

BY DAVE FORREST

A
RETURN
TO THE TREES

DAVE FORREST

A Return to the Trees

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*For my beautiful grandchildren.
May you return to the trees often.*

Contents

1	A Return to the Trees	1
2	Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old	5
3	Camping Conversations	14
4	Shinrin-Yoku - Who Knew?	18
5	Goin' Fishin'	23
6	My Londoners	29
7	Outdoor Education	37
	<i>Our Outdoor Albums</i>	47
	<i>Also by Dave Forrest</i>	70

One

A Return to the Trees



Retirement for me has meant a return to the trees. Jamie once gave me a shirt with a famous John Muir quote, “I hear the mountains calling and I must return.” The last five years, I’ve had time to answer their call.

On many Fridays, your mom and I take walks, exploring the Bay Area’s most beautiful forests and hills: Pt. Reyes, Half Moon Bay, and the East Bay’s Joaquin Miller and Tilden Parks. My favorite weekly activities include kayaking on Lake Chabot, hiking on the Sequoia-Bay View Trail, and bike riding up Cull Canyon.

Friends, Tom and Tim, have helped me rediscover old Mt. Tam challenges. We took the Dipsea trail from Old Mill Park in Mill Valley to Muir Woods and then on to Stinson Beach. And we have a regular Wednesday date to walk and talk on Oakland’s redwood trails.

Jamie has shown me I can still backpack. We’ve traveled old

A Return to the Trees

trails to Glen Camp and found a new one to Sky Camp on our recent trip to Pt. Reyes.

I've made several excursions to Truckee, to enjoy Jim's new home in the Sierra pines. In the spring, we've hiked in green meadows next to a winding stream; in winter we've skied down white, crystalline, slopes.

I've taken my grand kids to green places, too. On our cross-country odyssey in 2018, Nate and I marveled at the verdant Wyoming countryside, including the towering Tetons and gorgeous Yellowstone Park. You can read about our adventure in "Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year Old."

Our family has established the tradition of camping trips to the redwoods of Samuel P. Taylor State Park. Each of our grand children wasted no time wading into the creek and sliding down the fallen redwood log, just as their mom and aunties had done as kids. We camped there with the O'Bergs last summer. This summer, our London contingent joined the family fun.

I've camped with Daisuke and Emiko in both California and Washington. I've written about one of my visits with Daisuke to the redwoods in West Marin in "Camping Conversations."

Nature nearby helped me survive the long, lonely, isolation of the pandemic. I took daily walks up the steep green ridge above our Sheffield Village home. When he was still able, Mack and I meandered nearby streets enjoying our neighbors' gardens. After it was deemed safe, I donned my mask walking the trails of the East Bay's redwood parks.

After the virus quarantine, we spent time in the trees and on the beach to reconnect with our far-flung family. When the O'Bergs returned from Okinawa, we spent sun soaked hours in the pool and ocean with Andrew, Abby, and Nate on Coronado Island. I've documented a few of these post-COVID adventures

A Return to the Trees

with grandchildren in the story, “Goin’ Fishin’”

Even in the big city London, we’ve enjoyed beautiful green parks and pathways. The English have made sure theirs is a city of trees and grass, as well as shops and homes. You can read about my exploits with Saya and Sachi in “My Londoners.”

“The World is Too Much With Us,” Wordsworth’s poem laments. Sadly, we are reminded of this truth with daily headlines of murder and mayhem. “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” Henry David Thoreau responds. I believe he is right.

Modern science has taught us that our precious forests capture carbon dioxide, replenishing oxygen in the air and helping to cool a warming planet.

Trees are also healers of the human heart. If you take a trip to the forest, you’ll glimpse children who still know how to play tag and build a fort. You’ll meet wanderers without smart phones, who will look you in the eye and make conversation. A return to the trees will make you more civilized, not less so.

The Japanese say spending time in nature improves human health. I’ve included a tongue and cheek endorsement of their practice of “forest bathing” in “Shinrin-Yoku- Who Knew?”

My daughters and son-in-laws have done a great job getting their little ones into the trees. They’ve made sure my grandchildren are getting lots of exercise and fresh air. I’ve written about their triumphs in the final story, “Outdoor Education.”

Enjoy this first volume of stories of my return to the trees with grand kids in tow. I am looking forward to lots more outdoor adventures together.

September 2022

A Return to the Trees



Backpacking at Pt. Reyes - 2016

Two

Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old



If you want a real adventure, take a cross country trip with a seven-year-old grandson.

You'll get to see your little one's important firsts, like Nate's first trip to the Grand Canyon. You can watch him take his first photographs with his first camera, capturing the grandeur of the Canyon. I even witnessed Nate's first selfie, with one of the wonders of the world in the background. That's my millennial.

Equally fun, Nate tasting his first root beer float. Discussion ensued, "Granddad, did you realize you can drink the root beer before you eat and then have the ice cream for dessert?"

On our cross-country journey, I got to see my grandchild's eyes grow big as a herd of buffalo interrupted traffic, crossing the road in the Grand Tetons. Be prepared for the intoxicating effect of animals in Yellowstone. On the day Nate spotted his

A Return to the Trees

first moose, prong horn sheep, and elk, he also swore he “might have seen two alligators in the Yellowstone river.” Don’t try to talk him out of this, at least not until the animal inebriation has worn off.



Nate photographing the Grand Canyon - 2018

Admittedly, there will be disappointments on your adventure. At the end of a long day we ran out of time to see the Yellowstone’s Upper and Lower Falls. Don’t worry, seven-year-olds bounce back quickly. That evening Nate squealed with delight at the indoor waterfalls at the Holiday Inn in Sheridan, Wyoming. I kid you not, there were indoor waterfalls, a swimming pool and 4 holes of miniature golf. So, take that Yellowstone.

Traveling with a seven-year-old may make you feel the sage. A long trip gives you time to teach your young protégé how to

Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old

read a map, use a compass, even open a pocket knife. I promise, mom, it was a very small pocket knife and Nate only did this maneuver with scrupulous adult supervision. How proud I felt the day after I taught Nate about Theodore Roosevelt's role in preventing the extinction of the buffalo, when my young pupil saw TR's face etched in stone on Mt. Rushmore exclaiming, "the President who saved the buffalo."

But don't be deceived. A cross country journey with a little one will often make you feel more ignorant than smart. While I could explain what a geyser is after Nate watched Old Faithful erupt, I quickly fell out of my depth when asked how they form. Or for that matter, how stars were first made, or "If God created Adam and Eve, who created God?", as Nate asked Mamo and me on an Oceanside beach.

