



LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS

SAVING OUR
CHILDREN
FROM
NATURE-
DEFICIT
DISORDER

RICHARD LOUV

For any number of valid and invalid reasons, increasing numbers of young people are becoming further and further detached from quality contact with nature and the outdoors. The implications and ramifications are monumental. Author, Richard Louv, has done an admirable job of capturing these reasons, their effects on children and society, and the many opportunities that exist for turning back the rapid advance of what he calls “nature-deficit disorder.”

He painstakingly cites relevant research to back up many of his key points and provides the resources for those interested in exploring various individual topics in more depth.

In my opinion, this book should be required reading for parents, educators, and visionary leaders of all persuasions.

A Book Report by David M. Hyink, Ph.D. – Forester, Conservationist, Outdoorsman

LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS / PERSONAL CONNECTION

- ✕ *If you are a “boomer” like me, born early in the period 1946-1964, you will be overcome with great memories of “natural play” as you read the opening sections of Louv’s book. Parents of “boomers” will too!*
- ✕ *I had wonderful recollections of tree houses, forts of all kinds, hikes, bike trips, campouts, sailing, sleeping in a backyard tent every night during the summer, Boy Scout Camp, hunting, fishing, trapping, damming up running water during the spring snowmelt, ice skating, summer baseball, swimming, late night games of “capture the flag” in the park, drowning out gophers, “stealing” green apples, wilderness canoe trips and the sounds of nocturnal creatures and wind through the trees as we lay on our backs at night gazing at the moon and stars.*
- ✕ *I have no doubts that these experiences enhanced my childhood and ultimately shaped who I became as an adult. I did my very best to share as many of these with my son as possible.*
- ✕ *For a number of years, I have been increasingly concerned that countless young people are not getting the benefit of these experiences. We have too many individuals, who – disconnected from nature and the natural world – have lost touch with the out-of-doors and the fundamental sources of the food, fiber and shelter that everyone now takes for granted. I consider myself one, of a growing number of like-minded souls, who is committed to finding and implementing successful and effective antidotes for “nature-deficit disorder.”*
- ✕ *Boy Scouting has always been a great part of my outdoor life. I believe that the Scouting program today is well suited to be one of those antidotes. As Will Rogers once said “The only problem with the Boy Scouts... There’s not enough of them!”*



LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS / BOOK REPORT CHARACTERISTICS

- ✘ *I attempted to highlight each chapter by paraphrasing and citing (what I thought to be) key passages and thoughts.*
- ✘ *Since I do not consider my review rigorous from a scholarly standpoint, I did not include any citations.*
- ✘ *While I generally attempted to be objective, the choice of said passages may well reflect my personal biases.*
- ✘ *My objective in creating this report is to encourage you to obtain your personal copy of “Last Child in the Woods;” and to have you think about how you can personally find ways to stem the tide of “Nature-Deficit Disorder.”*
- ✘ *Footer graphics credit: Ms. Liz Smith, Black Hills Area Council, Boy Scouts of America, Rapid City, SD*



PART 1: THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NATURE

× Gifts of Nature (Chapter 1)

- + *“Unlike television, nature does not steal time; it amplifies it.”*
- + *“Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses.”*
- + *“In nature, a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace.”*
- + *“Something else was different when we were young: Our **parents** were outdoors.”*



PART 1: THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NATURE

× **Gifts of Nature (Chapter 1)** – From classroom interviews...

- + *“I like to play indoors, ‘cause that’s where all the electrical outlets are.”*
- + *“...playing in nature is:*
 - × *Unproductive*
 - × *Off-limits*
 - × *Alien*
 - × *Cute*
 - × *Dangerous*
 - × *Televised”*
- + *“...computers are more important than nature, because computers are where the jobs are.”*



PART 1: THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NATURE

- ✗ First Frontier was characterized by the existence of “free land” and wide open spaces
- ✗ Second Frontier was characterized by the family farm and an attachment to land and water – ended with “boomers”
- ✗ **The Third Frontier (Chapter 2)** characterized by:
 - + “*Severance of the public and private mind from our food’s origins*” – food comes from Safeway, lumber from Home Depot
 - + “*Disappearing line between machines, humans, and other animals*” – cloning and genetic manipulation and modification
 - + “*Increased intellectual understanding of our relationship with other animals*” – whale songs, primate communications, pets
 - + “*Invasion of our cities by wild animals*” – e.g. deer populations highest in over one hundred years, urban cougars and bears
 - + “*Rise of a new kind of suburban form*” – designing and engineering “nature” back into cities and suburbs



