. Ambitious parents often choose athletic endeavors that build more than just narrow active skills; they search for those which initiate a lifelong kernel of wisdom. In *Team vs. Individual Sport*, Brent George writes, "With individual sport, you can't hide behind teammates. Success and failure are yours alone to bear. Where you can rely on a teammate in team sports, you must rely on yourself in individual sport."<sup>1</sup> While team sports are enjoyable for their social benefits, individual sports may hold more valued outcomes. Knowing that individual action sports initiate a long-term learning curve, all parents must do is bring up athletes who choose the more risky path from an early age.

Raising kids who are unafraid of sports injuries is a challenge in itself. It is hard as a parent to push your child to attempt risky feats like hitting jumps on skis, when you yourself cannot accomplish the skill. There is one simple solution to this predicament: send kids out to learn for themselves. Fully support whatever risks they enjoy naturally. Sending his three-year-old child down a Black Diamond ski run, a parent could rely on the child to figure out any potential problems. On the Psychology Educator forum, Dr. Brian Moser explains that "By pushing through the fear in the sport, many find that they are better able to face the challenges life puts in their way."<sup>2</sup> Children must learn to be winners by facing their biggest fears without help and without firm direction. As Michael Jordan once said, "I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."<sup>3</sup>

Fearless athletes result from the way we present individual action sports. As soon as children can walk, stand, crawl, or float, it is essential to offer them extreme sports so that they naturally adapt to adrenaline rushes without fear. It is not how much time parents spend with children building their skills, but most importantly, the attitude instilled into nascent competitive minds. Tamar Chansky, a psychologist studying early child exposure to different activities, says, "Our children can wish for the super-human talent, the near perfect skills -- those may be out of reach -- but what is absolutely in your child's grasp, where the level playing field truly lies, is in the mindset of an Olympian."<sup>4</sup> Olympians are not afraid to make mistakes; Olympians do not give up after an injury or loss.

I propose to leave purely up to the athlete full control of his or her ultimate success. Besides creating future extreme athletes and Olympians, my proposal has many other benefits for parents. Team sports are nice because parents can leave their kids for a few hours with a coach and go to the store or do errands. For the first time, extreme action sports can offer the same type of relief. Sending kids off on their own to learn a sport at full speed frees the parent, who really does not need to be present during the learning process. With my plan, mom can drop her two-year-old off at the ski hill by himself, run to the bank, store, etc., all while enabling her young child to develop into a fearless, professional skier.

### Ironclad

by Noah Stapp

"One. . . two. . . three. . . . four. . . . five!" The sharp clang of the steel bar hitting the rack jolted me from my focused state. As I re-racked the bar, my arms cried out, exhausted from exertion. It was Tuesday morning, and I was in the gym, working out despite a nasty cold and colossal mound of homework. I felt at peace, away from the stress of school, grades, and life. Here was a very different kind of stress: physical, heavy weight that tore muscles down and rebuilt them, stronger than before. The resulting soreness and exhaustion was oddly calming: a sort of pride taken from defeating your body and remaking it better. Sighing, I sniffled in a deep breath and grabbed the bar, starting a new set of repetitions.

Weightlifting is one of the few constants in my life besides school. Three times a week, every week, I go to the gym, ignoring, for the most part, weather, sickness, and stress. Consistency is key to weightlifting: without consistent, progressive exertion, you cannot improve and grow stronger. I have applied this lesson to everything in my life: school, hobbies, social activities. Repetition and consistency are the only way to improve most things in life, making success far easier. Before I began weightlifting, I would often procrastinate, putting off schoolwork until the last minute, then rushing and doing a subpar job. This laziness and lack of consistency carried over into

Since I will not be starting kindergarten for two more years, I have tons of free time to ski, but my parents always work, making it hard for them to teach me. Perfect: I ride faster without them anyways.

*My mom drops me off at the hill and the liftys pick me up and place me onto the chairlift. I am about ready to shred. With ten inches of fresh snow, the chest-deep powder will be sending me face shots all day long! Even though most of the time there is too much snow for me to see where I am going, and my skis are not nearly wide enough to stay afloat, I can still out-ride all the grownups.*

*The only downside to riding alone on pow days is that when I get buried, I can't get out, and when I crash, sending my gear every which direction, it takes me forever to tread through the deep snow to gather it all and continue my run. Riding alone has taught me that when I am hurt, my mom is not going to be there to make it better. I have learned to ski it out, or scream.*

