



**You don't quit playing
because you grow old;
you grow old because
you quit playing.**

by Bev Hoffman

About two years ago I started working/playing with a very special group of people: senior citizens. In a beautiful park filled with sturdy elders of its own, oak trees. I met a most dynamic and energetic woman named Bobbi Graybarth. She was developing a synergistic motivational program for seniors called Longevity Therapy. We began designing play experiences into the program and very rapidly PLAY became a major component.

Our program is a complex of many experiences including movement, tai chi, yoga, breathing, art, of course, poetry, relaxation techniques, and, of course, play. The goal is to encourage an individual to discover his/her own emotional and physical experience, hoping to effect both physical and attitudinal changes. The result: responsibility for one's own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

We design games that encourage movement, touching, trusting, expression, and community. In some of the balloon and parachute games I've witnessed a range of motion that would make a physical therapist envious. The reason this happens is related to the magical nature of play. While playing, or getting into the "flow" of a game, the elder does not remember to use negative attitudes that often decrease the desire to move or participate. Instead, caught in the action of the game, increased movement and action of motion automatically take place. In one turning home a stroke victim named Bob, with little or no movement in either leg, quite handily kicked a balloon in a game of *balloon soccer*.

Since most of our work is done in group settings, we believe very strongly in building a sense of trust and community. We do this primarily through the medium of PLAY. Once a level of trust is built up in a group, the individuals are more expressive and open to each other. A sense of freedom takes over which often leads to positive attitudes about group

and self potential. It becomes a very strong empowering experience more often than not.

At one senior center we were ending the group with a Guinean lullaby called "Mimim." What followed was one of those magical moments: after the tape ended, drawing closer and closer together, fifteen voices continued for fifteen minutes the works, "Light has come, I hear music, and I'll keep on singing."

Because what we do with elders is basically an experiential catalyst, we feel our workshops must offer much the same information. A more important reason for doing this, however, is that the professionals that come to the workshops are just as much in need of the program. They are tense, burdened by stress, short of breath, non-communicative with their peers, and on and on. Often as much as one half of a workshop is devoted to an experiential process for these professionals, in much the way a New Games Training is designed to give the trainees an experience as well as "tools."

Usually when we work with a game that will both unify the group and relax everyone. It will also signify the beginning of a very interesting day. Some nursing home Activity Coordinators were really shocked one day as I led them to the roof to do some *parachute games*. Depending on the group, the rest of the workshop consists of experiential sessions, philosophical raps, role playing through a model Longevity Therapy session, problem sharing, and then "making it home."

After working with both professionals and seniors, I am amazed at the latter's openness to new

ideas. With less ego investment, they are free to try new and different things, to adopt new attitudes. The creative, expressive person in them readily surfaces when given the opportunity. One of our goals is for the individual to regain access to and develop the imagination, thus freeing the creative process. Creative play, role-playing, free-form movement and poetry are just some of the things we do to encourage that vital flow of expression.

Group play is one of my favorite activities. After some relaxation, we'll play a piece of music, usually modern jazz, while leading the group through touching, listening, smelling and hearing the music. As the lights go up, responses come forth and are written down. If they are slow in coming, we solicit them in guided questions; once a few images spew forth, it's like a volcano erupting. The result is an increased sense of self-worth, improved ability to express feelings, and often a very remarkable piece of poetry.

What I've discovered in leading New Games and in working with elders is the overwhelming importance of PLAY. It is not only worthwhile in itself but is, in fact, vital to human life. New Games has put me in touch with my own playfulness, and Longevity Therapy has put me in touch with a new wonderful group of players. Together they have facilitated my understanding of the meaning of the words "human being."

Bev Hoffman is a long-time New Games enthusiast and Field Representative and conducts the Longevity Therapy program in New Orleans, LA.

