

## 7-28-17 Children in Touch with Nature

Children haven't really changed over the ages. They imitate. They look for guidance. They look for amusement. They make amusement. They are curious. They like to keep busy, even if they don't know it. They are sponges for knowledge. They have lessons to learn from their parents and extended family and they wonder. There is so much to learn; so, they wonder. How do things work? What happens next? What do you do in certain situations?

These questions used to be discussed around the camp fire or around the dinner table. Now, it seems as though it is difficult to find the time for it.

Children haven't changed but life has changed. We are automated, and connected to technology more than we are to people much of the time. Technology was supposed to free up time. Time for what, though? Creativity? Exploration?

How's that working out?

If we examine how we spend our time, as we examine how we spend our money, would we find ourselves rich or poor?

This is something to ponder as we raise our children. Not only is it important to value how we spend our time, but it is also important to reflect upon how our children view life, and how it is lived by those people important in their lives. They are observing us and our decisions.

As most families are busy with both parents working, it is all the more challenging to raise our children. Families are busier than ever with sports and camps. They all have a tight schedule.

My parents had a tight schedule also, with eight children to raise and bills to pay but we talked at supper and we had simple pleasures nearby. Those fun activities were many, now that I think about it. Fishing, camping, walks in the woods, a quick visit to nearby school grounds for fun on the swings and slides. All year round, we ventured into the woods for a quick camp fire and hot dogs and cocoa. Sometimes the winter conditions were just right for sliding through the woods on the icy surface of the snow. Then, there was "sledding" on pine needles.

When we fished, we sometimes ran out of worms and my father would turn over logs and look for salamanders, the ordinary reddish brown type. My father would cut off its tail, explaining to me how they could and would regenerate it in short time. This is true. (Fantastic science lessons abound!) The wiggling tail was put onto a hook and became bait.

I credit these early childhood experiences for my own sense of curiosity which is by far the most important attribute for a health agent. Be curious. Make discoveries. Plan accordingly. Move ahead.

A recent perc test is responsible for my memories and ponderings. A young girl, about eight years old was watching nearby with her parents. She had just returned from a summer art camp and was holding a clay coil pot, a gift proudly presented to her parents. As the excavator

dug the hole deeper and deeper, the soils changed. Towards the bottom of the ten-foot deep hole, the loamy sands turned to a fine sandy silt. It wasn't quite "plastic-y" enough to call it silt or clay but it had enough clay that a small handful could form a nice sphere just by bouncing it around in the hand. It looked like a very large light grey marble. I handed it to the girl. She smiled. She touched it. She squished it. That made it crack open. I explained the sand component and how that interfered with it holding together to make a nice coil like she had made in her art class that day. She nodded but she still liked her lump of moist soil.

Handing her a twig, she asked, "What's that for?" "To use for whatever you might want to press into the soil. Initials, shapes, designs, whatever you want." She smiled and drew a heart. And she asked for sparkles and jewels. Girls will be girls. The jewels weren't available, but she was still interested enough in the ball of soil that she smiled and smiled, holding it in her hands.

The neighbor's children arrived next and they wanted some! There was plenty to go around. Walking over to the pile of soils from the excavation, I grabbed a large chunk of the sandy clay loam and brought it back to the children, dividing it into four chunks.

Those children were so excited to receive their gifts! They all said, "Cool!" That term had two meanings and those meanings are significant. They all realized as soon as they touched their ball of soil that it was cool in temperature on that hot day. It was cool because it was from about nine feet down and moist with cool ground water.

It was also cool as in, you know, cool, daddy-o, even though they don't know that expression.

I left that perc test happy as the four children walked away with their gifts, saying, "Cool" knowing they had their tactile discovery for the day. I hoped they would explore for hours what they could do with that chunk of moist, pliable, cool, grey soil. I smiled, knowing they were in touch with what nature had to offer.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax and Plympton. She can be reached at 781 293 6768 and [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)