



The Observatory



Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School ~ Issue 3 November 2005

Keep It Simple

by Lori Lux, Board Chair

Where does the time go? Seems it was just swimsuit, sunscreen and flip flop weather and now as I hunker down to write this article, it's getting dark early, the leaves have fallen from the trees, Starbucks is offering those delicious pumpkin lattes and there is that distinctive feeling of fall in the air. In a blink of an eye the holidays will be here which bring such a mix of joy, wonder and stress for us all.

Take a moment to reflect back on your childhood memories of the holiday season. What is it that you remember? Was it the number of gifts you received or getting that very special something you'd been dreaming about? Was it the elaborate Christmas dinner or Chanukah celebration that took your parents days to create, or was it something much simpler and much less materialistic.

As I look back, it's not the gifts that I remember although there was one year that Santa brought a pink Huffy bicycle that I'd been pining over for months. I was so happy with that bike for all of about 12 hours until it was stolen off the front porch and my parents let me mourn its disappearance with those words every child loves to hear, "now let this be a lesson to you." Do you think maybe I remember that gift so vividly because of the trauma involved?

What I do remember most are the traditions my family had or the special time we spent together -- the much simpler things like reciting the Night Before Christmas at Christmas Eve dinner, baking cookies with my mother, writing a note and leaving cookies and carrots for Santa and his reindeer and then being so happy when all we found were crumbs on the plate and a thank you note from Santa himself.

I remember one Christmas in particular that for all accounts could be the plot for a bad Christmas movie. Our family had a house in upstate New York - one of those beautiful Victorian homes with the big porches, small rooms and a serious lack of heating. Our entire family decided to meet there for Christmas rather than the

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Our Experiences Make Us Stronger

by Marie Imai, LGSONS Director

Dear Families,

Now that we have returned to our beloved red schoolhouse and the children are busy discovering the joys of the dressups, play-dough, trains and big blocks with a warm and cozy roof overhead, I find myself looking back at the lessons learned outside this fall. Attending an outdoor school introduces children to the real world in very real ways – some wonderful and some not so great:

-the creek has cool crawdads but they can pinch

-it also has magnificent crossing rocks but the greenish looking ones are very slippery

-the bunny hill is high and hard to climb but what exhilaration the children feel when standing on top

-yellow jackets eat flies and speed the decomposition of carrion but hurt a lot when they sting

-live squirrels are cute but dead ones are different and can be scary

-sliding down a rocky hillside is exciting but it can hurt your bottom or scratch your legs

In fact there are no guarantees that our

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summer visits we were accustomed to. This included my grandparents, my aunt and uncle and their three very small children, and the four people in my family. It started so well and with the best intentions, we tromped through a forest to cut down our tree, and we strung cranberries and popcorn for garland and felt very cozy and connected to our extended family. Then it all went terribly wrong. The temperature dropped to some incredibly ridiculous sub zero number, our anemic heater began to falter and a nasty flu bug struck the house. I believe all but my mom came down with the bug. That's a lot of sick, cold and miserable people but somehow my memories of that event are positive because of the simplicity of the trip and the connectedness of my family. I don't remember gifts, or meals or if the house looked just so, but I do remember all of us together.

A few years back we decided to do a re-set on the direction Christmas was heading for our family. It seemed there were just too many gifts, too many events, too many schedules and just not enough quality time spent together. That year we did the bare minimum in decorating our house and headed to Tahoe as soon as the winter break bell rang. We got our tree and watched the snow fall as we decorated our tree with hand strung popcorn and cranberry garlands.

For ornaments we made color copies of our favorite pictures from the year, mounted those on paper, punched a hole on top and tied them on the tree. It was so simple, yet so beautiful, and there was more tree gazing that year than any with our store bought ornaments.

I'm going to try and keep it simple again this year, a vow I make every year. Sometimes I find it challenging with the manufactured consumer extravaganza that starts earlier and earlier every year. We'll do our best to focus on the making of traditions and memories because in the end, that's what our children will remember.

