

# Cherokee

## Aiming high

Climbers Craig Bray (front), Scott Barnes and Scott Laster will raise funds to fight leukemia on a trek up a 14,400-foot peak. J13



GLENN HANNIGAN

Our Cherokee columnist  
E-mail: [ghannigan@ajc.com](mailto:ghannigan@ajc.com)

## Expensive toy not as good as the box

A pile of dirt. A mayonnaise jar. A cardboard box.

What do these items have in common?

If you want a lifeline before answering, let me recommend Towne Lake resident Rex Bowlby, who's written a book that includes each object, titled: "Why Would I Want the Toy, When I Can Have the Box?"

Simply stated, it's Bowlby's belief that with patience and a little imagination, common items from everyday life can quickly morph into objects of enjoyment, fascination and education. His 158-page book, published in March, is a resource guide for parents who seek to build lasting memories with their children, without requiring a pricey trip to Orlando.

"I think we need to go back to the basics and simplify our lives," says Bowlby, father of two sons, Ryan, 11, and Eric, 8. "Most people are very busy, and their lives are overflowing with activities. We've become too reliant on electronics, high-tech toys and large family amusement centers to entertain our kids. It's unnecessary."

Bowlby's conversion experience began on his eldest son's third birthday. Not long after Ryan opened his expensive motorized spaceship, the youngster excitedly yelled for dad to join him downstairs.

Rex found Ryan enthusiastically playing with the cardboard box.

"I don't think that was just a frivolous event," Bowlby said. "It was profound. And we've all seen similar examples. Children enjoy unstructured play. They want to be creative and interact with others. A computer game is never going to replace that."

Bowlby, who has a B.A. in psychology from the University of California, strives to be observant of his children's play habits and interests. He doesn't attempt to steer their pursuits as much as he wants to join in.

"When we moved into the Arbors subdivision it was about half built-out," Bowlby said. "One day, Ryan and I came across a construction site that had a large mound of dirt piled up. We climbed to the top.

"That hill became Mount Everest, the surface of the moon, a giant slide, even the pitcher's mound at Yankee Stadium. We played out there for hours."

The next day, the red-clay Mount Everest was flattened. But no great loss. Plenty more where that came from. The Bowlbys made a ritual of exploring dirt hills and construction piles around the neighborhood.

"It never got boring," dad says.

Bowlby says the key to entertaining children is being flexible. A simple caterpillar sighting in the back yard can turn into an all-day biology lesson with the help of a mayonnaise jar. But not every exercise is designed as a learning experience.

Bowlby's book, geared toward parents of children ages 3 to 6, is subtitled "101 Ways To Make The Most Of Your Children, With The Least From Your Wallet." It includes tips on everything from paper airplanes to water balloons to bathing the family dog.

One day, he even turned his boys loose in the back yard with a couple of cans of shaving cream. After being shocked by how much thick foam can emerge from a little tin can, dad quickly orchestrated another activity: A garden hose with running water.

Bowlby, who began writing the book 18 months ago, resigned after 20 years at Lockheed to help promote it. His wife, Barbara, works at IBM.

Bowlby will be doing a book signing at Barnes & Noble on Barrett Parkway Saturday, June 17, from 2 to 4 p.m..

"I've done something I'm proud of," Bowlby says. "Raising children is a critical job. If I can help some parents and make a difference in their family, I'll feel rewarded."

Bowlby's book can be ordered at Amazon.com or by calling 770-591-4662.

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