PART 1: THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NATURE

✕ The Criminalization of Natural Play (Chapter 3)

- + Private Government: Homeowner's Associations, Subdivision Covenants
- + Public Governments: Building Permits (backyard play and tree houses), Environmental Regulations (kite-flying vs. protected bird species)
- + *“We tell our kids that traditional forms of outdoor play are against the rules... Then we get on their backs when they sit in front of TV – and then we tell them to go outside and play. But where?”*



PART 2: WHY THE YOUNG (AND THE REST OF US) NEED NATURE

✗ Climbing the Tree of Health (Chapter 4)

- + The childhood link between outdoor activity and physical health is clear
 - ✗ Childhood obesity is rising – despite the greatest increases in organized sports in history.
 - ✗ Children 6-11 spend 30 hours per week watching TV or a computer monitor. CDC study found direct link between the amount of TV and body fat.
 - ✗ Anti-depressant prescriptions for children doubled in the past 5 years. Exposure to nature can relieve some of the everyday pressures that lead to depression.



PART 2: WHY THE YOUNG (AND THE REST OF US) NEED NATURE

✦ A Life of the Senses: Nature vs. the Know-It-All State of Mind (Chapter 5)

- + *“Today, the life of the senses is, literally, electrified.”*
- + *“Our experience of natural landscape often occurs within an automobile looking out.”* (If not watching a DVD)
- + *“That which cannot be Googled does not count.”*
- + *“For a whole generation of kids, direct experiences in the backyard, in the tool shed, in the fields and woods, has been replaced by indirect learning, through machines. These young people are smart, they grew up with computers, they were supposed to be superior – but now we know something’s missing.”*



PART 2: WHY THE YOUNG (AND THE REST OF US) NEED NATURE

✕ The “Eighth Intelligence” – “Nature Smart” (Chapter 6)

- + Montessori movement has recognized the connection to nature for decades.
- + *“Children who spend more time playing outdoors have more friends.”*
- + *“You don’t see many new tree houses. More often than not, adults build the ones that do exist, sometimes for themselves.”*
- + When building a tree house as a kid: *“...you probably learned from your failures more than from success.”*



PART 2: WHY THE YOUNG (AND THE REST OF US) NEED NATURE

✦ The Genius of Childhood: How Nature Nurtures Creativity (Chapter 7)

- + *“Multisensory experiences in nature help to build the cognitive constructs necessary for sustained intellectual development.”*
- + *“A ‘loose-parts’ toy is open-ended; children may use it in many ways and combine it with other loose parts through imagination and creativity.”*
- + *“Nature, which excites all the senses, remains the richest source of loose parts.”*
- + *“America’s genius has been nurtured by nature – by space, both physical and mental.”*



PART 2: WHY THE YOUNG (AND THE REST OF US) NEED NATURE

✖ Nature-Deficit Disorder and the Restorative Environment (Chapter 8)

- + *“With all of the testing in schools there is no time for physical education, let alone exploring the outdoors.”*
- + *“Studies suggest that nature may be useful as a therapy for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), used with, or when appropriate, even replacing medications or behavioral therapies.”*
- + *“To take natural play away from children may be tantamount to withholding oxygen.”*
- + *If “contact with nature is as important to children as good nutrition and adequate sleep, the current trends in children’s access to nature need to be addressed.”*



PART 3: THE BEST OF INTENTIONS: WHY JOHNNIE AND JEANNIE DON'T PLAY OUTSIDE ANYMORE

× Time and Fear (Chapter 9)

- + *“In an effort to value and structure time, some of us unintentionally may be killing dreamtime.”*
- + *“...vacant lots are vanishing.”*
- + *“When a park is graded to create a playing field, children gain soccer capacity, but they lose places for self-directed play. Indeed, research suggests that children, when left to their own devices, are drawn to the rough edges of such parks, the ravines and rocky inclines, the natural vegetation.”*
- + *“I was intrigued with the way children defined play: often, their definition did not include soccer or piano lessons. Those activities were more like work.”*
- + *“Time in nature is not leisure time; it is an essential investment in our children’s health.”*



