Secret place: An experiment in discovery and creativity

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A SECRET PLACE: AN EXPERIMENT IN
DISCOVERY AND CREATIVITY

by
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Researchers in psychology, child development, education, and other disciplines have documented a steady erosion in the quality of childhood and with it, a decrease in perseverance, attention, and self-discipline in the classroom. An over-saturation with pre-programmed electronic toys, games, and entertainment and over-scheduling with adult-directed activities have left today's children and adolescents with little inclination or free time to explore, discover, and develop such "intrapersonal" skills as sorting out their feelings, solving problems, and tapping into their innate creativity.

To examine this trend on a local level, a survey was conducted on childhood pastimes, following the findings of geographer Roger Hart, whose 1979 study *Children's Experience of Place* detailed a child's fundamental need for self-discovered and self-constructed places. Along with questions on a wide range of pursuits, the survey held key questions dealing with secret places, such as hideouts and tree houses, and with other imaginative activities such as secret codes, personal inventions, and imaginary friends and animals. The survey was administered to 352 individuals in six age groups, from age 9 to 66+. The data were analyzed both within each age category and across categories, confirming the conclusions of Hart and others and suggesting some significant new dimensions and perspectives. Key findings are discussed and summarized in bar graphs and numerical tables.

As a possible antidote to the phenomenon of declining childhood creativity, the concept of *a secret place* became the basis of curriculum for junior high art classes, with positive and promising results. Classroom praxis is described and illustrated with examples of student work, both visual and textual.

The next step in the experiment was the application of the secret place concept to the investigator's own creativity. This led to the production of seven large paintings and eight free-verse poems, which, in turn, were reproduced in smaller format to yield a limited edition of hand-bound books. The genesis of the works is described, accompanied by reproductions of the paintings and poems.

Finally, broader environmental and cultural implications are suggested along with ramifications for the classroom, families, and communities.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am convinced that whatever creativity I may possess is largely due to secret places I have inhabited. I hope this work will aid and inspire others to recognize the importance of creating their own sanctuaries, regardless of age, wherein they can dream, imagine, and play.

This project expanded far beyond my initial expectations, and I could not have completed such a task without the help of the following people, to whom I owe a sincere debt of gratitude:

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Little Tree and ol’ Maud the hound roamed the mountain, exploring the trails, looking after every creature that inhabited that beautiful place. He and Maud knew the spring branch well, and they scampered along its banks, up the hollow talking to the swallows, Little Tree squatting like a giant to study the little marshes, discovering rock minnows and musk bugs, learning the secret of frogs:

Following the spring branch was how I found the secret place. It was a little ways up the side of the mountain and hemmed in with laurel. It was not very big, a grass knoll with an old sweet gum tree bending down. When I saw it, I knew it was my secret place, and so I went there a whole lot. Ol’ Maud taken to going with me. She liked it too, and we would sit under the sweet gum and listen—and watch . . . . I reckined [sic] I was too young to keep a secret, for I had to tell Granma about my place. She wasn’t surprised—which surprised me. Granma said all Cherokees had a secret place . . . . She said she reckined most everybody had a secret place, but she couldn’t be certain, as she had never made inquiries of it. Granma said it was necessary. Which made me feel right good about having one. (Carter 58, 59)

In Forrest Carter’s autobiographical novel about remembrances of life with his Cherokee grandparents, the small boy discovers the
importance of having a secret place, regardless of one's age. "Granma said it was necessary." It is!

As a visual arts educator for sixteen years, I have been concerned by the gradual, yet steady decline in some students' general performance in creativity, imagination, and the simple patience needed for completing quality original artwork. I am seeing, in many students, an increase in complacency, passivity, lack of inquisitiveness, and overall laziness. I believe this alarming, subtle trend is due to insidious culprits in our modern American lifestyle. Today, children are raised in a world where speed is the need; days are packed to overflowing with a flurry of scheduled hustle-and-bustle activities, with little or no silent time; and television, videos, and computer-related pastimes reign.

It is evident that in most people's lives, both children's and adults', there may have been no experience of such a haven as Forrest Carter found for himself; indeed, Little Tree's (Carter's) tranquil, secret place does not exist in the world most know today. Yet the scarcity and even foreignness of scenes like the one Carter evokes do not make the personal haven any less relevant to life today; quite the reverse. Consequently, as a culmination of a three-year Master's Degree project, I have explored the concept of a secret place as an antidote for the burgeoning damage that childhood, in particular, is incurring.
The secret place comes in many guises. Perhaps it is poets, with their acute aesthetic sensitivities, who have best defined the essence of the secret place. William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence*, for instance, captures moments of wonder:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of you hand  
And Eternity in an hour. (Suransky 39)

An excerpt from Robert Frost’s appealing *Birches* offers a delightful explanation of the birch trees’ bent appearance:

I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father’s trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them. (Frost 107-108)

In *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, Robert Louis Stevenson describes a child’s secret place much like that of Little Tree’s in “My Kingdom”:

Down by a shining water well  
I found a very little dell,  
No higher than my head.  
The heather and the gorse about  
In summer bloom were coming out,  
Some yellow and some red.

I called the little pool a sea;  
The little hills were big to me;  
For I am very small.  
I made a boat, I made a town,  
I searched the caverns up and down,
And named them one and all.

And all about was mine, I said,
The little sparrows overhead,
    The little minnows too.
This was the world and I was king;
For me the bees came by to sing,
    For me the swallows flew.
(Stevenson 64-65)

The magic of inside places is vividly captured by A. A. Milne's imaginative child's eye view of an ordinary staircase in "Halfway Down":

Halfway down the stairs
Is a stair
Where I sit.
There isn't any
Other stair
Quite like
It.
I'm not at the bottom,
I'm not at the top;
So this is the stair
Where
I always
Stop.

Halfway up the stairs
Isn't up,
And isn't down
It isn't the nursery.
It isn't the town
And all sorts of funny thoughts
Run round my head:
"It isn't really
Anywhere!
It's somewhere else
Instead!" (Milne 83)

Carolyn Adelman speaks of the childhood that I personally remember:
Childhood was a gentle place, an easing into age
With discoveries made at one's own pace, absorbing life and
Finding security in self-knowledge, its sunny interludes lasting forever.

I delighted in secret places
Losing myself in caves hollowed in the haymow
And hiding in the dark, ancient milk-house, my sulking place
And climbing the silo ladder skyward, my solitary thinking place
And time to experience self and solitude.

In that gentle place my soul learned the wonder of discovery
And the awe of contemplation
And the wonders of time. (Adelman)

The *secret place* has its own life, its own reality, and affords its occupant escape—space—quiet—a sense of clarity, time to think, a time to listen to one's own voice, imagine, reflect, and play. Howard Gardner labels these intrapersonal activities as "access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior" (Gardner 239). Gardner insists that this form of knowledge is of tremendous importance in that it is also closely tied to the interpersonal skills of looking outward, toward the behavior, feelings, and motivations of others. His research indicates that neither form of intelligence, under ordinary circumstances, can develop without the other (Gardner 241). It is clear that without normal
development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, an individual will most likely be a liability in society. "The less a person understands the feelings, the responses, and the behavior of others, the more likely he will interact inappropriately with them and therefore fail to secure his proper place within the larger community" (Gardiner 254).

The development of personal knowledge is a natural process if it is allowed. Noted European pedagogy theorist Martinus J. Langveld wrote in 1967:

Children are not formed and influenced by schooling alone; they are drawn just as much by their own world and their own self-constituted environments. And for this, children do not need just the formal upbringing of the school curriculum; they also need freedom and openness to the becoming of that which is as yet undetermined and uncertain. (Langveld)

It is up to parents in particular, and teachers when possible, to offer the child access to special places in trusted environments. Hidden places that permit access to worlds brimming with the possibilities of new and meaningful experiences. “During all the stages leading to adulthood, the secret place remains an asylum in which the personality can mature; this self-creating process of this standing apart from others, this experiment, this growing in self-awareness, this creative peace and absolute intimacy demand it—for they are only possible in alone-ness” (Langveld).
The notion of the secret place and the activities that can take place there is a catalyst for creativity, imagination, and free play. Developing imagination is an important way to gain knowledge (Lee). Psychologist Erik Erikson explains, "Imaginative play is a precursor of conceptual thought—in which possibilities are explored upon the inner 'stage' of a child's imagination" (cited in Lee). That play is of central importance in a child's life is well supported by decades of research. Imaginative play is just as important in a child's development as learning numbers and the ABCs; it is an absolutely critical part of childhood. Yale University child development psychologists Dorothy and Jerome Singer affirm, "A critical feature of adult life is our ability to create stories we tell ourselves about possible futures and ways of attaining our goals" (cited in Lee). Children need to get an early start in such inner storytelling and mental manipulation of various situations. The Singers have also shown that children who are good at imagining, that is, creating scenarios from their own minds, not from a menu of possibilities, have superior concentration, less aggression, more sensitivity to others, and the ability to take more pleasure in what they do (Healy Failure 228).