The best response may be to write down all the questions that a seven-year-old asks that you cannot answer, for further research, of course. Alas, our list of questions grew much more quickly than we had time to answer, but they are there for Nate's future investigations.

Be prepared to be amazed too, if your grandchildren are geniuses like mine. I listened carefully as our artist Nate explained that the rocks we saw at Zion National Park were mainly red with a little green in them, but the rocks farther north appeared mainly green with a little red in them.

"Do you see the difference Grandad?"

"I do now, Nate, but not until you pointed it out to me."

On your trip, you'll realize how little difference there is in the reactions of someone sixty-four and seven when it comes to seeing a gorgeous cloud that "looks like a Stegosaurus." Age doesn't really make a difference. Nate and I equally enjoyed golden sunsets and were both in awe of the "green ocean" of

A Return to the Trees

Wyoming grasslands we saw descending the mountains.

As a grandparent, I had to revive some of those atrophied parental muscles. You'll need to remember that when a child says they are hungry or must use the bathroom, it is already too late. So, anticipate. You'll have to remind yourself how to say "Yes" to three requests, so that you get cooperation when you say "No" to the fourth. And you'll need quick reflexes so you can divert your seven-year old's attention from the roadside sign for the "The Reptile Gardens" on your way to Mt. Rushmore because, let's face it, Nate would pick the lizards over the Presidents in a heartbeat.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge our stellar traveling crew. In addition to Nate and I, our two cars included Nate's dad, Rob, and the O'Berg's thirteen-year-old dog, Hudson, my fellow senior citizen on the trip. Rob is a Marine Captain with a specialty in logistics. When you are traveling with a seven-year-old across country, I would highly recommend bringing a Marine with you. Rob provided crucial logistical support. He could carry more bags on one trip to and from hotel rooms than any person I have ever met. Every morning he organized our cars with meticulous precision, making sure they had fuel. And when the GPS malfunctioned in our lead car and we had crossed the Mississippi River twice trying to get out of St. Louis, Rob could read a map, a dying art. And most fun of all, our Marine Captain bought walkie-talkies and taught Nate and I how to use them. And so, we chatted over the airwaves, as we traveled the highways and byways of the eastern half of the country. "Roger That."

Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old



Father and son cross country trip - 2018

A Return to the Trees

Prepare to be entertained by your seven-year-old. Nate made one long drive shorter by creating a puppet show in the back seat with his three stuffed animals, Diamond the rattlesnake, Tuff the buffalo, and Green Extreme the turtle. Nate gives serious thought to naming his stuffed animals. The rehearsal was quite elaborate and included three acts. It kept him entertained for the drive. I was somewhat relieved Nate forgot his promise to perform the entire show at the motel that night. Does that make me a bad grandparent?

The thing is seven-year-olds love to laugh at their own jokes. I learned that if they think they've told a good one, they'll tell it repeatedly. For example, Nate decided to surprise me by hiding Diamond the rattlesnake under my pillow, in my suitcase, under my chair ... well, you get the idea. He laughed and laughed each time I feigned surprise. His delight never got old.

I learned on one long drive, Nate was not only excited to learn but to teach as well. On hearing that I was not a golfer, he made it his mission to instruct me in his favorite game. Nate explained, "First you need to learn to putt by practicing close to the cup and then moving farther back." He coached me in hitting with irons and woods. I think we may have another teacher in the family. Before we reached Virginia, Nate designed a virtual putting green on his tablet with Minecraft to help me conceptualize the putting process. I know you didn't believe me, but my grandchildren really are geniuses.

Nate also shared the important rules of golf sportsmanship: not to talk when another golfer makes a shot, not to brag if you win and not to complain if you lose, which we agreed were good guidelines for any competitive endeavor. And Nate added a few of his own rules. He explained you shouldn't golf anywhere near wild animals because they might choke on a golf ball, and

Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old

a golfer should avoid hitting a ball high into a flock of geese or into a beehive of angry bees... all of which seemed very useful modern additions to the rules of a centuries old game.

Seven-year-olds are quixotic in their moods, not unlike the seventeen-year-olds I taught. One minute they are having fun, the next it's a culture of complaint. Even if you've had a great day they can turn on you. My advice is book motels with swimming pools and throw them in. A few minutes in a pool, morning, noon, or night, will soothe the savage beast... and if they've stressed you out, jump in with them.

Inquiring minds might want to know what to pack for your seven-year-old on a 3000-mile car journey. The box I sent Nate said, "Do not open until car trip." The day we departed he opened it to find: baseball gloves and a Frisbee, a rock collection and a book about rocks, kits for making glider airplanes and world monuments, and three books on the Grand Canyon, Zion, and Yellowstone National Parks. Nate's parents hit a home run with a camera and journal, and Rob bought some great art supplies along the way.

I should deal head on with the issue of electronics. Nate did have a tablet, loaded with his favorite program *Minecraft*. It kept him occupied for many miles, along with the other items from his box. Nate used *Minecraft* to create several homes, a virtual putting green, and was designing a hotel as we drove through West Virginia.

Seven-year-olds can be great conversationalists too. During our trip, Nate shared dozens of inventions he was thinking about from amazing roller coasters and water slides to a variety of new ideas, all of which involved suction cups. And as we plowed through five Midwestern states, Nate made the longest drive of our journey a fun one. We discussed favorites: favorite

A Return to the Trees

movies, favorite TV shows, favorite books and favorite songs. I learned he appreciates *Mary Poppins* and he found out that I enjoyed *Big Hero Six* and *Coco*. We both like fiction and nonfiction books, although Nate explained he liked nonfiction a little better, especially any book about rocks or reptiles, which he reminded me included dinosaurs.

All I can say is that a cross-country trip with a seven-year-old is totally worth it. It's fun and you are bound to have some special moments. Mine came watching Nate and his Marine Dad explore Mt. Rushmore's Presidents on the 4th of July. Another came at a 50s diner in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Nate asked the waitress, "What's a malt? I'm trying to decide between a malt and a milkshake." The waitress tried her best to describe the flavor to my seven-year-old. After a lengthy pause Nate replied, "I think I'll order a root beer float."

As a senior citizen, I receive lots of travel offers, from Swedish luxury cruises to AARP bus tours. *National Geographic* sends its glossy brochures for far flung places and REI advertises its extreme outdoor excursions. However, if you want a real adventure take a cross country car trip with a grandchild, and see our big, beautiful, nation through the eyes of a seven-year-old.

July 2018

Through the Eyes of a Seven-Year-Old



*Daisuke playing in the redwoods at Samuel P. Taylor State Park -
2019*

Three

Camping Conversations



My four-year-old grandson, Daisuke, and I went camping recently. We had some important conversations.

