

Pass It On®...

Getting Outside is the Best Way to Get Rid of the Blues

Brad's idea of a good time is to swim across the lake at the base of the Grand Tetons, then hike to the top peak and back again on the same day. Sometimes his wife Sheila will join him for the hike portion. He's also summited with his two daughters, ages 19 and 15. They climb frozen waterfalls in the winter and ski the backcountry. In the summer they do 100-mile bike races together and afterward hold family pull-up contests on an abandoned trellis 30 feet above a sandy river. "Being in the wilderness is the best therapy I've found," Sheila says. "It's a stress reliever. It reduces anxiety." Brad agrees. "If I'm in the middle of a stressful week at work I'll get up at 4 in the morning and hike the nearest peak and watch the sunrise before going to the office."

An [article](#) published in the Berkley News details the power of Nature therapy not only in reducing stress and anxiety, but also in dramatically reducing the symptoms of PTSD. This is the premise the National Abilities center is built on. The NAC draws in participants from all over the Country; veterans with PTSD, kids with autism, stroke survivors. It's a mixed bag of humanity who landed on the unfairness side of life. And it's a group that Brad and his family would join in the mountains.

Brad's family was soon part of a larger family, skiing with autistic kids, mountain biking with veterans. The girls quickly connected with the kids they skied with. Sage, the oldest daughter remembers: "It's a lot easier to bond with these kids. You instantly become friends because they are not encumbered by the same social cues. Their boundaries are different. They love easily." The therapy was working both ways. Sienna recalls riding with a man in his mid-forties. He'd suffered a stroke two years earlier and his right side was paralyzed. Sienna rode beside his recumbent bike and listened to the man's daughter sing gospel songs to encourage him along. "Days like that just bring out the best in us," Sienna says. Amen. The forest and the clear sky beyond create a sense of connection beyond our small humanness. Just walking the trails or ambling along on a bicycle we become a part of something bigger. It's that awe we feel that heals our emotions.

Brad's wife Sheila was asked to teach a yoga class for veterans in that peaceful mountain setting. She didn't give it much thought but two days before the class, her mother passed away. "I showed up vulnerable and hoping the class would be a distraction," Sheila says. "And then I see people coming in, many missing limbs and I was totally unprepared. How do you teach yoga to someone who doesn't have legs?" The class settled in and Sheila grew emotional. "I've just lost my mother," she said. "We are all hurting in some way. But if we help each other out we'll get through it." She won't forget that first class. When it was over, the whole class embraced. "It was a spiritual experience," Sheila says, still tagged with the emotions of that day.

"Being in the wilderness has sustained our family through hard times," Brad says. "And now we get to see how it heals our new friends," Sheila adds.

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