Through play, particularly open-ended play that requires the child's input and imagination, children find paths to discovery and understanding, and along the way, they open the door to independence,
self-confidence, and unlimited potential (Lee). Researcher Joan Almon
sums up the vital connection between play and creativity:

Although play is a steady part of healthy children’s lives, it is
not easy to define what play is. I prefer to think of it as a
bubbling spring of health and creativity within each
child—and, for that matter, within every human being.
Sometimes this spring seems to stop flowing but it remains
at the heart of every human being and, with a bit of effort,
the blockages can be cleared away and a creative, playful
spirit can flow again. This can happen at any age. (Almon)

Biologist Karl Groos, around the turn of the century, wrote two
volumes on the importance of play in the lives of animals and humans.
He argued that play was a preparation for life. He noted that young
animals play at stalking games that prepare them as adults to pursue
their prey. Similarly, when children pretend play, they are preparing to
assume adult roles (Elkind 196). As children use symbolic objects to
pretend, they are broadening their mental landscapes and building
abstract abilities. Unfortunately, some preschool teachers report that
stimulus-saturated children are losing the ability to play spontaneously.
“It takes me until after Christmas to get them to pretend that a block is a
loaf of bread” (Healy Failure 224).

Research indicates strong links between creative play and
language, physical, cognitive, and social development, development of
mathematical abilities, empathy, social altruism, indicators of health,
and problem-solving skills, convergent and divergent, both of which are
essential for life. The resounding answer to where creativity comes from is play—good old unmonitored, unstructured, free and open play (Almon). And as a side note, according to Dr. Jane Healy, organized sports do not qualify as “play” in the same sense because they are structured by adults and lack spontaneity. Researcher Sara Smilanski has observed that children who show the greatest capacities for social make-believe play also display more imagination and less aggression, and possess a greater ability to use language for speaking and understanding others (Almon).

Bryant Furlow, in an article for New Scientist, articulates the relationship between play and mental health:

Children destined to suffer mental illnesses such as schizophrenia as adults, for example, engage in precious little social play early in life. But can a lack of play affect the creativity and leaning abilities of normal children? No one knows for sure, but there is a growing concern that play is disappearing from childhood and that this will affect children’s physical, social, and emotional health. When rat pups are denied the opportunity to play they grow smaller neocortices and lose the ability to apply social rules when they do interact with their peers. (cited in Almon)

It is through play that the child restructures and reinvents; it is the mode through which things in the world disclose themselves. The transforming nature of play allows the child to become fully realized as a human being (Suransky 172).

Play fosters curiosity, which is a major catalyst to learning, the cornerstone of creativity, and the only solution to complacency.
Becoming an inquisitive person is a pre-requisite for growing up with the potential for living an enriching life. "Inquisitiveness may be the beginning of meaningful learning, but beyond that, it is one permanent and certain characteristic of citizens of a thriving democracy who seek self-enriching worlds of scientific, aesthetic, and humanistic exploration and discovery" (Barell 225). Samuel Johnson wrote in 1751, "Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous mind" (cited in Barell 225).

Unfortunately, modern trends reveal that we are becoming a playless society, in the sense of free, creative play, and this has left many children passive and lacking motivation for learning (Almon). Chief offenders in this phenomenon are the lack of silent time due to overscheduling a child's life (including the prevalence of organized sports) and children's dependence on electronic entertainment: television, videos, and computers.

"Hyperparenting," a recent catch phrase, is defined as an overscheduled family style that, in some circles is being touted as the best way to raise children—to raise "winners". This program promises to create successful children who get into Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Cornell, and Princeton. The blueprint: enrich every facet of a child's life done through activities started early—preferably prenatally—combined with
intense practice, parental selflessness, and ceaseless devotion to being
the best (Rosenfeld).

According to Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld, the widespread adoption of this
over-scheduled family style has altered family lives. "In the past 20
years, unstructured children's activities have declined by 50 percent,
structured sports time has doubled, household conversations have
become far less frequent, family dinners have declined 33 percent, and
family vacations have decreased by 28 percent (Rosenfeld). Dr. Rosenfeld
goes on to say that many of today's children are so tightly scheduled that
many have never invented a backyard game, and few get rewarded for the
joy they found in discovering, imagining, creating, and exploring. In
many instances, when not in constant, frenzied motion, some children
have no idea what to do and become bored. "Boredom", usually a
dreaded word, is not necessarily bad, and under the discernment of
tuned-in adults, can lead to "free time" or "unscheduled" time which can
stimulate children to think, create, imagine, and hear the whisperings of
their own inner voice, the one that makes them write a story or build an
"invention" out of odds and ends, or imagine an elaborate adventure from
inside a discarded cardboard box. Children must have the opportunity
to make of space and silence a world of meaning; awaken their curiosity
and develop according to their own timetable (Suransky 38).
Psychologists and psychiatrists recognize that feelings and emotions are the most complex and intricate part of development. Feelings and emotions have their own timing and rhythm and cannot be hurried (Elkind 12). Rosenfeld affirms, “Kids need time to be alone, to rehearse in their minds, to relax.”

As a result of such hurrying, children are put under undue stress, they learn impatience, and researchers say that because there is less emphasis and time to “go out and play,” children these days are on their way to being the most unfit ever. Children need time to grow, to learn, and to develop. Childhood is an important stage of life to which children are entitled. Hurrying children into adulthood violates the sanctity of life (Elkind 202).

Another culprit that robs children of time for spontaneous play is technology-related pastimes. Dr. Susan Johnson had worked professionally as a Physician Consultant at the School Health Center in San Francisco, studying the effects television has on children. But it wasn’t until she intimately observed her own six-year-old that the real impact of how television altered behavior became clear to her:

Before watching TV, he would be outside in nature, content to look at bugs, make things with sticks and rocks, and play in the water and sand. He seemed at peace with himself, his body, and his environment. When watching TV, he was so unresponsive to me and to what was happening around him, that he seemed glued to the television set. When I turned off
the TV he became anxious, nervous, and irritable and usually cried (or screamed) for the TV to be turned back on. His play was erratic, his movements impulsive and uncoordinated. His play lacked his own imaginative input. Instead of creating his own play themes, he was simply re-enacting what he had just seen on TV in a very repetitive, uncreative and stilted way. (Johnson)

Dr. Johnson's research has shown that currently 66 percent of American households own three or more television sets. Children of all ages, from preschool through adolescence, watch an average of four hours of television per day (excluding time spent watching videos or playing computer games). A child spends more time watching television than any other activity except sleeping, and by age 18, a child has spent more time in front of a television set than at school. Johnson goes on to say that several investigations have concluded that the act of viewing television is more damaging to the brain than the content, which can be horrendous in itself. Watching television has been characterized as multi-leveled sensory deprivation that may be stunting the growth of children's brains. As a comparison, when young animals were placed in an enclosed area where they could only watch other animals play, their brain growth decreased in proportion to the time spent inactively watching (Johnson). In addition, the rapid-fire change of images, which occurs approximately every two to six seconds, does not give the brain a chance to process the image. This, in conjunction with how television
affects the movements of the eyes, results in problems with children’s ability to pay attention, to concentrate, and to focus.

Active play time has been curtailed because children are spending so much time in front of the TV. They tend to reject other activities because merely watching is easier (Healy Endangered 198). Dr. Jane Healy’s research indicates that too much television viewing induces neural passivity, which reduces the ability to stick to a task and tends to shorten the time children are willing to spend on solving problems. In addition, it emphasizes skills which do not transfer well to reading or listening and has a hypnotic, possibly neurologically addictive effect on the brain by changing the frequency of its electrical impulses in ways that block active mental processing (Healy Endangered 198). It is common for teachers, myself included, to be frustrated because it is becoming more and more difficult to keep attention in the classroom when young people are used to the fast-paced action and special effects they constantly view outside of school.

Viewing fixed external images on television becomes a habit and children get used to not using their imagination. Television and other electronic media are taking their toll on reading as well as play time. Unlike reading a book, television and computers do not allow the mind to create its own pictures nor the time to think about them, and watching
requires less mental effort than reading. Healy interviewed an eleven-year-old student who commented, “Reading books is boring, and it takes so long. Searching the Web is faster and more fun because we can get sound recordings, like of a dolphin’s sounds, or a video of the discovery of the bow of the Titanic” (Healy Failure 32). This reaction is common among students with whom I work. Our school has a designated twenty-minute reading time each day, and sadly, every year, I hear more complaints about how much they hate that time. The following comments came from a survey of teachers conducted by the Education Committee of the Professional Association of Teachers, “The sole topic of conversation is TV, videos or computer games. It occupies all out-of-school time. They have stopped reading from choice, they now play games” (Education Committee).

The overuse of computers in children’s lives is closely related to the problems caused by television. Research has shown that 84 percent of students have their own personal computers, many in their bedrooms; 62.5 percent have access to hand-held games; and 81.2 percent have access to video recorders, many in their bedrooms (Education Committee). Contrary to modern public opinion, computers are not the end all solution to well-educated individuals. According to Dr. Healy in her book Failure To Connect, 90 percent of voters in the United States are
convinced that schools with computers can do a better job of educating, and 61 percent would support a federal tax increase to speed the process of equipping schools with state-of-the-art-technology. She concludes, "Thus we expose our children to computer games, programmed learning software, and computer camps, all of which have children working with external symbols (pictures on a screen) rather than with internal ones (language, mental images)" (28).

Because of electronic pseudo-reality, children are becoming separated from nature. As they sit in a room mesmerized by a colorful screen, they are missing what the physical world offers. Reflectively examining a small pool of water, a leaf, or a rock presents snail-paced, real-time information and lessons in patience. I recently saw a cartoon that showed a young boy sitting in front of a computer screen using a drawing program. The image on the screen was a snowman. A window beside the boy showed that snowflakes were falling outside. According to Healy, fewer than 10 percent of American children learn about nature from the outdoors, about one-third from school, and more than half learn about it from some sort of electronic device (Healy Failure 225). "Nature is the greatest teacher of patience, delayed gratification, reverence, awe and observation. The colors are spectacular and all the senses are stimulated. Many children today think being out in nature is boring,"
because they are so used to the fast-paced, action-packed (electronic) images" (Johnson). Thoreau warned us that if we are not careful, we may become "tools of our tools" (cited in Healy Failure 32).

