

## Chapter 7

# Uncovering Your Talents

*In my school there were lots of fights between kids. It bugged me and I wanted to do something about it, but it seemed impossible to just jump in at the moment. My mom is a mediator. That's her job. She helps people settle arguments to try to avoid going to court. I talked to Mom about it. At first she said that I shouldn't get involved but then she had an idea. She thought that we could have mediation at school—kids helping kids. My mom talked to my school principal and we started a peer mediation program. First we had to get trained. My mom and one of her friends from work trained seven of us after school. They taught us how to stay neutral and how to listen to what a person was really saying and how to help people communicate when they were mad and upset. I'm really good at it; maybe it's because I am used to thinking like that being around my mom and everything. Now when there are fights we get to talk to the people fighting—if they are willing to try it. It almost always works because kids want a way to work things out but sometimes it is really hard. It's great because it's like a kid helping a kid, instead of a teacher or a parent. I think kids are really much more likely to be honest and say what they really think in front of another kid. In our school the fighting has gone way down. I feel so good about being able to do something when people need to work out a tough situation. Before I could just sit there and watch.*

Astrid, 14

In this chapter, we're going to look at your hobbies and talents. Sometimes talents and hobbies are connected to each other; sometimes they are not. Take a second to ask yourself: *what am I good at?* You might not be able to



burn up the track with your record times, or negotiate a peace deal in the Middle East just yet, but we know you have talents. More important than *what* your talents are is whether you take time to develop and use them. No one, including you, will benefit from unused talent.

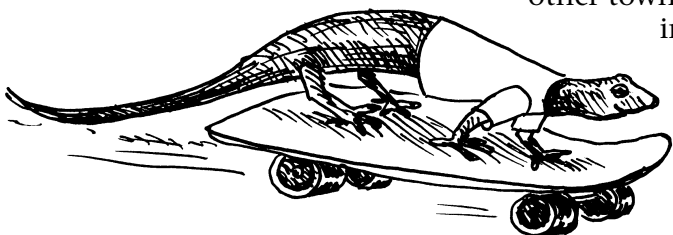
## What Are Your Hobbies?

Hobbies are activities you enjoy. People have many different hobbies. Some people like to fish. Others like to dance. Some like to ride horses. Still others like to build things. What do you like to do? Do you have the same hobbies as your friends? Usually friends like to do at least some of the same things. Look through this list and see if any of your hobbies are there. What other hobbies are there? Can you add to the list?

- Skiing
- Running
- Listening to music
- Dancing
- Singing
- Painting
- Computers
- Soccer
- Baseball
- Debating (Forensics)
- Sculpting
- Gardening
- Playing chess
- Training animals
- Playing a musical instrument
- Reading
- Drawing
- Writing
- Tennis
- Football
- Basketball
- Acting
- Collections (stamps, insects, coins, etc.)
- Making models
- Rollerblading
- Skateboarding
- Swimming
- Hiking
- Ice skating
- Water hockey
- Volunteer work

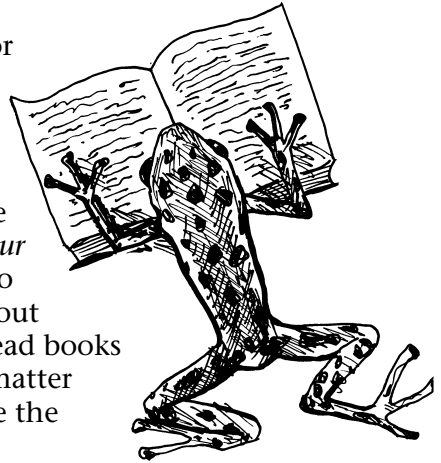
There are thousands of hobbies to choose from and, depending upon where you live, you may have other hobbies specific to your town. In some towns people like to learn certain dances, such as clogging and square dancing. In other towns, people may be especially interested in cross-country

skiing or surfing or water polo. Some hobbies depend on the climate where you live. It



would be difficult to become a great skier, or join the polar bear swim club, if you lived in Florida.

Some hobbies later turn into careers or passions. Some people love their hobbies so much they want to spend most of their time doing them. If someone asks you *What is your passion?* they want to know what you love to do the most. Some people are passionate about music, others about politics. Some love to read books and other people like... sky diving! But no matter what your passion is, it is a lot of fun to take the time to get out and get active.



*The first time I went sky diving I was really scared until I got out of the plane and let go, and then I was so happy to be soaring through the air like a bird. Now I know why birds are so happy all the time. As soon as I got on the ground I wanted to go again right away, I couldn't wait to go again the next time. I learned that even one jump can take hours of preparation—checking the parachute, the pilot checking the plane and planning the jump with the other sky divers. It takes a lot of practice to be able to maneuver yourself in the air like an expert.*

*Robert, Physicist*

## Overcoming Boredom

If you feel bored with your life, or find that you sit in front of the TV for hours because you can't think of anything else to do, then chances are you haven't found your niche. (Watching TV doesn't count as a hobby!) Don't give up trying to find your special interest. We promise that once you find your hobby, whatever you choose will seem more interesting than watching the same programs on TV over and over again. When you start a hobby, you have to use your brain a little. So get ready for some thinking and some action.

