

Deep in the Woods? Good!

By Bronwyn Worthington

The scorching hot drive slowly led us from urban streets to primitive dusty roads. At last, my children and I arrived at the cabin in the woods for our long-awaited getaway. After stopping long enough to take in the familiar smell of pine trees, I busied myself with unloading food into kitchen cupboards.

Meanwhile, my daughter selected the tiny but ever-so-cozy room on the first floor. Determined to personalize her space, she quickly began plastering posters onto the log walls. Upon reaching the top of the stairs my son walked toward the master bedroom where light flooded in through multiple windows. Without a thought, he hurled his duffel bag on the floor. Sleeping quarters now claimed, he wasted no time moving on to explore new territory.

Early the next morning I awoke to the view of a deer tending her baby fawn. I rushed to wake my children, and the three of us cherished a front-seat view of this sacred mother-child dance.

Later, a trek into the forest opened the door of possibility for spotting smaller animals. Together, we watched rabbits and chipmunks cheerfully darting to and fro. Before long, my youngsters were leading the way through the woods, fully confident in their youthful instincts. I found myself asking how fifteen years could have passed since I started this crazy mama life. How is it that these two have morphed from babes in the pouch – to littles always underfoot – to adolescents forging ahead?

After a day filled with the pleasantries of observing meek and mild animals, we found ourselves in for a turn of events. In passing, my son declared that he had seen a critter moving about in the entryway closet. When I asked what he thought it might be, he shrugged and suggested, “A squirrel?”

For the next 24 hours, my daughter and I felt certain we were hearing strange noises from this closet. I tried to dismiss visions of rodents and bats, knowing all the while that pack rats have been known to show up here on occasion.

During the third day of our trip, I suddenly heard my daughter shriek. Rushing downstairs, I saw her staring at the entryway closet, yelling, “Snake!” By the time I made my way over, our new roommate had slithered out of sight. Uncertain as to whether he was still occupying the closet, I phoned my parents, the rightful owners of the cabin. My

dad suggested alerting a nearby neighbor who held a reputation for being an accomplished snake trapper.

After considering our options, we did what any average city folk might do. We made a call out to the local hardware store in search of snake traps. After the clerk politely informed us that these types of traps were not part of their inventory, she suggested we lure the animal into a pillowcase. I couldn't help but laugh as I pictured myself attempting to charm a snake into my pillowcase!

Much to my relief, the noises within the closet faded, and we never spotted the snake again.

Our most memorable wildlife sighting came later in our week when, once again, my daughter alerted us with a loud yell. Pointing outside, she declared “Bear!” Sure enough, as my son and I gazed out the window, a fuzzy brown bear sauntered around the house on his way back into the woods.

A grateful sense of awe filled the moment, giving way to a new family memory. Isn't it funny how animals in nature nearly always show up when we're least expecting to see them? More often than not, wild animals make themselves visible when we quiet down. In doing so, we offer them the right to vulnerably go about their business. Through quietly paying attention to our surroundings, even the most mundane routines can be revived. Who knows what altogether new life-giving experiences might just surprise us today?

Despite the inevitable challenges, I thoroughly enjoyed our wilderness getaway. With video games and social events set aside, we accomplished our goal of embracing our home in the woods. The simple act of showing up created space for new adventures and deepening connections between my children and me.

On our final day, we dropped by a nearby lake where we completed our trip. Each of us plunged into the glimmering ripples of water, swimming stroke upon stroke. After finally having our fill of sun and sand, we topped off the afternoon with over-priced ice cream treats. Brimming with gratitude for the simple pleasures of life, we drove home dripping with summertime joy!

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