“What would you like to do first?” I asked Daisuke as we got close to Samuel P. Taylor State Park.

“First, I’d like to stop for ice cream, then let’s see the animals, and later we can play in the creek.”

At 10:30 am we stopped for ice cream at the Lagunitas Grocery Store. Dessert first is a grandparent’s prerogative.

We sat on the park bench in front of the store, Daisuke with his ice cream and me with my coffee.

He told me, “Camping is my favorite thing to do.”

“Mine too.”

We headed for the little natural museum at the Pt. Reyes headquarters to view their animal exhibit.

On the way up the hill to see the Morgan horses, Daisuke saw

Camping Conversations

poppies. He picked one and told me, "I'm picking this poppy for you because I love you. Now you pick one for me because you love me."

"Here's your poppy Daisuke because I love you."

Back at the campsite, we headed down to Papermill Creek. As we waded into the stream Daisuke said, "I feel good holding your hand Grandad."

"Me too Daisuke, I like holding your hand."

Daisuke threw rocks with enthusiasm, exclaiming, "Grandad we're having an adventure!"

"That we are Daisuke."



Grandad and Daisuke exploring Papermill Creek -2019

In the evening, Daisuke and I cooked macaroni and cheese and hot dogs. As we ate, Daisuke complimented the meal, "I like your food Grandad." It was the first time in 64 years anyone

A Return to the Trees

had said that to me.

“Thanks for helping Daisuke.”

After we roasted marshmallows, Daisuke asked, “Can we explore?”

“What do you mean explore?”

“We could take the flashlight and take a night walk. We could look for big animals, little animals and vampires.”

“OK, let’s explore.”

As we walked, we saw the moon and stars through the redwood trees. Much better than vampires I thought.

“We’re exploring Grandad!”

“Yes, we are Daisuke.”

In the morning after breakfast, Daisuke suggested, “Let’s play tag Grandad.”

“I’m awfully slow.”

“I know and I’m fast. OK, let’s play dinosaurs.”

We found a nearby grove of redwoods with lots of room for dinosaurs to play, “Are we meat eaters or leaf eaters?” I asked.

“Well, you can say we’re meat eaters, but I say carnivores. I’m a T-Rex.”

Daisuke spent well over a half hour reenacting the drama that was the late Cretaceous Period, complete with a running narration of dinosaur versus T-Rex during the Mesozoic Era.

“It’s time to go Daisuke.”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, I want to stay another night Grandad.”

“We can’t tonight, but we’ll come back this summer ... because I know camping is your favorite thing to do.”

“It is my favorite thing to do, especially with you.”

April 2019

Camping Conversations



*Emiko camping in Washington at Kanaskat-Palmer State Park -
2021*

Four

Shinrin-Yoku - Who Knew?



I was just about to start my bike ride up Cull Canyon when I received the digital Kaiser Thrive newsletter on my phone, boasting an amazing Japanese therapy. The article claimed Shinrin-Yoku was invented by the Japanese in 1982 and, “has been found to lower blood pressure, heart rates, and levels of harmful hormones – like cortisol, which your body produces when stressed.”

Kaiser suggested that a person of any age should do this practice “at least 20 minutes every day.” Shinrin-Yoku sounded amazing, especially since the evening before the Internet and the TV stopped working at 151 Covington Street causing a fair amount of stress and consternation. Let me explain.

It was 101 degrees in Oakland. I had assembled two more fans for your mom to go with our multitude of air conditioners and cooling appliances strewn throughout the house. We had just watched an amazing Game 5 Warriors’ victory over the

Raptors, as the Splash Brothers edged their nemesis by a single point. Then it happened, the screen froze with a triumphant Steph Curry pointing toward the heavens.

I checked the other TV's. Frozen. I checked the Xfinity box, only two lights visible. I restarted the router to no avail. Your mom handed me a flashlight, demanding I check to see if a rat had chewed through the cables outside. Perhaps it was the same rodent we had been hunting with our electric rat zapper trap. Maybe he was retaliating. All was intact as the reality sunk in: No *90 Day Fiancé*, no Australian sit-com. We were without TV or Internet, and it was night.

Marilyn was not happy, but I didn't panic. I knew I couldn't download another book on my Kindle, having just finished *Ordinary Grace*, which I highly recommend. However, I had something to get me through the night: an actual book – paper and print – by Ursula Le Guin. And so, I read.

The next morning I was awoken early by Marilyn. She had barely slept. It was 5 am, and the TV still had the menacing message, "Sorry, we're having some trouble."

"The TV upstairs isn't working either. Let's check the cable connection outside." Before we climbed on the roof, I confirmed with a prerecorded message from Xfinity that ours was a "street interruption of service that would be restored by 8:29 am."

I was going to be fine I reasoned. I might not have TV or Internet at home, but I had my phone. I checked my WhatsApp to find a photo of Jamie holding Saya in London. I had a Marco Polo message from Miya, showing a video of Emiko crawling and Daisuke teaching her how to clap. I could do this.

8:29 AM came and went and still no TV or Internet. Marilyn headed for an air-conditioned mall in Pleasanton. I decided to

A Return to the Trees

load my bike onto the car and head to Cull Canyon for a bike ride. It was on that sweltering day in the Cull Canyon parking lot that I decided to become a devotee of Shinrin-Yoku.

The Kaiser newsletter explained, “While our modern way of life can be convenient, it’s taking us away from the health benefits of nature. To the point where getting outside should now be a priority. This is where the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku — or forest bathing — can help.”

Forest bathing, what a fantastic idea! How did the Japanese ever discover this amazing concept? I read on, “In 1982, the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries created the term shinrin-yoku, which translates to “forest bathing” or “absorbing the forest atmosphere.” The practice encourages people to simply spend time in nature — no actual bathing required.”

No actual bathing required ... fantastic! The newsletter continued, “It’s also very low impact, which means you don’t have to go for trail runs or do an intense hike. The goal of forest bathing is to live in the present moment while immersing your senses in the sights and sounds of a natural setting.”

Why hadn’t I thought of it, spending time in nature? And the Kaiser newsletter cited studies, complete with footnotes, to back up their claim, “One study by the International Journal of Environmental Health Research found that spending time in an urban park can have a positive impact on a person’s sense of well-being.”

This information was gold. In addition, the Kaiser news article went on to tell its readers the ABC’s of performing Shinrin-Yoku. “While the word “forest” is in the name of this practice, don’t worry — heading out to a heavily wooded area isn’t required. You could take a trip to a local park, your favorite

Shinrin-Yoku - Who Knew?

nearby trail, the beach, a lake, or any natural setting. Just be sure to turn off or silence your phone or any other device.”

