

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

All Work and No Play? No Way!

A few years ago, Jerry Rogoff, M.D., became so engrossed in a wood-working project that he lost track of time.

An intercom system links his Vermont home to a workshop on the property. At some point in the day, his wife's voice resonated over the intercom speaker.

"Are you going to eat today?"

"Is it lunchtime?" Dr. Rogoff asked.

"No. It's suppertime," his wife replied.

He had been in the workshop 8 hours, but "had absolutely no idea what time it was," said Dr. Rogoff, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who practices in Boston. "There's a clock in the shop, but I never

psychoanalytic practice. It remains a fixture in his office.

He noted that woodworking provides him with a tangible measure of success that isn't always attainable in his field. "Psychiatric work generally goes very slowly," he explained. "You get some quick results with medication, but on the whole, your changes are measured in millimeters, not in miles. In the workshop, I measure them in miles. You create something. There's real change, and it's quick. You're in control of it. None of that applies to the psychiatric process. There you try your best, but you're often not fully in control of it and it's somewhat unpredictable. Change is slow. In the end, you don't always have something to show for your labors."

Carl C. Bell, M.D., said it's crucial for physicians to have a hobby outside of their job. "Medicine is ugly work, because you're constantly confronting trauma, death, disability, pain, and suffering," said Dr. Bell, professor of psychiatry and public health at the University of Illinois at

Chicago "I have three principles: Save some lives, make some money, and have some fun. That's what I look for in a job. Sometimes two out of three aren't bad. You have to maintain balance. Otherwise, you're not good to anybody. From a hobby perspective, that's important."

Francis E. Rushton, M.D., can identify with that notion. About three times a year, he goes on brief backpacking adventures to clear his mind, usually with his sons or with other pediatricians. Because of his hectic work schedule, "I don't always have a lot of opportunities to spend time with my kids," said Dr. Rushton, who practices in Beaufort, S.C. "I'm so busy here in the office that when it comes to vacation time, it's hard for me to stop and sit. Somehow I just seem to keep moving. For me, backpacking is a way to stay active, but it's mindless. After 2-3 days, all of the worries of the office disappear and the only thing I have to worry about is, 'am I going to freeze to death?' or 'do I have anything to eat?'"

His journeys have included trails in the Sierra Nevadas, the Yukon Territory, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Baxter State Park in Maine, as well as footpaths in Norway, New Zealand, and Venezuela.

"It's a time for me to communicate with my kids, it's a time for me to see a different part of the country, and it's a time for me to physically work out some of the frustrations of the office," Dr. Rushton said. "[These frustrations are] physically taxing to me, and there's a sense of accomplishment when I get done. It's a cleansing of the mind. I come back, and I'm ready to charge forth again at work."



COURTESY DR. FRANCIS E. RUSHTON

Dr. Francis E. Rushton is shown with his two sons Will and Seth at Rae Lakes in California's Sierra Nevada Range.

looked at it. I was totally absorbed. There is something extraordinarily therapeutic about that. Woodworking does wonders for me."

About every other weekend, he and his wife drive from their Boston-area home to their second home in Vermont. There he has made two dining room tables, a chest of drawers, a slant-front desk with six secret compartments, a cradle, a crib, and a child's table and chairs—all for family or friends.

He considers the hobby a form of solace. "It's a way to be by oneself yet in no way be bored, to really be engaged in something," he said. "It's physically creative; in psychiatry, you're not. Psychiatry is very sedentary. In the workshop I'm active, moving, and doing something all the time all day long. There's also a creative aspect. Sometimes I design my own furniture and sometimes I follow plans, but there's a real sense of working with my hands and creating something."

Physicians "need this type of play," he added. "They need something to get away from the intensity and pressure of work and both relax and fulfill themselves. That improves one's life, one's relationships with spouse and family, and I think it improves one's work with patients."

