



Michael Gaeta Interviews Kim John Payne and Thomas Cooper On Contact Talk Radio

You're tuned into "What We Need to Know with Andrea Isaacs, Michael Gaeta and Croix Sather. Dr. Michael Gaeta is a visionary teacher, clinician, and writer in the field of natural health care. He's an acupuncturist, nutritionist, and herbalist who lectures nationally on natural healing and medicine. Michael will host this exploration in dialogue, integrity, and expanding awareness with a wide range of new paradigm leaders. Now, here's "What We Need to Know."

MG: Welcome, everyone, to "What We Need to Know." I'm Dr. Michael Gaeta, and I'm joined by two very special guests today. We have with us Kim John Payne, who is an international speaker and author of the recent book, *Simplicity Parenting, Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier and More Secure Kids*. Welcome, Kim.

KJP: Thank you, Michael.

MG: I'm also joined by Dr. Thomas Cooper. Tom is a professor at Emerson College, a world expert on media ethics and culture and the author of the upcoming *Fast Media, Media Fast: How to Clear Your Mind and Invigorate Your Life in an Age of Media Overload*. So welcome to you, Tom.

TC: Thanks very much, Michael.

MG: Our topic today is about media and health with these two remarkable gentlemen. These topics certainly encompass children, children's lives, and their development, as well as the range of issues related to media, health and our culture. We'll also explore

how media and health relate to our lives, our culture and how we can make more conscious choices related to mass media and creating a sense of balance and well-being in doing that. So Kim, I'd like to start with you. I would just add that this book has become quite a phenomenon nationally and I believe internationally. Why has this struck such a chord?

KJP: I think we're living in a post-excess culture where we've, for a while now, come to recognize the effects of excess on our environment. Many people, after this economic struggle that we've had in the last couple of years, have also come to recognize that we're living in a post-excess time in terms of the economy. You speak to educators around the country, and actually around the world, about the excesses of high-stakes testing, the pressure we're putting on children in school is also now becoming more and more well-known; and people are looking for solutions. But, Michael, what I think is happening is that parents are now recognizing that we're living in a post-excess culture and are really starting to question the family life that has become severe where our children are increasingly subject to what I would call as soul fever. It's where this is too much and too fast, too soon. This has started a parent movement and this book is really about that recognition. Parents now know this and are looking for simple and sensible ways in which they can get balance back in their family lives.

MG: That's excellent. And thank you. I'm really glad that the book has been helping thousands of families around the country. Now twenty-six states have Simplicity Groups where parents get together to implement this material, right?

KJP: Yes, it's almost like the theory of global warming where the air is thinning around the planet. But it seems like the thinning air levels are thinning in our families, and we're just subjected to so much. At our Center for Social Sustainability, we actually train simplicity parenting in groups. They then go back to their communities, and it's very modest really. They convene groups of fifteen or twenty people for a fourteen-week

program. Town by town, city by city, this is really starting to make an impact because there are so many group leaders out there now and so many parents are seeking them out. So, yeah, this book has definitely become a movement.

MG: Well, I'm glad for that. And Tom, this book which is coming out soon, *Fast Media, Media Fast* – you've been a professor for many years. I know this book came about in part from – you've published many academic books over the years – your work with your students, in giving them an experience around having a media fast or a media diet. So, can you tell us how this book and material came about?

TC: That's right, Michael. It did come out of Emerson College classrooms where we began to experiment with some students, cutting out all the media that they could, a practical media fast, in their lives while other students took a media diet, that is deciding what media they wished to consume and which ones to cut out, including perhaps their guilty pleasures. A third group was a control group; that is they went about their media habits but monitored them. This was about how their participation in media changed their consciousness. It became holding a mirror up to them regarding their media behavior to see whether they were in charge or the media was in charge. Out of that has grown an awareness that many, many other groups want to try things like this, maybe trying a week without media or for a week changing their media consumption or at least examining their media consumption to once again see who's in charge and what the right relationship is to have with media. So it's now gone public. Parents want to try this with their children. Seniors want to try this as a change in gears, as well as church groups, civic groups, and many, many others, including educators. They want to take this class because it's customizable to almost any group or individual.