Kaiser also provided safety precautions when practicing Shinrin-Yoku, “Always pay attention to your surroundings, stay on marked trails, and wear appropriate gear (and don’t forget to consider things like sun protection, allergies, and insect repellents). It’s a good idea to also be aware of any potential dangers — like wild animals or uneven ground. When possible, bring a buddy or let someone know where you’re going and for how long.”

OK, I would wear sunscreen and avoid wild animals, maybe even invite a friend, since Shinrin-Yoku could be dangerous. And how often should I practice this modern Japanese art? The Kaiser article answered, “A good rule of thumb is to practice forest bathing for at least 20 minutes every day. If you don’t have that much time to spare, that’s OK. Any amount of time you can spend outdoors enjoying fresh air and sunshine is good. Plus, the goal of forest bathing is to relax and detach — the practice shouldn’t feel like a chore. It should be an activity you look forward to and enjoy.”

I should do an outdoor activity that I look forward to and enjoy. I was 65 years old, and why hadn’t I thought of this? Shinrin-Yoku, who knew?

It was then and there, as I headed up the hill on my bike, that I decided that I would forever be an adherent, no a champion, of Shinrin-Yoku. The only change I would make in my Shinrin-Yoku routine would be to call my outdoor activities Forrest bathing, rather than forest bathing.

I returned home from my bike ride, refreshed, reinvigorated by my first day practicing Shinrin-Yoku. As luck would have it, both the Internet and television were back on. We missed *The*

A Return to the Trees

People's Court, but caught the last few minutes of *Judge Judy*. We breathed a sigh of relief, civilization restored.

July 2019



Abby and Mamo forest bathing. Spring 2021

Five

Goin' Fishin'



Fully vaccinated and with the pandemic subsiding, it was time to visit grandkids. It had been a year and a half. I wondered how much they would remember me and how well I would know them. Credit FaceTime, it didn't take long for us to get back in the swing of things.

The O'Bergs arrived first from Okinawa, smiles and happy tears as Nicole, Nate, Abby and Andrew made their way down the airport escalator.

At the Coronado Island Hotel we celebrated Abby's 7th birthday with what I would learn were her favorite birds, flamingos. As luck would have it, the motel had some real ones outside the hotel lobby. I took a birthday photo of her, pink birds in the background.

It didn't take long to find out that swimming was an immediate hit for all three. Andrew would implore me, "C'mon Grandad, come in the pool." I showed Abby how to get her head

A Return to the Trees

under the water, a prerequisite for real swimming, and I gave Nate a few tips to improve his freestyle. We spent hours in the hotel pool.



Coronado Island beach - 2021

Nate and I rode hotel bikes, circumnavigating seven miles around the island. Most of the route was a tame bike trail, but I showed him how to safely ride on the road with cars, too. A fact we didn't report to his mom.

When we moved to the lodge at the North Island Naval Base, we visited the beautiful adjacent beach. Nate loved boogie boarding. He invited me in the cold, gray, Pacific water. I couldn't say no, even though I wanted to.

Andrew's request was to fly kites on the beach. As soon

Goin' Fishin'

as we got his kite aloft, a security guard told us to bring it in. Nothing could be flown that might interfere with military planes' flight paths. We didn't dwell on disappointment; I had kept my promise to Andrew.

The lodge's big green lawn provided new opportunities for grand kids and grandparents to frolic together. We played variations of baseball. Nate loved catch, with his new mitt decked out in Giant's colors — orange and black. Mamo was able to persuade Abby to join in with her purple and pink glove. Andrew just wanted to hit the wiffle ball with a big plastic bat. At one point every kid at the lodge between two and twelve joined our festivities.



Andrew in the sand - 2021

A Return to the Trees

The big green was also the only place large enough to handle an Aerobie, the high flying frisbee ring. Mamo also found a game at Target that Nate liked, in which one player launches a small soft ball attached to an elastic ring. The second player tries to catch it with, what appeared to be, a plastic jai-lai net. And then back it goes to the first player. Both games provided hours of fun.

On the lawn, Nate challenged his mom to a foot race. They tied. Nate then asked me to race his mom. Nicole was surprised as I was when her dear-old-dad beat her to the finish line. And Nate, using the logic of the transitive property in algebra — If A and B tie, and C beats B — decided there was no reason to challenge his granddad to a foot race.

While at the lodge, Nate joined me on an early morning walk on the beach. He and I took turns taking photos of beach birds. Nate had a wonderful eye for capturing the aerobatics and antics of royal terns, sandpipers and seagulls. And as we were handing the camera back and forth, he commented, “Nature makes beautiful art every day.” I made sure that some of his best photos made it to the walls of his new room.

It was on our trip to the Bay Area that we found Abby’s passion. She and Mamo spent hours at the deck table creating art: drawings, painting, and collage. And our artist loved music, too. She accompanied Mamo in her songs, beating rhythms to the guitar on a small pair of bongos. Abby even made a Mother’s Day music video for her mom, complete with original lyrics and music.

After a successful O’Berg reunion, I headed north to meet the Ramirez family in the Bay Area. I picked up Daisuke for a camping trip to the redwoods. And, thankfully, I was joined by our resident elementary school specialist, Auntie Jamie .

Goin' Fishin'

Upon his arrival to Samuel P., Daisuke threw open the car door and ran into a grove of redwoods shouting, "I love camping." And his enthusiasm showed on several hikes, one in which he nearly catapulted himself into the canyon below.

Safely home at Covington Street, Daisuke immediately went to the cupboard to look for his Chex cereal and requested his favorite TV show, *Curious George's Halloween Special*. He remembered all his old routines.

Emiko was so little the last time I had seen her in person. I was a little nervous. As if to quell my concerns she came up to me, took my hand, saying, "Let's play in the sand." At the end of several hours in the new sandbox and with play dough on the porch table, we were no longer strangers.

My grand kids all remembered me. In some cases, we picked up where we left off. In others, I learned new things about what each liked. Nate enjoyed a leisurely stroll and Daisuke, a run through the forest. Abby was wild about art and music. Andrew loved the pool and batting. Emiko was happy in the sandbox and making shapes with play dough.

"It's sort of like fishing," I told Jim as we discussed our grand parenting strategies. "You've got to figure out which part of the stream the fish are biting in and what type of bait to use. It's different for each grand kid, but when you find what they like, they're hooked."

Next stop, London. I'm goin' fishin' for my Saya and Sachi.