Wishing you all the simple joys and wonders of the holiday season. ☺



(Our Experiences Make Us Stronger, continued)

experiences outdoors will necessarily be lovely and comfortable and that is part of the enduring value of spending lots of time outdoors. We learn as the song goes “We are able, we are strong, we can sing as we hike along.”

Our 4/5s class had the unnerving experience of disturbing a yellow jacket nest while on my favorite hike at Saratoga Springs. We had crossed under the high, arching old stone bridge and headed down the creek, slipping and sliding our way across. Suddenly with half the class still in the creek and half headed up the hill a swarm of yellow jackets came flying out of their home in the ground that we had just tromped upon. There was immediate chaos with many children and adults getting stung before we were able to get far enough away from their nest. It was a very scary time regardless of whether one got stung or not. But thanks to the very helpful parents, the cold water of the creek and the stinging in the first aid kit we were able to calm down and care for each other back at the playground area. The bravery medal went to Teacher Charlotte whose curly hair was full of wasps and to Devan Young who was stung more than any other child. Sophie Davidson’s grandmother, Phyllis, played her guitar and we sang and ate our way back to a little peace and normality even though we were too afraid of attracting more wasps to enjoy the beautiful pomegranates that Eriko brought that day. Though I would never ever wish a yellow jacket sting for anyone, the children really responded compassionately to those who were hurt— not only then but in the weeks to come. There were cards and inquiries and hugs all around. We wrote the children’s stories of the yellow jacket attack in their journals, read a native American legend about yellow jackets and the following week Teacher Bruce helped the children act out a play about that bad day. We are still talking about it when someone remembers and some of the children are still fearful or uneasy about hiking in the woods but collectively we took care of ourselves. We are all ok and we remember that as well. I believe that we are all stronger for facing and handling difficulties in life. For some children this process takes longer than we imagine it should but being part of a community that can share the stories and the healing is very helpful. In fact this is how we learn resiliency and get practice in overcoming adversity – two extremely important lessons for all of life.

Through having school so close to nature the children are better able to experience the full circle of life as we encounter not only the dead leaves of fall but an occasional dead mole or mouse or bird or squirrel. Their innate curiosity draws them to examine these animals closely and to ask lots of questions. Then we take the opportunity to bury each animal, express our sorrow for its death and our thanks for its life. Some big feelings often come out at this time. By experiencing death in this gentle way children can begin to become more comfortable with this natural part of life. It is such valuable practice for the more personal and human losses that are inevitable in our lifetimes. And it can even be the start of a scientific career.

But more than anything else for me, being outdoors is fun, it’s adventurous and exciting because we don’t know what may come next. I am still laughing about the time one of the moms in my class climbed up in the branches of the most magnificent oak tree in the Santa Cruz mountains and then was too afraid to climb back down. We eventually called the fire department who brought a medium sized ladder in their very large truck much to the delight of everyone else. And I’ll never forget the day a great blue heron flew down to Saratoga Springs to feast on some freshly stocked trout in a dammed up place in the creek. She ate and ate and we all watched her very closely for a long time. So, put on your jackets and go exploring in your special corner of this magnificent place we live. And let me know what you find around the bend in the trail!

Love, Marie ☪

Speak up!

Thank you to everyone for your submissions and help on this issue. If you have something you would like to submit for the next issue, please send them to Sonia Casper at mtnmama@garlic.com by Wednesday, January 4th.

Happy Holidays!



Bag It And Feed A Family

by Linda Aggarwal

Second Harvest Food Bank
November 1-17, 2005

Please help us kick our 2005 “Bag It and Feed a Family” food drive on November 1st. We are excited to once again join hands with the Second Harvest Food Bank and provide food to those in need. Pick up a paper bag or kid’s bag at the Schoolhouse and fill it with a meal. The Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is a private, non-profit organization that collects and distributes more than 27 million pounds of food each year to low-income children, adults and seniors. The food bank currently serves an average of 163,500 individuals each month: nearly 60% are families with dependent children. Mountain School’s Food Drive is a fun and easy way to support the Food Bank. In fact, Food Drives provide nearly one-third of the food they distribute annually.

