

Into the Forest of Creativity

By Bronwyn Worthington

Memories of backwoods summer play reawaken each year during the summer months. I recall my sister running alongside me as we jostle through the woods. Together, we dart down a woodsy trail leading to an open meadow sprinkled with wildflowers. Momentarily, we may stop to call on a neighboring friend or two. Soon after, we make our way toward a babbling creek where we spend the morning constructing a village. After creating intricate make-shift bakeries, shops and restaurants, we prepare to engage in a world belonging to us alone.

Little did I know that my playmate and I were learning lessons far beyond the purple-inked dittos that seemed to populate so many of our early school days in the 1980s. How grateful I am to have had a fourth grade teacher who opted to read books like *Bridge to Terabithia* and *The Cay* aloud to her students. Full of vivid natural imagery, these young adult novels portrayed poignant tales and exemplified creative problem-solving. Today, these classroom experiences provide a creative context for my summer adventures.

David Sobel, author of *Wild Play: Parenting*

Adventures in the Great Outdoors, credits the concept of story as an essential means of helping children connect with nature. Through nurturing a child's ability to create special places within small worlds, he shares how parents and teachers can help kids create their own life stories. When one considers the extent to which a rich inner life could influence a child's future, fostering natural settings for youngsters seems like a pretty solid investment.

So, in an attempt to let my tween and teen write a bit of their own wilderness story, I'm preparing to take these two back to my childhood home. We'll be heading up to the rustic cabin my father built nearly four decades ago. Even after twelve years of homesteading led to a difficult decision to move into town, my parents refused to part with their land.

Surprisingly, I've never returned for more than a couple nights since moving out with my parents at age sixteen. Several years ago, my husband and I attempted a week's stay in this remote location. Within a day, several wasp stings aimed at our son sent us into a tailspin. This, in addition to a tick that

embedded itself into my daughter's neck, promptly sent us to the nearest town where we set up camp in a hotel for the remainder of the week.

In spite of past issues, I'm resolved to make this trip work. My list of necessary items includes eucalyptus to keep the indoor bugs at bay, plenty of insect repellent for outdoor play, baking soda for bee stings, tweezers for ticks, and a sizable first aid kit for whatever else comes our way. There's something to be said for that old Scout motto – be prepared!

Items not making my list include gaming devices. Sounds simple, huh? Maybe, until you consider my fourteen-year-old son would happily turn over his favorite dessert for two minutes of virtual reality. Not one day has passed this week without him asking how long we're going to be on this trip. Each day I've responded that we will be gone for a week. I pensively wonder, is he challenging me to lessen the duration that we're away or simply hoping I'll change my mind? Today, though, he's expressed feeling a "little excited" about going along. Perhaps my resolve is at last paying off.



For more details visit colvillerendezvous.org

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Another item I'm leaving behind is our calendar. Interestingly, this will be every bit as tricky to do without as the electronics. My daughter, you see, is an intricate planner. While she may approach video games with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, she simply can't do without planned activities. Never one to be bored, she is constantly initiating a new idea.

In fact, our most recent visit to my parents' cabin was the result of this dreamer's plans for an eleventh birthday celebration. Hauling two carloads of girls, dozens of party favors, and everything else but the kitchen sink certainly made for a memorable occasion – if only there weren't several days of recovery afterward! Needless to say, we're now headed for a quieter trek, free of the usually jam-packed extracurricular and social events.

As I continue to make my list and pack our bags, I'm calmly anticipating the adventure ahead. Certainly, this trip pales in comparison with our visit to Redwood National Park a few years back. This time around, we are not venturing into the wild unknown, but rather giving a familiar place the chance to renew our imaginations. I remain hopeful that this



renewal may just birth a new chapter within our life stories.

Wherever summer beckons you and your family, there is bound to be some place for your children to play. Who knows – you may just find that you want to play along as well. Whether traveling far or near, flirting with sunshine or dancing in the rain, we all have a

story of our own to build. What better place to build than within nature itself?

Bronwyn Worthington is a teacher in Spokane where she is currently pursuing her M.Ed in Teaching & Learning with an emphasis on Social Emotional Learning. Explore more at bronwynworthington.com.



SPHYR Summit

Thursday, July 20, 2017
9am-3pm
Colville Ag Trade Center

SPHYR Clubs (Students Promoting Healthy Youth Relationships) and Rural Resources Victim Services are offering a 1-day youth camp providing workshops on art, wilderness first aid, communication, dog training and much more. This camp is free, and youth who will be in 9th through 12th grade are invited.

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