

WIN

A POP UP
CAMPER VAN

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The Green Parent

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Free Range

GIVE YOUR KIDS A
1970's SUMMER

CREATE YOUR
DREAM HOME

.....
*'We must
remember
our inner
child who
once ran
barefoot in
the woods'*

THE MAN WHO
PLANTS TREES

.....
10 STEPS TO A
PAIN FREE
BIRTH

RAISE
MINDFUL
TEENS

**TAKE THE
CHALLENGE**

7 days to calmer,
happier kids

**SACRED
SUMMER**

Explore
magical
places

HOW TO

Reduce
stress

Heal skin
with diet

Make an
eye mask

*Free
inside*

Beauty Bible
Relax Cards



HOW TO GIVE YOUR KIDS A 1970's Summer

Andrea Mynard gets excited about allowing her daughter a free-range summer holiday

PHOTOGRAPH *David Handley*

THE SUN IS SHINING, THE summer holidays are beckoning and I'm starting to day-dream about children climbing trees, having picnics and camping out in the tree-house. Images of my own 1970s childhood flash into my mind: cycling off with friends to a nearby brook to find tadpoles that we attempted to bring home in jam-jars, making treasure maps and dens and generally running wild with the three children who lived next door.

We did have a couple of planned days out each summer holiday but what I remember best is competing to see who could climb to the highest point in the apple trees, making camps with deck chairs and sun-loungers, sleeping out in the garden in a tent and daring each other to creep into the house to find extra penguin biscuits. Or just setting out for an 'adventure' on our bikes, jam sandwiches in our rucksacks.

I wasn't even growing up in the countryside but in the suburbs of a Midlands town, but perhaps thanks to being an avid reader of 'The Famous Five' and 'Children of the New Forest' I revelled in the freedom to play outdoors in our garden, in the streets around us and on the patches of waste ground leading to our favourite brook. In my head I think my siblings, friends and I were exploring treasure islands, romantic prairies, a vast undiscovered wilderness.

My indulgent nostalgia has partly been prompted by reading Raffaella Barker's 'Come and Tell Me Some Lies' a wonderful, semi-autobiographical novel where she

'I REVELLED IN THE FREEDOM TO PLAY OUTDOORS IN THE STREETS AROUND US AND ON THE PATCHES OF WASTE GROUND LEADING TO OUR FAVOURITE BROOK'

draws on her own wild, 70s childhood in Norfolk – growing up with many brothers and sisters, grumpy donkeys, goats, dogs and rabbits in a house up a long track with fields and woods behind it. She describes waking up to the birds and thinking, what are we going to do today?

Yet already many of this year's precious summery days of freedom are filling up with planned play-dates, there are suggestions of trips out, kids' summer activity clubs to think about and my daughter's school bag is full of literature about exciting days out nearby offering 'family fun.' All very tempting but if I'm not careful those days of waking up with no particular plan for the day are going to be non-existent for my own family.

Cramming Activities?

When I consider all the wonderful kid's activities on offer these days, it certainly seems as if we've become more child-centred in focus than during my own 1970s childhood. Obviously a good thing, but coupled with

our fear of letting children become bored, it can lead to a tendency to cram too much in.

It's easy to feel guilt when our children are left to get bored. I can picture many times when I've promised trips to the playground, qualified with 'Just let me finish the ironing/ do the hovering/answer a few emails and we'll go,' and felt terrible as it takes longer than planned and I can hear disappointed groans and moans in the background.

Allowing the Real Fun

Yet actually, when children are unintentionally left to become bored, it's often when the real fun happens. In my own home, it often revolves around potions. Murky ones, found lurking in corners of the house much later – in good weather there'll be 'perfume' made in buckets outside, on rainy days there'll be a request for a tea bag, the chalk will disappear, the bathroom door will close and I'll know there's a stinky potion being concocted. I may miss the sunny prettiness of all the primroses in my garden when they're de-headed for perfume and groan at the clearing up to do after indoor potion-making but I have to smile too as this is exactly the sort of play that reminds me of my own childhood games.

Rebecca Fossett, who lives with husband, Joe, and children; Leo and Daisy on a small farm from which they run camel treks in Warwickshire, also remembers enjoying a 1970s childhood and is appreciative of the self-reliance and spirit of adventure that it's instilled in her (she went on to work with lions in a circus >



> before training camels). She recalls:

'My childhood was spent on the back of my pony, often used as a form of transport to meet friends. I was very lucky as there was far less traffic around, I'd be out for hours. I didn't have a mobile phone, I'd call when I got to my friend's house. If something went wrong I had to sort it out for myself and I think this is really important – having this sort of freedom teaches you to look after yourself.'