PART 3: THE BEST OF INTENTIONS: WHY JOHNNIE AND JEANNIE DON'T PLAY OUTSIDE ANYMORE

✖ The Bogeyman Syndrome Redux (Chapter 10)

- + *“Fear is the emotion that separates a developing child from the full, essential benefits of nature. Fear of traffic, of crime, of stranger-danger – and of nature itself.”*
- + *“...between 1970 and 1990, the radius around the home where children were allowed to roam on their own had shrunk to a ninth of what it was in 1970.”*
- + *“Most of the abductors weren’t strangers, but family members or someone the family knew.”*
- + *“One wonders how the children growing up in this culture of control will define freedom when they are adults.”*
- + *“The EPA now warns us that **indoor** air pollution is the nation’s number one environmental threat to health – and it’s from two to ten times worse than outdoor air pollution.”*



PART 3: THE BEST OF INTENTIONS: WHY JOHNNIE AND JEANNIE DON'T PLAY OUTSIDE ANYMORE

✗ Don't Know Much About Natural History: Education as a Barrier to Nature (Chapter 11)

- + *"If educators are to help heal the broken bond between the young and the natural world, they and the rest of us must confront the unintended educational consequences of an overly abstract science education: ecophobia (fear of ecological deterioration) and the death of natural history studies. Equally important, the wave of test-based education reform that became dominant in the late 1990's leaves little room for hands-on experience in nature."*
- + *The problem with computers isn't computers – they're just tools; the problem is that overdependence on them displaces other sources of education, from the arts to nature."*
- + *"Not only is there a huge elitist prejudice against natural history and for microbiology, [but] simple economics almost rule out a change, because good natural history classes must be small."*



PART 3: THE BEST OF INTENTIONS: WHY JOHNNIE AND JEANNIE DON'T PLAY OUTSIDE ANYMORE

✧ Where Will Future Stewards of Nature Come From? (Chapter 12)

- + Visits to National Parks topped-out: Yosemite (1996), Grand Canyon (1991), Yellowstone (1992) Crater Lake (1995), Mt. Rainier (1991), Carlsbad (1980).
- + *"In 2001, the number of visitors who camped in national parks dropped by nearly a third, to its lowest point in a quarter century. The drop-off in camping is especially evident among people younger than thirty, possibly because no one took them camping when they were kids. Consequently, they're not taking their own kids camping."*
- + *"Some kids end up disappointed that the parks aren't more Disneyesque."*
- + *"If park and forest attendance stagnates as the visitor age rises, what happens to the future political constituency for parks and national forests?"*
- + *"For most of these people [environmental leaders], the natural habitats were accessible for unstructured play and discovery nearly every day when they were kids. But for some reason, you don't hear many environmentalists expressing much concern about the intimacy factor between kids and nature."*
- + *"Considering the mounting social and legal pressures, Scouting organizations deserve praise for maintaining any link to nature."*



PART 4: THE NATURE-CHILD REUNION

✕ Bringing Nature Home (Chapter 13)

- + *“Alone, parents cannot heal the broken bond. But each guardian, parent, or other family member can lead the way at home, and within the institutions to which they belong.”*
- + *“Stress reduction, greater physical health, a deeper sense of spirit, more creativity, a sense of play, even a safer life – these are the rewards that await a family when it invites more nature into children’s lives.”*
- + *“...the first physical entry point into nature is the backyard;...”*
- + *“...the biggest problems faced by children are not the absence of experiences in dramatically picturesque wilderness, but the lack of day-to-day contact with the elements.”*
- + *“It’s better to know one mountain than to climb many.”*



PART 4: THE NATURE-CHILD REUNION

✕ Scared Smart: Facing the Bogeyman (Chapter 14)

