

## Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)

Written by Maya Beecham  
Friday, 14 May 2010 13:02

---



Children sprawled out on couches, recliners, or floors; nearly hypnotized by a variety of images and messages projected from a television screen. The image has become all too familiar. Increasingly, young children are adopting habits of a sedentary lifestyle, at a stage in life when activity is imperative to growth, mentally and physically. *Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)*, a children's book written by Candy Pettiford and illustrated by Andres Guzman, is one step in Pettiford's mission to reclaim youth.

It all began with a personal revelation. "I have grandkids. And I realized we were losing them because they were watching too much TV. Not only that but they are into these different electronic games. I thought: 'If I am having problems with my grandkids I know people must be having problems with their children and their grandchildren.' I really almost stumbled upon writing the book," said the author.

One day Pettiford's husband David overheard their granddaughter Egypt reading the entire story aloud. He encouraged his wife to publish the book. Pettiford realized the universal need of all children to maintain physical activity, and she was a testament to the importance of exercise. "I'm passionate because we are losing our children to the many screens in their lives. Screens like: Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, smart phones, Flixster, YouTube, My Space, Nintendo DS, the Internet, and of course TV and movies. I also realized, in having Rheumatoid Arthritis, you need to exercise. I know that I am a person that is on the go all the time and I know

## Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)

Written by Maya Beecham  
Friday, 14 May 2010 13:02

---

television just really isn't in my forecast, so that's how [the book] came about."

The story, written "in rhythmical rhyme," profiles the life of a young boy named Barack who navigates life after discovering his television is broken. As explained in one of the book's passages: "The family television is broke and Barack has to learn to change his lifestyle. He begins to exercise, meet friends and make money. All this happens because his television is broke..... He says I was getting fat because I was sitting around watching too much television, now I am skateboarding. He is getting out and exercising."

Pettiford is part of a nationwide movement to mobilize physical activity in the lives of young people, to save them from disease and early death. In February 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama launched the "Let's Move" campaign which led to President Obama commissioning a Taskforce on Childhood Obesity. The taskforce developed The Childhood Obesity Task Force Plan, an interagency plan to end childhood obesity and promote physical activity, unveiled by the First Lady on May 11, 2010.

Pettiford believes the tradition of oral history and the legacy of passing on honored family values through consistent family time has been destroyed by various forms of media, and she has statistics to prove her theory.

- Research shows that children spend between five and six hours per day watching TV, playing video games, or using a computer for recreation;
- Time spent in front of a screen is second only to the amount of time children spend sleeping;
- Metabolism rates while watching TV are lower than resting rates;
- The more time youth spend in front of a screen, the more likely they are to be overweight; and

## Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)

Written by Maya Beecham  
Friday, 14 May 2010 13:02

---

- Overweight is highest among children who watch TV or play video games for four or more hours per day.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Children spend a considerable amount of time with media. One study found that time spent watching TV, videos, DVDs, and movies averaged slightly over 3 hours per day among children aged 8–18 years. Several studies have found a positive association between the time spent viewing television and increased prevalence of obesity in children."

Pettiford visits local schools to read to students and she finds, "most of the students raise their hands when I ask the question do you have a television in your bedroom. We are talking about Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Sometimes the teachers say the students are coming in so tired. Well it's because they may be watching television from 1 am – 2 am in the morning and they leave it on all night because parents don't make them turn the television off."

Interaction and conversation became a vital component of Pettiford's relationship with her grandchildren, as she worked to wean them from television. "Every Wednesday night I have my grandkids over for dinner; we've been doing this for the last 10 years. We are playing games, dominoes, cards, checkers, and all these fun things. There is so much interaction because we are laughing and talking and sharing and there is no television. Television stunts conversation. So when my grandchildren come over they don't ask me to watch television. You have got to replace television with fun activities," said Pettiford.

Pettiford offers the following advice to guide parents as they train their children not to be heavy consumers of television.

- Limit screen time to no more than 2 hours per day;

## Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)

Written by Maya Beecham  
Friday, 14 May 2010 13:02

---

- Set reasonable limits for cell phone use and text messaging;
- Do not put a TV in a child's bedroom;
- Make meal time, family time - turn off the TV during family meal time. Better yet, remove a TV from the eating area;
- Make screen time active time by doing simple exercises during commercial breaks;
- Help your kids be savvy media consumers by teaching them to recognize a sales pitch;
  
- Create family memories by planning fun alternatives to TV time for your family;
- Develop a fun and creative curriculum;
- Have children read a book to you and/or you read to them;
- Record children reading stories on a voice recorder so they can hear how they sound and
- **Be a good role model** - limit your TV watching and recreational computer use to less than two hours per day.

Pettiford continues, "have a gamut of things for them to do. Be interactive with your kids. Have a conversation with them, and you will find out a lot of information. I am on a mission to get these parents to wake up because we are losing a whole generation of kids."

*Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)*, is now available at Common Good Books at 165 Western Avenue North, Saint Paul, MN 55102; Red Balloon on 891 Grand Avenue, St Paul, MN 55105, or by contacting Candy Pettiford at (651) 646-6737, or [candygram2008@ive.com](mailto:candygram2008@ive.com)

## Oh The Things You Can Do! (When You Don't Watch TV)

Written by Maya Beecham  
Friday, 14 May 2010 13:02

---