

9/10/2000

Virtual reality of video games no substitute for real world

You may have heard about Norma McCorvey. She was the plaintiff in *Roe vs. Wade*, the case in which the Supreme Court issued its infamous 1973 decision which legalized abortion in the United States. Interestingly, Norma McCorvey is now Catholic, and she spends a great deal of her time touring the country, speaking out against abortion. She says that she began to have second thoughts about abortion when she drove by a playground and saw that it was completely empty. The absence of children spoke to her soul.

Her story reminds me of a recent development in a Tulsa neighborhood.

The city wanted to install sidewalks in the neighborhood, free of charge, mostly so children could ride bikes and trikes on the sidewalks and have a safer means of getting to the neighborhood school.

A couple of neighbors objected to the sidewalk idea, so the city passed out a survey to residents in the neighborhood. The survey responses indicated that the overwhelming majority of the neighbors were against the sidewalks because the sidewalks were a nuisance when it came to mowing and there weren't very many children in the neighborhood anyway. So the city didn't put in the sidewalks.

Now that the summer of 2000 is over, I am unofficially reporting that I saw few if any children on area sidewalks or playgrounds during the daytime in the past summer. I hardly saw any children outside at all during daylight hours,



Tim Sullivan

Family Life Director

except for kids walking from the parking lot to the mall. I have heard many others making the same observation.

The big culprit is not just declining birthrates but video games and the Internet. When I was a child, we didn't have such wonders, so we played outside every day of the summer. The neighbor's backyard was perfect for whiffle ball, with a fence line that resembled the outfield wall at Yankee Stadium.

We played baseball regularly at Boulder Park, stopping off at the Milk Depot on the way home for refreshment. We formed a club, the Moonlight Riders, for exploring on our bikes.

I was thinking recently that my worst transgression as a youth was at least real rather than simulated in a video game. My brother and I were out shooting BB guns in the neighborhood. One of our neighbors, the Harringtons, had a big, shiny green ball perched on a pedestal in a garden in their front yard. My brother encouraged me to shoot it. I told him it would explode, but he responded by saying that it was metal, that he

had felt it just the other day. Thus encouraged, I shot at the ball, and it exploded into a million pieces. A short time later, I was favored with an interview with a police detective.

I had to work the rest of the summer, washing windows and mowing yards at an average wage of 25 cents an hour, to earn enough money to replace that green ball. While the Harringtons would have been better off if I had been playing a video game, at least I had to suffer the consequences of my inappropriate behavior.

These days, kids can use a vast array of weapons to destroy all sorts of things on their monitors and there are no consequences whatsoever other than a mild case of blurred vision.

The other benefit of my experience with virtueless reality was that it provided my family with material that they could and did use against me for years at family gatherings. It wouldn't have been worth mentioning at all if the explosion of the Harrington's green ball had been simulated in a video game.

I'm not encouraging kids to get outside and do something destructive. I am suggesting that there's a price to be paid for our children staying indoors all the time and living vicariously through various electronic gadgets. If something doesn't change soon we'll be selling off all our playgrounds.

Our closing verse is from the Book of Genesis: "Ah, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that the Lord has blessed."