

Remedying nature deficit disorder

Carol Meyer | Feb. 22, 2011 Eco Catholic

Most of us are ever alert to signs of physical ailments both in ourselves and in our children. Yet we rarely think about the widespread plague that is steadily growing in America: nature deficit disorder. This term created by Richard Louv in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, referred to the increasing alienation of children from nature and its resultant negative effects. But I see no need to restrict the term to children, when most of us adults are just as removed from the pleasures and benefits of the natural world.

Numerous signs of nature deficit disorder could be listed, but I picked just a few: stress, boredom, depression, fatigue, loneliness, and sadness. I grant that additional causes might account for these feelings, but I know of no emotions that cannot be ameliorated by immersion in nature. Merely stepping outside, we encounter a different energy that is more peaceful, balanced and restorative. The beauty of a cloud-tinged sky or a stalwart, steady tree can push out the staleness of life cramped within four walls. It's simply hard to feel bad when we're bird-watching, hiking, lying on the grass, or planting flowers.

Instead of popping a Prozac or can of beer to dull symptoms, maybe time outside would do the trick. It might be that simple. Just as thirst reminds us that we need water, maybe the above negative signs are cues that we need more of nature. And while an extended time outside is great, even short, frequent times of savoring and appreciating creation — taking a few deep breaths of fresh air, lingering to look deeply at the moon, walking around the block — might be enough to get us into our senses and out of our heads, where most of our problems originate.

Visiting poor countries, I've noticed that people seem happier than we are, and I think one of the main reasons is because they are more in contact with nature. They don't have big houses with all the amenities to wall themselves off. The natural world is the great grace we have all but forgotten about in our quest for more affluence. It has always been handed to us by God free of charge. But we don't seem to appreciate it or value its healing potential for whatever ails us. Notice that in Genesis, perfection wasn't depicted as life in a palace, surrounded by possessions and wealth, but rather Eve and Adam living harmoniously in a nature paradise. That should tell us something.

I think two things are necessary to remedy nature deficit disorder. One is the obvious of getting out in nature more, whether on a daily basis or for more extended periods of time. A friend of mine used to have a small hermitage by a lake on private land that she loaned out. Once I spent five glorious days there alone lying in the hammock, swimming, walking the land, reading, praying, and being one with God and creation. Would that all of us could have kind of opportunity to rejuvenate in nature on a regular basis. Most people can get away for a weekend or take a vacation in nature if it's really a priority.

The second thing I recommend to alleviate a nature deficit is to learn more about creation spirituality. I grew up being in and loving nature, but it was when I learned about creation spirituality almost 20 years ago, that I felt a missing piece click into place. I watched a series of 12 videos called *Canticle to the Cosmos* by cosmologist Brian Swimme and they changed my life forever. I learned about the wondrous evolution of the cosmos (and

thus something profound about God) and our place in it, and I knew I belonged in a whole new way. I was part of a 13.4 billion year drama that left no room for boredom, self-pity, or smallness of soul. I learned that I had a home of one trillion galaxies, so why did I need a lot of 'stuff' to feel worthwhile? A sense of blessing and the goodness of being was more than enough.

Creation spirituality has been one of the greatest gifts of my life, and one of the things that motivates me to write this blog. I'll be telling you more in future blogs, but meanwhile, just search for creation spirituality on the web and lots of good resources and groups will come up. You don't need to suffer the negative effects of a nature deficit when the universe is right outside your door, eager to fill you with joy and aliveness in abundance.

If you are looking for a resource about nature deficit disorder in children, check out this link: [Nature Deficit Disorder](#)

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