MG: Right. Well, I'm certainly happy this book is coming out in a very timely way. You also had quite a remarkable experience. You took a bit of a sabbatical from your teaching duties at Emerson and lived with what you called the plain people. Would you tell us about that?

TC: Absolutely. Many people think of the plain people as the Amish, although there are many other groups of plain people who primarily do without electronic media. They may read newspapers and books to some extent, but most of their media consumption is very educational and quite minimal. Kim was mentioning excess. They shun excess at all cost and use media only as a necessity. It's a wonderful learning experience. There are many groups around the world like Pacific Islanders who have no media, and there are also people who have just one source of media. When I was on Easter Island, the Rapa Nui people, were like this. They had just one television station. So wherever you go that has an unusual media diet, you might say, it gives you a chance to get some perspective on one's own supersaturated media world and to see what the pros and cons are and how it differs for people who never use media to people who use minimal media to people who are saturated in media. Each has its pros and cons. And I'm glad we're having a conversation of the pros on cutting back on media.

MG: I think it's amazing that the two of you have really distinguished yourselves in your fields and had a similar experience of seeing the difference in groups of people and individuals who have either consciously made a choice. In your case, Kim, you've advised people to have a more balanced relationship with respect to the media. And you, Tom, have experience actually living with cultures where it's just how they live. Certainly there's a conscious choice involved, but it's really woven into the fabric of their culture. Maybe we can have a bit of a conversation and perhaps we can comment first on the differences you've seen between mainstream families and individuals with media excess that we see and the contrast with families and individuals who have a much smaller media diet. So, Kim, maybe you could start with your observations about the families and individuals who've made this conscious choice.

KJP: One of the things I've noticed, as more and more families and parents decide to go on a media diet or a fast - or there's a third group which is those that never began to

feast ever because they made a decision very early on to particularly not have screen media but also radio as well, in the homes as well. And this isn't an isolated thing. This is really starting to develop. There are the plain people that you mentioned, Tom. But I'm sure you're aware that more and more people in mainstream in the U. S. are actually consciously to live just as they would in neighborhoods and wherever they live around the country and who are taking the screens out of their homes, just getting rid of them, just basically what I think of as detoxifying. Yet you wouldn't know because they live right next door to you.

The thing I've noticed, more directly to your question, is that the children of these low or no screen – by screen meaning computers and TVs, Game Boys, the range of screens from small to large – tend to be more creative in their play. They are very slow to be bored. Boredom is not a thing that comes up at all because there's a creative spark in these children that is not used to being passively entertained. That's one piece that I notice. The other piece I notice is that they're very personable. They want to engage in conversation with other children and adults. I've noticed, and I've made a very careful observation of these things, that their attention spans are very good. They tend to be able to focus very well and bring their attention to bear where they choose to bring it to bear, which to me is a vitally important thing about raising a child. It's to have that attention. They tend to have a very good impulse control because they haven't been served up a diet of if you want it you can get it and get it quickly. They have good impulse control, but one of the key things I've noticed is that they're very empathetic kids. They're kids who are popular in their peer groups. This is surprising because you would think that children raised without TV and computers would not have much to offer when they stand among their peers when talking about television programs or video games. But actually what happens, and I've observed this first-hand on many occasions, is a kind of media compensation – I call it media flashback conversation, like an acid flashback where kids just have to detoxify and get it out of their systems. They talk and they babble, and they don't really listen to each other. They stand there and

text each other and play with their mobile gadgets. Usually about five to ten minutes in, that starts to wane. Then the kids who are media free turn to the other kids and say, "What shall we do?" This is because these kids always have something ready on the tips of their tongues, "Okay, so why don't we build forts? Why don't we play 'Catch the Sand?'" They offer many, many suggestions that they have. These are the kids – and I've noticed this interestingly – whose parents come to me and ask, "Well, you know if I cut out screens for my kids, won't they be ostracized by the group?" So I've watched this because I wanted to be very clear about that and not give any advice that would be helpful. I've watched it, gosh, over twenty years now. What I see is that these are the ones who are enduringly popular. If you're struggling at school or you're being bullied, or something is happening, do you want to go to a child – well you want to go to a kid who can listen, who is creative, who is fun to play with. They're the ones who are sought out, and they're the ones who have really good, long-term friendships. It's very, very interesting.