What foods are most needed?

The Food Bank needs nutritious, non-perishable foods such as:

- Meals in a can (stew, chili, soup)
- Tuna/canned meat
- Peanut butter
- Canned foods with pop-top lids
- Low sugar cereals
- 100% fruit juices in single serving boxes
- Canned fruit packed in juice
- Canned vegetables

Note: No glass please.

Hunger Quiz

Test your knowledge of hunger in the Bay Area. Answers at the bottom.

1. Approximately what portion of the households in our community do not always have enough food to meet their basic needs?
 - a) 1 in 1000
 - b) 1 in 189
 - c) 1 in 28
 - d) 1 in 4

2. Which group makes up the largest segment of people who are hungry in our area?
 - a) The homeless
 - b) The elderly
 - c) Children
 - d) Low-income, working families
3. Which of the following diseases or conditions can be caused by hunger?
 - a) Anemia/iron deficiency
 - b) Physical weakness
 - c) Stunted growth
 - d) Cognitive and behavioral impairment
 - e) Heart disease
 - f) All of the above
4. What percentage of Californians live below 200% of the Federal Poverty Threshold?
 - a) 5.2%
 - b) 12.8%
 - c) 20%
 - d) 32.9%

Answer Key

1. D - 1 in 4. The Northern California Council for the Community Website states, “more than 25% of our community walks a daily tightrope, balancing fundamental needs and often sacrificing the nutritious foods they need to maintain a healthy life” This uncertainty is due to inadequate resources, such as lack of money, rise in the cost of housing, health care costs, and rise in the cost of living.
2. D - Low-income, working families. Approximately 67% of Second Harvest Food Bank food recipients are low-income, working families with minor children. The homeless are just 11% of the people needing food assistance. Seniors account for 5% of those individuals needing food assistance.
3. F - All of the above. Hunger impedes child development, worsens the effects of existing ill health conditions, and leads directly to life-threatening illnesses.
4. D - 32.9%. 32.9% of Californians, about one third of the population, live 200% below the Federal Poverty

(Bag It and Feed a Family, continued)

Threshold. 18.4% of Californians also lack adequate healthcare of which 1.2 million are children.**

Data Source: Data compiled monthly from agency and direct service program reports from July 00-June 01 unless indicated otherwise.

*USDA Economic Research Service, 1999, (cited in the USDA press release at <http://www.usda.gov/events/f414.htm>.)

**Cost of living figure: Regional Financial Associates, (study cited in San Jose Mercury News, December 7, 1999)

***USDA Economic Research Service, 1997, (cited in USDA press release "More Than One-Fourth of U.S. Food Wasted, USDA Study Finds" at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/MENU/gleaning/SUPPORT/fdwaste.txt>) ☞

Los Gatos Holiday Parade

by Kristin Mitchell



Los Gatos 49th Annual Children's
Christmas & Holidays Parade

Saturday, December 3, 2005
Parade begins at 11:00 AM
Meet at 10:00am...location TBD

Strollers, bikes, scooters, wagons and dogs on leash are welcome. Bring the whole family. Come early and enjoy the camaraderie and decorate your wagon or bike, and remember to wear your red MS sweat-shirt or t-shirt.

More information on what time to meet and where to meet coming soon. ☞

Some Special Acknowledgements for Special Efforts

We'd like you all to know that Dave Curran's (dad to Ben in the 3/4s) mother, Ingrid, donated the beautiful new storage cabinet in the bathroom and Dave installed it on the workday. Thank you to everyone else who helped on that day as well. Cami Czarny is the artist who added the hungry caterpillar to our sliding tube. The school is looking good!

And the garden is looking fabulous, better than it ever has, thanks to our garden volunteer on the board, Therese Volker.

The new garden shed was built by Max Stock, an alumnus of our school who is now 16 and volunteered to make something for the school to complete the requirements for his Eagle Scout award.

