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# WHEN PLANS GET SNOWED OUT

## Lessons From a Long Winter

This winter has been tough. Storms seem to arrive just as the last pile of snow was starting to melt. By February, many of us feel worn down by the constant cycle of shoveling, salting, and scraping ice off our windshields. In our house, winter fatigue showed up early, along with sore backs and questionable help from my kids.

My boys are now 12, 13, and 15. Early this winter, their snow removal efforts were, at best, symbolic. They would put on their coats, grab a shovel, and head outside, but the results suggested more looking busy than actually moving snow. I felt like I was doing about 90% of the work, and my back agreed. It was frustrating, but also familiar. Real effort often takes time, repetition, and sometimes a little pressure before it shows up.

Then came the most recent storm, which was significant. Schools were shut down, many people were forced to work from home, and winter reminded us it doesn't care about our calendars. I had a legal conference scheduled that was still being held, but the weather (along with a dead car battery) forced me to pivot. Staying home was not optional. The sidewalks and driveways needed to be cleared, and there was no room for pretend help this time.

With nowhere else to be and no shortcuts available, my kids finally leaned in. Shovels moved with purpose, and snow was cleared properly. For the first time this winter, it felt like a complete team effort. It was not perfect or fast, but it was real. Watching them step up was a reminder that responsibility is often learned through experience and necessity, not lectures.

Winter storms have a way of disrupting our plans and forcing us to adjust. No matter how carefully we plan our days, life has a habit of throwing obstacles in our path, sometimes in the form of a foot of snow. What matters most is how we respond when things don't go as expected.

This winter has reinforced the importance of preparation and shared responsibility. Clearing snow is not glamorous, but it is necessary for safety, for our neighbors, and for showing up for one another. When everyone contributes, even difficult tasks feel more manageable.



As we move through the rest of winter, my hope is that we carry these lessons forward. Effort matters. Adaptability matters. Winter storms will keep coming, and plans will continue to change. That said, if we're willing to adjust and work together, we will be better prepared for whatever comes next.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, Groundhog Day will already be behind us, and the predictions will have been made. While Punxsutawney Phil gets most of the headlines, I have always put more stock in Staten Island Chuck. Whether spring arrives early or takes its time, the days are getting longer, and that alone feels like progress. Until then, let's keep pitching in and get through winter together, one snowfall at a time.

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*-Brian O'Connor*

# SILVER SCREEN SPEED

## SECRETS OF THE SILENT FILM AGE

Contrary to what the surviving films may suggest, people didn't move faster during the earliest years of cinema.

If you watch an old silent film from decades past, it may appear as though someone's holding down the "fast-forward" button. Movements seem exaggerated and hyper-fast, bombarding our eyes with visuals that are as surreal as they are comical. However, nothing is wrong with your senses. These films were created this way, and the reasons behind their quicker momentum are an intriguing mix of technology, commerce, and the inventive minds of maverick film directors.

### Fleeting Frames of Fantasy

Here's a fun fact: Whether we watch a film from a century ago or one released last week, we're *not actually* seeing real movement on screen. Instead, we're viewing a succession of images presented rapidly enough to give us the impression that

someone (or something) is in motion. This technique is called *frames per second (fps)*.

One of the earliest pioneers in film, the legendary inventor Thomas Edison, determined that movies ideally needed to be shot at 46 fps or more to produce convincing on-screen movement. However, early filmmakers often faced financial restraints with film stock, causing them to shoot many movies at 12 or 16 fps. As technology advanced over the years, the speed of these primitive films increased considerably when played on more modern equipment.

### The Cinematic Cranking Craze

While most view it today as a retired relic of a bygone era, the Bell and Howell 2709 movie camera was all the rage in the 1920s. Considered revolutionary at the time, the hand-cranked machine enabled users to shoot at varying speeds based on the number of cranks per minute. "Ben-Hur:



A Tale of the Christ" (1925) and Charlie Chaplin's "The Gold Rush" (1925) were among the movies shot with a 2709. The technology allowed directors to order camera operators to either slow down or speed up their cranking for dramatic effect.

From there, the movies would hit theaters, where they'd often appear to move *even faster*. For example, something shot at 16 fps would appear sped up when shown through projectors running at a quicker pace. In fact, theaters loved to project films at very high speeds, as faster films meant quicker showings, enabling them to sell more tickets per day.

## PUZZLES AND PATIENCE

### KEYS TO RAISING CRITICAL THINKERS

In a culture overwhelmed by algorithms and conflicting media sources, critical thinking is more important than ever. This is especially true of young children, many of whom will become our future CEOs, writers, and world leaders. Here are two simple ways parents can help their little ones develop the thinking skills they'll need to thrive through life's challenges.

#### Questions kindle thoughtful truths.

Whether you're raising a young child for the first time or are a veteran grandparent who's



done it all, you can surely recall moments when a little one hit you with a barrage of questions that tested your patience. Few people would fault you for rushing through your answers to satisfy your tiny inquisitor when stressed, but regularly questioning things is a sign of a critical thinker.