- + *“The trick for me is to offer controlled risk.”*
- + *“We know that parks generally build social cohesion. Trees and grass do more than decorate the landscape.”*
- + *“...nature accentuates all the senses, and the senses are a child’s primal first line of self-defense.”*
- + *“...a child in nature is required to make decisions not often encountered in a more constricted, planned environment – ones that not only present danger, but opportunity.”*
- + *“Don’t just teach your kids about evil; teach them about good...”*
- + *“To increase your child’s safety, encourage more time outdoors, in nature. Natural play strengthens children’s self-confidence and arouses their senses – their awareness of the world and all that moves in it, seen and unseen.”*



PART 4: THE NATURE-CHILD REUNION

✕ Telling Turtle Tales: Using Nature as a Moral Teacher (Chapter 15)

- + *“Today, some folks would frown at a boy collecting turtles. But unless a child is collecting endangered species, the aggregate good outweighs the damage done to nature.”*
- + *“Today’s families are more likely to be confronted with moral questions, ones seldom asked in past decades, about children’s traditional hunting-and-gathering interaction with nature.”*
- + *“In 2000, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) declared fishing ‘the final frontier of animal rights.’”*
- + *“By any measure, the destruction of nature caused by hunting pales in comparison to the destruction of habitat by urban sprawl and pollution.”*
- + *“Birding has become one of the continent’s fastest growing outdoor pastimes.”*
- + *“Nature journaling is also a useful tool for young people.”*
- + *“We shouldn’t be worshipping nature as God, ..., but nature is the way that God communicates to us most forcefully.”*



PART 5: THE JUNGLE BLACKBOARD

✖ Natural School Reform (Chapter 16)

- + *“The concept of environment-based education – known by a number of names – is at least a century old.”*
- + *“In the United States, the trend is toward dropping recess.”*
- + *“...what if we adopted at least two Finnish traits – greater social respect for teachers and an enthusiasm for environment-based education?”*
- + *“...environment-based education produces student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math; improves standardized test scores and grade-point averages; and develops skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making.”*
- + *“...students in these programs demonstrate better attendance and behavior than students in traditional classrooms.”*



PART 5: THE JUNGLE BLACKBOARD

✖ Camp Revival (Chapter 17)

- + *“The great worth of outdoor education programs is their focus on the elements that have always united humankind: driving rain, hard wind, warm sun, forests deep and dark – and the awe and amazement that our Earth inspires, especially during our formative years.”*
- + *“The best camps are creating the best of what existed in the 1940’s – a sense of shared purpose.”*
- + *Researchers have also found that people with disabilities gain enhanced body image and positive behavior changes from their camp experiences.”*
- + *“We need, in essence, a camp revival.”*



PART 6: WONDER LAND: OPENING THE FOURTH FRONTIER

✕ The Education of Judge Thatcher: Decriminalizing Natural Play (Chapter 18)

- + *“Sometimes it seems that Mark Twain’s Tom and Huck should pack it in – come home from the woods, plug in Becky’s PlayStation 2, and master the new Grand Theft Auto video game.”*
- + *If Becky’s father, Judge Thatcher, were to review the bizarre legal framework today covering children, recreation, the environment and landowner liability, he might be puzzled by the phalanx of legal restrictions...”*
- + *“As a powerful deterrent to natural play, fear of liability ranks right behind the bogeyman.”*
- + *The legal tangle of outdoor play will be one of the most difficult challenges in the fourth frontier.”*



PART 6: WONDER LAND: OPENING THE FOURTH FRONTIER

✕ Cities Gone Wild (Chapter 19)

- + *“Today a number of ecologists and ethicists are challenging the assumption that cities have no room for wildlife.”*
- + *Imagine a “Zoopolis” where “...areas in cities are transformed into natural habitats through land-planning, architectural design, and public education.”*
- + *“Until recently, the new urbanism and the sustainable cities movement have paid insufficient attention to the needs of children.”*
- + *“Even so-called ‘green developers’ show little interest in integrating children and wildlife.”*
- + *“The concept of so-called adventure playgrounds originated in Europe after World War II when a playground designer studied children playing in ‘normal’ asphalt and cement playgrounds – and found they preferred playing in the dirt and lumber from the post-war rubble.”*
- + *“Local school districts currently offer studies on rain forests and global warming – but fail to focus on their home region’s own rich array of indigenous species.”*