MG: Wow, that's very hopeful. And what have you seen, Tom, living with these cultures and also with your own students whom you've been working with?

TC: First of all, let me offer appreciation for Kim's insights there because they're very consistent not only with what I've seen but what I've read in the literature where there have been scientific tests in groups of children with and without saturated doses of media and so forth. So I think he's right on the beam with this. One major difference is – and we want to make it clear that we're not media bashing today because there are all kinds of creative media that people can produce as well as creative music and so forth and so on and I'm sure Kim would agree with that, that there are many positive uses of expression – so one of the differences is that children are actually more free to be a creative expressive person. You mentioned creativity but actually they can also make better television, make better movies and so forth in their time if they're not inundated and saturated all the time by electronic stimuli because their consciousness is just the

recycled conformist thinking of the masses. It's not an independent individual. So if you want to be a great painter or a great musician and you want to bring out what's within that child, whatever the design is within them, often exposing them to the masses is seen as a good idea. It is to a point but not to the point of saturation because a person needs to hear him or herself think in order to let his or her own expression be unique and define his or her voice. One of the positives is that if you are going to want to express yourself in a unique, creative, valuable way to society, you can't be swimming in an ocean of other people's sound bytes and just uttering the predictable wisdom of the day. So you actually become more individual and more in touch with your soul, you might say, and your genius, and what it is that you wish to express, if you can take the time, to hear what's already inside you rather than just the programming of other people.

Secondly, Kim mentioned excess before. I think there are negative health issues related to excess that you, Michael, might know about as a doctor. When you actually put all the surveys together of the American people and their concerns about the media, the first one is truth. Very few of them think the media is not biased. They're concerned with accuracy and sensationalism. But the second one is excess. They think there's excessive sexuality available to very young children and there's excessive violence available to very young children who often don't have parents nearby or whatever when they're watching it. But there's also general excess, excessive advertising. Super Bowl is now nine hours, nine minutes of football and nine hours of programming which is almost all some type of advertising. Four years of our lives will be spent consuming advertising and so forth. So that level of excess and even that level of excess in content where people say, "Enough Lindsey Lohan, enough Britney in jail, enough whatever it's going to be." Everything seems to be an overload, and therefore one of the positives you feel in families is the absence of that. You feel greater clarity, more relaxation, and you think that people not only think more for themselves but have space in their lives to reflect, to be mindful of others, to spend more time loving a pet or loving other people who may be neglected, more time to discover what they are about life. If they're spiritual, it's a

chance to touch their spiritual side. If they're affectionate, it's a chance to be more in touch with the people they love. If they have a kind of hidden dream inside, it's a chance to begin to pursue that hidden dream rather than be a couch potato. All of that potential is waiting inside a person, with many different possible directions, such as the potential to have a career in an area they always wanted, the potential to awaken to a new level of self-discovery, the potential to finally paint or write poetry or whatever they want to do, the potential to break out of the herd and have an influence on society. It may be the potential to do something about the environment rather than just complain about it. It's the potential to play a part in the community or volunteer to help someone who is dying of this or that in a hospital. All of those avenues of opportunities are shrinking for people in the aggregate because more of their time that would be spent in those service areas and self-development areas are being spent primarily in absorbing now over nine hours of media per household per day. That's a lot if you think about the time available.

MG: That's incredible! Thank you for these comments. I appreciate the work you've done in this area. We're going to take a short break now; please join us when we come back...I thought from our first section we might just have a little bit more from you gentlemen on the current state of affairs, what you Tom could say as a diagnostic piece about what's happening in our culture and media, just to see if there are any additional thoughts than we've had in that area. Then maybe we could spend the balance of our time talking about practical solutions and ways we can make more conscious choices, with specific examples to have more balanced, fulfilling, and peaceful lives. Before we do that, I remember reading a comic, which I thought of from something you said Tom. The husband and wife were talking, many years ago during the Clinton years. And the husband said, "Yeah, you know what I think about Bill Clinton?" And the wife said, "Well, if I want to know what you think, I'll just listen to Rush Limbaugh." It's like what you said, Tom, that so much of our thinking is recycled from the sound bytes and media and not actually original thinking from what you referred to beautifully in the book as first hand living. So maybe you gentlemen could add any other thoughts you have about

the current state of affairs. What are the things we need to be aware of in terms of media and our lives? So Kim, maybe you could start us off. If there's anything you'd like to add, even though you've offered a lot, that would be wonderful.