May 2021

A Return to the Trees



Family camping trip -2021

Six

My Londoners



No doubt, London is a world class city for exploring history, parks, and theaters. On previous visits, Tamiko and Corey have been excellent tour guides, whether taking me on a stroll in Hyde Park, visiting Westminster Abbey, or climbing the stairs at Saint Paul's Cathedral for spectacular views of the Thames below. Recently, my trips to London have been getting even more exciting.

On a recent visit, I was greeted by my granddaughter Saya. My almost three-year-old rushed out of nursery exclaiming, "Ello Grandad", as she wrapped me in a big hug. Who says Londoners are reserved?

Saya led the trip home on her blue scooter – gliding in and out of alleys, parks, and streets to 23 Alwyne Villas. She confidently rode on one leg, occasionally lifting the other from the scooter and looking back to see if we were keeping up. And she stopped at every vehicle crossing to hold my hand across the street. You

couldn't find a better city tour guide.

Mornings start early in my London. Saya is up at 5 am or so. She crawls into my bed for a "cuddle." Sometimes she sleeps more, but usually she wants to discuss important issues with her granddad: "Did you know Finola is my friend at nursery?" "Shall we make a fort?" "I'm ready to get up and make tea."

I've learned a lot about tea time from my Londoners. We get our two mugs – one big and one small. Saya presses the button for the kettle to heat the water. She carefully puts the tea into the tea strainer. Saya explains, "The milk goes first and then the hot water." While her tea is steeping, she scoops my coffee into the French press. After we add the hot water, she loves to push the plunger. We slurp our tea and coffee together – she says in her beautiful British accent – "Delicious!"

The food and accommodations at Alwyne Villas are five star. For example, Miko makes the best oatmeal and pancakes from scratch breakfast. Our chef treated us to sumptuous dinners: fresh salmon, tasty stew, and a chicken dinner commemorating her Grandma Fran. Sit next to Sachi and watch her chow down, and you'll see just how good the cuisine is at the Forrest/Spells residence.

After breakfast, Miko puts *Daniel Tiger* on the telly while she braids Saya's hair. On one morning, the girls and I were watching *Daniel Tiger* without their mom. Sachi – who grabs anything electronic – got a hold of the remote and switched to a show about drag racing. Our girl has broad and varied interests.

On regular week days, Saya would be going to nursery. But I'm visiting, so she gets a few days to play hooky. We visited the Museum of Natural History to view award winning photos of animals. We saw pictures of mammals, birds, fish, and insects

My Londoners

in stunning colors. It was a great exhibit for young and old, although, we did have to rush the little ones past the face of a lioness covered in the blood of her most recent prey.

I've been to the British Museum and the Tate Modern, but I would highly recommend London's Transportation Museum if your museum goers are five and under. Saya and Sachi drove a double decker bus simulator. They sang and danced at a museum story time, heralding London's famous boats, buses, trains, taxis and underground. And I must admit, story time was a lot more exciting than my rendition of, "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round."

Along with museums, you'll want to sample London's fine dining. Stick close to Corey if you want to find the best food in the city. After an excursion to a farm in the city to see ducks, chickens, goats and donkeys, we dined at Lahore – serving delicious Pakistani meals – including the best naan in the city.

England gets a bad rap for its food, which is fabulous. A burger at Balthazar's near Covenant Gardens or even a turkey sandwich at the Dinosaur Café at the Museum of Natural History Museum tops similar American fare. On a Saturday, Corey and I took Saya to "Little Kickers" for football – be sure not to call it soccer or you'll give away that you're American. Saya did a great job dribbling, trapping the ball, and kicking goals. And afterwards, Corey shared their tradition, the bakery tour which included several of London's best.

After a busy day seeing the London sights, you'll be happy to know everyone takes a nap at Alwyne Villas. Senior citizens join little ones for an afternoon rest. One day, Sachi was so exhausted she fell asleep on top of me. Nothing better!

A Return to the Trees



Saya at Whistable Beach - 2022

My Londoners

There is a lot of pretty countryside to see outside London. On one visit, we hiked the White Cliffs of Dover. This time we took a train to visit the seaside town of Whistable. It is only an hour's ride from London's St. Pancras Station which I embarrassingly called Pancreas Station. I was particularly intrigued since I watch a British drama called *Whistable Pearl*, set in the relaxed fishing village specializing in oysters. It didn't disappoint.

Saya and Sachi played in the beautiful sunshine on a pebbled beach. It was a joyous romp until an overexuberant Saya waded in too deep, her Wellies filling with cold sea water. If you don't know what Wellies are, they are rain boots or galoshes. You'll need to learn the lingo if you go to Britain: a pram is a stroller, plasters are Band-Aids, and rubbish is England's more elegant name for trash. Don't worry, you'll catch on.

We met the nicest people in Whistable: a shoe clerk who outfitted Saya in a sporty pair of pink tennies, a British couple who helped us find our way to an alternative train after ours was cancelled, and a taxi driver who regaled us with a history of Canterbury, the beautiful and old nearby town where we caught the train home.

Kind people are a feature of my London. Miko and Corey have surrounded themselves with a coterie of international friends who are fun and funny. They hail from the: US, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Poland, Nigeria, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia. Some even come from Britain.

Most of their friends are young couples with kids. We ran into many of them at Coloured Rocks Park. That's not the official name, but the moniker for the park with brightly painted boulders where Saya and Sachi swing, climb and slide with their buddies. There are so many nice green places and pathways in kid friendly London.

A Return to the Trees



Sachi swinging at Coloured Rocks Park - 2022

One of the most magical days in my recent stay was a spontaneous barbecue at Sophia and Seb's house across the street from 23 Alwyne Villas. Their backyard is a big, beautiful, secret

My Londoners

garden. The children chased bubbles, drew with chalk, and played on the carpet of green grass, as their parents chatted.

Londoners love a celebration, a Sunday roast or a drink at a local pub. We had our own very special one, a first birthday honoring Sachi. She was born March 14th, otherwise known as Pi Day. And if you're like me and too old to remember, the first three digits in Pi are 3.14. In her honor, Miko baked a scrumptious apple pie. We lit a candle and sang happy birthday to Sachi. And we did it again the next day – as we finished off left-overs.

The British cherish the written word. On one trip to London, I visited the British Museum where I saw the Rosetta Stone and the cuneiform tablet of Gilgamesh. My Londoners love to read, too. You can visit their first-rate children's library at 23 Alwyne Villas. They've got the classics like the *Hungry Caterpillar* and *Little Blue Truck*, and wonderful contemporary children's titles by Arree Chung, Matt De La Pena, and Christian Robinson. My new personal favorite is, *Grandfather and I*, for obvious reasons.