Thanks so much to Troy Hastings (4/5s father of Julia) for stepping up to the plate and organizing our Turkey Trot day.

A big vote of appreciation for our new director, Mary Matlack, and for all the board members who keep our school functioning so well. Thank you for giving of your time and talents as well as caring for your families and yourselves.

We'd like to extend two very special thank yous for the creation of our 50th anniversary logo. Lisa Tollner, an LGSONS alum, and her company Cintara began work on the original idea for our logo using a representation of the school house in the design. This proved to be a very time-consuming and complicated task.

Rather than use more of Cintara's resources, we turned to graphic designer Aimee Frank, a current parent in our 3/4s class. She rose to the challenge with an amazingly short timeline, and created the special logos we will be using for our T-shirts and sweat-shirts this year. Thank you Aimee for your willingness to step in and make it happen and for your wonderful design ideas!! And, thank you to Lisa Tollner and Cintara for the initial time and energy you put into this project. ☞

Teacher Spotlight: Jane Krejci

by Sonia Casper

Q: Where did you grow up and what was your childhood like?

A: I was born in San Francisco. When I was four, my family moved to Yosemite Valley where we lived for the next 14 years. There is a book entitled *Idyllic Childhood* which chronicles growing up in Yosemite. That was my childhood - full of outdoor adventures, free, and safe in a small, supportive community of 800 people. I spent most of my time outside playing with my older sister, younger brother and friends. Hiking, biking, swimming (in the icy Merced River!), skiing and skating were an integral part of our lives. John Muir wrote, "Going to the mountains is going home." There is still that sense of "Home" for me in Yosemite.

Q: What is your fondest childhood memory?

A: We had lots of games and imaginative play amidst the boulders and trees near our house. Every summer our family hiked into the back country with a couple of burros to carry our gear. We would not see anyone else for days!

Q: What did you do for a living before coming to work at MS?

A: My work has always involved education. I taught and developed primary school materials in Africa for 5 years. I was a third grade teacher in Union School District. Then, I spent 12 years working for BRIO Toys as the Product Development Manager for the U.S. It involved training, marketing, product design and coordination with the parent company in Sweden.

Q: How did you find MS and what drew you to the school?

A: A mom I met through some volunteer work told me about LGSONS. I really knew very little about it when our daughter, Liesel, turned two and started the program. It was a good fit for us then - and today!

Q: From your time as a parent at MS, what aspects of the curriculum did you find served you best over the years?

A: The "observation" aspect of the school has helped me sit back and observe. It helped me give Liesel the space she needed - and I learned a lot in the process. I also realized at a deeper level the importance of play in a child's life. This influenced my work at BRIO. And, of course, the nature component of the program is wonderful.

Q: What was your biggest challenge as a parent?

A: One of the realities of getting older is that the details of the past are less poignant! Liesel was an "easy" child. One of my challenges was to change and grow with her; "letting go" as she moved on to the next interesting stage of her development. We also raised two boys from Africa (Uganda and Malawi). My challenge was to support Francisco and Robert in retaining their unique backgrounds and identity, while transitioning into American society.

Q: What motivated you to become a teacher at MS, and what do you like best about the job?

A: When Liesel "graduated" from Mountain School, the Director asked me to be a Special Materials teacher. I loved the school, believed in its approach - and it was part-time. Over the past 25+ years I have been involved in different classes and love the combination of playing with children and working with parents. And the staff is unequalled! (Liesel assisted in the Saturday 2s during college; and assisted Marie in the 4-5s while working on her teaching credential. We are sad that her two year old daughter Lily cannot be part of Mountain School - but no one wants to carpool from Michigan!)

Q: What do you do in your spare time (hobbies)?

A: Gardening takes a lot of my time, but it is very satisfying. I like to walk/hike, read, travel and spend time with family and friends. Volunteer work (mainly with children!) is an important of my life, also.

Q: What was or would be your favorite (dream) vacation?

