

Big Island Weekly

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Pardon, our mistake

If we missed something, generally screwed up, spelled your name wrong or made any other catastrophic error, send your corrections to editor@bigislandweekly.com.

Ka'ikena

RAP rocks!

My youngest son came running home from school recently singing the praises of a new program at his school. It was called the Read Aloud Program, or RAP for short, a part of the non-profit Read Aloud America. He is a book-lover so anything having to do with reading gets him giddy. When he told me about the program, my first thought was that I had to take a turn reading to his class. Without looking into the program, we signed up for it and attended our first RAP session.

We got to his school at 5:30 p.m. along with hundreds of other families. I was shocked to see such a huge turnout. Upon check-in, I was issued a binder filled with information to help further my child's love for reading. I even got a coupon for a discounted pizza; every working mother's dream gift, as that meant one less dinner I would need to prepare. We entered the school's cafeteria and found a seat near the front.

Once the program began, I discovered why my son was so anxious to attend. The emcee, who also happened to be the program's founder, Jed Gaines, explained the purpose of the evening's events. The idea was to separate ourselves from our daily tasks and worries, and disconnect from our digital brains and enjoy some good old-fashioned family time. There were prize giveaways and time to simply sit and socialize with our children. No cell phones, no iPads, no texting, just time spent together with a bunch of good books; not books we had to read, but that were read to us. Of course I had brought a stack of work with me, assuming it would be story time, and therefore the perfect time to get ahead on a few stories of my own. My son said, "Mom, please don't work tonight." How could I resist his sincere request? He was right. I put my work aside and gave him every ounce of my attention. Good thing too, because the program was nothing like what I expected. It was so much better! And no, I didn't have to do any of the reading.

After a little information about the program and some introductions, the keiki were grouped by grade and whisked off to classrooms for age-appropriate story time. There were programs for all the kids from toddlers to teens. The parents stayed in the cafeteria and enjoyed a rare treat; books were read to us for a change. There were a couple cute little books, followed by a chapter from a book I remember reading back in my school days called "Where the Red Fern



Photo by Rita French

Grows." I recalled being a kid again and my love for books, especially old, previously loved ones from the library. It was nostalgic and relaxing. It exceeded all of my expectations.

The children returned after about 45 minutes and then we were all treated to a pizza dinner. There were more prizes handed out through dinner. Gifts ranged from free books to board games and toys. It was impressive how well the chance at prizes kept the kids' attention. All in all, this free event was a huge success and a blast to attend. With several more RAP sessions coming up through the end of March, I was happy to commit to attending more events. To my shock, the evening wrapped up with the emcee informing the audience that the program has lost its funding and faces extinction after this school year. The evening brought families together and stressed the importance of literacy and quality time as a family without the interruptions of the world. To take away the opportunity for families to experience RAP and all it has to offer is truly a shame. How can a program this valuable be cut? Literacy is critical for our children, for their future and ours. RAP not only supports reading, but it brings families together in a way that no other program has done before.

My focus is now firmly aimed at helping to raise awareness about RAP; what it is, what it offers and how we can keep the program running for our communities, our families and our children. For more information, visit them online at www.readaloudamerica.org and look for RAP in a school near you.

Yisa Var