

Being Outdoors with My Children

by Amy Robertshaw

My two year old daughter awoke the other morning in her crib and stripped down to her "birthday suit"

before she called out her cry. "Mama! Mama!" I rushed to her side. She was holding a tube of cream I had mistakenly left in her room.

what might this day hold in store? So, I began to sing a little song, made up in the

Outside What is it about being outdoors that seems to make

ing's frustrations in the air at our home. He can't understand what anyone has

the day. And as for my children, the difference is in the air. It is the

fun and joy and play. The joys and sorrows of delight are absorbed by the day, the trees and the flowers.

the joy and the peace of the day, the joy of the day, the joy of the day.

Our outdoor adventures are usually as simple as heading to our own backyard.

unstructured time. Unstructured time to play, to wander, to explore the natural world in which we have

deity, we simply can *be*, taking in whatever the world offers on this day.

For the days when the backyard or the neighborhood is not

rially Stonewall Farm where we visit the woods and the stream, we have

the lovely shallow stream. Walking at Goose Pond is a delight as we have watched the children explore

frogs, and picked blueberries.

As I have stood by watching my children shed their shoes and delve into the play of sandboxes and rolling

in the grass I have felt such a satisfaction. I am grateful that Isaac was not interested in camps or classes, for

this year at least. Instead he wisely knew what he wanted: when we can have as much un-

structured outdoor play time as possible. I am thrilled that Isaac loves to pick blackberries and catch frogs. I love

I am no expert in parenting practices. And let me be clear that all of our summer explorations have not been heavenly experiences with all the voices singing on in the distance. Of course, everything has its moments...

point onward. One thing is true though. Few of the ideas out there in the parenting world are as simple as lacing up your shoes and stepping outdoors.

Over the past decade we have all been reading more and more about the decline of outdoor, unstructured play for children. Entire volumes can and have been written on the subject. Dick and I have looked

news to us this indoor, sedentary experience is linked to a host of mental health problems.

In this fast paced world, with such an emphasis on high academics, some schools have reduced class size to maximize teaching time. The American Academy of Pediatrics warns of a decline in response to many federal education policies threaten free play and free play time. For example, the report states that "free and unstructured play is healthy and - in fact - essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones, as well as helping them become more resilient."²

babies take great conspicuous delight when they experience warm water or a breeze on their skin.

Play. It is the magic of childhood. In the book *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, Edward Hallowell, MD,

from which our children build their creativity and imagination.

Summer is nearly upon us. The gift of summer will find us

from *Sanctuaries of Childhood*, by Shea Darian.

the face of every flower we meet, let us take more time in our daily journey to get our hearts above and infuse our minds with the glow of summer.⁴

¹ Louv, page 32

² aap.org

³ Hallowell, page 103

⁴ Darian, *Sanctuaries of Childhood*