Whenever possible, take the time to *lean into* your child's questions. Instead of simply giving them an answer, ask them their thoughts about the information you've provided. Rather than asking them questions that could be answered with a simple yes or no, prompt them with open-ended ones that will strengthen their reasoning skills and prompt them to consider a topic more deeply.

#### Small struggles make stronger minds.

As parents, we want to answer our children's questions and find solutions to all their problems. While some situations

will always require our intervention (such as a medical emergency), it's sometimes best to allow kids to find their own path to solving dilemmas or discovering answers. Board games, puzzles, building blocks, and even role-playing games with friends can foster stronger thinking skills, so allow your children plenty of time to engage in activities that expand their minds while they're having fun.

When you see your child struggle to figure out how to complete a playtime task, pause before jumping in to help. Giving them room to sort out the issue instead of immediately coming to their aid will help them think and problem-solve more independently.

When we practice patience and give children space to explore the world in their own way, we nurture curious, confident thinkers who are ready for whatever life brings.



# TAKE A *BREAK*



## A Sweet Swindle? THE CASE OF THE SKIMPY SNACK

The concept of “shrinkflation” may be gaining ground in light of today’s economy, but it’s nothing new. In fact, nearly a decade ago, the thought of companies reducing the amount of product available in each sale while charging the same price hit one Midwestern man right in his sweet tooth.

In 2017, Robert Bratton of Columbus, Missouri, sued the Hershey Co. for \$5 million, claiming that the boxes of Reese’s Pieces and Whoppers he regularly purchased were not filled with enough candy. Citing violations of the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act, he alleged that 29% of the Reese’s Pieces boxes he purchased were empty, while only 59% of the Whoppers packaging contained actual product. His suit further alleged that the candy company unjustly enriched itself by knowingly selling boxed items containing considerable empty space.

Aiming to avoid leaving a sour taste in court, Hershey’s contended that at least some empty space is common in most packaged goods to allow for “efficient manufacturing and distribution.” Additionally, the company claimed that consumers are made aware of this necessary space before purchasing its goods, as the contents of Whoppers and Reese’s Pieces boxes “audibly rattle.”

Despite his multimillion-dollar complaint, Bratton continued to purchase Hershey products, a move that ultimately led to the unraveling of his lawsuit. In 2018, Judge Nanette K. Laughrey dismissed the case after it was revealed that the plaintiff had purchased Reese’s Pieces and Whopper boxes by *the hundreds* over several years, despite knowing the high likelihood that they would not be full.

“Mr. Bratton testified that he initially expected the boxes to be full, but at some point ... [he] realized that they’re not,” Laughrey said in her ruling. “Although Mr. Bratton claimed to have always clung to his hope that the boxes would be full, he acknowledged that he did not expect the box to be miraculously filled the next time he bought it.”

While Bratton’s love for sugary treats is impossible to deny, his efforts to take down a chocolate giant for shortchanging his confectionery conquests were questionable at best.

## Mouthwatering Mini Cheesecakes

### INGREDIENTS

- 12 oz package vanilla wafers
- 16 oz cream cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup white sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 21 oz can cherry pie filling

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 F.
2. In two 24-cup miniature muffin pans, line each space with a paper liner.
3. Using a food processor or resealable plastic bag, crush vanilla wafers into a fine crumb.
4. Press 1/2 teaspoon of crumbs into each paper liner.
5. In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, eggs, and vanilla until light and fluffy.
6. Fill each miniature muffin liner with this mixture, almost to the top.
7. Bake in the preheated oven for 15 minutes or until the cheesecakes are set.
8. Cool completely in the pan.
9. Top each mini cheesecake with about a teaspoon of cherry pie filling before serving. Enjoy!

Inspired by [AllRecipes.com](https://www.allrecipes.com)



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## BRIGHT DAY, DIM IDEA SUNLIT STUPIDITY FOILS A THIEF

Santa Claus isn't real. The world doesn't disappear when you close your eyes. You can be arrested for burglary regardless of the time of day you commit the crime.

Most reasonable people accept the above facts as undeniable truths long before they reach 22. Unfortunately (or humorously, depending on your point of view), James Blankenship of Willoughby, Ohio, was unaware of that last fact despite being a legal adult for four years. One day during the summer of 2013, he broke into his mother's house in the neighboring city of Eastlake by removing a window screen.

Already on shaky ground with his parent for reasons not specified in media coverage of the incident, he had been banned from the Eastlake premises for at least three months before attempting to enter it without permission. According to statements his mother later gave to the police, her son had no possessions in the home at the time of the incident.

Because Blankenship chose to commit his crime *in broad daylight*, his mother spotted him and alerted the police. Rather than fleeing the neighborhood when he was discovered, he hid in a crawl space near his mother's home. A witness reported seeing him run behind a nearby house, which allowed police to locate him easily. According to an official statement on the Eastlake Police's Facebook page, Blankenship told the arresting officers, "I thought you could only be charged with burglary if you break in during the nighttime."

After pleading guilty to a lesser charge of breaking and entering, Blankenship served 60 days in prison (with 120 days out of his original 180-day sentence suspended) and was fined \$100. Perhaps most significantly, he also learned a valuable lesson on how the sun helps people see things during the day.