In action sports, self-confidence and grit comes from one simple solution: free-range parenting. Only truly untethered children fully learn how sports work and how winning feels. Such children keep chasing that feeling. Pediatrician Lisa Zamosky says, "In fact, if you grew up in the '70s and '80s (and earlier, of course), you probably remember going out to play after school and being expected to return home only when the street lights turned on."<sup>5</sup> Older generations have created extreme sport pioneers like base jumper Shane McConkey, stuntman Evel Knievel, pro freeskiier Candide Thovex, and pro mountain biker Stevie Smith. Some of the most gnarly athletes of their time, these men were once kids who did not have countless opportunities to explore many different sports. However, once they found their passion, the sport that put them in their elements, they bloomed. Parents used to realize that they could not keep kids like these legends from going outside and hopping on whatever gave them a rush. Now, when kids are bored, they are handed a phone or iPad and told to stay quiet while mommy works. Parents must give their kids freedom to pursue and love activities that will spawn success. The more parents suppress a kid's dream, the less that kid will believe in his own possibilities.

Rooted in the tried and true ways of old, my solution, while rarely used, is the way to sporting success. Parents may fear sending their kids out alone to discover the dynamics of a sport, but must accept such risk as the only way to grow Olympians. This is the most logical way to raise competitive, athletic kids.

As I grew up, my mom was always concerned with the idea that there had to be a responsible adult around wherever I went. Her fears stunted my level of athletic excellence, thus removing me from the upper echelon of skiers with whom I might be competing today. If my parents had just let me go ski whenever I felt the urge or whenever it snowed, alone, then the 2018 Winter Olympics might have been a reality for my future. I cannot go back and become a kid again to do it all over, but when I have children of my own, they will have the chance to become legends. Parental fear of death only retards the growth of extreme athletes.

*April 8th, 2016: weather is perfect with a cool breeze coming up the valley. The whole scene -- newly uncovered bike trails threading through Jug Mountain -- could have been perfect until my bike and I took flight. Bail! then.. silence. My vision returned a half hour after the wreck and my walking came within a few hours. The next three months I spent my life severely concussed.*

other parts of my life: most notably, I was out of shape and incredibly socially anxious.

Weightlifting was the driving force behind fixing all three problems. I got into shape over time, and my newfound fitness gave me confidence and the drive to improve through repetition, helping me to conquer my social fears. I began planning ahead, doing schoolwork at a consistent rate, and no longer procrastinated until the last minute. The quality of my work began rising: consistent practice led to gradual improvement in skills. Skipping a day or week of exercise can mean stalling progress, forcing me to effectively repeat a previous workout, rather than growing stronger. Picking up that first barbell gave me an iron will, one that has proved invaluable in all areas of my life.

Today I can say that now I am a much better rider because of that crash. I calculate every inch of my rides and have become more aware of crucial situations. If my parents had been forced to accept free-range parenting, this accident would have occurred much earlier in my life, and I would have benefitted from the increased wisdom earlier in my career. Pushing the sport to new heights is what adrenaline junkies like myself are made to do. Getting the better shots and the bigger name is all a part of being unleashed to explore extreme sports at a young age.

#### Endnotes

1 -- Team vs. Individual Sport. G4 Athlete, Sports Biomechanics.  
<http://g4athlete.com/team-vs-individual-sport/> Mercer Island, WA: 2012. Viewed: 2016.

2 -- Overcoming Fear of the Most Dangerous Sports.  
<https://psychologyeducator.wordpress.com/2013/08/05/overcoming-fear-of-the-most-dangerous-sports/> Psychology Educator, Tips for Aspiring Psychology Students. 2013. Viewed: 2016.

3 -- Jordan, Michael. Brainy Quotes, Michael Jordan Quotes.  
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/michaeljor127660.html> 2001. Viewed: 2016.

4 -- Chansky, Tamar. Teach Your Child to Think like an Olympic Athlete.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/worry-wise/201402/teach-your-child-think-olympic-athlete> Psychology Today, 2014. Viewed: 2016.

5 -- Zamosky, Lisa. Free-Range Parenting: It's a new hands-off approach to raising kids. Should you give it a try?  
<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/features/free-range-parenting> WebMD: Health & Parenting. Viewed: 2016.

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### Western Fortress

by Noah Stapp

Mountains loom, rings of rocky ramparts  
around emerald castles of life.  
Spears of pine jut from below battlements,  
their eternal lush hue defending against cold, white invasion.  
Chirps and hoots fill icy heights,  
volleys of bright song and primal sound;  
wars of music,  
artillery firing forever.  
Icy blue moats pool beneath spires of jagged stone,  
hiding black depths unknown: glassy blockades where life survives, safe from man.  
Songs may change, evergreens may fall,  
but stony keeps stand immortal.

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### Lake of Life

by Noah Stapp

You lie, lake, throughout the winter hell.  
Your ice cage, your cage a shield

for life, safe from the frozen spell.

