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Community News

July 2011

The Necessity of Nature Play

We must consider ourselves lucky to live in the ultimate location for nature play. From glorious Glacier Park in our back yard to an abundance of neighborhood parks to relatively generously sized yards (on the grand urban scale of things), we can ensure that our children receive a healthy dose of nature play and reduce the impact of exaggerated dangers and sedentary plugged-in play. The conclusion has been reached that nature play is a need for children rather than a want. "In nature, a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace."¹

Nature play can be facilitated by something as simple as a patch of rough ground in your yard where children are allowed to dig, build, plant or do what they want. A digging pit, a dirt pile, the availability of outdoor water for children's use, or a discovery board (see what moves in under a scrap of board, roughly 2'x2') can promote the connection between child and the natural world. Plants, gardens, and berries – there's nothing like witnessing the wonder of where food comes from and enjoying snacks straight from the vines. Many plants and shrubs can be used to create secret places that spark the imagination.²

There are safety concerns and precautions should be taken to avoid things such as sunburn, insect bites, and to prevent accidents. However, the benefits of nature play far outweigh many of the risks exaggerated by the media. By all means be safe, but recognize the huge positive aspects that a connection with nature can create. Habits of active outdoor play during childhood will: reduce the propensity for obesity; develop creativity, concentration, and more inter-gender play; may promote healthy immune system development; and will encourage life-long conservation values.³ "The protection of nature depends on more than the organizational strength of stewardship organizations; it also depends on the quality of the relationship between the young and nature—on how, or if, the young attach to nature."⁴

The freedom of having a natural site to call his/her own, playing with nature, not just in nature (catching tiny critters, collecting leaves and rock, lying in tall grass, digging for buried treasure, splashing in the creek, hiding admists the shrubs, and climbing a tree⁴) will pro-



mote a sense of independence and those simple cherished childhood memories!

The Story of the Sunflower House⁵

Working in my garden at Heart's Ease one day, I turned to greet an elderly lady. "Oh," she said, her voice full of nostalgia, "this reminds me of my childhood in Nebraska." I knew she must have some special memories to share. "Can you remember any special garden things you did as a child?" I asked.

She thought a moment then began a wonderful story: "We were poor and didn't have lots of store-bought things. My favorite flower project was our summer playhouse—we didn't have a regular playhouse, but one we planted every year.

"In early summer, my mother would wake us up with 'Get up you sleepyheads, today's the day!' and we would get out of bed and pull on our clothes. We didn't even want to eat breakfast, but she would make us sit down and take our time. It all just served to heighten the excitement. We couldn't wait to get outside.

"Chores done, watering can and stick in tow, we would head outside and take time choosing the best, flattest, sunniest spot in our garden. Then the work would begin.

"Mother would use the stick to trace out a large rectangle, usually about 6 by 9 feet, leaving a small opening for a doorway. She would drag the stick along the ground and gouge out a trench a couple of inches deep. My little sister and brother would trail behind and drop in seeds. John would drop in a big, fat sunflower seed; daintily, my sister would tuck in a 'Heavenly Blue' morning glory seed. I would trudge along behind them lugging the huge tin watering can. I'd use my foot to knock the earth back over the seeds and then I'd give them a small drink of water.

"Every day one of us would have the chore of walking that rectangle of land and giving a drink of water to the sleeping seeds. We all hoped to be the one to discover the first awakening green heads that poked through the soil.

"Once the green of the sunflowers peeked through the earth, we became even more interested in our growing playhouse. Usually, we would each water the plot once a day. Soon the sunflowers were climbing skyward and the 'Heavenly Blue' morning glories were wrapping their tendrils around the stalk and heading upward too.

"I don't know how long it took before the sunflowers were at least twice as tall as us kids, but soon they were and Mother would come out with a big roll of used string we had saved up through the winter. 'John, you fetch the ladder and we'll get your roof going today,' Mother would say. My brother would drag out the big ladder and Mother would tie string to the top of one sunflower's



neck. She would lace the string across that rectangle, back and forth, back and forth, 'til all we could see was a spider web of string against the blue Nebraska sky.