Dr. Rogoff first took up woodworking during his residency in 1968 at Massachusetts Mental Health Center as a way to "decompress, debrief, and escape from the pressures of work." He bought a radial arm saw and built on basic skills he learned in junior high shop class in Detroit. One of the first things he made was an analytic couch out of walnut for his

David Abend, D.O., also finds escape in physical activity. He works out at a nearby gym 3 days a week with a personal trainer, doing circuit training, followed by a half-hour of cardiovascular activity. "I also jog, but not competitively," said Dr. Abend, who practices family medicine and osteopathic manipulation in Westwood, N.J. "I think you do your patients a great disservice by leading an inactive life."

Music's another passion for Dr. Abend. "I just got an iPod, and I have about 5,000 CDs, everything from classical to metal music," he said. "I'm actually a closet metal head."

He also takes piano lessons and guitar lessons, and he's been to "concerts galore."

Photos of musicians and athletes adorn the walls of his office, and he shows popular movies in his waiting room. "A doctor is very one dimensional if he doesn't have hobbies," Dr. Abend said. "In primary care, you're seeing people from all walks of life. I can talk about art one minute or music and sports the next. There's not much I can't talk to you about."

Dr. Bell of Chicago regards the Chinese martial art of Chi Kung as not only his hobby but also his "survival strategy." He learned Chi Kung exercises from a martial

arts instructor in 1976, and in 1995, he produced his own video, "Dr. Carl Bell's 8 Pieces of Brocade," which is now available as a DVD (for information, visit www.gift-from-within.org/html/resource.html). In the DVD, which is intended for people who work in the fields of social service, medicine, and law enforcement, Dr. Bell demonstrates various Chi Kung exercises and explains how they benefit the body by reducing stress.

"They're easy to learn and they massage all of the acupuncture points in the body," he said. "I used to have chronic sinusitis, and I used to do Western exercises. When I started the Chi Kung, my sinusitis went away."

Over time, he added, the exercises have helped improve his endurance, flexibility, and tolerance for pain, cold, and heat, as well as his memory, thought processing, and affect tolerance. "I'm healthy as hell," he said.

He was quick to point out that the exercises are not a one-time magic bullet—a detail he conveys in Chi Kung workshops he leads at various psychiatry meetings. "You have to do them regularly," he said. ■

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

Pediatrician Masters the Ski Slopes

Ski racer Suzanne Boulter, M.D., flies downhill faster than most other snow skiers her age, and she has the credentials to prove it.

In 2003, she won the women's Masters National Championship in Park City, Utah, in the 55- to 59-year-old age category.

"It's neat at this age to still be working on things and trying to improve and see some results," said Dr. Boulter, a pediatrician with the family practice residency program at Concord (N.H.) Hospital.

Every Friday between Thanksgiving and the end of March, Dr. Boulter trains in a masters program at Waterville Valley, a New Hampshire ski area where she and her husband own a condo. The training usually alternates between slalom and giant slalom—all in preparation for the 10-15 races she competes in each year, mostly in the Northeast.

Her goal is to "get better technically and translate that into skiing faster in the course," she said. "Winning the nationals in 2003 was totally unexpected for me. There aren't large numbers of women in the older age groups at the nationals, so there is always opportunity there, but it was very surprising."

Over the years she's

suffered a concussion and her share of broken bones from training and competing on the slopes, but few other sports provide her with the same sense of fulfillment.

"I have this physical outlet on the weekend, then I switch to the workday week, so it's a nice balance," said Dr. Boulter, a New Hampshire native who started skiing in high school. "When my kids were growing up, I didn't do anything like this," she said.

Outside of ski season, she stays active by biking and water skiing, playing tennis, and doing aerobics.

"If for whatever reason I could not continue ski racing, I'd still do those other outdoor activities for as long as I could," she said. "If I couldn't do all of those things, I'd probably read more books and journals."



COURTESY DR. SUZANNE BOULTER

Dr. Suzanne Boulter skis the slalom course on the slopes of Bromley Mountain in Manchester, Vt.