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CLARE COOPER MARCUS

## Rememberance of Landscapes Past

Institute of Urban & Regional Development  
University of California, Berkeley

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## Landscape

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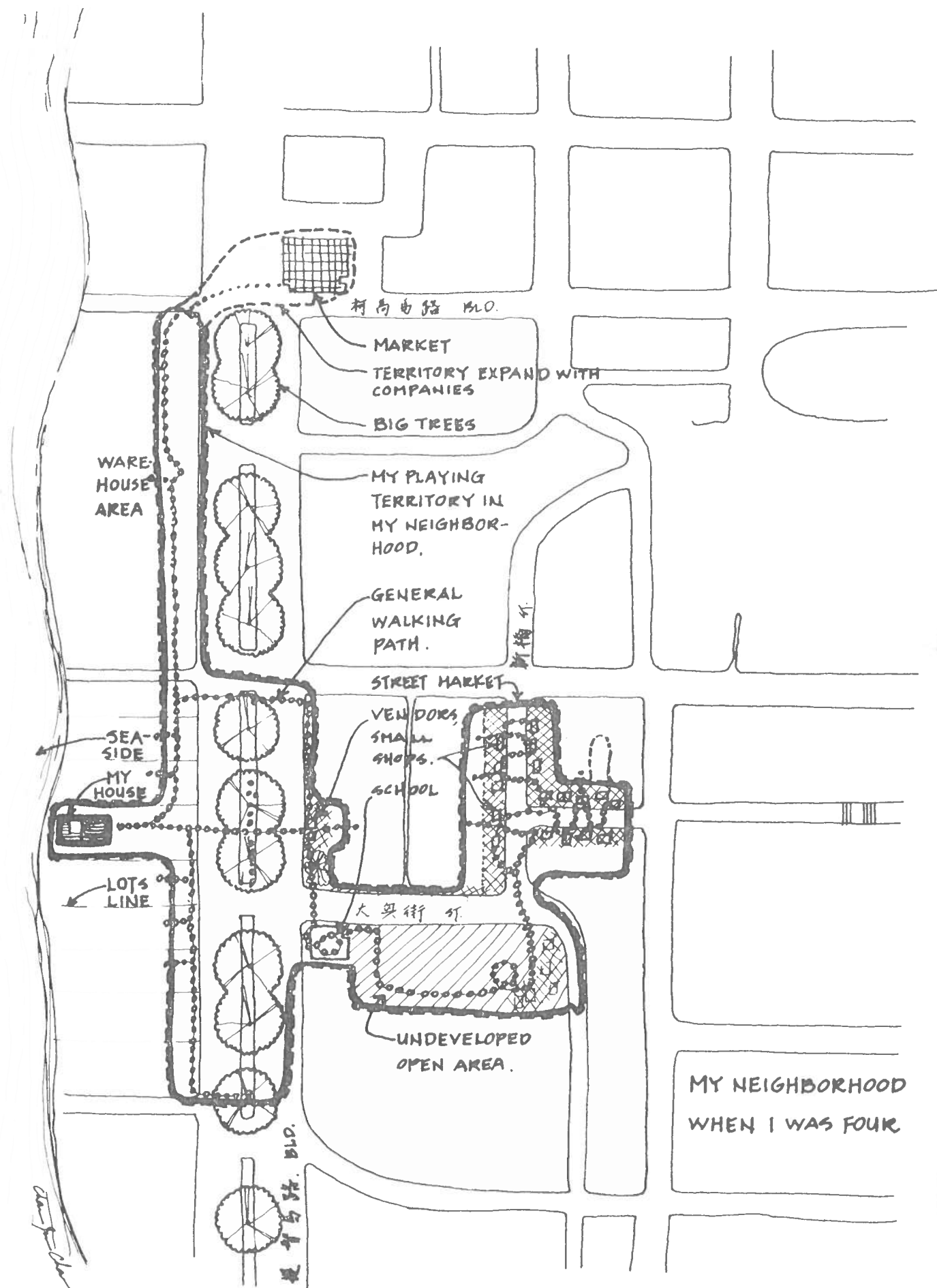
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"Going into the Central Park at Eighth  
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MY NEIGHBORHOOD  
WHEN I WAS FOUR