KJP: Well, about that first hand living that you referred to, Michael, one of the things that concerns me about this media tsunami, this deluge, is that I worked in my early years, about ten years, as an addiction counselor, substance abuse work. What comes up for me when I look at media consumption now is the very real danger is addiction. When I'm speaking to high school children, because I often get asked to talk about addiction, I ask them how they would define addiction. One group in New York City a number of years ago defined addiction beautifully. They said addiction is an increasing and compulsive tendency to replace inner development and avoid pain and boredom by creating outer stimulation. So it's this tendency to create outer stimulation to avoid boredom, avoid pain, and avoid inner development. That's what you, Tom, were mentioning a moment ago. It's this inner development, these qualities you so beautifully named, of inner development. What media does is to create an outer stimulation, a very socially acceptable outer stimulation, that replaces inner development. That's the definition of addiction. We use drugs, but we can apply that kind of definition in many spheres. We can think about materialism or all kinds of different addictions, really, such as exercise addiction, and so on. There are all kinds, but media is really chief among them. When I talk to kids, they say that the number one addiction they face is an addiction to noise. It's really very interesting. I ask the kids how many feel they are in that state? Probably about 85-90% - about of the many, many groups I've spoken to over the years - admit that they are addicted to noise which the media provides. Those figures you quoted, Tom, of up to 9 hours, wasn't it back in 2005 that the Kaiser Foundation found that the average amount of time a teenager would spend in front of a screen was somewhere around five hours. So if you do the math, that kind of trajectory, we are seeing exactly what a heroin addict or alcoholic experiences. You have to increase the amount of the substance, in this case sensory substance, that you take into

your veins to have what the drug addict would call a hit. So we're increasing and increasing the amount of substance we take in, the amount of hours we spend watching screen, in order to get the same satisfaction. Tom, I wonder what you make of that?

TC: Yes, Kim, that's gone on. In fact, Gerber's research showed that *Rambo 1* has maybe fifty dead bodies. *Rambo 2* has 100 and *Rambo 3* has 150. In other words, you must increase the dosage, and he even used the word dosage just as you are, for people to have the same experience with the sequel that they had with the original. You've got to provide more violence, we might say. I once heard a TV director flash slash trash for cash. So the media that provides us with wholesome nutrition, and creativity, that may lead us to a standing ovation in our soul and transform ourselves, that's wonderful. Many of us have read a book, seen a movie or a play, or seen a piece of music, or even read a magazine article or something that changed our lives or woke us up; and we certainly want to distinguish between that 10% or whatever it might be of wholesome nutritional media and the 90% that could be called flash-slash-trash-for-cash, increasing the ratings, doing anything for a buck, promoting advertising at all costs. So, yes, I quite agree with you that the ratio of what we might call productive, creative media to simply addictive media that raises the dosage of violence or sexuality, pornography being an example of something that's very much on the increase in all demographics with teenagers, children, adults, and seniors, a huge increase in media that have no message, that have no important educational training, or that don't entertain very effectively because they can be made cheaper and because people can be given one that leads to two that leads to four which is exactly how an addiction works. I very much agree. I think part of the answer, though, is to recommend balance for people and recommend self-reflection for people rather than go to an extreme of having a total media fast right away. Often people won't be able to adjust very well and they have, just as you're mentioning with addiction, withdrawal symptoms. If you tell them they can watch TV on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and then the big game is on Thursday and they can't see it, it has a lot of parallels to working with addiction. You have to, in some cases,

find clever strategies for people to withdraw incrementally or let them design their own program for seeing a little of this, doing a little of that. Did you know that we have TV Anonymous now? It's a group that wants to go to bed at 11 or 12 o'clock, but actually the remote is still in their hands at 1 or 2 a.m. I'm not judgmental; I've done that myself where I started out watching something. I know I've got important meetings the next day, and suddenly it's much later than I thought. We also have internet addiction centers now and not just in the United States. I was reading about one in Taiwan. The parallel of addiction is not just a metaphor. Many, like you Kim, who have worked in that area, see this occurring in media and its like. Thank you for your insights.