A: I have had many wonderful opportunities to travel and I am grateful for the pleasure and insight it has brought. Generally, I like active, outdoor travel with a learning component. We just returned from a month in

Italy spent in rural areas - including two farm stays. We enjoyed the people, food and wine. My sister, brother in law and a dear friend from Sweden joined us for part of the time. Two very different trips, but memorable, were Egypt and Norway.

Q: Your grace and knowledge is so inspiring. Can you offer some words of wisdom to parents?

A: Passion and Compassion are very important to me. I try to approach every task (no matter how small) and opportunity with focused energy and openness. Compassion is the soul of a community. I try to be kind and accepting of others, as well as my self. Helen Keller wrote, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." ☞

The Wind

by Robert Louis Stevenson

I saw you toss the kites on high
And blow the birds about the sky;
And all around I heard you pass,
Like ladies' skirts across the grass--
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

I saw the different things you did,
But always you yourself you hid.
I felt you push, I heard you call,
I could not see yourself at all--
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

O you that are so strong and cold,
O blower, are you young or old?
Are you a beast of field and tree,
Or just a stronger child than me?
 O wind, a-blowing all day long,
 O wind, that sings so loud a song!

Calendar

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK

November 1-17, 2005

for more info see "Feed a Family and Bag It!" on page 4

MINI COURSES

Tuesday, Nov 15th -- Stick horse class

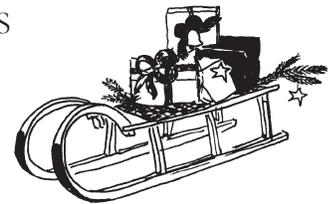
Thursday, Nov. 17th -- Role of make believe in child development

Sign-ups are available online at: www.wattes.org/cgi-bin/lgsons.cgi.

LOS GATOS 49TH ANNUAL CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS & HOLIDAYS PARADE

Saturday, December 3, 2005

Parade begins at 11:00am



Strollers, bikes, scooters, wagons and dogs on leash are welcome. Look for information from Kristen Mitchell on what time to meet, where to meet and any themes for this year. Don't forget to wear your red sweat-shirt or t-shirt for the Christmas Parade

LEARNING EXPRESS SHOPPING NIGHT

Monday December 5th

4pm-8pm, Learning Express at El Paseo Shopping Center

MS will receive 20% of all purchases made by MS families and friends that night. For more info see "Shopping Night..." on page 9.

Note: The Wooden Horse will donate 5% of your total purchase to our school when you present a voucher. Vouchers will be available soon at the schoolhouse.

OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, January 22nd

11:00am - 2:00pm at the schoolhouse

This is the time when interested families can come to our school house to visit with some of our teachers, get answers to questions and have their children experience our school environment and activities. The priority registration period will begin on January 22nd as well. Please encourage anyone you know who is interested in our school to get their applications in during the priority registration period.

There is a Place

by Angie Davidson, Sat. 2's Teacher and mother of Julie 4/5's

Next to the first house that I have any memory of living in, there was an enormous empty lot. There was a big dirt hill perfect for riding our bikes down really fast; a rickety old swing set stood there that you could climb as well as swing on; an irrigation ditch ran nearby, perfect for playing in with or without water; and there was lots of space. We were on our own and had to figure out what to play, and how, and work things out among ourselves. Our imaginations could roam, and so could we. It's difficult these days in the Bay Area to find places like that to play in, but there is at least one place besides our school with the spirit of those old empty lots: the Berkeley Marina Adventure Playground. It is really fun, and it's definitely worth the drive.

There are loads of fun things to do there. There are amazing forts everywhere. Kids can paint anything, and as a result everything is a riot of colors. There are giant cargo nets to climb, and piles of tires, and a telephone pole with tires stacked up on it like Cheerios on a string. There's a cable zip line to whiz down into a sandpit, which is a total blast. There are hoses kids can turn on at will to cool off or to make mud. There are also crazy old keyless pianos painted a kaleidoscope of colors and sand and dirt and weeds and flowers, and the result is absolutely fun and wonderful.