Clifford Stoll, a disillusioned pioneer of the Internet, comments, "The computer requires almost no physical interaction or dexterity, beyond the ability to type . . . and demands rote memorization of nonobvious rules. You subjugate your own thinking patterns to those of the computer. Using this 'tool' alters our thinking processes" (cited in Healy Failure 33). He goes on to observe that by always depending on a computer when confronted with a problem, we might ignore or not recognize other solutions, thus degrading our own creative thinking powers (Healy Failure 33).

Another recent catch phrase, "edutainment" has surfaced as the computer is extolled as being an educator. "Learning is fun," Healy states, "but it is also hard work."

Working hard and surmounting challenges and ultimately succeeding is what builds real motivation. Any gadget that turns this exciting and difficult process into an easy game is dishonest and cheats the child out of the joy of personal mastery. Encouraging children to "learn" by flitting about in a colorful multimedia world is a recipe for a disorganized and undisciplined mind." (Healy Failure 54)

Toys, of course, are fundamental tools that aid in learning and growing. Those that provide autonomous control of play by the child are
the most valuable in cultivating thinking skills. Paints, Tinkertoys, non-animated dolls, empty boxes, etc., are fully under the child’s control and teach natural laws such as gravity, and cause and effect, empowering the young learner, enhancing motor skills, and conveying major principles of how the world works (Healy Failure 209). Bob Sorensen, Executive Director of Michigan Special Education Services, contends that electronic toys contribute to a lack of motor development which can, in turn, lead to learning disabilities:

We see more and more kids now who have all these fancy gadgets and machines, but they don’t know how to coordinate their bodies and they can’t have a decent conversation. They spend hours on these computers and mostly they’re playing games. Their motor development is retarded, and they struggle with reading. (cited in Healy Failure 219)

Many adult experts in fields such as math, science, technology, and the arts still do much of their reasoning with body intelligence as a result of playing with old-fashioned, non-electronic toys. Frank Lloyd Wright remembered all his life the blocks that got him started on his career. At the age of eighty-eight, Wright commented, “The maple wood blocks are in my fingers to this day” (Healy Failure 220).

Warren Buckleitner, a software reviewer, commented, “One screensaver I previewed was so engaging that children tended to simply sit and watch it” (cited in Healy Failure 222). A kindergarten teacher in
Iowa says, “These plug-in kids don’t know how to play” (Healy Failure 222). Joan Almon, President of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association, says, “A good toy is 90 percent child and 10 percent toy” (cited in Healy Failure 222). A first-grade teacher responded, “Most children’s software is 90 percent computer and 10 percent child” (cited in Healy Failure 222). An ironic twist is that much of the software children use today was developed by a company founded by two brothers who, as children, created their own secret world in an alcove under the stairs based on their reading of the Hardy Boys adventure series. Healy states, “Although their software is among the “better” products, I am quite sure its manufactured delights don’t hold a candle to that wonderful secret kingdom that occupied so many of their hours—and later enabled them to make a fortune from parents who feared their own children might have too much unscheduled time” (Healy Failure 228).

Of course, I do not suggest that technology and its advantages be eliminated from children’s lives. Good television programming has provided a wealth of information and some valuable entertainment for us all, and computers and the Internet have changed lives for the better in most cases. Computer innovator Alan Kay believes new technology—when combined with active, personal learning experiences—can expand human intelligence far beyond the strictures of traditional education
(cited in Healy *Failure* 130). Our children must be prepared for life in an information-loaded, but de-personalized landscape (Healy *Failure* 30). As teachers and parents, we must be able to take full advantage of the positive and valuable aspects of all the media, yet strike a balance by reinforcing and not neglecting the fundamental needs of growing children, by implementing ways to encourage original thought, by enhancing imaginations, and by teaching patience, in other words, by giving them a grounding in humanity.

It is evident, then, based on the findings of numerous studies, such as those reported above, that a confluence of factors in our modern American lifestyle are to blame for some children’s problems in creative thinking and motivation. Life has dramatically changed in the past thirty years, and my next chapter provides some significant insights and contrasts in that regard.
II

INQUIRY

*The path the child must travel to get from the world-in-common to his own place is not too far.*
~Martinus J. Langeveld

In the early 1970s, Roger Hart, a behavioral researcher, conducted an in-depth scientific study on the play habits of children. His emphasis was specifically on their relationship with their environment. In a small, semi-rural town in Vermont he followed 86 children for two years studying where they went and how they spent their time. Hart’s findings were numerous and interesting; three of them emerged as being specifically pertinent to this thesis. He found: (1) that the children, at some point in their routines, sought out solitary time; (2) that they spent a significant amount of time building or modifying the landscape to create their own spaces; and (3) that the natural world played an important part in their activities.

Hart observed that some of the most important places in a child’s environment are experienced alone and that many children intentionally seek out quiet places. Very often they carry water, dirt, or sand to these places that become sites for hours of quiet introspection, where they
often dabble seemingly aimlessly (Hart 171). As adults, he goes on to say, we tend to dismiss this type of activity, but it is extremely important to a child's development. "Most surveys of children's play seem to have ignored those activities in which children are resting, watching, or dabbling by themselves in a quiet, seemingly introspective manner. Such activity is commonly recorded as "passive" by observational studies. But, without a doubt, the children are active" (Hart 204).

Many times the children would have a special place that was their own. Hart observed children as young as three finding small spaces in which to sit by themselves—a box or a cupboard. "These serve as places of retreat, to look out upon the world from a place of one's own, as places for experimenting with how to put things together" (Hart 204). For instance, for Davy, a six-year-old in a family of five children, the special place was as simple as a six-inch-square lump of turf at the base of a tree. As his sister put it, "None of us can use it, it's always his" (Hart 313).

This act of finding and making places for themselves was common and was an important quality of children's interaction with their environment, and finding their place is a process of making order and meaning (Hart 349). Child-built forts and "houses" were among the top three preferred places to be, in the children estimation. The most
important aspect of building something of their own was the satisfaction they gained during the process of transforming the physical world. Many times children would find places and imagine interior structure without any actual physical modification by them (Hart 330).

Hart learned that these important building activities usually took place in areas not dominated by adults and in a less manicured more natural setting of tall grass, sand, and dirt, which supplied loose parts for building. Nature seemed to be a powerful force that drew the children into creative play. Hart confirmed Frobel’s (1826) previous finding that “the harmony and unity of the natural world and a child’s desire to grasp this unity is in order to develop a sense of inner unity” (Hart 330).

Trees in particular were popular places to play. They were highly valued for climbing and for tree houses, and beneath the trees, children commonly found an area of dirt where grass didn’t grow well. Here in the shade, they would dig up dirt to make miniature landscapes which occupied them for hours at time. Hart found that trees were much more valuable to the children than any play equipment (Hart 203). He learned that children throughout the town developed strong affections for particular trees. He writes, “I saw children returning repeatedly to the same tree during my two years in the town. Joe valued the birch tree because there were so many different ways to climb it—his mother and
father explained that of all places outside of his bedroom, the birch tree was the place he most considered to be his own" (Hart 203).

Hart's analysis of the childhood of 35 years ago was a different world from that of today. Of course technology, especially that which was accessible to children, was limited, and the world seemed a safer place for children to freely roam their environs. Most markedly, in Hart's study, however, was the fact that all the children enjoyed long stretches of unstructured days to explore and play.

It is apparent that there has been a significant change in childhood activities in the past 35 years. I was curious to know what today's children actually do and how it might differ from the pastimes of other generations. I am certainly no expert in gathering and analyzing data in a scientific manner, but as an experiment, I conducted my own survey to see if the results would reveal some insights. For this study, I was more interested in pastimes that encouraged imagination and creativity, so I embedded those types of statements in a variety of others so that the respondents wouldn't be led. The complete questionnaires can be found in Appendix A.

The surveys were administered in two versions to six age groupings, in ascending order. For the youngest age group, I chose fourth-graders, who seemed to be at the ideal juncture for such a
purpose, since they were still young enough to be in that vital
imaginative stage of early childhood, yet they would have the literacy
skills to read a simple questionnaire, mark their choices, and write
comments. The survey was taken by 82 children, the entire fourth grade
at Valley Elementary, in Huntsville, Utah. To represent the next age level
(13 to 17), an expanded version of the questionnaire was administered to
my school's entire ninth grade, numbering 93 students. For the young
adult category (18 to 30), I contacted an instructor and a professor at
Weber State University in nearby Ogden, Utah, and they administered
the surveys in their college classes, both lower division and upper
division. For the two mature adult categories (age 31 to 50 and 51 to
65), my school's faculty and staff at Snowcrest Junior High in Eden,
Utah, completed the survey, and many of the faculty of Weber State
participated as well. And of course, there were some older students in
the university classes who fell into these categories as well. The totals
were 92 in the young adult category, 36 in the early-middle-age category
and 34 in the middle-age category. The oldest generation, age 66+, was
the most difficult to represent adequately and is consequently the
smallest in number, with 15 respondents. A few of these came from the
older faculty members at Weber State University, but most were long-
time residents of my small town, whom I contacted by mail. While I was
looking forward to gaining some insights into the attitudes and
backgrounds of my parents’ generation, some of the neighborhood
respondents seemed confused about my intent. As a result, their
answers were not complete, and the data in that section, besides being
scanty numerically, is slightly skewed.