"In a matter of days, the Heavenly Blues would start journeying across the web, and soon the string was invisible. Looking up, all you could see was the gold of the sunflower faces, the green of all the leaves and like patches of the sky itself, the blue of those morning glories. I'll tell you there was nothing like crawling through the door of that playhouse and lying on the ground looking up through that incredible lacework of vines and flowers. I guess you could say that I spent the best days of my childhood playing, dreaming, and sleeping in that little shelter.

"How do you go about furnishing a house so special? Surely you cannot go to a store and buy anything that will fit properly into such a home. The children searched fields and woods and found everything they needed. Their mother did not have to teach them to do this; they just knew, instinctively, what was right for their playhouse. What they chose was what their mother and father, grandmother and grandfather had used before them.

For a table, they rolled in a large, flat rock. Perfect chairs came from the woodpile—short, fat stumps. Doll beds were made of corn husks and down-stuffed milkweed pods. For carpets, moss and lichens; for coverlets, great big leaves (sycamores were soft, but woolly lamb's ears and old-fashioned mullein were the best). Dinnerware was not a problem—round honesty plant pods were dishes, acorns and caps made cups and saucers, a plump, red rosehip poked with a thorn became a teapot with a spout.

Filarees were scissors, wild walnut halves were the porridge bowls (look at the heart inside them), beech leaves were napkins, and a burr-basket (from burdock) filled with miniature wildflowers sat in the middle of the rock-table. The garden was an endless toy store.

At night, the children ran barefoot through the grass catching fireflies. Gently, so as not to injure the fragile, flickering lights, they tucked them into the blossoms of hollyhocks and knit the edges together with a long twig. Some of the hollyhock-firefly lanterns were hung inside the sunflower house. Others were used in fairy-like processions through the moist darkness of the garden.

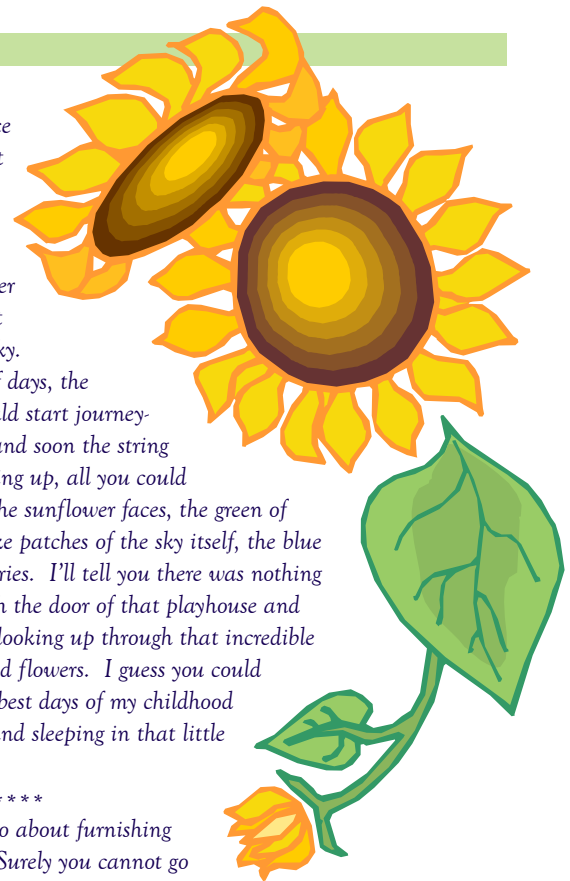
¹ Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods. Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 2005) 7.

² Ken Finch, A Parents Guide to Nature Play (Green Hearts INC, 2009) 7-9.

³ Finch 3.

⁴ Finch 4.

⁵ Sharon Lovejoy, Sunflower Houses. A Book for Children and Their Grown-Ups (New York, NY: Workman, 2001) 61-66.

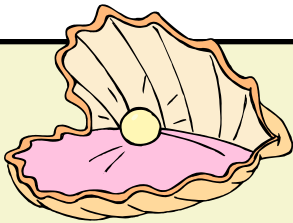


Congratulations Graduates!



