War

At the crack of dawn, it’s war!

Well…when I turn the lights on you can begin throwing rubber balls at my blanket fort, but you know what I mean. Summer afternoons always included war. Somewhere between mandatory one hour reading time and maxing out my two-hour TV time limit is when Michael and I would head to the basement for battle.

I would construct around the staircase because I could take cover behind the banister and hang blankets off the nearby treadmill. Michael would construct on the opposing side because he knew I wanted the staircase. Admittedly, his side had better architecture: he had the couch and the miscellaneous chairs that only went upstairs for large gatherings. But he didn’t have a staircase. The blankets were held by 2lb disc weights, which were more a hazard if the fort collapsed than they were helping support the structure.

Winning the war is…complex…your goal is to knock over five carboard blocks hidden in the fort that grant you access to your opponent’s fort to search for a hidden item that if found within the allotted thirty seconds must be returned to your fort without being hit by your opponent who is only allowed to throw had one ball and must stand in the back of their fort. Sounds like a kid made these rules...

When night fell, and yes, these battles had their own complex day-night cycles, the hum of the air conditioner and water heater in the adjacent room would be interrupted by Michael’s wolf howls which scared me, and my deviant giggles which scared Michael. We were both scared of the millipede that would occasionally enter our forts (without even knocking down the necessary cardboard boxes for entry).

During war, it’s important to avoid causalities. Potential casualties included family member’s whose pictures are framed on the wall, lightbulbs encased in the ceiling, and Legos that sit on the spectating shelves. When the war would conclude (either in defeat or destruction) there was always one rule, leave the battlefield better than you found it: rotate the couch so it would be facing the TV again, return the chairs to the tables upstairs, remove the blankets from the treadmill so it could look like it was being used. It was a polite war.

But all wars end. I outgrew a babysitter and the basement evolved into a mancave. The treadmill is in the same spot, but now instead of blankets, it is covered in dust to show that time has passed. The couch has been upgraded for a sectional. The staircase now has posters that read “Man Cave,” and “10 Rules for the Man Cave,” because without them, you would confuse it for a basement. The old family pictures have now been organized by generation and blood line, and any broken glass from an errant ball has been cleaned and replaced. The lightbulbs are now slightly more energy efficient. The Legos have increased in number to show that time has passed, and how I passed the time. “Daytime” rarely occurs in the mancave anymore; “Nighttime” is still simulated, but the hum of machinery is now broken up by a movie I’m supposed to be watching with my girlfriend.

I don’t read books for pleasure anymore, maybe I should reinstitute the two-hour TV man and one hour reading time. Maybe we shouldn’t have introduced day and night to the basement, maybe then time wouldn’t pass, and it could have always stayed a basement. Maybe then I could have one more Michael Battle, I still remember the rules. Michael’s a father now, so he’s closer to his next battle then I am…I never thought I’d look forward to war.