Administering the survey was very enjoyable and, I felt, successful.
Respondents of all ages (except some in the oldest bracket, as noted
above) seemed to enjoy the activity. Most took the trouble to write
comments at the end, and several even included side notes in the
margins expressing that this had been an enjoyable exercise and
thanking me for jogging memories that they hadn’t thought of in years.

Because of the number and design of the questions and the
generational range of the respondents, the survey turned out to be rich
with implications across age groups as well as within each age group,
and it contains with a wealth of data that I can follow up on and expand
in future studies. For purposes of this project, I pulled out what I
thought to be eight key questions which seemed promising in light of my
current research and my experience and intuitions about children’s
creativity. The eight questions, of necessity, had to be pulled from the
shorter list of questions used for the fourth-graders, although many
other interesting combinations suggested themselves. I then tabulated
the data in terms of percentages of answers for the three choices ("often", "sometimes", and "never") in each age group. Those data are reproduced in Appendix B as the age frequency graphs. In addition, I ran comparisons of the various age groups for each question, re-numbered for this purpose as Questions 1 through 8, which were not, of course, their positions in the surveys; these results are labeled by question number in Appendix B, starting with Figure 7. The data are reported both in tables showing the actual percentages and as figures converting those percentages into bar graphs. My discussion here will refer to the latter, since their visual aspect makes them most easily accessible, and I offer four conclusions concerning what I found to be the most significant patterns.

First, my intuitions were confirmed about the increasing hold of technology-based entertainment on children's free time. Figure 8 in Appendix B shows the results of Question 2: "I play video games." / "I liked to play video games, pinball, and arcade-type games." A striking reverse pattern appears between the "never" responses from the adult groups ("no" from the children) and the "often/yes" responses of the young adult, adolescent, and children groups. The data suggest that the video game phenomenon must be seen as separate from the issue of electronic entertainment in general, since these results are not
duplicated for Question 1 on television viewing (see Appendix B, Figure 1) and Question 7 on watching videos (see Appendix B, Figure 13). I had rather expected to find the same kind of criss-cross pattern across the age groups for all three of these questions, but the patterns of use for those two activities, while certainly generationally governed to some extent, are evidently more complex than they are for video game play.

Second, the results from Question 4 and Question 8 seem to point towards the general erosion of imaginative play noted by other researchers. Question 4: "I have 'secret codes' with my friends" / "My friends and I had 'clubs' and 'secret codes'" (see Appendix B, Figure 10) was intended to look at that hallmark of early childhood peer-group bonding: the secret club or group of friends and the accompanying specialized communication among members. The "sometimes" answer is the most notable in this case, with even the crusty, post-65 respondents having engaged in it. The "sometimes" and "often" answers taken together show that these kinds of activities have indeed been perennial mainstays of childhood adventures, that is, until very recently. The break in the pattern is the fourth-graders, who are at the very age where this in-group bonding should be occurring, yet over half of the children reported no participation. Even more striking is the pattern of responses to Question 8: "I have imaginary friends or animals" / "I created
'imaginary friends or animals'" (see Appendix B, Figure 14). Obviously, not all children, even imaginative ones, find outlet for their creativity in this way, yet it still seems significant that the proportion of those who do has decreased markedly in the younger age groups, with the most dramatic change found in the youngest: nearly 80% of the fourth-graders report never imagining playmates, pets, monsters, and the like, perhaps because they find them already-made in their video game play.

Third, the patterns from these three questions relate to perhaps the most dramatic finding in the survey and the one I find most disturbing: the results of Question 5: "I am bored when there is nothing to do" / "When there was nothing to do I was bored" (see Appendix B, Figure 11). The "yes" / "often" answer is the most revealing here, its white bars showing that sharp rise to the left as the ages of the respondents decreases. This points to a growing inability of children to "make their own fun," to rely on their own imaginations in the absence of the ubiquitous ready-made activities and programmed play. It also demonstrates that my subjects have definitely followed national trends described in my Foundation chapter and confirms in my mind something I have long been concerned about in my years of teaching: the increasing dysfunction of students when asked to create something on
their own. It seems that such classroom problems have their roots years before in patterns of mind established in childhood.

Finally, in contrast to the findings from the four questions discussed above are the results from Question 6: "I have a hideout or a secret place." / "I liked to play in hideouts and secret places" (see Appendix B, Figure 12). The “often” / “yes” and “sometimes” answers taken together for all age groups show the continued importance of this activity for all age groups. While the fourth-graders do have the largest number of negative responses (almost 30%), their over 70% affirmative responses stand in marked contrast to their use of secret codes or imaginary playmates or creatures. In addition, in the comments section, where respondents were asked to describe something special and memorable ("Please write your very favorite thing to do" / Please describe a very favorite and memorable activity you used do as a young child”), many responses, across age groups, spoke of secret places. Observe the similarities in the representative examples given below:

**Age 13-17:**

"I played in the sand with a crane and would dig big holes in the ground."

"Me and my brother would build forts [and] hide in them. We would have code names and we would play for days."

"Build forts out of blankets and chairs."
"I used to always build houses out of cushions and play house."

"I used to love to just walk through the wood."

"I used to have a dead tree in the field next to me. It had two floors made out of string, a couch, and our code which was a star, . . . but someone bought the land and tore it down so we don’t have it any more."

**Age 18-30:**

"I loved to climb trees. I named my favorite tree; his name was Barkly."

"I went to my grandpa’s house and played with my sister and cousins. We dug holes in the back yard and made all kinds of discoveries."

"As a young girl, we spent days building a hut in the woods behind my house, and we would have club meetings and always were playing in our hut."

"We used to play with all the neighbor children—like we were detectives and had secret codes and forts; we would build forts and climb trees as secret hiding locations."

**Age 31-50:**

"I loved to build snow forts, and houses out of chairs and cushions. I would build “secret” rooms in them and play with my imaginary friends, and read books."

"We would build vast complexes of dams and water ways in our garden or sand pile. Then we would inhabit them with army men and other defensive type things."

**Age 51-65:**

"Play in old buildings—and in the alleys and ditches in my neighborhood."
"I used to love to build imaginary towns and cities out of all the pillows I could find throughout the house from beds, sofa cushions, and so on. My brothers, sister, and friends would play for hours in what we’d constructed (especially on rainy days)."

"I was born and brought up in India. Swimming in the river and village ponds, and playing in the riverbed in summer months are my favorites."

That respondents would choose these particular activities, out of all those suggested in the survey questions (especially the longer version, with its 39 questions) seems significant. It is also interesting that almost none of the fourth-graders singled out huts, hideouts, or other secret place activities as their favorites, despite the fact that their answers to the questionnaire showed that most of them do engage in them. Unlike the other five groups, the youngest respondents reported their favorite things to do as being soccer, video games, taking care of pets, and playing with brothers and sisters. Those kinds of activities are notably absent from the comments of all the other age groups. It may be that the value of the hidden places and personal havens becomes apparent only after time. As one respondent in the 18-30 age group stated, "I used to build forts with my brother—in the house or in the fields. It was so much fun. I sure do miss that.” The importance for all generations of both natural places and what Hart calls child-constructed places,
indoors and out, attests to something firm and continuous, in a fabric where so many other threads have been broken.

In a small way, then, the data from my survey, in both the answers to the questionnaire and the written comments, confirm Hart's findings and Langeveld's characterization of the significance of the secret place in the psyche and developing personality of the child. It seems that even as other traditional childhood outlets and pastimes have been eroding, the impulse to seek out or create places of one's own has remained as fundamental as ever. It is for this reason that the concept of a secret place is so powerful, both as a metaphor for childhood discovery and creativity and as bulwark against the modern-day assault on childhood. It is to the vital protective aspect of the secret place that I now turn.
III

PRAXIS

Our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb mountains, as high as possible.
~Loris Malaguzzi

As we struggle raising and teaching our children among all the obstacles inherent in the average modern American lifestyle, the most conspicuous and one of the most important elements missing is that of silence. Psychotherapist Gunilla Norris writes, "Silence is something like an endangered species. The experience of silence is now so rare that we must guard it and treasure it. For when we make room for silence, we make room for ourselves" (cited in Ryder). William Penn wrote, "True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment" (cited in Ryder). Amy E. Dean, in her book Caring for the Family Soul says, "The careful listening to oneself that is afforded by taking advantage of moments of silence is valuable in 'giving voice' to innermost thoughts and feelings that may rarely be heard. Such inward awareness aids communication; the clearer the inner feelings, the easier it can be to translate such feelings into words" (Rogers). Personally, I know the value of silent times and as a teacher;
I believe it is of utmost importance to share with my students what has been successful for me in terms of learning about and creating art.

I have made a concerted effort in my classes for the past two years in particular, to foster the notion and value of silence. We begin each class session with ten minutes of "silent drawing". I have observed that for some children it is a welcome respite in their day, but for others, it is a constant struggle to quiet themselves and feel the peace and clarity that comes when one is still and focused. My only solution for them is consistency and persistence. During these silent sessions we draw objects from nature. Occasionally, the students go outside to gather interesting natural things such as leaves, rocks, pine cones, and flowers to bring back to draw. They learn quickly that to draw is to see. This helps them slow down and closely observe minute details that they would normally overlook.