Photo: Bev Hoffman

New Games Submerged

by John Rippey

As a lifeguard for the city of Portland, Oregon, I've made considerable use of New Games as a teaching aid, for crowd control, and to relieve periodic bouts with monotony. Most of the games in the New Games Book adapt readily to an aquatic setting.

Getting a game off land and into the water is a good chance to exercise a few theories in game change. There are two important considerations to keep in mind. The first is SAFETY. Here the bottom line seems to be the fact that most people aren't equipped with gills, therefore it's important to structure the play around terrestrial breathing traditions. Usually this consideration means giving thought to the swimming skill of those playing, the depth of the water, and making sure that everyone is aware of pool safety procedures.

Secondly, I've noticed that water any deeper than knee-level radically alters the pace of most land-oriented games. Body movement and mobility become very slo-o-o-w in comparison. For example, a game of regulation volleyball played in waist-deep water is too frustrating for most players. If you change the equipment, and use a large inflatable

beachball (the bigger the better), the movement of the ball is slow enough to provide the wading volleyball players with a still exciting, yet manageable game.

The sense of slowness coupled with buoyancy combine well with New Games in teaching swimming skills. At the beginner level, when students are accustomed themselves to the aquatic environment, I use a lot of trust games. *Trust falls*, *people pass*, and *cookie machine* allow beginners to experience being in the water with the support of others, including the instructor. Once the swimmer becomes accustomed to the water, the cushioning effect it has diminishes the risk factor normally associated with falling on hard surfaces. This often allows swimmers to attempt play activities they wouldn't usually try on land. Gymnastic skills come easier in the water then transfer to land as well.

Teaching particular swimming skills through the use of New Games lessens the instructional feel in a class situation. *Tunnel Tag* is a great way to get beginners to put their faces underwater. Variations of *Tag-tag* are always good for skills practice; you're safe as long as you and a partner are floating on your backs; blowing bubbles; opening your eyes underwater; etc.

Competitive swimming is notorious for the gridding monotony of its workouts. Try *Anous* while

treading water in deep water. And, the *lap game* in deep water takes on entirely new dimensions. A game of *ocropus* in the deep end can also provide a strenuous workout!

The problem of disruptions during recreational swim often puts one's style of guarding to the test. On those long, hot summer days when aqua frenzy threatens and the friendly poolside lifeguard is in danger of lapsing into an autistic heat demon, you can organize the chaos with a game or two. This accomplishes two things: first, it orders the whirling bodies into a manageable group. One guard is able to supervise a large crowd, thereby relieving the other guards. Large group games such as *ocropus*, *leeb*, *British bulldog*, *also-dho-dho*, *spirals* and the *lap game* work well. Second, these impromptu play sessions give the pool workers a sense of orderliness.

There can be some very dull moments in lifeguarding—a dangerous situation, since alertness is a concern. New Games to the rescue! Once safety precautions are taken care of, the referee/player structure allows the lifeguard to join in the game, instead of standing on the deck. A quick game can revitalize the sinking enthusiasm of the most jaded lifeguard!

John Rippey is a lifeguard for the city of Portland, OR, a NEAF Field Representative, and an avid New Games supporter.

Games

COOKIE MACHINE



Who wouldn't leap at the chance to become their own fantasy cookie? You provide the recipe and we'll supply the oven. Everyone has got to be up just right. Form two lines, facing each other with forearms extended palms up into the center. Make sure that the hands alternate from each side of the line and that everyone is bunched together

very closely. Now, we've got a brick-tight oven. All the bakers chant your cookie choice ("Chocolate Chip!" "Chocolate Chip!") as you up just right. Form two lines, facing each other, until you pop out of the oven end, freshly baked. We can't afford any broken pieces in this bakery, so handle the dough with extreme care,

and have two strong bakens available to ease each cookie out of the oven. Everyone should have a chance to invent their own cookie (keeping the titles in good taste, of course). When we've all been baked to a golden brown, what better excuse to call a break for...cookies and milk!