# Remembrance of Landscapes Past

Clare Cooper Marcus

*Childhood is not a thing which dries up as soon as it has completed its cycle. It is not a memory. It is the most living of treasures, and it continues to enrich us without our knowing it. . . . Woe to the man who cannot remember his childhood, recapture it within himself, like a body inside his own body, a new blood in the old blood: he is dead as soon as it leaves him. — Franz Hellen, Secret Documents.*

ALL OF US carry the memory seeds of childhood landscapes—those environments we encountered, smelled, dug in, climbed, and explored when our senses seemed most tantalizingly alive. The smell of a certain flower, the call of a favorite bird, the sight of a familiar staircase or porch or attic window can trigger the floodgate of memories. We explore the place in our mind's eye, almost *feeling* the texture of that tree trunk, almost *smelling* the musty odor of grandmother's basement.

These poignant memories affect us in countless subtle ways, from the colors we choose for furnishings to the locations we choose to live in. In teaching students of architecture and landscape architecture, I put them through learning experiences to heighten awareness of their own environmental histories and to alert them to how the settings of the past affect their current environmental preferences and values. I feel it is important for these students to undergo some form of environmental values analysis, so they can better understand their biases before they unknowingly inflict them on unsuspecting clients.

As a starting point, I lead students on a guided fantasy tour back to a favorite childhood place. Once they have explored this place in some detail with their eyes closed, I ask them to draw, sketch, or map it. Next, I ask them to describe it objectively—where it was, what it was, their age—and then subjectively: the emotions and feelings it evoked (or still evokes). From there, they compile an “environmental autobiography,” describing other significant environments in their lives up to and including the present. In a final section of the paper, students analyze to what extent these experiences are reflected in their currently held values regarding the environment, career choice, and the designs they produce in studio classes or topics they choose to research.

In the fall of 1977, I randomly selected fifty environmental autobiographies from a class of eighty students and did a simple content analysis. Two major themes stood out in these rich and evocative offerings: the significance of outdoor environments and the need for hiding places. Despite the great variety of place and country of upbringing and of

socio-economic class or culture represented in the sample, the themes remained more or less constant, which suggests that children seek to fulfill some basic needs in the physical environment—whatever and wherever that environment may be.

## *Significance of outdoor places*

Eighty-six percent of the environments freely recalled in this study were wholly or predominantly outdoors. Only three students cited totally interior spaces. One was a young Chinese woman whose early years were spent in a third-floor apartment in Hong Kong, and two were young women who had grown up in a series of apartments and duplexes in Los Angeles. This outdoors emphasis confirms Roger Hart's and Robin Moore's work with children in Vermont, California, and England and a number of behavioral mapping studies of residential areas, suggesting a much greater use of outdoor spaces by children than by adults. However, when we compare the predominance of fondly remembered outdoor environments with the few existing time-budget studies of how children actually spend their day, the emphasis is puzzling. A UNESCO-sponsored study edited by Kevin Lynch looked at children growing up in cities in four different nations and found as little as five to ten percent of the total day is spent outdoors on a typical school day, thirty to thirty-five percent on weekends.

The truth is that time spent outdoors had (and still has in our memories) a significance and numinous quality far beyond its temporal extent. Children use the outdoors as a place to explore, to discover the wonders of plant and animal life, to test themselves against unknown dangers.

A landscape architecture student found his grandfather's house in Southern California such a place: “My brother and I were allowed to explore the entire area. In comparison to the surroundings of our home in Los Angeles, Grampa's house seemed set in the middle of a wilderness. I remember the great feeling of anticipation and adventure as we began the first hike of the summer after being deposited by our parents. There was the ‘tree cave,’ an enclosed hollow formed by the dense upper foliage of a tree. The mountain was actually a small hill but it seemed immense to us. One side had a steep face of sandstone and we would enjoy the challenge of racing to the top. However, the most exciting place to explore was the ‘marsh’ . . . with hawks, quail, snakes, and an occasional coyote or bobcat. It was easy to imagine ourselves as wilderness explorers or soldiers and we often did, bringing along a bow and arrow or a BB gun. I perceived the marsh as a very ominous place, though fascinating at the same time. I often went there by myself,



drawn by qualities which made the marsh seem completely isolated from the rest of the world."

