

Play to Learn, Learn to Play
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Spring is here again. As daylight increases and animals and plants get more active, we often look to new beginnings and starting fresh. Spring cleaning is one manifestation of this desire to be productive and energetic after the dark and cold of winter. Another frequent sight is that of people playing. Especially in light of the effects of the pandemic, people feel a need to enjoy the things around them and interact with others and nature. I have seen quite a few very happy dogs out for walks these past few weeks!

My grandfather passed away from Alzheimer's more than a decade ago. Not long after his diagnosis, our family was visiting for the summer. One afternoon, he asked me to go with him for a drive, just us two. At first he was quiet, but then he pulled the car to a stop. This, he explained to me, pointing to a house on a corner, was his boyhood home. He spoke about his time as a child and the games he played. All that afternoon, he took me to stop after stop sharing with me the places he grew up and the experiences he had. It is a very tender memory for me. I can recall my grandfather telling me more than once that "You only get old when you stop having fun". I have pondered on that experience and his words often since he passed.

Those that know me well can tell you that I love to play. One of the things I enjoy about being a programming librarian is the opportunity to enjoy work and help others enjoy life too. Play is a powerful tool. Science and medicine have discovered that play is not only integral to the healthy mental, social, and physical development of children, but it also improves medical patient recovery, helps stave off mental illness and decline, and boosts immune levels and positive brain chemistry. Play can help us heal, help us forget, forge new friendships, connect to those we love, and much more.

It is a common stereotype in older books and movies that libraries and librarians are stuffy, quiet, and serious. I'll admit to the second and third when necessary, but librarians tend to be portrayed as all three at once. Just watch "It's a Wonderful Life", and you'll get what I mean. Our wonderful patrons here at the New Ulm Public Library, of course, know better than that. Our staff is happy to help you as best we can with a variety of services. Everyone is welcome here, and being a place for the community to gather, we have a variety of activities to stimulate your own opportunities to learn and play.

I'm reminded of the words of Julie Andrews in the original Mary Poppins movie. "In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. You find the fun and - SNAP - the job's a game." I hope you take time to enjoy the changing seasons. I hope you look for ways to enjoy what you do, and of course, I hope you'll join us at the library as we play, and learn, together.