KJP: Well, one of the things that happened to me recently was that I had this sort of fortuitous cancellation of a flight. So I found myself in a hotel room for a day. There was this 54" flat screen television with things like Game Boy, gaming and video gaming, all kinds of things; and I've been wanting to do this for a long, long time. I wanted to do a little bit of a study. Here is something that's not empirical but awfully interesting. I hear from a lot of good Dads, as I give talks all over, even if they are dragged along by their wives. They're still there. And they say to me, "Look, Kim, we had TV when we were growing up. We watched a lot of TV and we're okay, aren't we?" On a good day, that is. I asked them what they watch, and inevitably the mind wanders back to *Mr. Rogers*, *Father Knows Best*, others like it. So I got some old *Mr. Rogers* and *Father Knows Best* shows, and I watched a whole bunch of them. Now, on average, what I noticed was that the amount of time that the camera panned or zoomed about once every eighty to ninety seconds. Now you've got to bear in mind that the studies that Jane Healy has done and others she cites in her book show that the average 12 year-old takes about four seconds to see a visual image, then take it through the various brain centers, and actually make meaning of it. In terms of brain capacity, that's a fairly good amount of time, four seconds. So watching *Mr. Rogers*, they use it every eighty to ninety seconds. Something will happen. An image, as you were saying, Tom, will flash, something will change. So I thought, "Okay. That's not too bad." Then I watched a series of television programming,

just randomly, that was rated for 4 to 9 year-olds; that was their target audience. What I counted there was an amazing, amazing shift, so much so that it was about eighty-five to ninety-five times a minute flashes and sometimes split-screen flashes. So ninety times a minute as opposed to four times a minute – just doing the math, that’s not bad. What I came to realize is that if a Dad says to me, “Well, we watch TV and we’re okay,” the fact is, just from my anecdotal watching of the screen, was that one hour of watching modern television or modern video games, we would have to get the same amount of sensory flashing by watching the same approximately nine hundred hours of *Mr. Rogers*. So, we can say that we’re okay, so our kids should be watching and they’ll be okay. That’s a little shaky. I continued watching because this was a long day for the violent images, as this is what you were talking about Tom; and what I noticed is that around 35% of all images were doing bodily harm to another cartoon character or someone else, particularly in the video games. If you do the math on 7.5 hours a day of screen exposure, then that means these kids are seeing 7,000 violent images a day. This is really stunning data. The problem is that this has become the new normal. We’ve stopped noticing because it’s become so ubiquitous. 900 hours of *Mr. Rogers* equates to one hour of contemporary television.

MG: That’s amazing.

TC: Let me be clear about the nine hours, just in case the listeners are wondering about the discrepancy. It’s nine hours now that we are approaching per household, which means that even toddlers who are left alone may be consuming nine hours, even if it’s just going in the subconscious background. A set may not be listened to by people, but it’s on for almost nine hours a day. That’s why I’m using that figure. The figures you are using may be per child because children aren’t home part of the day because they’re at school or at day care or whatever else they may be doing with parents or with friends. Nevertheless, just to be scholarly and to make sure the numbers are clearly explained, it’s a huge dosage, whether the child is consciously or subconsciously taking it in.

Sometimes it's more dangerous not to be consciously watching it because you don't know what's going there. Then you go to a supermarket, and suddenly you went in to buy two products and you emerge with nine more because you thought, "Oh, yeah. I remember that." The issue is the quality of control that it has over us and that is something that has to be monitored.

KJP: Well, I actually talk about that in my book, Tom. Have you come across the "test of power," whereby if a child pesters you for a toy, it usually will take three or four times when you say no before they will accept it. But if that child is watching television, either consciously or subconsciously, those figures rise dramatically, to over thirty times, the child will request it and for some children it's significantly more than that where they will keep asking and asking and pestering for the product or toy because they're being continually stimulated by the television. So one of the things that parents report is how much less the kids pester them for stuff. They don't have to keep buying all this stuff or arguing about it because the kids don't ask. That's when the media diet can take hold.

MG: Well put. That's going to be worth a lot to a parent.