It is tempting to read such an account and many others like it and conclude that children will be environmentally deprived if confined to a small yard. But that would be a naive assumption. Children, just as adults, generally do remarkably well with what they have. They describe small places with a richness of detail equal to that recalled in wider landscapes, but on a smaller scale. Consider this account by a woman landscape architecture student from a San Francisco suburb: "I'm about four or five now, and to me this little yard isn't small at all—it's spacious and protected, sunny and warm. It's a whole wonderful world, full of endless satisfactions and learning experiences. Brilliant pink and red and coral geraniums cascade from ceramic pots on top of the fireplace and wall, fuchsias swing their bells against the long wall while coral bells nod at their feet, bending over the blue lobelia. Just in front of my kitchen door is my little bricked-in play area—stretching from the house across to the flower beds against the wall and enclosing the fireplace. I felt this was *my* territory, created especially for me and, secondarily, for my family. I felt safe and sheltered. Everything always seemed so bright and alive. It's funny that I remember the yard more than another part of the house. I think it's because the patio is the only place that was open and free and would allow me to get lost in fantasy, release energy, and not be bothered by adults or any structured situation."

From a totally different place and culture, an architecture student from Iran recalled very similar emotions

about the courtyard of his childhood: "The feeling I most associate with this yard is that of enclosure and security and freedom. I could do almost anything I wanted there, running in a circle around the yard, chasing my sister, playing with the flowers, digging in the garden and looking for worms, eating food with my parents and sister, singing to myself. But the predominant feature of the yard was the fountain and the endless things I could do with it—swimming, playing with the fishes, sailing paper boats, breaking the ice in winter. I always tend to remember this yard and all that took place within its boundaries with utmost warmth and the most pleasant memories."

Most students, however, did not recall the yard or patio as their "special place" of childhood. This area was their parents' domain—a place, like the house, to be kept neat and tidy, a place under the too watchful supervision of parental eyes. A woman who grew up in an outer suburb of San Francisco described her need to escape to the wild unmonitored territory across the street: "The yard was landscaped in early *Sunset* and was divided into specific use areas: entry, adult, utility, children's play, and back entry. When I was little there was a sandbox and later a very sophisticated playhouse with glass windows. The fields were different. When I went across the street into the fields, I could become anybody I wanted to be. Most often I was another person: a princess, a pioneer crossing the plains, an explorer. We would outfit a red, metal wagon like a Conestoga wagon and "cross the plains." Sometimes we pretended we were Indians and would collect acorns. The fields were, for me, a great setting for fantasies, trying on different hats . . . working on elaborate schemes centering on the 'wilderness.' I just loved the feeling that I was a new, independent, different person."

Some reasons for these fond remembrances of outdoor places are obvious. Every child and parent is familiar with the running battle about keeping the house neat and tidy. Outdoor play, especially when beyond the immediate surroundings of the house, is not inhibited by the same restrictions; a tree climbed, a model city carved in the dirt, bugs collected and held in tiny clicking matchboxes do not violate parental demands for "neatness." Therefore, children seek the outdoors from an early age because it allows them a definite freedom, if not in territorial range, then at least in the intensity with which they interact with, manipulate, and explore the environment. Also, the outdoor environment is always changing in major and subtle ways: fuchsia blossoms drop from unreachable branches to be floated as "lilies" in the storm gutter; tumbleweeds blow across the fields to be caught and ridden like horses; snow falls and changes the pitted surface of the city dump into a lunar landscape. Contrast these possibilities with the place-for-everything-and-everything-in-its-place mentality of most home interiors. No wonder the questioning child, especially from ages five through eleven, seeks the freedom of outdoors. Could it be that our attraction to nature and the outdoors as adults was set in early childhood, when being outside meant freedom from parental restrictions? A young latino San Franciscan described the privacy and release from domestic demands that he found in the expanses of Golden Gate Park: "When I was younger, there were lots of conflicts and lots of reprimands. . . . I was not to mess around or play in the living room due to the large amount

of breakable objects around. However, that was where the television was located. Consequently, I persisted. . . . The western portion of Golden Gate Park allowed me the opportunity to explore the tadpoles and microscopic creatures to be found around the Chain of Lakes without intrusion from sightseers and tourists. It was here I could hide among the reeds and sail driftwood down Amazonian undergrowth. It was here also that I would relish solitary walks and private talks with my girl friend."