You'll enjoy the night life at Alwyne Villas, too. About 7:30 pm, it's time for the little ones to hit the hay. Saya and Sachi take baths, brush teeth, before bedtime stories. After lights out, the adults gather downstairs to discuss global challenges: politics, war, and economic fairness. Sometimes, we tackle the most intractable of issues, which recently was how to handle Saya's nursery friend who scratches and screams.

London has lots to offer. It's worth visiting the Churchill War Rooms, the Borough Market, and Buckingham Palace. But if you want real excitement, see this fabulous city with my Londoners, Saya and Sachi. They're the best tour guides, ever.

March 2022

A Return to the Trees



Sand play at Whistable beach - 2022

Seven

Outdoor Education



My mom and dad gave me the freedom to explore Mill Valley creeks and Mt. Tam. They encouraged me to camp, hike, bike, and ski. Your Grandma Fran would say, “I am preparing you for the future with lots of leisure time, when we have a 30-hour work week.”

I was that little boy who couldn’t sit still. My mom realized she had to keep me active to burn off a lot of my excess energy. I played Little League; I tried tumbling, swimming, judo, tennis, and as a teenager, wrestling and diving. I’ve watched all my grand kids jumping with joy at trampoline parks. They are energetic, too, a lot like me when I was a kid.

The 30-hour work week never materialized, but there was wisdom in your Grandma Fran’s notion that outdoor education for little ones produces happy, fit, adults. My guess is that if it was important in my generation, it is even more crucial for the kids growing up today. In addition to TV, today’s little ones

A Return to the Trees

spend lots of time on their devices watching videos and playing video games. Spending time outdoors is the antidote for all the hours indoors on tablets, computers, and phones.

I am happy to report that outdoor education is progressing nicely with my grand kids, in large part due to the excellent efforts of their parents. From the youngest to the oldest, they are getting lots of fresh air and exercise.



Sachi's first camping trip at Samuel P. Taylor State Park. Summer 2022

Sachi, just one, grabs her coat and points to the door, the signal to her mom that it's time to go outside and play. She's become the master of the swings and a daredevil on the slide. It is amazing how early little ones discover that activity in the fresh air is their happy place.

Sachi has her older sister to inspire her, too. A daring

Outdoor Education

Saya commutes daily to her nursery, gliding across London sidewalks on her three-wheeled scooter. In addition, three-year-old Saya has already entered organized lessons, attending Little Kickers soccer camp, tennis in the park, and her first swim class. These first experiences with athletics teach little ones how to follow directions from adults other than parents. And, this summer, both of my London girls camped in California for their first time. They loved it!



*Saya Frances, founding member of Samuel P. Scooter Brigade.
Summer 2022.*

Their cousin, Emiko, loves to play at the park, too. She's just turned four, but she's already hiked and camped in beautiful places in Washington and California. She's learned the joy of dipping her toes in a wild river in the summer heat and throwing a snowball at her brother in the winter cold. Emiko is

A Return to the Trees

playing soccer this fall with her dad as the coach. In Grandma Fran's and my day, girls were excluded from some organized athletics. Fortunately, nowadays, if a sport is good for boys, then it's good for girls, too. That's progress.



Emiko playing at Marin park. Summer 2022.

On a recent trip to Hawaii, I watched Andrew take a swim test at the hotel pool. He wasn't going to get to go down the water slide or swim without a life jacket, if he couldn't pass the swim

Outdoor Education

test. He practiced and practiced, dog-paddling the length of the pool. What pride he felt when the lifeguards gave him the green light. Mastering a difficult skill brings such a sense of accomplishment in children. This fall he's playing soccer, and in his very first game, Andrew scored his team's first goal. Way to go, Andrew David!



Andrew David at San Marcos trampoline park. Summer 2022.

Daisuke has been sleeping under the stars since he was little, and he will tell you, “Camping is my favorite thing to do.” He has progressed from T-Ball to coach-pitch baseball. One shared video shows him leading off with a double. Sports are so important for helping kids learn teamwork. Competition gives parents and coaches a chance to teach sportsmanship, so young people are gracious in both victory and defeat.

A Return to the Trees



Daisuke in the redwoods. Spring 2022.

You don't have to spend much time with Abby to realize how much she loves dance. Put a little music on and she'll perform. This summer on the family camping trip, she showed us her

Outdoor Education

moves. And Abby likes tumbling, too. We got her a mat for the backyard where she can practice her somersaults and walkovers. This fall she's back on the soccer field.



Abby showing off her dance moves at the campsite. Summer 2022.

I want all my grand kids to learn to ride a bike and swim safely. I also like what their parents are doing by exposing their children to different athletic activities. Nate's tried surfing, Daisuke skiing, and Saya tennis. By attempting lots of sports, each can decide on their favorites.

This summer, I took Nate on a backpacking trip to Point Reyes. He's the first grandchild to continue a tradition I began

A Return to the Trees

with his mom and aunties when they were his age. A half a mile up the trail, he stopped for a water break. “Backpacking is hard, Grandad.”

“It is!” I agreed. “We’ll take it slow, stop when you want, but I know you can do it.” And he did. He hiked four miles the over the Laguna Trail to Coast Camp.

In the afternoon, we explored Santa Maria beach, gathering shells and climbing on sand dunes. At our campsite, the deer casually grazed nearby. A hawk swooped into camp, hunting for small prey. In the evening, we were treated to a beautiful sunset and a gorgeous rising moon. Nothing is better than backpacking for gaining an appreciation and love of nature.

There are academic benefits to hands-on activities in the outdoors, too. Every year local naturalist Mrs. Terwilliger took me and my Old Mill School classmates on nature hikes. We listened to her make the sounds of birds, entertainingly describing Marin’s flora and fauna. I can still remember collecting wildflowers on Mount Tam for a sophomore biology project. I pressed the flowers, labeling them with their Latin names.

I employed similar open-air strategies with Nate when he returned from Okinawa. He photographed and collected sand dollars at the beach, adding these specimens to his first entry in Nate’s Nature Book. In Oakland, I took him on a three-mile hike up Leona Canyon. With the help of a trail guide, Nate identified and photographed plants used by local tribes, including the Miwok and Ohlone people. The same spring, Nate and I walked along the Earthquake Trail at Point Reyes. We discussed the geologic causes of The Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and the human consequences, too. Outdoor education is good for both body and mind.

Outdoor Education



Nate's first backpacking trip at Point Reyes. Summer 2022

Ours is a camping culture. This summer the O'Bergs pitched tents at Lake O'Neill, the redwoods of Samuel P. and at the beach in San Onofre. The Forrest/Ramirez clan take regular

A Return to the Trees

camping trips to the beautiful, green, mountains surrounding the Seattle area. And our London contingent recently had their first family camping adventure at the South Downs of south-eastern England.