KJP: But in general, what a lot of parents report is that discipline becomes a whole lot easier when there is very carefully balanced, discerned media consumption in the home. Again, having a long interest in neurobiology and neuropsychology, one of the things that's affected neuropsychologically, neurologists claim that right and left brain activity, in particular the understanding of cause and effect. I've read these studies and watched countless parents as they dramatically decrease the amount of screen media consumption in their homes. I can't tell you how much these parents have said to me that pretty much within the week they couldn't believe how much easier it was to redirect their children and more disciplined, that the child now had a much greater empathy if he or she did something to a sibling. Previously, when they were media saturated, they would deny it or disassociate from it. Now the disassociating from it is

rather worrying. When the media diet really comes in, they just take screens out of the home for very young children. Even the American Medical Association recommends that children prior to the age of 2 should be screen-free, and that's a very conservative organization. They report how the much better the discipline is. My comment to that is similar to yours, Tom, is that I think they're simply deepening their family connections. They're deepening normal, healthy human relationships so that when a time to redirect a child comes up, it comes out of a good, caring, solid relationship. I wonder what you think.

TC: Yes, well put. I certainly agree. One thing I'm just remembering is, Michael, that we need to let people know where both of these books are available. In my case it's not on Amazon yet; it's at gaetacommunications.com. It's called *Fast Media, Media Fast*. And Kim, what about your book. Where can we find that?

KJP: My book is published by Ballantine Books, Random House. So it's just generally around in independent book stores, book stores, Barnes and Noble and Amazon. You can also buy it on Kindle though I don't recommend that.

MG: That would be ironic, wouldn't it!

KJP: But equally as important, Tom, is the simplicityparenting.com website. This is not just shameless advertising. But it's because people who want to connect with their community. People may be afraid of this because it is a little bit counter-culture, wanting to simplify around media and other issues. They can find thousands and thousands of other parents and other professionals who are really resonating with this message of simplifying and connecting. There are a lot of good ideas at that simplicityparenting.com website as well.

TC: Yeah, gaetacommunications.com also has a lot of Michael's world in it, inspiring seminars and things that people should turn onto as well. We want to bring people to those websites for inspiration, not just for products.

KJP: Absolutely.

MG: Well, good. I appreciate our conversation. In outlining, we've looked at the nature of the problem in terms of media excess and just general lifestyle excess, media excess and over-stimulation and the effects of that. We've also looked at the dramatic difference in communities, cultures, and families where there has been a conscious decision to reduce media consumption and awaken other aspects of life. You gentlemen have raised your own healthy daughters with their own different phases of growing. What could you offer, as parents and adults, in this culture as an additional, with practical solutions that people can use in their own lives?

KJP: Well, Tom, you've thought a lot about that with the media diet. Would you like to help us with that?

TC: Yes, Kim. I value you as well; but somebody has to start, so I'm happy to do that. First, I have great humility and look up to Kim in this area because no one has a Ph. D. in parenting, at least as far as I know.

KJP: They should come with a health warning, if they do.

TC: Bill Cosby, when he wrote his book, made a lot of jokes about the fact that you're always on your own the first time around and the second time around and so forth as a parent because each child is unique and so on. Formulas tend to blind us and we need to be sensitive to the uniqueness of each child and the needs of each child. So, I don't want to pretend to be an expert on parenting, but I do want to say that when you have media

in the background in your family and when you have a grasp over it instead of the other way around, there tends to be far greater harmony in the family. When there isn't, there tends to be space to talk about it and to look it in the eye and to go to what it is that needs to change, a lot more than when people are over-stimulated. The great French philosopher, Pascal, said, "All of men's problems are reduced to one, our inability to live quietly in one small room. We seek distraction." So as Kim is indicating, the things that lead to personal development can never actually be triggered if there's too much distraction in our lives. But similarly, the things that lead to dysfunction in our families can never be addressed if there is too much distraction in our lives. And if it's all too much easier to go turn on the TV, websites, or whatever it is, when something comes up in the family that needs to be resolved or needs to be addressed, that's what will happen. It's a lot easier to have a beer and that can lead in turn to a lot more beers and alcoholism, or to have a drug and that can lead ultimately to more, or to go turn on the TV and avoid whatever it is that needs to be addressed. So media can be, as Pascal put it, a major distraction when things are not going well. But even when things are going well, they prevent us from bonding and celebrating those moments because we say, "Hey, I'll talk to you during the commercial," or "Come back when this show is over," or "Don't you know tonight is my whatever it is night?" So the bonding that could take place doesn't get the quality time and doesn't have the room for nourishing and depth. No wonder we have a society now where there are so many single parents, so many children who are abused, so many families that don't talk to each other, multiple divorces. We could go on and on about the reasons why, such as the parents should be there to keep the kids from watching so much TV. Those demographics are changed and we have so few caregivers compared to what we used to. People work longer hours. The economy is more stressful. We have children who don't want to talk to abusive parents. So the climate is altogether different, and that's all the more reason for us to make sure that the TV is not the babysitter or that the TV is not the surrogate parent, especially. Do you agree, Kim?

