

Rediscovering Mindfulness

By: Christopher Guardino, LMHC

When I was about 10 years old I spent an entire summer in upstate New York fascinated by snakes. See, I had wandered upon a snake early in June and had purchased a ten gallon tank, decorated in the natural habitat of the Garder snake and began a summer long obsession with animals. I became interested and since this was a much different era the information was much further than a click away. I meticulously researched the snakes of the region, where they lived, when they were active and what they ate. I practiced what I was learning on my pet snake whilst walking daily to feed my passion for finding more snakes.

A strange thing happened on those walks. Slowly I drifted from being consumed with adolescent worry. Being picked on, worrying about my appearance, feeling insecure, worrying about girls, etc, etc. Instead I was invested fully in the sound of snakes, the sight of small gaps under rocks and the smell of grass in the morning. I learned the nuances of my craft by devoting myself to focus.

Towards August a local man mentioned to me a snake called a red belly racer. I now had a goal. I spent a little of every morning especially focused and observant of the hallmark signs of the famed red belly racer. Towards the end of the summer an old deflated pool raft lying in the sun gave me an opportunity to fill a kid's dream and finish the summer strong. I snatched aside the cover with one hand and was ready to strike with the other, the method I had practiced many times before. In one swift motion I grabbed the snake carefully just behind its head and lifted it into the light to see my prized red belly racer. The positive feelings built all summer reached a crescendo as I ran back hollering about my prize.

Now 41 years old I am far from that snake hunting boy. Many similarities remain not the least of which is a passionate and unquenchable thirst for learning. Yet, there was a problem. My morning walks were no longer enjoyable. I found myself preoccupied by thoughts of bills, my recent divorce, my terrifying future and so much more. Real life would not relent. I knew something needed to change. Maybe I couldn't find another red belly racer but surely I could recapture the serenity and love of those moments. So slowly I focused like I did when I was a boy, on the sights and sounds and smells of my neighborhood. I focused on the simple pleasure of walking and the sensations in my body. I committed myself to letting go of the anxiety that would still be there after my walk. I promised myself to remain mindful and to stay away from having a full mind. When I finally transcended and embraced that mindfulness I found my metaphorical red belly racer.

Christopher Guardino is a licensed mental health counselor since 2004. Chris worked at FFF since 1994 in various advocacy capacities. Presently he lives in Maine providing

his services through e-therapy and pursuing his love of snowboarding and outdoor activities. If you have any questions or comments for Christopher you can contact him at treatmentmadesimple.com