But the essence of the playground is that kids create the structures themselves, and the activities that go with them. Kids earn the right to check out a hammer or saw or paint by roaming the area and picking up scraps of wood or nails, helping to clean up as well as contributing to the community, and immediately building a connection to the place and the people there. It is a simple yet very meaningful act. And then they can start to build. They can build their own fort, or anything, really, or add to an existing one. They can even change or take down an existing structure if no one's working on it or minds, another great opportunity for working with others, negotiating and figuring things out. When we were there, big kids were building things together, and younger kids with their parents; everyone was having fun.

It's designed for kids 7 and older, but younger children can go too if accompanied and supervised by a parent. Our 4- and 6-year-olds loved it and have asked repeatedly when we can go back. (The last time we were nearby but didn't have time to go, the news was met with tears from the backseat.)

Adventure playgrounds have an interesting history. The first opened in Denmark in 1943 during World War II. C. Th. Sørensen, a Danish landscape architect, noticed that children preferred playing in the rubble piles from the war to playing in designed playgrounds, and he thought of "a junk playground in which children could create and shape, dream and imagine a reality." The idea is to provide a place where children can develop social relationships, create their own place, work with different materials and people, and build community. If you go, you can judge for yourself if it lives up to that lofty ideal.

The Adventure Playground is free for 4 children or fewer, accompanied by an adult. It's open Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., but closed when raining. Over the upcoming holidays, the playground will be closed Veteran's Day (Nov. 11), Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 24 and 25), and December 24 – January 1st. It will be open during the school holidays December 19-23, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For more information on the Berkeley Marina Adventure Playground, go to <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/marina/marinaexp/adventplgd.html>.

For more information on adventure playgrounds and their history and philosophy, visit the brief and interesting website <http://adventureplaygrounds.hampshire.edu/index.html>.

☛



Autumn Vegetable Soup

by: Gillian Claus

Prep time 45-50 minutes
(much of which is simmering
time)

Yield: 5-6 servings



1-2 tbs butter or oil (olive or canola)
1 1/2 cups chopped leeks
1 1/2 cups quartered brussel sprouts
1 large carrot, chopped
1 stalk celery, chopped
1 large potato, chopped
1 cup peeled chopped acorn or butternut squash (and/
or pumpkin and/or sweet potato)
3/4 tsp salt (adjust to taste)
freshly ground pepper
cayenne (to taste)
2 large cloves of garlic (minced)
3 cups stock or water
1 cup (packed) chopped Swiss chard or collard greens
1 large firm tomato, chopped
1 bell pepper, chopped – green, red or yellow
1 1/2 tsp dried dill
1/2 tsp dried marjoram or basil
2 tsp soy sauce (or to taste)
1 TBSP fresh lemon juice
sour cream or yogurt (room temp)
sunflower seeds, for garnish
minced fresh parsley, for garnish

1 In a soup pot or Dutch oven, cook the first 11 ingredi-
ents (everything through the garlic) over moderate heat,
covered, for 10-15 minutes, stirring intermittently.

2 Add stock or water. Bring to a boil, lower to a simmer.
Cover and let it cook slowly until everything is tender
(another 15 to 20 minutes).

3 Add Swiss chard or greens, tomato chunks, and
chopped bell pepper. Simmer about 5 more minutes.

4 Add herbs, soy sauce, and lemon juice, and continue to
simmer another 3 to 5 minutes.

5 If you choose to add sour cream or yogurt, stir it in
just before serving. Garnish each bowlful with sunflower
seeds and parsley. 🍴

Shopping Night at Learning Express

by Lisa Bailey

When: Monday, December 5th

Where: Learning Express Toy Store
1350 El Paseo De Saratoga

Time: 10:00a.m - 8:00p.m

Get a head start on your Holiday shopping! Just men-
tion LGSONS when you make a purchase and Learn-
ing Express will generously donate 20% of the total
purchases made by our friends, family and faculty
back to the school. From 4-8p.m we will have Gift
Wrap by LGSONS volunteers, refreshments, music
and general holiday cheer.

