

# SANDCASTLES

## JULY 2006

I love watching my son build sand castles. The determination in his face while turning over buckets of sand, the carving of tunnels with his plastic shovel, the intricate moats to keep the “*bad guys*” out, is priceless. I realized something while watching my son spend so much time and effort on his castle. Stephen was spending time, work and effort in an endeavor that he could not take home to admire and play with tomorrow. A project that would surely be destroyed by the rising tides of the Gulf of Mexico. Yet he pressed on enjoying every minute of his work. My son knew his castle wouldn’t last but he didn’t care. The building of the castle was the joy; the process is what mattered.

There is lesson in my son’s architectural endeavor at the beach.

Change scenarios...A middle-age man is sitting at his desk, he is surfing the net looking for investment tips, in the background CNBC’s *Mad Money* program with James Cramer is blaring on the television. This man is also attempting to build a castle. Instead of sand walls and beach shells, his building blocks are stocks, bonds, gold, or anything that he feels will get him closer to finishing his fortress. Unfortunately for this man, and millions others like him when his castle inevitably collapses, there is no happiness in the process, there is no joy. Millions of Americans believe the lie, the myth that if they get that fancy new trading software or their broker gets them into the next hot IPO that their castle will be bigger, better and completed faster.

We are all building our own proverbial castles in life. The question is whether or not the process is one of happiness or of heartbreak. Individuals who focus on their goals and meeting them will not fall victim to the never-ending hamster wheel of get rich quick dreams. Economist and *National Review* columnist Donald Luskin describes the hamster wheel as the, “*The conspiracy to keep people poor and stupid; how big government, big business, big media, and big academia, block your road to financial freedom and tell you its for your own good.*” I would add that an end result of this “*conspiracy*” is a forlorn existence.

The ability to comprehend what the boundaries and limitations of what the financial markets can do for oneself is empowering on more than one level. First, is the recognition that the road to wealth and prosperity is not the Autobahn. Building wealth, like everything else in life that has true worth involves work, time and effort. Second, the process itself, rather than being focused on stock, charts, James Cramer rants, and gold salesman, is instead devoted to meeting college funding for ones offspring, starting a business, enjoying a three decade retirement, and most importantly spending time with the ones you love.

The reality is that all our castles will be washed away. Nobody lives forever. The ability to build wealth and build legacies to pass on to our loved ones is important, however, the life one leads and the time one spends is of far greater worth than anything that passes through probate. It is a tragedy when individuals come to that realization too late in life. It is time to make a choice. It is up to you in how your castle building experience will be... A stressed-out market timing, stock chart watching, CNBC addicted existence or a day at the beach?