In addition, as a result of my own work and my research on this topic, I have added "A Secret Place" unit to my curriculum. I introduce the idea at the beginning of the semester or year as we discuss why students take art classes. I emphasize that the class is not just about making art pieces, the result of which they may or may not like, but it is about tapping into their imaginations, about creating, and it is the process that is most important. We discuss how and where creative
people such as artists, writers, and scientists, produce fresh ideas. I speak about the importance of silence, and the need for a place they can go to reflect, meditate, daydream, and imagine things that they don’t have time for in the ‘real world’. I read to them about how Little Tree found his secret place and how Granma said it was necessary. I explain to my students that this is a good habit to continue throughout their lives, and I warn them that they must be vigilant in their quest to keep and use their secret places and guard the precious silence that resides there because the world is bent on gobbling it up. After various discussions and other related assignments throughout the semester or year, the students reflect and write about their progress on finding time and space for themselves. Following are some of my ninth-grade students’ responses:

“I guess my secret place would be my room. Also, sometimes I go down with my dog to the edge of the river. I just sit and listen to it and the birds.”

“I like to go to the swing set in our backyard. I think it’s necessary because we all need our time for imagination and we all need our time to think about things. Finding a place where it’s quiet and secret is always good, then no one can bother you.”

“I go to my room to have privacy from my brother and sometimes my parents. It’s where [I] can hide. I think it helps develop things to know about yourself, lets you have some freedom and helps so that you aren’t stressed.”
"Up the street there is a hidden path which leads to an area where there is a flatbed trailer. If I stand on the trailer, I can see Pineview [Reservoir] and a beautiful view of the Valley."

"Right now I don't really have a secret place but sometimes when I get mad or upset, I just go behind the couch or play the piano. Sometimes I go into my room but everyone knows how to unlock my door. Going outside and just petting my horses makes me relax and feel good about myself."

"A place that I like to be alone is my room. Everything there is familiar, quiet, and comforting. I usually like to just listen to music, read, draw, or just relax."

"One place I like to go is the garage. I work on things in there because when I work on things I can be by myself and I can think."

"Now my secret place is walking somewhere."

"My secret place is my bed. It's nice to go there at the end of the day and just think. When I'm in my secret place I don't have to worry about impressing anyone or doing something wrong. It's just me. Everything's so simple and calm."

"Even now I don't really have a secret place to go but I still have my mind, spirit, and heart. For those 'secret places' I am truly grateful. For with having seven kids in the family, it's hard to find a place to go without being found, so you can't be found in your heart, mind, or spirit."

An additional related assignment required the students to create an altered book. One of the two-page spreads was to represent a secret place, from the past or present, or even a fantasy place. They could use any medium appropriate to the book form and could choose visual images alone, words alone, or both combined. Samples of their book pages are reproduced in Appendix C.
I was quite pleased with the results of this experimental assignment. The students were cooperative and caught the vision of what could be done with an open-ended project such as this. Our class discussions on the secret place theme became entertaining, as their inhibitions melted, and they enthusiastically began to think and remember. The book pages are as varied as the personalities who produced them. The only common element is that they demonstrated the introspection the exercise was intended to produce.

Since the instructions gave them the latitude of using words or no words, or image or no image, it is interesting that all the students chose to use a visual image. One image is a simple letter “M” (the young lady’s initial) with flower-like brush strokes and lines. I asked her how she arrived at this particular solution, and she responded, “I just love this color of pink, and if you could really see who I am, it would look something like this.” Another effort shows the immersion into active sports which allows a young man to be totally inside himself. He related, “When I’m out there, snowboarding or on my motorcycle, my mind feels so clean—so clear, and it’s what I’m all about, at least for now.” Others show more conventional hide-outs—tree houses, a backyard hut—or natural settings—a rocky desert, groves of trees, or a favorite backyard tree, all confirming the intrinsic attraction of unused space (uncultivated
or unconstructed in the conventional manner). A final darker image affirms how the mind itself can be a haven. I feel that this first effort was a success, and I look forward to refining the assignment and using it in future classes.

A key truth that has guided my classroom praxis in developing and implementing these activities is that creative children become creative adults. As a teacher, I have accepted the charge to help prepare young people to take on their future roles as leaders and parents in a challenging society. Because I am a teacher of the arts, I feel a special need to ensure that I send my students away with the skills of creativity our world so desperately demands. John Barell, speaking about the September 11 disaster in his book *Developing More Curious Minds*, quotes Lewis Lapham in *Harper's Magazine*, “We suffered not from a lack of data but from a failure of imagination. We heard from some government spokespersons that information was available to different agencies, but no one ‘connected the dots’” (Barell vii). Hindsight aside, what about the future? Barell goes on to say, “What seems clear to me now is our need to be wide awake to the world around us... in order to achieve this status of heightened awareness about our communities and the world, we need to foster and develop what makes us unique—that is, our ability to imagine, to think, to ask demanding questions” (Barell viii).
We cannot leave our future in the hands of a complacent, passive, and sluggish majority. I am attempting to teach my students that despite the alluring effects of the latest electronic gadgetry, it is important to "unplug" and find quiet time and a quiet place for thought, reflection, unstructured play, and for entertaining wild imaginative ideas. I tell them that a creative mind is not a blank slate into which brilliant ideas magically pop. The expression "nothing in, nothing out" is enormously accurate. Using the mind to its fullest potential requires difficult, time-consuming work, acute observation, asking thousands of questions, implementing and restructuring information, and many times, it requires failing at a task. Thinking creatively is a learned skill and a practiced habit that must begin when a person is very young.

In my classes, a finished art piece is the "gravy." What we are really about is the process of achievement. It is learning how to tackle a difficult and unfamiliar task. We are about not giving up—learning the fact that sometimes the only difference between failure and success is more time and patience. We are about quieting our minds and listening to our own unique inner voices. Junior high school students are in the awkward position between childhood and adulthood, and I have actually seen the light go on in many students' faces when they come to the realization that they are distinctive individuals who have their own ideas,
opinions, and options of expression. I want my students to be truly human—to have the ability to look inward as well as outward, to develop and maintain a heightened awareness and a caring attitude toward their environment, and to understand the fact that no machine can ever replace what the human imagination can achieve.

Despite incredible and useful advancements in today's technological world, it is the homely, simplistic, yet wise advice of Little Tree's old "granma" from Depression-era Cherokee Hill Country that ultimately rings true as a way to strike a much-needed humanistic balance: Having a secret place is necessary!
IV

CREATION

*Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves.*
~Maurice Maeterlinck

A challenging and, for me, risky step in my exploration of secret places was to use the theme as a wellspring for my own creativity, in much the same way as the activities described in the preceding section were intended to serve my students. Over the past year, I have created seven paintings with accompanying verse. The paintings are 22 ½" x 26", acrylic and oil pastel on clay-coated paper. Reproductions of the paintings and the text can be seen in Appendix D. In addition, digital capture of the originals was made to fit an 8" x 8" format, along with the poetry. I then made a limited edition of 20 hand-bound books.

This part of the project was most rewarding personally. My intent was to capture, through illustrations and words, the essence and significance of secret places and the remarkable creative activities that can happen within them, for people of any age. As I began, I really had no plan as to what images I would portray nor exactly what direction I would take. The first painting was of the tree house, which was the one
and only solid idea I had. In fact, the premise for the entire project came from the fact that I wanted to do a painting of a tree house.

I have fond memories of my own childhood tree house. Those poorly built, ramshackle elevated semi-structures seem to hold a universal, almost magical attraction for any child who has the good fortune of having one. One early autumn evening, I was taking my nightly walk (one of my secret places is solitary walking). The dusk had just slipped into darkness, and a huge yellow-orange moon was rising above the mountain rim. The air was cool and crisp, and stars were beginning to be visible. As I made my way down the road, I looked up and saw the moon shining through the leaves and branches of a tree. The scene was so striking that I stopped for a moment to appreciate the view. It was then that I noticed a funny-looking old tree house tucked behind the foliage—and I knew I had my image.

It seemed like everything happened that way—things just fell into place. I can't remember even now in which order the rest of the paintings came. I not only relied on my own recollections, but also those of my children and other members of my family to give voice to the secret places. The tumbled hay, for instance, turned out to be a blending of several barn experiences when my children were young, and my sister hunts chokecherries every season.
My nine-year-old nephew, Wilson, proved an invaluable connection with young childhood. He was enormously pleased when I asked him if he had any secret places. He enthusiastically took me on several guided tours and called me on the phone numerous times to add information. His face was beaming as we stood in front of the ancient and dilapidated calf pens, and he announced earnestly and in all seriousness, “My friend Jackson and I have big plans for this place!” I’ll never forget that sweet moment. He then went on to tell me about what they wanted to do to them. Two of my paintings are of Wilson’s “huts”. Along with such childhood secret places, the paintings also embody ideas representing adult sanctuaries. Hopefully, both through image and words, I have captured the essence and significance of a secret place for everyone.

As I come to the end of this particular work, I realize I have rediscovered something I had unintentionally let slip away. It is an essential element that allows us to be truly human. It has helped me reinvent myself as an artist, enhanced how I instruct my students, and given me a measure of peace and renewed confidence to deal with my other roles in life. I was able to recover the loss by applying my own prescription for ailing creativity to myself.

