

Why Every Child Needs a Little Florentia

One of the reasons I created Florentia was because I believe many children are slowly losing something that previous generations took for granted.

Not technology.

Not information.

Not convenience.

Imagination.

Or perhaps more accurately, the opportunities that imagination needs in order to grow.

When I was a child, I remember regularly walking into the kitchen and announcing to my mother:

“Mom, I’m bored.”

Her response was rarely what I wanted to hear.

She would suggest things like:

“Go jump on the trampoline.”

“Go play in your fort.”

“Go do your homework.”

The homework suggestion never got much traction.

The trampoline wasn’t always appealing either. By that stage I’d already spent countless hours on it. I could do front somersaults. Back somersaults. Every variation my young body was brave enough to attempt.

I was bored of the trampoline too.

But eventually, having exhausted all arguments, I would wander outside and climb onto it anyway.

And that’s where something interesting happened.

Instead of bouncing, I would lie on my back and stare at the clouds.

At first I was just looking.

Then I started imagining.

One cloud looked like a lion.

Another looked like a dragon.

A third became a pirate ship.

As the wind moved them across the sky, the shapes changed and so did the stories. Characters appeared. Adventures unfolded. Entire worlds were created and destroyed before the next cloud drifted into view.

Nobody instructed me to do this.

Nobody gave me a worksheet.

Nobody designed an activity.

It happened because there was space.

Space to think.

Space to wonder.

Space to be bored.

And perhaps that's what concerns me most about the world our children are growing up in today.

Not that they have access to technology.

I run an AI company. I spend my days helping organisations use technology to create better customer experiences. I believe technology can do extraordinary things.

But imagination doesn't usually grow when every spare moment is filled.

It grows in the gaps.

It grows in the quiet moments.

It grows when a child has nothing to do except stare at the clouds and wonder what they might become.

Research increasingly suggests that children are spending less time in unstructured outdoor play than previous generations. Studies have highlighted a decline in outdoor free play despite its recognised importance for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

At the same time, children's screen time continues to rise, giving them access to incredible experiences but leaving fewer opportunities for the kind of self-directed exploration that helps creativity flourish.

The challenge isn't choosing between technology and imagination.

Children need both.

The challenge is making sure one doesn't crowd out the other.

That belief became one of the foundations of The Adventures of Andy Greenleaves.

Florentia is a world without phones.

Without social media.

Without endless notifications.

Not because those things are bad.

But because removing them allows us to focus on something else.

Curiosity.

Adventure.

Nature.

Wonder.

When I was creating Florentia with my daughter Lilly, I would ask her questions about how the world worked.

If there were no phones, how would people communicate?

If there was no electricity, how would they create light?

Her answers were often far more imaginative than mine.

The wind could carry messages.

Glowbugs could light the night.

Children naturally think this way.

They don't begin with limitations.

They begin with possibilities.

My hope isn't that children finish Andy Greenleaves and wish they lived in Florentia.

My hope is that they finish the story and begin to see a little more Florentia in their own world.

Perhaps they spend an extra hour outside.

Perhaps they notice something they have never noticed before.

Perhaps they ask a new question.

Perhaps they lie on a trampoline and watch the clouds.

Because the future won't belong to the people who can access information the fastest.

Artificial intelligence can already do that.

The future will belong to the people who can imagine possibilities that don't yet exist.

And every great adventure begins with the same simple question:

"What if?"

And maybe as an adult your next idea or adventure could come from the notion of "What if... I didn't take my phone to the toilet?"