In a different setting, a man who spent part of his childhood on a Cape Cod air force base recalled the nearby woods as a place to be free of family admonitions: "The woods were really my home there. Exploring, finding new trails, climbing the hills, building forts, climbing trees, digging tunnels, and picking wild blueberries were a few of the things I loved to do. I couldn't stand being in the house and the woods was a place I could go to do what I wanted and not be bothered by directions from parents or sisters. The woods seemed old, kind, and wise. I loved to be in them, even in the dead of winter."

Brought up in the confines of a third-floor Hong Kong apartment, a young woman described the intimate moments of escape when she and her sister slipped away to the roof of their building: "No place in my house can compare to the loft and roof terrace. My sister and I used to hide there to play actresses in the old-fashioned Chinese operas. Because of the steep, narrow stairway, my parents seldom bothered to go up there, hence the loft became our private quarter. It was away from the street noise and working scenery; instead there was peaceful scenery of the river, the light summer breezes, and the occasional singing of sparrows. I enjoyed the moments when my sister was in a good mood and she would sit on the roof edge and begin telling me stories or singing."

Occasionally a direct confrontation between the child's and the parents' environmental values was remembered poignantly: the yard that could not be dug in; the hideout that had to be removed because it spoiled the view from the family room. A young black man recalled with bitterness his parents' upwardly mobile move from the flatlands to the Berkeley hills; he was forced to take his beloved dog to the pound, because his parents were concerned that the animal might dig up their fancy new garden.

Such is the contrast and potential conflict between adults' and children's needs in the space closest to home that most students report having "escaped" to leftover, undesigned territories. Those who had grown up in developing suburbia recalled most evocatively the patches of woodland, marsh, or meadow that still remained between burgeoning subdivisions. For many, the greatest environmental trauma of later childhood or adolescence was to witness this beloved lair being bulldozed and built over. Indeed, a few cited the emotions triggered by this event as the prime reason that they became interested in environmental design as a profession.

In city settings, where no "left-over" space remained, the wild urban park fulfilled the same need for escape. A few students from San Francisco explored and tested themselves in the large expanses of Golden Gate or Lincoln Park. One of these city dwellers wrote, "Along the park's rim are rough paths that arrive at tidal beaches, the kind that would disappear with high tide and unveil caves,

niches, and nooks with low tide. Dirt paths lead through brush and past wind-whipped trees down sudden drops and narrow edges to rock outcroppings jutting defiantly against all forces of nature. It was along the bluffs that I could find a place to rest and nestle and collect my thoughts and speculate about being here and also somewhere else. I would think about my future, trips I'd like to make. I would check out my skills in cliff climbing and the time it would take in order to be back home in time for dinner."

In the two cases out of fifty where a neighborhood park was remembered favorably, the students were members of racial minorities. A young man who grew up in a predominantly black, middle-class neighborhood in Richmond, California, gave high praise to his neighborhood park: "Actually it seems as if I were born all over again when we moved to Richmond. It is the city that helped develop the person that I am now in every way, shape, and form. The area was filled with strong young athletic black boys, all my age and all of whom were my very good friends. The park was fierce in athletic competition. This place was sometimes violent and many fights occurred there. This did not scare me away from the park even though I did have my share of fights there, too. The reason that I feel so positive about my childhood environment is because the surrounding area permitted me to be socially and physically active. I could get to the homes of twenty of my friends in less than five minutes. We all loved and trusted one another."

Whereas parks and leftover spaces formed the prime escapes for city and suburban children on a day-to-day basis, trips to summer camp and visits to grandparents' farm or uncle's ranch formed an immensely important environmental experience on an occasional basis. Indeed, these vacation experiences often were recalled in much more detail and with more emotion than the home neighborhood. A French-born architecture student covered his home in a city high-rise in a few lines, but spent several pages describing in detail his summer trips to a Basque farm where he worked hard, but roamed freely and had great adventures. A woman who grew up in a rapidly urbanizing New Jersey suburb recalled her many summers on a dairy farm in upstate New York with great warmth. Perhaps these warm remembrances point up the fact that children, like adults, appreciate being needed. Those reared in urban America are rarely given work responsibilities beyond emptying the garbage. Visits to a relative's farm where they actually had to pitch hay, shovel dirt, and bring in the cows, or to summer camp where responsibilities and work meant fun and learning, are fondly remembered. For some, these experiences had an even deeper psychological significance: an only child reared in a restrictive suburban environment by a mother who insisted on "ladylike behavior" wrote of her beloved grandfather's ranch in rural Colorado. Here she was encouraged to rough it and prove herself in a man's and boy's world. In designing spaces for children, do we consider the need—especially important in today's rapidly changing view of sex roles—for places where girls can be "unladylike," and boys can be nurturing? The designer cannot shrug this off as "a matter for the home environment." Landscapes mirror society's values, including "appropriate" behavior for boys and girls.