Kindergartners: Jasmine Anderson, Emma Cummings, Tia Good, Oliver Latham, Sabrina McDonnell, Mason Molter, Trey Nelson, Kaden Palmer, Tevan Solomon, Jasper Steindorf, Kyron Taggart, Hayden Woodring
Sixth Year: Isabelle Cuthbertson, Paul Harms, McKenna Hulslander, Kiley Lisk, Rose Madison, Mathew Martini, Charlie McCadden, MaryPat McNicoll, Sarah McNicoll, Trenton Vann

Seniors: Zac Parker, Sam Watson, Peter Hoag, Flint Martino, Mariah Gladstone, Elena Potter, Liana Bates
Teacher Education: Debbie Buchanan, Susan Bernt, Kelley Cooper, Heather Blood, Amanda Fleming, Judy Strom, Sharlo Haggard
...and everyone in between!!



Nurturing Great Pearls of Wisdom

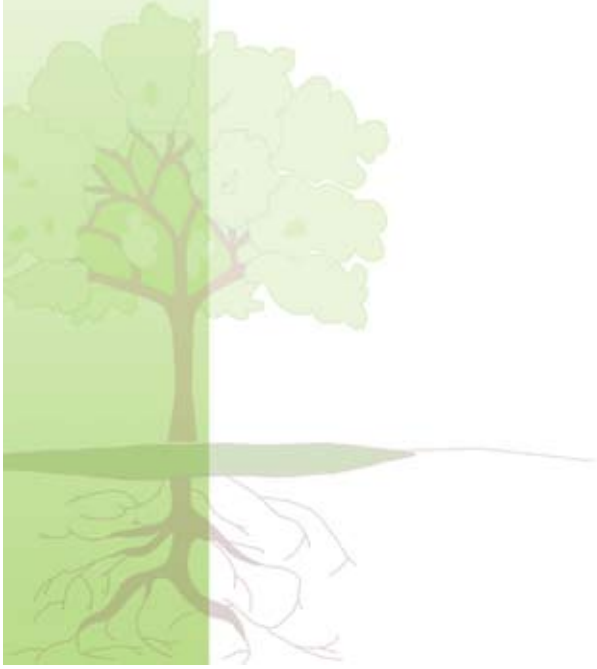
Montessori is a complex philosophy and for those of us not directly immersed in it on a daily basis, it is important to continuously educate ourselves, refresh, and broaden our understanding of it. Familiarizing oneself with the positive aspects of a Montessori education and knowing that those things exist here keep us firmly rooted in our course. Knowing that parents are on the same page as teachers and are mutually supportive can only benefit children. In addition to the academic aspect of the curriculum, Montessori gives equal time to the social, emotional and physical development of the child – adding up to whole child education.

We urge parents to maintain their own continuing education in Montessori philosophy. In addition to what is distributed and/or presented by the schools, here are some easy places to start...

- Enjoy this five minute YouTube video on one parent's perspective of the core contrast between Montessori and conventional schools: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcgN0IEh5IA>
- The American Montessori Society website, Family Resource tab. www.amshq.org
- Any of the books on children's connection to nature referenced in this newsletter are consistent with the core values of Montessori. This does not represent a political statement, but regards only the needs of children, the quality of their education, their health, well-being, and development.

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Bulletin Board



Woodland Classroom Prep. Day

Parents welcome to help (counts toward Community Service Hours).

Please call the office to schedule your time for

Thurs., August 25th • 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

**Classroom Placements will be mailed by August 10th.*

Woodland Parent Orientation

For All families, new and returning.

Meeting followed by a Dessert Potluck - bring your favorite!

Thurs., August 25th • 6:00 p.m.

Child care no charge. Earn one Community Service Hour for attending.

Woodland Open House for New Families

Fri., August 26th • 9:00-11:00 a.m.

New families only. Bring your plant, photo, clothes box, meet your

teacher, etc.

Record of Kindergarten Immunization boosters due in the office before the first day of school!

First Day of School
Monday, August 29th

Labor Day - No School

Monday, September 5th

Center Closed, care not available

KME Band Begins

Tuesday, September 6th

8:00 a.m.

Open to any Elementary 2 students

KME Parent Orientation

Mandatory for All KME families, new and returning.

Thurs., September 8th • 5:15 p.m.

Elementary II Fall Trip to Duck Lake

Thurs-Fri, September 15-16th

Montessori Mile

Accept the Challenge!

Wed., September 28th @ KME



**Congratulations to AJ Zogar
and family who welcomed
Hazel Grace on June 18th!**