

Of a certain age...

By Sue Stafford
Columnist

I was fortunate to grow up surrounded by nature. Our house sat on an acre-plus lot, containing numerous mature apple and pear trees tended by my father and overflowing flowerbeds that were my mother's domain. Every summer the back third of our property burst into a plentiful vegetable garden.

There were multitudes of forts and secret hiding places both in the yard and in the many-acre wood behind our property. Forested trails, a lazy stream, and an abundant hillside of blackberries were all mine for exploring and pretending.

Throughout my childhood I had four-legged companionship — dogs, cats, and even a pet raccoon. Borrowed and rented horses filled my longing for the equine experience.

Now, all these many years later, I am again surrounded by towering evergreen trees, a meandering creek, two feline companions, local deer, and spectacular mountains that never fail to take my breath away.

In the intervening years, I developed a passion for gardening, eventually sharing my love of nature as a horticultural therapist, working with people facing serious mental-health challenges. It was during that time of life that I witnessed proof-positive the value of nature for healing our human ills — physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

Author Richard Louv wrote a book about the importance of children having the opportunity to be immersed in the outdoors. Pediatricians have begun prescribing vitamin N (nature) for their patients. Outdoor school is again gaining popularity for fifth- and sixth-graders to experience learning in an outdoor setting.

Here in Sisters, where we are surrounded by nature's bounty, students have multiple opportunities through IEE and other programs to experience Mother Nature's gifts and to appreciate the need for stewardship of those gifts. While they are learning, there are other more subtle benefits accruing.

Studies have shown that time spent in nature positively impacts self-esteem, mood, and social interaction. Stress levels are reduced, people feel happier, and creativity increases. Other studies suggest a lessening of depression and/or anxiety occur in nature.

In Japan, forest bathing is encouraged, based on the belief that spending time walking in the woods has therapeutic effects. Forest schools in Finland and Scotland are kindergartens for children up to age seven who spend most of their day outdoors, regardless of the weather, interacting with nature.

Sisters' own Brett Miller, a veteran of the Iraq war, is providing experiences for our wounded veterans to heal in nature through his Warfighter Outfitters. Being outdoors, hunting and fishing, in communion with nature and each other, helps to heal the scars of war.

Perhaps the reason so many people love Sisters is because of the effect our surroundings have on us. Scientific studies point to increased creativity,

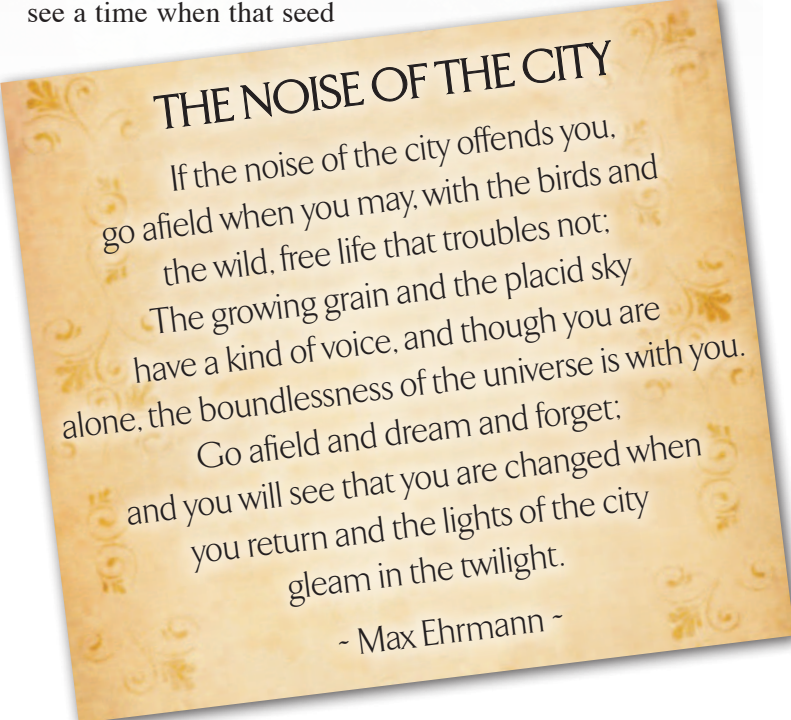
increased feelings of generosity, and a stronger sense of community coming from experiencing the great outdoors on a regular basis.

What if you can't get out and hike the trails or kayak the lakes? A pleasing view out a hospital window has shown to improve healing time for a patient. Planting a few seeds in a pot on a windowsill is a belief in the future. When you plant that seed and wait for it to sprout, you believe you will see a time when that seed

becomes a plant.

Sitting quietly outside, listening to the birds singing, feeling the breeze in my hair, and the warmth of the sun on my face, or smelling the new-mown grass helps quiet my chattering mind, soothes my soul, and reminds me of my place in the universe.

As the daylight lengthens and the temperatures warm, make time to get outdoors. Immerse yourself in nature.



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Time to give Metolius Lawn Care a call and get your yard cleaned up and your grass properly cared-for so you can enjoy its bounty through the summer.

This winter has been especially hard on lawns. It's probably more important than usual to fertilize, and if you haven't thatched and aerated in a long time, now is the time to do it to help your lawn recover from the stress of the weather.

Get your sprinkler systems tested and ready to go for the spring irrigating season.



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