Shut away beneath this icy shell,  
a kingdom of life survives, waiting  
to wish winter's wrath farewell.

Winds may blow, and lights may quell,  
but always will there be a soul alive,  
surviving throughout each death knell.

Winter ends and life begins to swell:  
water begins its incessant flow.  
Souls beneath gather, starting to rebel.

Sunshine beams as life emerges to dwell,  
the curse of darkness failing.  
A new world awakes, free of winter's prison cell.

Bright sun shines, stars twinkle, warm seas dispel  
the cold. The world is full of vigor:  
new and old are one, strong against the well.  
Come out from death to live, to birth, to yell.

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### **Chamber**

by Ben Crogh

Up,  
above  
the corridor  
rests quietly, a room  
history built within four walls,  
oppressed by the heaviness of internal wars.

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### **Advancement**

by Noah Stapp

We needed fuel, we needed life:  
nature was kind to give.  
We wanted gold, we wanted war:  
so others could not live.

Golden greens turned to rusty browns;  
lakes drained, could not outlive  
our thirst for blood, our own and earth's.  
Nature was sad to give.

Our wars remained, our greed survived;  
earth's treasures ripped from ground.  
Our people died, souls torn from life.  
Nature: man's battleground.

Keeps rose above bare rocky wastes  
watching over their claims.  
Towers thrust into heaven, while  
nature went up in flames.

Man's home was black, grey steel and stone  
all emerald lands were gone,  
replaced by cold, unfeeling walls,  
green festered in bounded lawn.

We wish for more scenic views of  
earth; ready to relive  
our primal home, abound with life:  
nature has none to give.

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### **Ambition**

by Ben Crogh

Walls bind: an airtight box surrounding the boy's mind.  
He sits strong, relieving inward pressure of  
an older generation.  
Brick is too brittle. Steel composes these prison walls.

Walls creak, moan, thump,  
drown out the boy's voice, which  
sends words that return empty,  
rejected: hurled back by impenetrable walls.

Walls stand: dull and motionless, statues of old.  
Sky blue, lime, cherry: vibrant paint wishes  
chip from damp walls toward cold floors.  
Day after day, gray overwhelms ancient walls.

Walls might weaken or become frail,  
allowing an optimistic plan of escape.  
Hoping, yearning for life, the boy's mind  
obsesses over each fleck of idea; emotions  
bounce back every futile dream.

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## Short Story

by Noah Stapp

Fresh new land: devoid  
of civilization. Abundant  
fauna, ready for reaping, act  
civilized: use tools, build  
huts, form families.

Mice compared to men, perhaps  
incapable of intelligence.

Such uncivilized wastelands  
could gain greatly  
from our Empire  
extraordinaire.

Another Great Explorer  
hoists his iron-tipped flag, illuminating  
empty earth; revealing great  
kingdoms of man.

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## Nightfall

by Noah Stapp

Lightless inky space invades,  
subsuming all in minutes, devouring  
indiscriminately.

Nature corrupts, transmuting  
once-emerald lands into black  
symphonies of discord and terror.

*Chickadeedees* mutate into unseen *cawcawcaws*  
mocking from shadows; vibrant  
wildlife shifts into muted, grotesque beasts  
stalking all survivors; trees morph, abhorrent  
twisting sentinels which  
grasp with wooden talons. No illuminating guardian  
stands watch in these heavens:  
darkness conquers, lord of all.

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## Lawless

by Ben Crogh

Water crashes and roars: deep  
turbulence lies below.

Pine trees fall; rocks roll. Nothing, nothing  
can stop his flow. Constant  
ruckus like banging bombs  
shakes forested earth: he stands,

unmoved. Stubborn nature  
refuting any challenge; smashing contenders  
into whitewash below.  
Reveling in impenetrable mist,  
filling others' happiness with risk. . .  
unique currents, stronger and faster  
under subtle blue ripples, catch many  
off guard.  
Content flows through watery domains,  
crashing down; rising  
upon each glassy surface.

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### **Westward Trek** by Noah Stapp

An Eastern boy, he traveled West, inside  
great birds of steel, roaring, shaking flight  
above rock spires, and emerald fields below:  
a land so huge, so high, with verdant spears  
of pine. He landed there, amidst grey peaks,  
awed by beauty, primal deep and strong.  
He traveled North, into valleys of stone,  
and earthy towers, gazing down below  
on every place, daring to humble man.  
He hiked and biked, both high and low, could not  
believe his eyes: all was so raw, so green,  
so bright. This world was heaven, tall and proud,  
unlike his home of hills and gunmetal.  
Alas, his time was up, his journey done:  
eastward cities called him, loud and hot.  
Steel eagles carried him to his old home,  
to share with all such wonders he had seen.

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