In July, we continued the grand family tradition of camping in the redwoods at Samuel P. Taylor State Park. This year was bigger and better than ever, as we welcomed first time family campers Sachi, Saya, and Corey. Mamo packed an incredible box of fun for the little ones including: lots of art supplies, a nature scavenger hunt, and glow sticks. Jamie led games galore, with beer in hand. We played in the creek and redwoods, as always. In addition, we added a few new activities: We launched a flotilla of inner tubes at Hearts Desire Beach and Papermill Creek, assembled an entertaining scooter brigade, and held a lively dance party in the woods. Nicole and Mamo prepped and cooked incredible meals. Even the S'mores were bigger and better this year!

Spending time in the outdoors is the gift that keeps on giving. In retirement, it has been a great joy to be able to hike, bike, swim, ski, and kayak. I am so grateful that my daughters are raising my grandchildren in this family tradition ... and I am hoping that they'll get a 30-hour work week, too.

September 2022

Our Outdoor Albums



Sisters at Samuel P. Taylor State Park - mid 1990s

A Return to the Trees



Point Reyes backpacking - circa 2001

Our Outdoor Albums

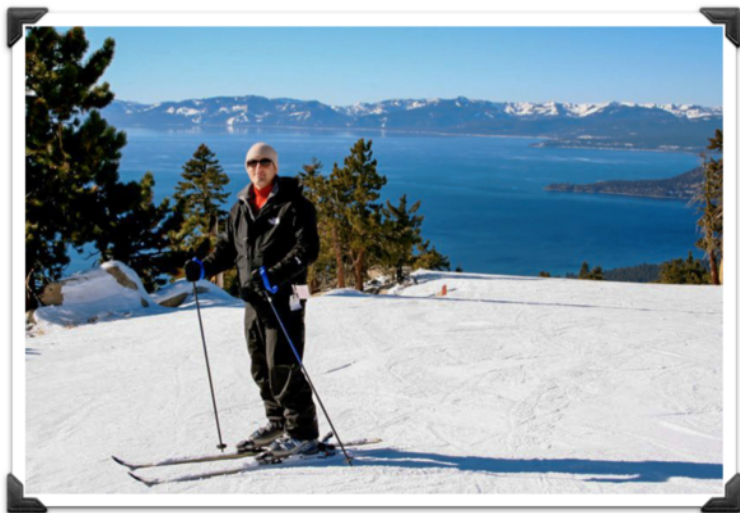


Snowboarding sisters - circa 2003



Tubing at Tahoe - 2009

A Return to the Trees



Skiing at Tahoe - 2009



Snowqualmie Pass - 2011

Our Outdoor Albums



Tahoe sledding - 2012

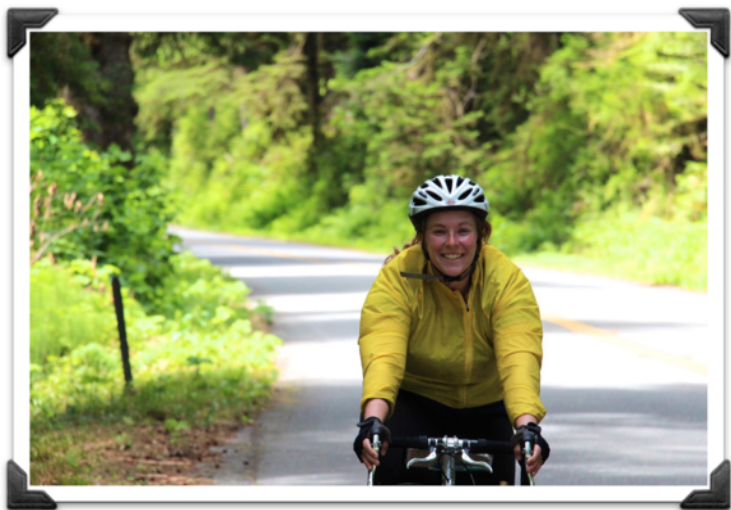


Camping at Samuel P. Taylor State Park - 2013

A Return to the Trees



Our Outdoor Albums



Pacific Coast bike adventure - 2015

A Return to the Trees



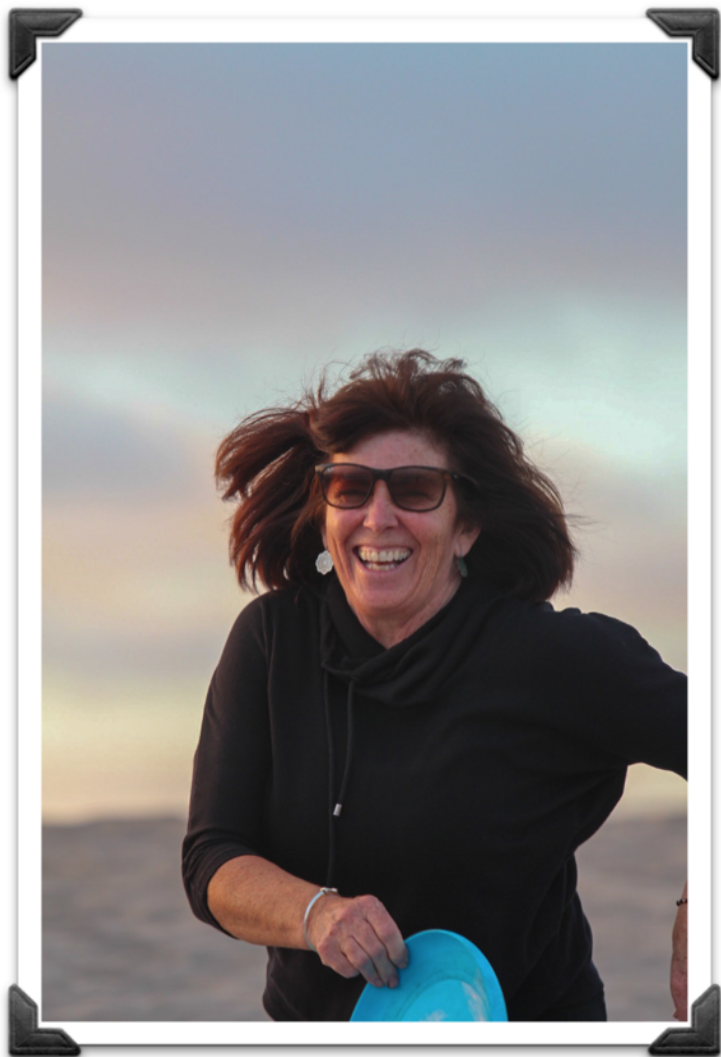
Hiking on the White Cliffs of Dover, England - 2016