Giving them Freedom

There are so many powerful benefits to be gained from releasing our children a little, letting them make mistakes and get into scrapes. Just giving them a little space to play freely with friends (without close adult supervision 24 hours a day) means that children will gain self-confidence, learn all sorts of social skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, compromise and communication. Then there's the sheer "feel-good" factor of having the freedom to play outside that's so good for mental health as well as physical health in later life.

Having given her children (now 14 and 16) the freedom to explore the fields around their farmhouse with friends, Rebecca Fossett agrees that it's 'given them independence and confidence' as has growing up with camels:

'The idea of going from one activity to another is abhorrent to me – they may end up super-achieving/playing three instruments but they'll live in the car the whole time. Both of my children ride, they've had a childhood going off with friends and messing about by the stream, making hay bale castles. And being around

big animals teaches you how to be on your toes more than growing up with hamsters.'

While Leo and Daisy have obviously learnt much from their natural surroundings and their free-range childhood, Rebecca points out that 'you can't stop the march of technology'. Her children get distracted by the delights of 24 hour television or screen games; when a friend recently brought an Xbox to play with on a sleepover, they all loved playing with it late at night but they'd spent hours jumping off a bridge into the stream first.

The Unscheduled Summer

Allowing our children to enjoy some of this type of freedom doesn't have to be restricted to a country upbringing of course. An unscheduled summer holiday can be great fun in a town or city, especially if you live in a neighbourhood with lots of children nearby – messing about on scooters or playing football in the street until far too late is great fun anywhere. As is having your best friend over for a sleepover, chatting and eating marshmallows from sleeping bags in the back garden. Alison Wright, mum of Nathan, seven, reminded me of my own suburban free-range childhood when she recalled growing up in the 1970s in Coventry:

'A gang of us used to go off on our bikes all over, we played out in the street, went to the park on our bikes, found frogs on some common ground. We fell out, we made up and we just had a lot of fun. We used to walk to school

on our own, we learnt to cross the road, to know about the dangers of cars, not accepting sweets off strangers and we looked after each other. Family trips out would be blackberrying or going for a walk - nothing beats just being able to be outside.'

Now living in a quiet close of a village, Alison and her husband Alan relish seeing Nathan play outside with the other five boys living in neighbouring houses: 'They get their bikes and scooters out in the close, and have a den in the middle – we have certain rules that they have to abide by/they know the limits of how far they're allowed to go, but the benefits are exercise, fresh air, learning to take responsibility for what they're doing. And they're not stuck in front of a screen.'

Obviously working out and agreeing the limits that you're comfortable for your children to roam within depends on their age (and personality too) and where you live, but even if it's just letting younger children loose to dig up the garden and make mud pies, having a more hands-off approach to the summer has to be more relaxing for all of us. I'm definitely looking forward to a free-range summer - waking up to the birds and wondering what to do with the day sounds like perfect planning to me.



MORE INSPIRATION

READ about a wonderfully wild 1970s childhood in 'Come and Tell Me some Lies' by Raffaella Barker, originally published 1994 but republished 2014 by Bloomsbury.

EXPLORE jacamels.co.uk to read about Rebecca and Joseph Fossett's camel treks.



We asked:
Structure or no structure
- how do you manage the holidays?

FAY HOLMES Not all structured. It's good for them to unwind and breathe again. Find their toys without time restrictions. Put together a toy chest for them, have some crafts and jigsaws, rainy day stuff and make sure they get done too. My son gets very cross if I make a promise that gets

broken! And the National Trust have heaps going on. The Wildlife Trust are great too. Enjoy them

REBECCA HUXTABLE-SMITH I have a calendar that starts to fill up with activities and events. Two of my children have autism so keeping as much structure in place as possible is important. I also keep a list of ideas for activities and events that can be done at any time dependent on the weather, walk in the woods, a picnic

by the stream, a bike ride etc., we cross them off as they get done. It also gives the children a record of all the things they've done during the holiday.

MELANIE BRAMMER We have a plan. Each week we try to make sure that we: go swimming twice, go on a long walk, go on a bike ride, cook something together, craft something, go to one of our favourite NT properties, go to a local museum or library, do the grocery shopping,

and do one thing that costs (10 pin bowling, soft play, safari park, farm park). We just aim to do a couple of those each day which means that we get lots of activity and out of the house, so in between times can be completely unstructured.

NICKY MERRICK We don't have any structure for 52 weeks of the year. It's not an issue. Kids are quite capable of entertaining themselves and making their mark on the

world in their own way. We are autonomous home educators.

KATE TALBOT-PONSONBY We just tend to chill out and go with the flow. Planning is done a night or two beforehand. I feel that if they have time to get bored, that's when they become more creative, both in terms of crafts, and playing.

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