Regrettably, I had allowed my own secret places to lie dormant in the crush of work, child rearing, and the care of an ailing parent. And
the result was immobility. As my own creative experiment, I consciously tapped into what I knew had always been there. I learned to carve out quiet time for myself—not an easy task. I focused; I worked; I allowed my mind to be receptive to imagination triggers that surprisingly solved many problems. Although I occasionally find myself backsliding just a little, I am confident that I will continue to move forward. The missing element that I have recovered is, simply, passion: the passion to care deeply about important things; the passion to search for what is interesting and fascinating; the passion for listening to one's own voice and telling the stories found there; the passion to look at the world in different ways, trying something difficult, working hard and enjoying triumphs; the passion to fight the paralysis of insecurity and excuse-making, not fearing criticism. And finally, discovering what is personally meaningful and then sharing it.
REFLECTION

Sanctuary is a word which here means a small safe place in a troubling world.
~Narrator in Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events (film)

As I reflect upon the varied course this study has taken, I can see many broader implications of the idea of the "secret place" as a remedy and a tool to reach children and teach them valuable intrapersonal skills that are so necessary in today's complex world. One area of concern is ecological. Although the students whom I teach and who participated in my survey, generally follow modern trends in terms of weakening imaginations and increasing passivity, they represent a narrow cross-section relative to other populations. These children of rural Ogden Valley, Utah, have most of the benefits of open spaces, unmanicured and natural areas Hart speaks of as so conducive to healthy play; it is just a matter of their knowing how to take advantage of such an ideal setting. Obviously, most other children do not have those advantages as green spaces disappear at an ever-increasing rate. A recent article in the Salt Lake Tribune, for instance, profiled child advocate and author Richard Louv and his ideas that no access to or interaction with nature is having
“disastrous consequences” for today’s children: “For many children, natural spaces they can roam freely are nonexistent. Most playgrounds and even neighborhoods follow sterile and structured designs, often aimed at minimizing litigation” (Adams C2). In addition, many parents do not allow children free access to natural spaces even where they exist, making the paths and “territories” Hart documented for his Vermont subjects a thing of the past: “Louv cites one study that found between 1970 and 1990, the area children were allowed to roam near their homes had shrunk to a ninth of what it had been” (Adams C2). This curtailment in the freedom children need for exploring and experimentation can be countered by careful city planning and the zoning of green spaces. And, Louv suggests, parents should “leave a part of the back yard rough so kids can build forts and dig holes and hunt for bugs there” (Adams C2). The safety and freedom of the 50s or even the 70s is not likely to come back, but as Louv and others contend, “There has to be purposeful effort to rethink the relationships children are allowed to have with nature” (Adams C2). Such efforts will be richly rewarded in the quality of childhood and in children’s emotional, intellectual, and creative development. The Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University’s College of Design affirms that playing in natural settings can “stimulate the imagination and creativity in

A second area of concern is social and cultural. Suburban planning, summer camps, and backyard refuges will certainly benefit children of those particular socio-economic classes. But the reality of today's society and today's classrooms is much different. The limitations of my study are clearly apparent as I observe the conditions of our neighboring school district, a mere 15 miles away, which serves a more diverse populace. These children come from a variety of income and ethnic backgrounds and deal with the problems of a city. Their school registration forms include a section asking where the family lives: “own home, rent home, apartment, motel, homeless shelter, car” and another section for eligibility for free meals at school, both breakfast and lunch. This reality, which probably affects most school districts in the United States, puts a different light on the notion of whiling away endless summer days in the luxury of a tree house. How can we as teachers of the arts deal with and adequately serve students who can't remember where they lived two months ago, who don't have a room or even a bed to sleep in, who are swallowed up in the confusion of a large family?

In unison with Hart's findings, my survey showed that across all age groups, there continues to be a strong impulse to create one's own
spaces, which indicates that this might be a universal natural human tendency. The key, then, would be teaching children that regardless of their circumstances, they can follow that urge. Each individual, young or old, can and should have some form of a sanctuary—a haven or secret place which is theirs alone. It is possible—and indeed, necessary—to create these places in alternative contexts from those commonly described by other researchers and by myself here. A couple of my ninth-grade students hit upon the idea that a sanctuary need not be a specific place: “My secret place is walking somewhere” and “I don't really have a secret place to go, but I have my mind, spirit, and heart. . . . you can't be found in your heart, mind, or spirit.” These students, with no coaching, have discovered this important truth. They know they are not limited by actual physical conditions in their quest to find a place where they can commune with themselves.

A recent popular movie, *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events*, offers a corollary to the lesson learned by Little Tree in Forrest Carter’s childhood memoir, with which I introduced this study. Whereas Carter’s secret place at the spring branch serves as a perfect model for traditional natural places of discovery and has worked well in my classes, perhaps I need likewise to present the lesson learned by the children in this movie. The film is, in a sense, an allegory on the rigors of
contemporary childhood, with the outrageous misfortunes suffered by the children being representative of other losses and disappointments in more ordinary childhood. A central theme introduced early in the story is that of "sanctuary." In the midst of squalor, cruelty, and deprivation, the orphaned Baudelaire children (a girl, a boy, and a toddler) turn their horrid little attic room into a magical place when they use a ribbon to tie a bedsheets into a small tent-like enclosure. In a visually stunning scene, they huddle together inside the small haven, made golden by the beam of a simple flashlight, and find strength and comfort.

The power of the self-created secret place is evident in the lives of these courageous and creative children, as it should be in all of us. The connection between the personal haven and the kind of resourcefulness and creativity we want to foster in our society is drawn explicitly by the author/narrator in the closing lines of the film:

They are the sort of people who know there's always something to invent, something to read, . . . and something to do to make a sanctuary, no matter how small, and for this reason, the Baudelaires were very fortunate indeed.
APPENDIX A

SURVEYS ON CHILDHOOD PASTIMES

I devised two versions of a questionnaire about childhood pastimes. One is fuller, with more detail and a larger number of questions. It was administered to ninth graders and to all the adult age-groups. The other was a simplification of the original survey, with fewer questions and shorter, easier sentences. It was administered only to fourth graders. The single-page children’s version is reproduced on the next page, with the two-page adolescent and adult version following. One difference between the two versions is that the children’s choices were “yes,” “no,” and “sometimes,” in that order, whereas the adolescent/adult response choices were on a sliding scale of “often,” “sometimes,” and “never,” in that order. Both versions give room for and encourage respondents to name and describe a “very favorite thing to do,” in the children’s version, or “a very favorite and memorable activity . . . that you don’t or can’t do any more,” in the longer version.
CHILDREN’S QUESTIONNAIRE

Things I Do

This is an educational study on what kids do. Please circle the answer that applies to you.

I like to play outdoors. yes no sometimes
I watch T.V. every day. yes no sometimes
I play with toys pretending they are “alive”. yes no sometimes
I write stories and poems at home. yes no sometimes
I play with Legos, puzzles, blocks, etc. yes no sometimes
I do chores in the house, like make my bed. yes no sometimes
I build forts, tree houses or “clubhouses”. yes no sometimes
I play video games. yes no sometimes
I take care of pets or farm animals. yes no sometimes
I take music lessons. yes no sometimes
I read books at home. yes no sometimes
I play sports like soccer, baseball, football. yes no sometimes
I build “inventions” out of odds and ends. yes no sometimes
I have “secret codes” with my friends yes no sometimes
I’m bored when there is nothing to do. yes no sometimes
My dad plays with me. yes no sometimes
I do yard work or farm chores yes no sometimes
I like to put on plays. yes no sometimes
I like to draw and color. yes no sometimes
I like to cook. yes no sometimes
I have a hideout or a secret place. yes no sometimes
I collect things like rocks, shells, cards, etc. yes no sometimes
I watch videos every day. yes no sometimes
I have imaginary friends or animals. yes no sometimes
I am afraid of the dark. yes no sometimes
I take dancing lessons. yes no sometimes
My mom plays with me. yes no sometimes

Please write your very favorite thing to do: (It could be something that’s not on this list.)

Thanks for your help!
**A D O L E S C E N T / A D U L T  Q U E S T I O N N A I R E**

**Personal Past Experience Survey**

This is an educational study on childhood pastimes. Please circle your age group and rate your participation in the following activities. Please do not sign your name. Thank you for your input.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>13-17</th>
<th>18-30</th>
<th>31-50</th>
<th>51-65</th>
<th>66+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**As a young child, I did the following:**

- I liked to play outdoors: riding bicycles, skating, running, etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I watched T.V.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I played with toys making them talk and “be alive”.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I wrote little stories and poems (outside of school).  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I liked to put together models, puzzles, Legos, Lincoln logs, etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I did house chores: garbage, dishes, simple cleaning, etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I built huts, forts, tree houses, “club houses” etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I liked to play video games, pinball, and arcade-type games.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I took care of pets or farm animals.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I had music lessons.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I liked to read books.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I played organized sports such as soccer, baseball, etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I tended younger siblings  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I liked to build “inventions” just out of odds and ends.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- My dad played with me.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- My friends and I had “clubs” and “secret codes”.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- When there was nothing to do I was bored.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I did outside chores: yard work, farm work, etc.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I played with dolls and dollhouses.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I made snow forts.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never
- I liked to make up new games or new versions of familiar games.  
  - often  
  - sometimes  
  - never

(over)
I played with building blocks. often sometimes never
I put on plays with my friends or siblings. often sometimes never
I liked to read comic books. often sometimes never
I liked to make homemade cards like Valentines (outside of school). often sometimes never
I created new “recipes” (not necessarily delicious). often sometimes never
I liked to color and draw (outside of school). often sometimes never
I liked to play in hideouts and secret places. often sometimes never
I collected things: rocks, shells, sports cards, “junk”, etc. often sometimes never
I watched videos. often sometimes never
I liked to do handwork: knit, crochet, boondoggle, leatherwork, etc. often sometimes never
I liked winter activities: skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, sledding, etc. often sometimes never
I liked to play “night games” in the summertime. often sometimes never
I created “imaginary friends or animals.” often sometimes never
I went on picnics with my family. often sometimes never
My mom played with me. often sometimes never
I was afraid of the dark. often sometimes never
I liked to camp out. often sometimes never
I had dancing lessons. often sometimes never

Please describe a very favorite and memorable activity you used do as a young child that you don’t or can’t do anymore: (It may or may not be included in the above list)
(*Note: Ages 13-17 may put a favorite activity that they still may currently do.)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thanks for your help!
APPENDIX B

TABULATED RESULTS OF SURVEYS

Following are the results of the generational survey on childhood pastimes, as described in Chapter II. The data are arranged in two sets, the first showing the responses to all eight key questions according to age group, and the second showing each question compared across age groups. A bar graph figure tops each page; a numerical table comes below, showing percentages of each response choice.

