

LIVING WELL IN LOWRY

BY NEIGHBORS FOR NEIGHBORS

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Free-Range Kids, Free-Range Summer!

If you grew up in the 70s and 80s like me, or really anytime before our current generation, then you can appreciate the memories of long summer days of unsupervised adventure. With summer waiting on our doorstep, I can vividly recall the innocent times of my childhood when we roamed from house to house, corralling friends along the way to come outside and play. If our bikes had odometers, I would bet the miles could number in the hundreds daily. No helmets, of course, and no GPS tracking to speak of.

Our play structures were the giant trees in the yard for climbing, and even places where my mom could not see us from the kitchen window. There was a pond that separated our house from our neighbor's house. We played in that (no life vest in sight), catching tadpoles, frogs, and other slimy things to put in our coffee cans (this was the pre K-cup era). We got dirty.

Sometimes we wouldn't come home for lunch. Can you imagine? Instead we'd rifle through our friend's pantry and create something on our own before heading back out on two wheels to the *dime store* (this was way before the *Dollar Store*) to load up on *candy dots* and *Faygo Red Pop*. We just *got lost*, in a good way, but we always came home.

While my recollection could be off on our age at the time of all this freedom, I sure feel it lasted throughout my entire childhood. My parents, the two very caring and intelligent people who raised us, *encouraged* this behavior - *go outside and play! Just call me when you get there (or leave there, or when you're on your way home so I know when to expect you back)*, my Mom would say. And away I'd go, with a couple quarters in my pocket to make those phone calls from a payphone if needed.

Our kids grow up in a very different environment these days. We've all taken part in conversations with friends, other parents, who wonder if our helicopter ways are a result of instant media alerts, or because we hear about crime as it happens and it just *feels* like it's everywhere! But it's really not.

Believe it or not, when we were all kids, according to the Department of Justice, crime was escalating in our communities all over the country. And today, overall crime rates are down to the lowest they've been in 40 years making our children *safer* than we were growing up - and we're the ones who were left *free* to roam outside, *ALL DAY!*

A few years ago, I went to see Lenore Skenazy, *a.k.a America's Worst Mom*, speak at a local elementary school. If you've never heard of her, she's a journalist out of New York and is *that* Mom who, together with her husband, decided to let her nine-year-old son ride the subway home alone in New York City. Of course, even *with* the happy ending of him finding his way home and discovering his independence, she still faced ridicule and criticism for her decision.

Out of her experience came her book, *Free-Range Kids: How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry)*. Obviously, there are varying degrees of this parenting philosophy. I'm willing to go out on a limb and say there's a good chunk of us whose kids are ready for a little bit more loosening of the reigns. For example, let the kids walk (even out of sight) around the block to get the mail for you. Or, let them wander further down the street, maybe cross one (gasp), to meet a friend or hit the park without you trailing behind. Isn't that one of the reasons we moved to Lowry, our safe, family-friendly community tucked in the city?

This summer, let's make Lowry Free-Range Friendly!

Mind you, this is coming from a Mom who has walked five houses down to take my kids to the bus stop, but everyone can find a happy medium that works for their family. Whether that's letting the kids play alone outside (outside of a fence even), down the street, or ride a mile to the library or to pick up bagels for breakfast on Sunday - it's up to us to instill that independence into our kids. We don't really want them living with us forever, do we?

Let's fill Lowry's streets and parks with kids this summer! Who's in? Now, if we can all remember to stop at the STOP signs, we'll be in really good shape!

*Happy Summer!
See you on the porch!
Julie A. Landen*

For more information visit www.FreeRangeKids.com