KJP: Yeah, that's beautifully put. You know, you gentlemen also do a lot of writing. But in writing this simplicity parenting book, and I'm now writing a new book. And I'll get to a place when I'm a little bit stuck and I don't know how to go forward, I find myself checking my email or looking at a website. Yet, when I'm in flow of creativity and I'm writing, the thought never occurs to me to seek distraction. So now when I'm stuck, I just close the laptop lid and just sit quietly for a few minutes. Inevitably, I find that I can begin to write again, whereas in the past, two or three hours sometimes would go by where I was responding to what I thought were vital emails and the book wasn't getting written. Now that's just a micro example of what you mentioned, Tom, of a much larger issue. Parents are becoming very aware of going into day care centers, and a bunch of them ask as a first question, "Is the television on?" It's hard to find a day care center, unless it's a Waldorf-oriented day care center, because most of them always have a TV on in the background for hours and hours. I was teaching and working with a bunch of day care providers, and there was a very animated conversation about how many day care providers are now turning off the television. When I asked why, they cited a number of day care provider developments. They also cited staying in business because a lot of parents are now asking about this. If they don't respond, then the parents will choose some other place for day care. I thought, "How thrilling! That's wonderful that things are beginning to change in this way."

Michael, one of the things you asked about was practical solutions. Both of you, Tom and Michael, alluded to this, starting small and doable. There are some parents who simply unplug during mealtimes. They say, "Okay, there's going to be one time a day, for instance at dinnertime. First of all, there's going to be a dinnertime to come together, because media is one of the biggest enemies of dinnertime. They collect their trays and go off to watch television, and that happens in many, many, countless numbers of homes. People don't eat together anymore because of television and computers. So the brave decision of some parents is to say, "We can't really get rid of the television yet or can't strictly limit it yet, but what we can do is unplug it during dinnertime." I would

include in this media voice screening, where someone calls in and you can hear his or her voice on the telephone. So all telephones get turned off or switched off, computers, TVs, everything gets turned off. That's a very small, humble step; but once you begin with wherever you can begin, the connection to your family is so wonderful that it's just delicious. You want to do more of it. A friend of mine, Bill Powers, who wrote *Hamlet's Blackberry*, a wonderful book, on Friday afternoon he simply pulls out the router and doesn't switch it on again until Monday. They don't have Smart Phones. They can't check email. So he, his wife, and his son can simply be together. The quality of their lives together is dramatically improved, and he writes about that in the book. Now other parents have just decided to go screen-free. Tom, this is one of the things I'd be interested in your comments on because I remember a 14 year-old boy who came into my office with his parents. I'm well-known for this sort of militant stance about screens, and they wanted to get rid of screens in the home. He commented to me that screens were everywhere. They're in libraries, gas stations, airports, and everyone of his friends had a screen and also had a TV and computer in their own rooms. The list was exhaustive. So I said to him, "Well, you exercise and you eat. You go to sleep and wake up." And he said, "Yes." So I said, "Well, you're right. Screens are everywhere. So all your parents are trying to do in not having screens is give you balance, just like waking and sleeping, just like eating and exercising. There's got to be a balance, only we don't have control over any other place in our children's lives in terms of screens apart from our homes." So in my recommending that people think seriously about having a screen-free home, it's not denying children screens because they still will have hours of screens a day, both at school and in the library, and all over the place. I'm suggesting that the home is the only place where we have control and therefore can bring balance. This boy wasn't pleased with this information. But many, many parents have done this and have reported that the quality of their family life has dramatically increased, yet the kids still see screens in other ways. I wonder, Tom, given your long, long years of thought and contemplation on this of what you make of this idea of having a digital and screen oasis in the home. Is that going too far?

