

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Nursery rhymes, like planking in a sea worthy vessel, are wedged tongue and groove deep into our subconscious.

The last verse of “Row Row Row Your Boat” concludes, “Cause if you're not careful, You'll fall into the sea” That line moored into my mind August 22nd as I sat among fellow community oarsmen during the first planning committee meeting for a youth summit. We grappled with the seamanship required to affect the communal sea change needed for mastery of the core issues facing our greatest asset, our youth.

All understood the nursery rhyme's timeless messages; what goes around comes around and singing the same tune works a lot better in negotiating the rivers of life than swinging one's paddle aimlessly.

Fairfield's worthy youth programs will benefit from better command, control and communication. The talent, time and tenacity exist to make it so. An additional approach became clear after listening to those at the 'front lines' share insight. It is simply this.

Deep keeled boats with strong rudders weather the storms of life best. Stable healthy families craft those keels and rudders of core attitudes, aptitudes and values. Case in point; Boys and Girls Clubs work. Why? They are surrogate family.

Fallen apples speak volumes about the tree. Two insightful pieces by Daily Republic journalists are exemplary. Susan Winlow observed those entering the work force lack 'soft skills', formerly taught at home, such as a good work ethic and noted that skill instruction is increasingly being done only in schools. Frankly, when the latest generation to leave home lands on their butt in the school of life, it will not be soft. Furthermore, the burden which ill preparedness lays heavy on hearth, heart and taxpayers wallets is rather hard to bear. One Winlow interviewee nailed it...“It...stems from...the...breakdown of the family unit....” Similarly, Andrea Garcia, citing national data reported...“Teens are (using)... alcohol and drugs earlier...at parties at which parents are present.”

Pick your guru; the Bible, Quran, Talmud, sociologists, great philosophers, mental health professionals or grandma. All agree that the family is the crucible of civilization and the parent child relationship is the most critical ingredient.

In 1982, Time Magazine printed a scarlet “H”, for herpes, on the cover. The only scarlet letter me and cronies were sporting well into young adulthood was a “V”; varsity or virgin, take your pick. More than babies boomed out of the greatest generation that lived. Their spawn ushered in the greatest boom in STD's in modern history.

Life can imitate art. Exposure to violence, sexual stereotypes and such unequivocally increases the odds of unsavory behavior. The headwaters of the river of funding which float this garbage ultimately lead to parents; biologic, legal or surrogate.

Parenting entails mentorship and modeling and is the toughest job in the world. It is not a relationship based on the exchange of goods and services or deferring of difficult value lessons. The boats launched from those shores will founder if they are not well provisioned with practical knowledge of nutrition, STD's, drug and alcohol use, exercise; the entire continuum of wellness-environmental, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychological. Young souls aboard such vessels are doomed to be incompetent members of an exploitative society and weaken our culture at its core

Youthful indiscretions are certainly not all parents fault. Even cream curdles and 'good kids' can and do make bad choices. Furthermore, surrogate parenting occurs as our youth observe all of our daily choices. Nonetheless, the family provides the winds that first fill young sailors' sails.

So I encourage youth summiteers to also hand oars to the adult school and Solano Community College. Using incentives, build on excellent resources in place to educate and animate the boat builders and sail fillers-parents. Failure of parents to know the talk to walk will have us all singing a sad refrain; the last line of our beloved nursery rhyme.

Kevin Ryan is a retired Colonel, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield.