

GAMES NIGHT WITH THE FAMILY by Beryl McGuinness



To say that my family was uber competitive when I was growing up might be a bit of an understatement but I have the mental and emotional scars seared into the nether regions of my brain somewhere, as proof!

Whether putting together a jigsaw puzzle or filling in a crossword from the New York Times (both often viewed as a peaceful, solitary, dare we say – contemplative pursuit) it often escalated into war as to who was quicker at it or who had to rely on outside assistance from either parent or dictionary.

A game of euchre could spark a vicious tirade of verbal abuse in an attempt to intimidate or bully you and this could be from your own partner chastising you for playing your weak and feeble hand whilst they were in possession of an unbeatable lone hand, and by god you should have passed – usually accentuated by a heavy thump of the fist on the table causing the deck of cards to levitate three inches. If you were caught cheating, this was regarded as the highest level of sins because stooping that low to begin with only highlighted your obvious mental inferiority. As I said, we were a very competitive family but we were honest about it.

It didn't matter if you were a member of the "fairer" sex; it had nothing to do with brawn or whether you were good at sports - and everything to do with intellect - albeit with some luck thrown in, at least when it came to cards.

One of the games in which you could get physically hurt was table tennis or ping pong. Every night we would string up the net on the dining room table as we couldn't afford an actual official table nor did we have the room to store one, and we would take turns with the winner of each match taking on the next challenger. By the end, especially if you were the winner, there were usually angry red welts on your arms and body and possibly your face if you didn't protect it well enough.

There was nothing civilized about it – no mere tapping of the ball gently from one end to the other – but deliberate full on body assaults if you couldn't return serves fast enough. The objective in

the game was to just have the ball glance off the edge of the table making it almost impossible to return without dexterity and timing usually accompanied by a few choice words out of earshot of mom and dad.

Nowadays if you attend your child's baseball, soccer or basketball game, you can't even say 'nice try' when they miss the hit, kick or hoop as the trying implies failure and you may psychologically damage them in some way. We didn't have any of this 'namby, pamby' good effort, nice game, pat on the back everyone's a winner sportsmanship crap – you were either a winner or the loser with a capital L and everyone in the neighbourhood knew about it.

Pretty much everything we did could have and was used as a competition – building a snowman, making cookies, skating on the back pond, dodge ball; the list was endless. Now that we are all adults (in the context of old enough to be perceived as mature) and have gone our separate ways, going through university or straight into a job, getting married and having families, moving away and seeing less of each other – you might think that this competitive streak may have mellowed and relaxed, like our waistlines – but I know better.

Last year my husband and I held a games night extravaganza at our house in which friends and some members of his family attended. We played Apples to Apples (card game), Five Crowns (card game), Yahtzee (dice game) and Password (word game). Everyone had a good time and lots of laughter and good natured bantering ensued. However, none of my family were able to attend.

Recently emboldened by that success we decided to hold a second games night where I expect all that will change as my family are able to make this one and our friends will have to step up their 'game on' or go down in crushing humiliation negating any possibility of a third mid-winter get together – at least any involving games.

So why, as you may be wondering, would we put ourselves in this position of potential abuse and mayhem; simply because we enjoy seeing our friends and family from time to time and relish the good-natured digs, the disbelief upon losing, and the stories that are exchanged, not to mention the laughter that ensues while playing these games – that and bragging rights are what makes the world go around. Paraphrasing the popular slogan that Tom Hanks uttered in *'A League of Their Own'* with Geena Davis, Madonna and Rosie O'Donnell – There's no Crying at Games Night!!

The End