Due to format considerations, the responses “no/sometimes/yes” from the children’s version of the survey were used throughout as the fields for the data base. Consequently, those terms appear in the bar graphs for all age groups. The tables, however, show the responses as “never/sometimes/often” for the adolescent and adult age groups.

Additionally, the percentage totals in the tables do not add up to 100% in all instances because of the rounding of numbers and the fact that not every respondent answered every question.
Figure 1. Frequency Graph for Group 1, Age 9

**Key**

**Q1** - I watch TV everyday.
**Q2** - I play video games.
**Q3** - I build "inventions" out of odds and ends.
**Q4** - I have "secret codes" with my friends.
**Q5** - I'm bored when there is nothing to do.
**Q6** - I have a hideout or a secret place.
**Q7** - I watch videos everyday.
**Q8** - I have imaginary friends or animals.

**Table 1. Percentages for Group 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G1 % Age 9</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>51.81</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>28.92</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>78.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>31.33</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>0.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28.92</td>
<td>55.42</td>
<td>24.10</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>77.11</td>
<td>66.27</td>
<td>15.66</td>
<td>16.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 2. Frequency Graph for Group 2, Age 13-17**

**Key**

**As a young child, I did the following:**

- **g1** - I watched TV.
- **g2** - I liked to play video games, pinball and arcade-type games.
- **g3** - I liked to build "inventions" just out of odds and ends.
- **g4** - My friends and I had "clubs" and "secret codes."
- **g5** - When there was nothing to do, I was bored.
- **g6** - I liked to play in hideouts and secret places.
- **g7** - I watch videos.
- **g8** - I created "imaginary friends or animals".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 13-17</th>
<th>g1</th>
<th>g2</th>
<th>g3</th>
<th>g4</th>
<th>g5</th>
<th>g6</th>
<th>g7</th>
<th>g8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>25.51</td>
<td>34.69</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>57.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>45.92</td>
<td>34.69</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>30.61</td>
<td>47.96</td>
<td>31.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>33.64</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>30.61</td>
<td>40.82</td>
<td>38.78</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>48.98</td>
<td>11.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Frequency Graph for Group 3, Age 18-30

**Key**

**As a young child, I did the following:**

- **Q1** - I watched TV.
- **Q2** - I liked to play video games, pinball and arcade-type games.
- **Q3** - I liked to build “inventions” just out of odds and ends.
- **Q4** - My friends and I had “clubs” and “secret codes.”
- **Q5** - When there was nothing to do, I was bored.
- **Q6** - I liked to play in hideouts and secret places.
- **Q7** - I watch videos.
- **Q8** - I created “imaginary friends or animals”.

**Table 3. Percentages for Group 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q3 % Age 18-30</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>58.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>59.79</td>
<td>31.11</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>44.33</td>
<td>60.82</td>
<td>28.87</td>
<td>56.70</td>
<td>26.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>40.12</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>19.59</td>
<td>34.02</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>70.10</td>
<td>42.27</td>
<td>14.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4. Frequency Graph for Group 4, Age 31-50

KEY

As a young child, I did the following:

- 91 - I watched TV.
- 92 - I liked to play video games, pinball and arcade-type games.
- 93 - I liked to build "inventions" just out of odds and ends.
- 94 - My friends and I had "clubs" and "secret codes."
- 95 - When there was nothing to do, I was bored.
- 96 - I liked to play in hideouts and secret places.
- 97 - I watch videos.
- 98 - I created "imaginary friends or animals".

Table 4. Percentages for Group 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G4 % Age 31-50</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>92</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5.710</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>74.29</td>
<td>34.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>22.86.</td>
<td>42.86.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>2.867</td>
<td>22.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a young child, I did the following:

**g1** - I watched TV.

**g2** - I liked to play video games, pinball and arcade-type games.

**g3** - I liked to build “inventions” just out of odds and ends.

**g4** - My friends and I had “clubs” and “secret codes.”

**g5** - When there was nothing to do, I was bored.

**g6** - I liked to play in hideouts and secret places.

**g7** - I watch videos.

**g8** - I created “imaginary friends or animals”.

Table 5. Percentages for Group 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G5 % Age 51-65</th>
<th>g1</th>
<th>g2</th>
<th>g3</th>
<th>g4</th>
<th>g5</th>
<th>g6</th>
<th>g7</th>
<th>g8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>62.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>97.14</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>48.57</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>31.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Frequency Graph for Group 6, Age 66+

**KEY**

As a young child, I did the following:

- **g1** - I watched TV.
- **g2** - I liked to play video games, pinball and arcade-type games.
- **g3** - I liked to build “inventions” just out of odds and ends.
- **g4** - My friends and I had “clubs” and “secret codes.”
- **g5** - When there was nothing to do, I was bored.
- **g6** - I liked to play in hideouts and secret places.
- **g7** - I watch videos.
- **g8** - I created “imaginary friends or animals”.

Table 6. Percentages for Group 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G6 % Age 66+</th>
<th>g1</th>
<th>g2</th>
<th>g3</th>
<th>g4</th>
<th>g5</th>
<th>g6</th>
<th>g7</th>
<th>g8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>45.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7. Comparison of Q1 Among Groups 1 - 6

**KEY**

- **G1** - Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** - Group 2, Age 13 - 17
- **G3** - Group 3, Age 18 - 30
- **G4** - Group 4, Age 31 - 50
- **G5** - Group 5, Age 51 - 65
- **G6** - Group 6, Age 66+

Table 7. Q1 Comparison for Groups 1 - 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>59.76</td>
<td>59.79</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>28.92</td>
<td>33.64</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question 2 Comparison**

_I liked to play video games, pinball, and arcade-type games_

![Bar chart showing comparison of Question 2 among age groups 1-6.](chart.png)

**Figure 8.** Comparison of Q2 Among Groups 1 - 6

**Key**

- **G1** – Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** – Group 2, Age 13 - 17
- **G3** – Group 3, Age 18 - 30
- **G4** – Group 4, Age 31 - 50
- **G5** – Group 5, Age 51 - 65
- **G6** – Group 6, Age 66+

**Table 8.** Q2 Comparison for Groups 1 - 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>25.51</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>85.71</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>26.51</td>
<td>45.92</td>
<td>37.11</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>55.42</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>38.14</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 3 Comparison

I liked to build "inventions" just out of odds and ends

![Bar chart showing percentage comparison for different age groups.](image)

Figure 9. Comparison of Q3 Among Groups 1 - 6

**KEY**

- **G1** - Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** - Group 2, Age 13 - 17
- **G3** - Group 3, Age 18 - 30
- **G4** - Group 4, Age 31 - 50
- **G5** - Group 5, Age 51 - 65
- **G6** - Group 6, Age 66+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>44.58</td>
<td>34.69</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31.33</td>
<td>34.69</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>24.10</td>
<td>30.61</td>
<td>19.59</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Q3 Comparison for Groups 1 - 6 in Percentages
Question 4 Comparison

My friends and I had "clubs" and "secret codes"

Figure 10. Comparison of Q4 Among Groups 1 - 6

**Key**

**G1** - Group 1, Age 9  
**G2** - Group 2, Age 13 – 17  
**G3** - Group 3, Age 18 – 30  
**G4** - Group 4, Age 31 – 50  
**G5** - Group 5, Age 51 – 65  
**G6** - Group 6, Age 66+

Table 10. Q4 Comparison for Groups 1 – 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>51.81%</td>
<td>16.33%</td>
<td>21.65%</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>44.33%</td>
<td>45.71%</td>
<td>48.57%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
<td>40.82%</td>
<td>34.02%</td>
<td>37.14%</td>
<td>34.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 5 Comparison
When there was nothing to do I was bored

Figure 11. Comparison of Q5 Among Groups 1 - 6

**Key**

- **G1** - Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** - Group 2, Age 13 - 17
- **G3** - Group 3, Age 18 - 30
- **G4** - Group 4, Age 31 - 50
- **G5** - Group 5, Age 51 - 65
- **G6** - Group 6, Age 66+

Table 11. Q5 Comparison for Groups 1 - 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>62.86</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>60.82</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>71.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>77.11</td>
<td>38.78</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12. Comparison of Q6 Among Groups 1 - 6

