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# PENCIL & SPOON

SUMMER 2018



## LIVING ON SEQUOIA TIME

Embracing a slower pace

Imagine you're a mouse, looking up at a human. That's the scale of a human looking up at *Sequoiadendron Giganteum*, or Giant Sequoia. A single tree trunk is wide enough to drive a car *along* or *through* – take your pick. Among the oldest living beings on earth, with a known lifespan of 3,500 years, the eldest Sequoias germinated when Pharaoh Hatshepsut ruled ancient Egypt. Every year, millions of people flock from all over the world to take in these California ancients; this summer Keith, Ava and I were among those numbers. Little did we know that, while our views would be the same, our outlook would differ greatly from the crowd's.

I'm not sure when we lost cell reception during the hair-raising mountain climb to our campground and the ancient grove but, once we lost it, we spent nearly a week without notifications and likes and email and friend suggestions and countless other pulls on our mental energy.

The *only* pull was towards stillness. It was glorious.

THE ONLY PULL  
WAS TOWARDS  
STILLNESS.



We set up camp in the shade of younger Sequoias and pines, beside a stream fed by melting snows. It was the last available campsite at Lodgepole Campground, which still astounds me because it was one of the best sites – fairly remote and shady, with boulders and crystal-clear pools for playmates.

Walking among the sequoias, I kept tearing up. The scale and intensity of the landscape overwhelmed me. Even the *baby* trees were giants. The vast span of time was visible on a single specimen: Tree trunks covered in brittle, lime-green moss, knots and gnarls as large boulders, and cavities scarred by the char of multiple wildfires. There was so much wildlife I felt like Snow White. Birds and deer and chipmunks scurried about, indifferent to our machinations. We were thrilled to see two black bears, one on a hike and one along the stream by our campsite. Their only interest? Grazing on grass and flowers.

Even in this wonderland, we soon discovered most people were unable to leave behind the pace of regular life. Kids played on their iPads beside cold firepits. Families hurried to check off the sites.

WE SOON DISCOVERED  
MOST PEOPLE WERE  
UNABLE TO LEAVE  
BEHIND THE PACE OF  
REGULAR LIFE.

See General Sherman, the largest tree in the world, take a picture. Check.

See Tharp's cabin, built inside a fallen Sequoia, take a picture. Check.

See the Crescent Meadow, take a picture. Check.

Walk on the Car Log, take a picture. Check.

Parents hissing "smile" through gritted teeth. Check.

Few stopped for more than 45 seconds in their quest to "see it all."

In some cases, they left the car running.

It made me profoundly sad.

In the past, I've noticed a similar tendency at our local zoo, where adults shuffle kids past animals at a breakneck pace. No sooner does a child walk up to an exhibit than their guardians direct them onward. "Ok, come on, let's go see the \_\_\_\_!" is the oft sung refrain. Inevitably, children's eyes glaze over in the harried attempt to see every animal.

Even back then, I wondered if there was another way.

When our daughter Ava was a baby, I'd watch for her cues before pushing the stroller to the next exhibit. Once she was out of the stroller and comfortably able to walk, she set the pace. If she



## PARENTING IS A CONSTANT REAFFIRMING OF FAMILY VALUES IN THE FACE OF SOCIETAL PRESSURE.

wanted to stare at a Chimpanzee for three hours, we could do that. After all, we were there for her enrichment, not mine. This child-led pace brought us some incredible memories, most notably the time a chimpanzee brought her baby over and tapped the window. She was showing the strange humans to her baby. What a delight for us!

I used the same logic in the Sequoias – yes, we took photos, but we also sat and enjoyed each site for a good while before moving on. We brought journals and I suggested that, at each stop, we write our impressions or draw what we saw.

Ava *hated* the idea.

While I thought I had raised my daughter to enjoy a slower pace, she is now 9-years old. While I immediately felt lulled by the sequoias, turns out she felt drawn towards constant motion, pulled by the pace folks set around us. She made every excuse for hurrying up. She didn't want to write. Or draw. Or she was hungry. Or tired. Or had to pee. Rather than give in, Keith and I had to set the example. We had to set the pace.



Parenting is a constant reaffirming of family values in the face of societal pressure.

It isn't easy to go against the grain. At first, Ava resisted like any good pre-teen on a family vacation. However, after a couple of stops, she began to settle down. She started to notice details.

She started to appreciate the nuances of the landscape. She wrote and drew for a little bit longer. She enjoyed just *being*.

While we were sitting beside Crescent Meadow, watching the mist hang over the gold and white wildflowers, Ava put down her pencil and sighed.

"Mama, why do people keep walking up to take pictures and then walking away? They're not looking at anything *and* they're crushing the flowers."

It was true. So many people had walked into the meadow to take the perfect "surrounded by flowers" shot, they'd worn a trail.