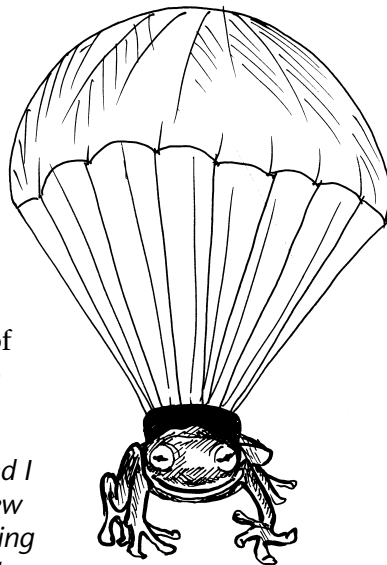
Many hobbies take time to get good at, so you have to practice. Don't expect that the first time you try to write a story or paint a portrait that everything will come out beautifully. All good things take time. Be patient, and find out what interests you. The interests you develop now may turn into a thrilling job in the future or be an exciting pastime. It is very rewarding to learn how to do something new, like play the piano, or play basketball, or fish. After you learn the basics of your new hobby, you can

become more creative.

A hobby can be something as simple as writing letters to your friends or keeping a journal or even sending e-mails. You don't have to learn to do triple backflips in the air, or jump out of airplanes or write a major screenplay to have an entertaining hobby.

*I started art class today after school, and I think I am going to love it. My teacher is new this year. I like him. He told us that he is going to push us really hard. He said that the best way to learn is by practice. I'm ready. I've been dying to take this class. I feel like a different person when I'm painting and it's cool to be around other people who feel the same way.*

Kristy, 13



## Hidden Talents

Your natural talents may be hidden deep inside of you. When someone asks you what you are good at, what do you say? Gee, I don't know. I'm not talented in sports, drama, or anything like that. I guess I don't have a real hobby or talent. Not true! Everyone is good at something. You just might not have discovered it yet. It may take you time to find out what you are good at, but you are definitely good at something.

Some talents stand out like billboards. People who sing, dance, act, play an instrument or do a sport well are noticeable. Such talents stick out and are hard to miss. There are other types of talents, too. Some of the most important talents in the world may go unnoticed for a long time. They may be more subtle. Dorothy has a very talented friend who didn't think she had any talents at all. Here is how one conversation with her went:

**Dawn:** *I'm not good at anything, I really am just totally untalented. I can't sing to save my life, I can't play an instrument, I'm not a great dancer and I can't think of anything that I do really well. Some of my friends are incredibly talented — one of my friends wrote me twenty-one perfect sonnets for my twenty-first birthday. I'm sure he will be famous some day. Another one of my friends was in the FBI. She's been involved in all kinds of fascinating crime crackdowns. I envy people who are really talented because I'm not one of them.*

**Dorothy:** *Dawn, we have been friends for a long time, and I can see your talents. You are a great friend. You are always there. When someone talks to you, you know how to listen. People feel important around you. You also know how to make someone feel better in the worst situations. You are reliable and trustworthy. Overall, I would say that your biggest talent is your ability to listen and to show someone that you care.*

**Dawn:** *But that's not a talent! Is it?*

What do you think? Is Dawn talented? Wouldn't you love to have a friend like her? And that is just the beginning of how talented she is. Can you think of other important talents that may not be obvious to the untrained eye? We thought of a few:

- ☉ *Being a good listener.*
- ☉ *Understanding how other people feel.*
- ☉ *Being a good problem solver.*
- ☉ *Being able to speak well in front of a group.*
- ☉ *Being able to help people negotiate.*
- ☉ *Being able to look at situations with a fresh perspective.*
- ☉ *Being able to make people laugh when they are sad.*
- ☉ *Being patient with difficult people or in difficult situations.*
- ☉ *Being able to make tough decisions under pressure.*
- ☉ *Being able to see the good in other people, even though they may not be popular.*
- ☉ *Being able to see your projects through from start to finish.*

These talents are just as important as other talents. In some cases they are more important. A person who is a good listener or a negotiator may be able to save someone's life in a crisis. Someone who works well under pressure may be able to concentrate when his friends can't. A person who can make people feel comforted when they are sad has a lot to give.

Sometimes people have no idea that they have a talent until they are put in an emergency situation. Here is one such case.



*I was in an elevator going down from the 25th when it got stuck. The building was huge and even though we screamed for help no one heard us. We tried the emergency button and that didn't work. After about 15 minutes one lady began to go into a panic. The woman was claustrophobic. Then the little girl that was there started to cry. Usually I am really shy but I saw that things were going downhill fast. I talked to her until she got a grip on herself. Then I told the little girl that we were playing a game to see who could tell the funniest story. Everyone relaxed and started talking. We stayed stuck for more than a half-hour when someone finally realized that we were there. I had no idea I could be so great with people.*

*Glenn, computer analyst*

We aren't suggesting that you lurk around elevators on the 25th floor, or hang around looking for car accidents or plane crashes to test for unrealized talents. We are merely saying that it is very possible that you have hidden talents. Some situations tend to bring out under-the-surface talents and help you to realize that you have something special to offer. It is also important to remember that talents are only as good as you allow them to be. A million dollars in gold won't do you any good if it's hidden under your bed for your whole life. Likewise, if you have a talent, use it.



## Journal

What talents do you have? How do you use your talents?  
What talents would you like to develop?



## To Do

1. Make a list of all of the things you like to do, and then do the same thing for someone in your family and one of your closest friends. What things do you have in common? How do you differ?
2. Some hobbies turn into careers. Can you think of anything that may start out as a hobby and turn into a career? Many people use their talents at their jobs. Can you think of any talents that would help someone do a certain type of job? What about jobs you don't get paid money for, like being a mother and raising children?

## Key Ideas

- ⌚ Having a hobby can liven up your life and help you find a fun and positive way to use your energy.
- ⌚ All people have a talent. Some talents are harder to recognize than other talents.



**Anyone who has never made a mistake  
has never tried anything new.**

**Albert Einstein**