Our Outdoor Albums



Papermill Creek - 2017

A Return to the Trees



Oceanside Beach - 2018

Our Outdoor Albums



Mt. Tam - 2019

A Return to the Trees



Camping at Samuel P. Taylor - 2021

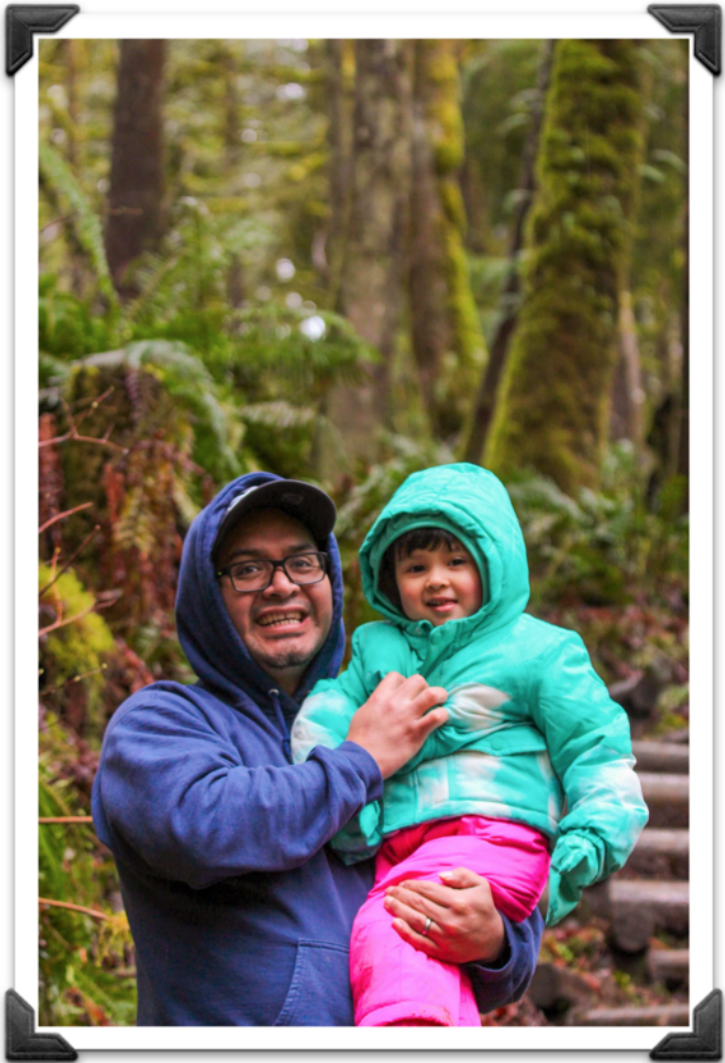
Our Outdoor Albums



*Cabin camping at Wallace Falls State Park, Washington - February
2022*



A Return to the Trees



Our Outdoor Albums



Climbing at Coloured Rocks Park, London - 2022

A Return to the Trees

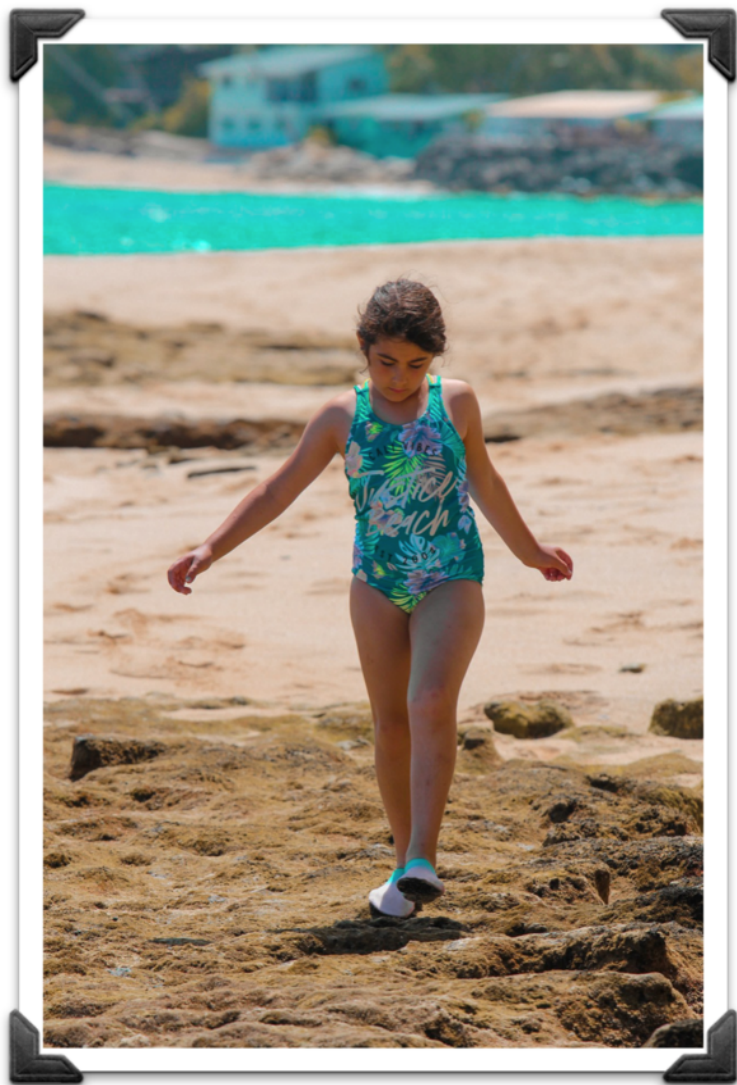


Whistable Beach, England - March, 2022



Spitalfields City Farm, London - March, 2022

Our Outdoor Albums



Exploring Turtle Beach, Oahu, Hawaii - April, 2022

A Return to the Trees



Our Outdoor Albums



Family camping trip to Samuel P. Taylor. July 2022.



A Return to the Trees



Our Outdoor Albums



A Return to the Trees





Camping collage by Andrew. Summer 2022.

Also by Dave Forrest



Mill Valley Memories

If you enjoyed *A Return to the Trees*, you might like *Mill Valley Memories*. Dave reminisces about growing up in Mill Valley, chronicles his adventures as a teenager, and reflects on his talented daughters, loving parents, and beautiful wife. You can read *Mill Valley Memories* online or download the book at:

<http://www.daveforrest.net/memories/>