"I don't know," I said, hugging her, "but I'm sure glad we're taking our time. 🌲"

## FALL EVENTS

This fall I will be speaking at a Tulsa City County Library literacy fundraiser and the Small Business Summit. Additionally, I will be guest lecturing at Tulsa University. Full descriptions are available on [SashaMartin.com/Events](http://SashaMartin.com/Events)

### CHAPTERS Literacy Fundraiser

Thursday, September 20, 2018

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM (CST)

Hardesty Regional Library

*Reservations: contact Central Library*

### WHY OUR STORIES MATTER

Thursday, September 27, 2018

7:30 AM – 8:15 AM

Marriott Tulsa Hotel Southern Hills

*Reservations: contact Tulsa Chamber*

## I FALL INTO YOU

I rushed in turbulence

stalled in pools of waiting

— ever drawn to you

those who doubted my path,

their rooted limbs

gripped upon one

bend in the journey

could not see down river;

they would have me

change course

— stay in mossy glen

or climb back up the mountain —

but none

could reverse

these waters;

once thawed,

none could refreeze

these melted mountain snows

I did not choose

this route — my soul

moves me across dry earth

sets bloom as I go

and so I go

I go to you

I carve canyons to you;

bend upon bend, I skip

over rock,

over boulder,

over cliff and cave

— now falling I drop

into the depths of you

this is the instant

two rivers join:

now

and now

and now again

I fall into you

I fall into you

I fall into you



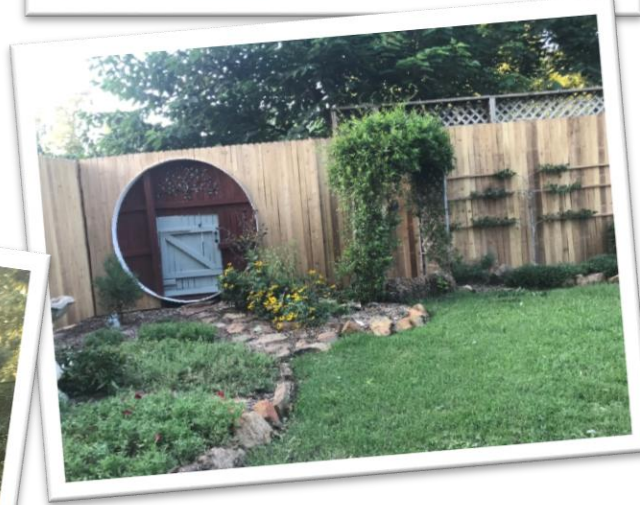
## FROM “EYESORE” TO FEATURE

### Design ideas from the garden

A badly peeling picnic table. A mismatched fence. Every so-called eyesore is an opportunity to unleash our creative spirits.

For years, our backyard was a patchwork of pickets – red and weathered grey, along with a chain link dog run (minus the dog). Each fence reflected someone else's taste, whether a neighbor or previous owner. For years I'd look out the back window and sigh, not sure how to put our own stamp on the garden (and, if I'm honest, a little afraid to). Then I read something that flipped the script. It suggested that, with careful planning, so-called eyesores can become *features*. Or, as I've come to think of it, one person's eyesore is a creative person's treasure. The key is to be bold and brave and unflinching.

I wasn't quite ready for “bold” last year, so we started small, removing the chain link fence and planting the former dog run with strawberries and herbs and native wildflowers (SPRING 2018 has a photo of our early plantings). Where before there was nothing but grass, we now see bees, monarchs, and ladybugs... They really like the thyme and the coneflowers. What a joy! This success emboldened us to tackle our remaining fences.



We love our neighbors and for years we've talked about creating an opening in the fence, so our girls can more easily play together (rather than walk around the block). Thus, phase one became clear: Make a little gate for the girls. Keith cut through the fence





one afternoon. Immediately, the girls began running between yards.

But we weren't done yet.

A moon gate/hobbit hole would perfectly highlight the bold red fence. We had to replace our aging fence, anyway – might as well make a statement. Keith was game. Creating the round opening took him two weekends, but the result is stunning. Now encircled, the red fence reminds me of Mondrian's geometric paintings.

As one friend said, "Wow, this is... ART!"

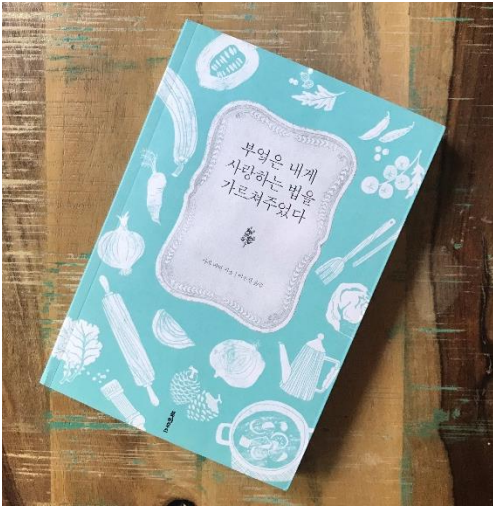
We've gone on to plant an espaliered pear tree, a grape vine, little stone paths, and more. It's fun how one thing leads to the next. Speaking of which... our peeling picnic table. I considered refinishing it, but thought it might be more interesting to add a blue wash... or quotes from our favorite books ...

Any ideas? 🌱



## NOW IN KOREAN

Spread the word – *Life from Scratch: A Memoir of Food, Family, and Forgiveness* is now in Korean! It's a lovely edition with a sweet cover & whimsical art. 📖



## GOING NATURAL

It's been six months or so since I cut off all my hair and stopped dying it. I'm looking forward to having vines of silver and black down my back someday. Watch out age, you and I are going to embrace. 📖



## LIGHTFALL

Iron and glass  
— we frame the light  
even as it swarms the floor,  
even as it brims our eyes  
and falls through us.

Fragile human efforting  
— our capacity for wonder diminished  
only when we believe humanity  
shapes the light.

In truth, persistent  
petals of lightfall form all shape —  
be they walls,  
be they windows.

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

Where do you find stillness?  
What is your relationship to creativity?  
Is there something big and bold you  
need to do?