TC: Well put, well put, Kim. I think that in spiritual terms people often talk about creating a place of sanctuary. Those who aren't spiritual may describe it in many other ways. I remember when I was a child I had my own place. Often people have a quiet place, a place of beauty, a place within – it's usually not an external place – but usually it's a place where they feel they have balance and the power of self-reflection without pressure from the environment. If the home is not that, where will it be? The bar? Where will your surrogate home become? What kind of home is that, if there is a smoke-free spot, for a person to come out? If the person is spiritual, it's a place for a person to worship. It may be nature for some people. If it isn't in those terms, at least it's reflection, meditation, something wholesome and healthy, something to hear yourself think even if you're not an intellectual or you don't have some kind of connection to a larger order. You want to be able to hear yourself think. If you're constantly surrounded by external stimuli, and that becomes almost impossible to know if your thinking is your own anyway, can anyone have an original thought anymore is a question I often ask. And how would you know it, if it was original or the result of programming? Let me give you a sense of what's possible in that way. I walked into an Amish home and I heard people singing in four-part harmony, and there were no other sounds. I walked into another Amish home and there was total silence. I've been on Native American reservations and walked into a home and there was this sense of individual people doing something creative, maybe one making a blanket, maybe a couple in a corner playing a game. So it's not just an Amish experience. It's also Native Americans, Pacific islanders, people living in intentional communities, people who turn off TV for a day. All kinds of people have the opportunity to do things in their homes and communities that give them a sense of depth. It's about knowing who they are rather than being told constantly by advertising, "This is who you're not. You better buy something to become that." I think there's great value, as you say, in what might be called the still point or the still place in one's life. If you can create a TV-free zone in your house or a room or two, or the entire house, depending on your own values, or if you can create that in your day,

at a smoke-free period of the day where there's dinner or at night when you and your spouse go for a walk or a talk to really clear the air and share the joys of the day with each other, all the things that enhance the quality of life. And since I do have a spiritual side, it's some kind of worship, whether that's one-on-one or with a group. I'm not imposing any faith on anyone, but it's something that deepens one's experience as a human being but also, if you will, as a God-being or a spiritual being or whatever language is natural for you, that for me nourishes all the other parts of my life. It's kind of having a circle without a center, to have a mediated electronic universe without some place within it for a person to gain perspective, overview, depth, and a greater awareness of their identity.

KJP: Beautifully put. One of the things I write about is moments of Sabbath. Those Sabbath moments, not necessarily a Sunday or Saturday, depending on one's spirituality, where are those moments of Sabbath during the day, that point to the periphery, that center to the circumference is all about for our children creating those moments of Sabbath. If we do create those moments, our children will inhabit them. One of the things I often talk about is the gift of boredom. If my kids come to me and say, "Daddy, there's nothing to do," my only response is, "Oh, dear." And if they keep coming back ten minutes later to tell me there's really nothing to do, I'll say, "Oh dear, dear! Becoming more boring than the boredom is very important and it's not to switch on the television because by welcoming the gift of boredom, ten, fifteen, at the most twenty minutes later, creativity has broken out. The children are then drawing or constructing. They're painting or playing, and the temptation to go to a television, if it's in the home, or if it's a computer is such a pity when it's given way to because in truth, real creativity is huge. One of the points I want people to understand about screen-free homes or screen diets is that I don't think, Tom, that you or I are suggesting going backwards. This is actually preparing children for a world that is changing rapidly and those empathetic, creative children will actually go on to become creative adults who are highly employable and have happy and well-adjusted lives.

MG: Hmmm. Well, Kim John Payne and Tom Cooper, thank you so much for this delightful conversation. It's been a very useful, practical perspective so that we can enrich our lives, making conscious choices. So thank you both very much for being with us today.

Please join us on November 18, 2011 when we'll be speaking with Kerry Bone on herbal safety. "Are herbs really safe," is the question we're going to discuss.

So thank you again Kim John Payne and Tom Cooper, and thank you all who have joined us. Have a good day.

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