**Key**

- **G1** - Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** - Group 2, Age 13 – 17
- **G3** - Group 3, Age 18 – 30
- **G4** - Group 4, Age 31 – 50
- **G5** - Group 5, Age 51 – 65
- **G6** - Group 6, Age 66+

Table 12. Q6 Comparison for Groups 1 – 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>28.92</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>30.61</td>
<td>28.84</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>71.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>66.27</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>70.10</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13. Comparison of Q7 Among Groups 1 - 6

**Key**

- **G1** – Group 1, Age 9
- **G2** – Group 2, Age 13 – 17
- **G3** – Group 3, Age 18 – 30
- **G4** – Group 4, Age 31 – 50
- **G5** – Group 5, Age 51 – 65
- **G6** – Group 6, Age 66+

Table 13. Q7 Comparison for Groups 1 – 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>39.76</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>74.29</td>
<td>97.14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>47.96</td>
<td>56.70</td>
<td>22.86</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Often</td>
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<td>48.98</td>
<td>42.27</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 14. Comparison of Q8 Among Groups 1 – 6

**Key**

G1 - Group 1, Age 9  
G2 - Group 2, Age 13 – 17  
G3 - Group 3, Age 18 – 30  
G4 - Group 4, Age 31 – 50  
G5 - Group 5, Age 51 – 65  
G6 - Group 6, Age 66+

Table 14. Q8 Comparison for Groups 1 – 6 in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 8</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>78.31</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>58.76</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>42.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>31.63</td>
<td>26.80</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>16.87</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

SECRET PLACES, AS IMAGINED AND DRAWN
BY NINTH-GRADE ART STUDENTS

The following ten images are taken from the altered books of my twenty advanced art students from Spring 2005. The original works were in various media, such as acrylic, collage, marker, and colored pencil. The two-page spreads were photographed and printed digitally.
This is the secret place this is my second name.

sustained by trees in the middle of my back yard with no one around.

When times are hard, I come for peace.

It's my way to escape from reality.
My secret place

is in a small covey
of trees, beneath the
cool, blue sky, where I
can think my thoughts
through well. It's my escape
from the hectic reality
where the trees
will not expose my secrets
to the world.

My secret place is in a
trees surrounded by peace
where I can have
a little more bliss. It's my time to relax
in my secret place, I can let my true feelings
show through, in happiness or sorrow,
for better, or for worse, what challenges
may come my way. I always know there is a
quiet, understanding place for me. A Sign
of Hope. That better times will come
my way.
The desert is my secret place.

A true spectacle of nature where the sun meets the sky and the pillars of rock and the mountains of sand. The wonder of the Flaminth, of their fallen or surviving here.
My secret place is my mind
where no one can find me.
If I don't want company...
no one will be there.

My mind is the only place
I can go to get away from everyone. To sort out my life
and collect my thoughts. No one can
find me... unless I want to let them in.
APPENDIX D

A SECRET PLACE: FACSIMILES OF PAINTINGS
AND ACCOMPANYING VERSE

The following images derive from the professional digital capture of my paintings described in Chapter IV. The arrangement of the verse text has been altered here due to format considerations on the page. The framed paintings themselves and placard-sized presentations of the accompanying verse were shown publicly in conjunction with the creative part of this project.
“So you see, imagination needs
Moodling long, inefficient, happy idling,
   Dawdling and puttering.”
Brenda Ueland

Ponder • Imagine • Dream • Reflect • Play
A Secret Place

Finding silent spaces isn’t easy.
A noisy world clamors relentlessly,
Paralyzing my perceptions.
Roaring obsessions . . .
Technology, tools, toys—a ravenous need to fill the void.
Complacency spawns unintelligible babble,
Hollow confusion assaults every sensation.
I become a non-entity, a passive receptor
In a fragmented universe.
Always doing rather than being.

Finding silent spaces isn’t easy.
But when I am weary of inane repetition,
Longing to ban irksome mind chatter,
And sit quietly with no task,
Breathe easily with no apprehension,
Entertain wild ideas not visible before,
Recover something forgotten . . .
When I yearn to lean into magenta, blue, and violet
Allowing patterns of meaning to wash over
My original self
It is then I escape to my secret place
Where I absorb amazing silence and carry it with me
When I leave.
Countless splinters poked and lodged in my stubby fingers
As we scrounged the yard for odd slabs of barn wood.
The boards had to be roughly the right size
Because sawing just never worked out.
Mother would say, "That poor old cottonwood will die
If you don't stop hammering so many nails into it."
It didn't die. It patiently cradled our palace,
And sighed with satisfaction.
Hand over hand, up the rickety ladder—good,
A perfect branch-handle to grasp . . .
They say the earth and its solar system are located
In the Milky Way galaxy.
Its spiraling arms contain over one hundred billion stars
That span all ages. At the speed of light,
It would take five-hundred thousand years to cross it.
Here in our tiny tree house with my flashlight beaming,
I somehow comprehend such vastness.
My dad said I could use Great-Grandpa's
Old calf pens for my huts.
Luckily, my friend Wilson and I
Spotted some red and blue paint
On the top shelf in the shed.
The two of us dragged Uncle Jack's heavy ladder
Clear across two yards to reach that high place.
It took most of a summer's day to paint the fronts,
We sure improved the looks of the place,
Don't you think?
Mom told me that kind of paint
Is hard to wash off clothes
And shoes . . . and kids.

Hammering nails is a pretty tough job
And sometimes painful,
But we needed plenty for hanging up
Our important stuff—things we need
Like horseshoes, string,
And a perfectly good leather belt
We found under some rocks.
Wilson and I have big plans for next week.
Maybe we can find some carpet pieces.
We're going to build a table, fix the roof,
And get more rope . . .
Oh, and we'll make a place
To keep the Band-Aids.
It's a good idea to be best friends with a very old tree.
You'll not find anyone who listens as intently
Or who shares such quiet, wise advice.
Be still—you'll be regaled
With ageless tales and secrets.
Sidle up against her wizened trunk
And search the soil for treasures.
Pine cones, pebbles, miniscule, crawly creatures.
Sheltered beneath her generous pine needle petticoats
I create an entire village with roads, a railroad track,
Houses—even a church with a steeple.
Acorn people clothed in leaves dwell here.
If I pull in the hose, they can play in rivers,
Or playfully float tiny boats on their lakes.
Sometimes, I carefully ascend
Her spiral bough staircase
To a perch high above,
Where I share the old tree's timeless view
Of an ordinary world.
I've survived many wild nights
Tucked snugly away in here
With only the necessary provisions,
Black licorice and potato chips.
Warm, dusty, woolen rug smells soothe and calm
Jittery trepidation into anxious bravery.
Yes, nights that would even terrify tough old Uncle John.
Gales whip dry leaves into a frenzied dance,
Tree limbs lash helplessly about,
Beating mercilessly against the houses.
Thunder cracks unexpectedly,
Sending a jagged shudder to my core.
What exhilaration!
All my stuffed animals scurried for shelter long ago;
Even the jungle birds and crickets have fallen silent
Waiting for the ferocious black storm in my living room
To pass.
Once Dallin stacked the hay wrong
So the whole pile tumbled into an enormous,
Awkward mountain.
No one put it back. What a bother it was at first,
To stumble over the bales
That blocked the path to the cow’s stall.
But then I spied an opening just the right size
To crawl into.
Prickly hay down my shirt was unbearable,
But quickly forgotten
When I heard a small sound.
Tiny muffled mews softly reached my ears
From within the dim, dusty spaces.
Abandoned and very hungry, that little kitten
Became one of my best pals.

The giant heap remained for a time
And we all became mountain goats
Endlessly clambering up and down
The lumpy landscape.
Our frivolous world of hills and caverns
Slowly vanished
As the hay was gradually used,
And our barn was never quite the same,
For the jumble was eventually replaced
With a vacant hole of neatly stacked bales.
VI

A late-summer chokecherry-picking excursion
Led me to an unexpected tangle of undergrowth
That beckoned me to enter a natural breach in the copse.
I entered a dark, cool world—backlit and dappled
Amid August's white-hot glare.
I took off my shoes and let my bare toes revel
In soft, loose soil.
Feeling somewhat guilty for abandoning my mission
I nevertheless found myself
Drawing lazy circles in the dirt with a stick,
Daydreaming of nothing in particular;
Hearing the gentle drone of an occasional insect,
And a distant chorus of meadowlarks.
A solitary ant burdened with a load twice its size
Caught my eye as it
Struggled over a pebble near my foot
Then trudged laboriously onward.
Powerless to leave this placid interlude
I relaxed against a fallen branch
Effortlessly drinking in an unfamiliar harmony.
Thoughts arose with remarkable lucidity
And I began to appreciate subtle details,
Patterns, and dimensions of my own presence
Like a glistening lost treasure.
VII

Watching snowflakes fall is much like
Gazing into a flickering fire near the hearth.
A first glance belies a repetitious image
But further scrutiny reveals
A constant rhythmic renewal
Complete, subtly unique, never tiresome.
Thoreau wrote,
"A man's life should be as fresh as a river.
It should be the same channel
But a new water every instant."
At times I am utterly blank.
I fear these internal droughts where nothing blooms,
Where heavy, sluggish mud oozes around my ankles
Forcing immobility and self-imposed inferiority.
It is then I must stop speaking, look slowly,
Alter my angle of vision,
Trust my senses to rebuild, reinvent.
Then, a whisper of fresh possibilities,
Like wisps of smoke
Above a hushed winter landscape
Offers elusive inspiration.
REFERENCES