**BRING: YOUR CHRISTMAS
LIST AND A FRIEND!**

Any Questions?

Please contact:

Lisa Bailey (408) 354-5735



Emergency Supplies

Our Purchasing Chair, Nigel Cockroft, has been
diligently working to update and restock our
Emergency Supplies at the schoolhouse. There
are several items that he has recommended we
add to our supplies. The school would graciously
accept donations of any of the following sup-
plies. Please contact Nigel at (408) 356-1193 or
n.cockroft@gemfire.com if you are able to donate
any of the following items: blankets, sauce pans/
pots, or a camping stove.

Many thanks to Nigel for all the time and effort
he's put towards this project. Here's hoping we'll
never have to use them. 🍴

Toddler Travel Tips

by Sonia Casper

Whether you realize it or not, the holidays are quickly approaching. Some may even be of the opinion that they are here. Many of us will be taking trips by car or plane to visit with loved ones, or to get away from it all. But for as much fun as those trips are, traveling with young children can be a challenge. Recently flew to up state New York, and although I'm a seasoned traveler, and have traveled before with my daughter Megan when she was young, this trip would be different. This trip would be just my two year old son, Jacob, and me. He's a sweetheart and mild mannered, but he's also a two year old boy who's favorite pastime is playing with cars and climbing. I couldn't imagine how a few books and some markers were going to entertain him on the two planes and 2-hour layover it would take to get to our destination. I was drawing a blank on ideas, everything seemed either too big, too heavy, too noisy, or just not travel friendly. So I asked a few friends how they did it, if they had any advice. You wouldn't believe some of the answers I got, but they worked! And the bonus is that they're light weight, easy to pack and cost very little. I thought I'd share some of these truly inspired ideas and tips with you.

Aluminum foil: Yes, you read right. Take along a few pieces of unused aluminum foil with you. Kids love the sound it makes when they manipulate it, scrunch it up, pull it apart, flatten it out, etc. I rolled a few squares of foil onto an empty paper towel roll for travel.

Small post-it notes: He loved pulling them apart, sticking them onto things around him, and sticking them back together over and over.



Scotch tape: Kids love tape. They like pulling it off the roll, rolling it into a ball, the sounds it makes when they crumple it, the way it sticks to their hands, putting it on everything from paper to their pants.

Stickers: I know you think you've hear this one before, but did you ever consider just getting the cheap round dot stickers that people use for garage sale tags? They're inexpensive and just as entertaining to a two year old as any sticker you can buy. Jacob completely decorated his car seat, his pants, his shirt sleeves, then pulled up his pant legs and shirt sleeves and stuck them on his legs and arms. He LOVED them!!!

Here are a few other items that he enjoyed:

- cloths pins
- a small deck of cards
- paper lunch bags and markers to make puppets with
- a couple of soft covered books
- the classic, travel Magna Doodle

For extra entertainment wrap the items (and maybe a new book or toy). The unwrapping and the paper are entertainment in themselves. Pack the bag when they're not around and don't tell them what's in the bag. Bring along some favorite snacks in small snack sized zip lock bags, for a quick distraction and a little comfort from home. Also, we bring our car seat and have them use it on the plane, and just as we have a strict rule in the car that we must be in our carseat when the car is on, we use the same rule on the plane. This may seem harsh to some, but we've found that this simple rule eliminates a majority of the struggles and conflicts of air travel. Kids are smart, and once they have the idea they can get out and run around, there's no turning back. However, if they think it's not an option they rarely ask. The people sitting around you will appreciate it too. Lastly, those seats are so close together that the seat in front of your child's seat is just at the perfect distance for their feet to rest on and kick. I always apologize in advance, at my earliest opportunity, to the person sitting in that seat and explain that I'll do my best to keep him from kicking the seat. the reality is that it's almost impossible to prevent, but it never fails that the attempt is appreciated, and makes the trip much less stressful.

A little planning ahead makes all the difference. A special thank you to Amber Shaw, and all the MS Moms for all their great ideas.

Happy holidays and happy travels!