PART 6: WONDER LAND: OPENING THE FOURTH FRONTIER

✧ Where the Wild Things Will Be: A New Back-to-the-Land Movement (Chapter 20)

- + *“Many Americans still do live in rural areas, and those who grew up in what remains of the farm country share a memory – often idealized – of that life.”*
- + *“With the advent of the personal computer, both farmers and upscale information workers could suddenly imagine themselves living in a new Eden, where the best of the rural and urban worlds could be linked by modem.”*
- + On moving back to Sioux Falls, South Dakota: *“The single best thing about living here is that everything is easy...”*
- + *“While retirees comprise much of the migration back... [there are] ...families that have moved to South Dakota so that their children could experience a quieter upbringing, including a more direct experience of nature.”*



PART 7: TO BE AMAZED

- ✧ **The Spiritual Necessity of Nature for the Young (Chapter 21)**
 - + *“Are God and Mother Nature married, or just good friends?”*
 - + *“Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”*
 - + *“Nature introduces children to the idea –to the **knowing** – that they are not alone in this world, and that realities and dimensions exist alongside their own.”*
 - + *“Yet the spiritual necessity of nature to the young is a topic that receives little notice. The absence of research may suggest a certain nervousness. After all, a child’s spiritual experience in nature – especially in solitude – is beyond adult or institutional control.”*
 - + *“Most people are either awakened to or are strengthened in their spiritual journey by experiences in the natural world.”*



PART 7: TO BE AMAZED

- ✕ **Fire and Fermentation: Building a Movement (Chapter 22)**
 - + *“By the time the largest fire in Southern California history was over, in October 2003, two dozen people died, more than two thousand homes were burned to the ground, and the Cuyamaca forest – the place in my county to which I most attached – was gone.”*
 - + *“When we contemplate the unraveling relationship between children and nature, we might consider it a fire going through and only that. We look forward to renewal.”*
 - + *“...the budding movement to reconnect childhood to nature draws potent support from the science of the health risks of nature-parched childhoods, and the growing passion of parents and others who see their children shuttered up on their couches and computer stands.”*

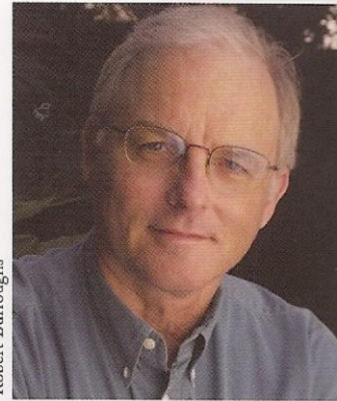


PART 7: TO BE AMAZED

✕ While it Lasts (Chapter 23)

- + *“The times I spent with my children in nature are among my most meaningful memories – and I hope theirs.”*
- + *We have such a brief opportunity to pass on to our children our love for this Earth, and to tell our stories. These are the moments when the work is made whole. In my children’s memories, the adventures we’ve had together in nature will always exist.”*

Robert Burroughs



RICHARD LOUV has been a columnist and member of the advisory board for *Parents* magazine and has written for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Christian Science*

Monitor, among other publications. He is a visiting scholar at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, an adviser to the Ford Foundation’s Leadership for a Changing World award program and to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, and a founder of Connect for Kids, the largest child-advocacy site on the Internet. The author of six books, Louv speaks throughout the country about family, nature, and community. He lives in San Diego, where he writes a column for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

HYINK BIO

- ✧ *Dave Hyink has had a keen interest in the outdoors since childhood. He earned his BSF (Forest Management & Economics) and MSF (Forest Biometrics) at the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture at Stephen F. Austin State University; and his Ph.D. (Forest Biometrics) at Purdue University.*
- ✧ *He spent 27 years in Weyerhaeuser Company 's Timberlands R&D organization and held faculty appointments at several major universities including: Auburn, Purdue, Virginia Tech, Washington and Idaho.*
- ✧ *Dr. Hyink is a graduate of Class XIII, of the Washington Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation's Leadership Program.*
- ✧ *He has been an active volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America – currently serving as VP-Strategic Planning with the Black Hills Area Council. He is a Distinguished Eagle Scout.*
- ✧ *Dave and his wife Stephanie are both retired and reside in the Black Hills, near Rapid City, SD.*