In a recent study of children growing up in a bland Australian suburb, planners insisted that children needed more sports fields and wide-open spaces, despite the fact that those existing were frequently unused. This is a sad, but all-too-frequent, example of male planners and designers seeing space for boys' team sports as fulfilling all children's recreational needs.

One can only speculate sadly on girls and boys growing up with no opportunities to court danger, test themselves, be part of a workaday world. The number of times that camp or backpacking experiences, visits to working farms and relatives' ranches were mentioned in these papers indicates that the impact of these experiences goes far beyond their limited temporal extent in children's lives. For some, such an experience formed a significant antidote to the blandness of suburbia or the restrictions of high-density living and may have sparked a deep and lasting concern for the natural environment.

Perhaps another reason why many of us remember outdoor areas with such nostalgia is because we experienced our first tastes of independence, of going it alone, of proving ourselves, outside the home. The outdoors holds a special place in our personal histories just as the frontier does in our national history. Apprehension at any age heightens awareness, so we recall in amazing detail those places where we personally dared and proved ourselves as children. A woman who grew up next to a desert ravine in Southern California reported, "I had no fear of anything outside. I was the conqueror, the princess, the adventurer; climbing heights, lizards, snakes didn't scare me—I was invincible."

An architecture student who grew up in Texas described his favorite place—a dark, scary culvert where his experiences were in marked contrast to those in the neat, bland yard of his suburban home: "It was dark in the tunnel—darker the further you dared go in. I knew the Giant Spiders lived there. I just didn't know how far in. About ten feet in there was a second culvert branching off. It was smaller and had metal reinforcing bars covering the opening. These had been pulled back (by the spiders?) and were twisted and rusted. . . . I conquered the spiders eventually and traveled great distances through the tunnels. I conquered countless foes there. I was alone there, but secure, knowing the tunnels connected me with hundreds of others. I was nearly always silent there, but was surrounded by gurgling, trickling water, deep resonant earth sounds, and rustling leaves."

Such places took on a heightened intensity when they were branded by parents as "forbidden territory." A landscape architecture student described her feelings at playing in a hidden strip of land behind the fence of her California home and occasional forays up a forbidden embankment: "When I was a child it was very much a place of excitement and challenge, mixed with a little bit of fear. My friends and I would make up all kinds of games, from hopping logs over water to a jungle excursion. To us then, the space seemed so much larger and dense and full of possible encounters. But it was the railroad tracks that held the big mystique. To me, climbing the steep slope to the top mixed a feeling of fear with excitement. I think the fear came from the wild terrain and the possible oncoming trains, rather than from getting caught. But the feeling I got once I was up there was worth the risk. To me it was so high up

I felt I could look out upon my whole world (which then basically consisted of the surrounding neighborhood). With my friends and family below, it left me alone up there to ponder my thoughts and feelings and wonder about what lay before me."

As adults, we program our living situations and daily paths to avoid behavior settings that are problematic. Our fears are focused much more on social or economic situations, relationships, and the future. But the child experiences the world much more directly. Fear is "What's in that corner of the attic that always creaks?" or "Will the big spider come and get me?" or "Who lives in the boarded-up house on the corner?" It would be interesting to find out at what age we cease taking risks and directly experiencing the environment and start mapping out our actions to avoid conflict, uncertainty, and fear. By adulthood, many of us have withdrawn from the landscapes we experienced with such intensity as children. No wonder some turn to mescaline trips in the forest or what J. B. Jackson has termed "psychedelic sports" (sky-diving, hang-gliding, downhill skiing) in an unconscious (or conscious) attempt to recreate that immediacy of self-environment contact we cherished in our early years.

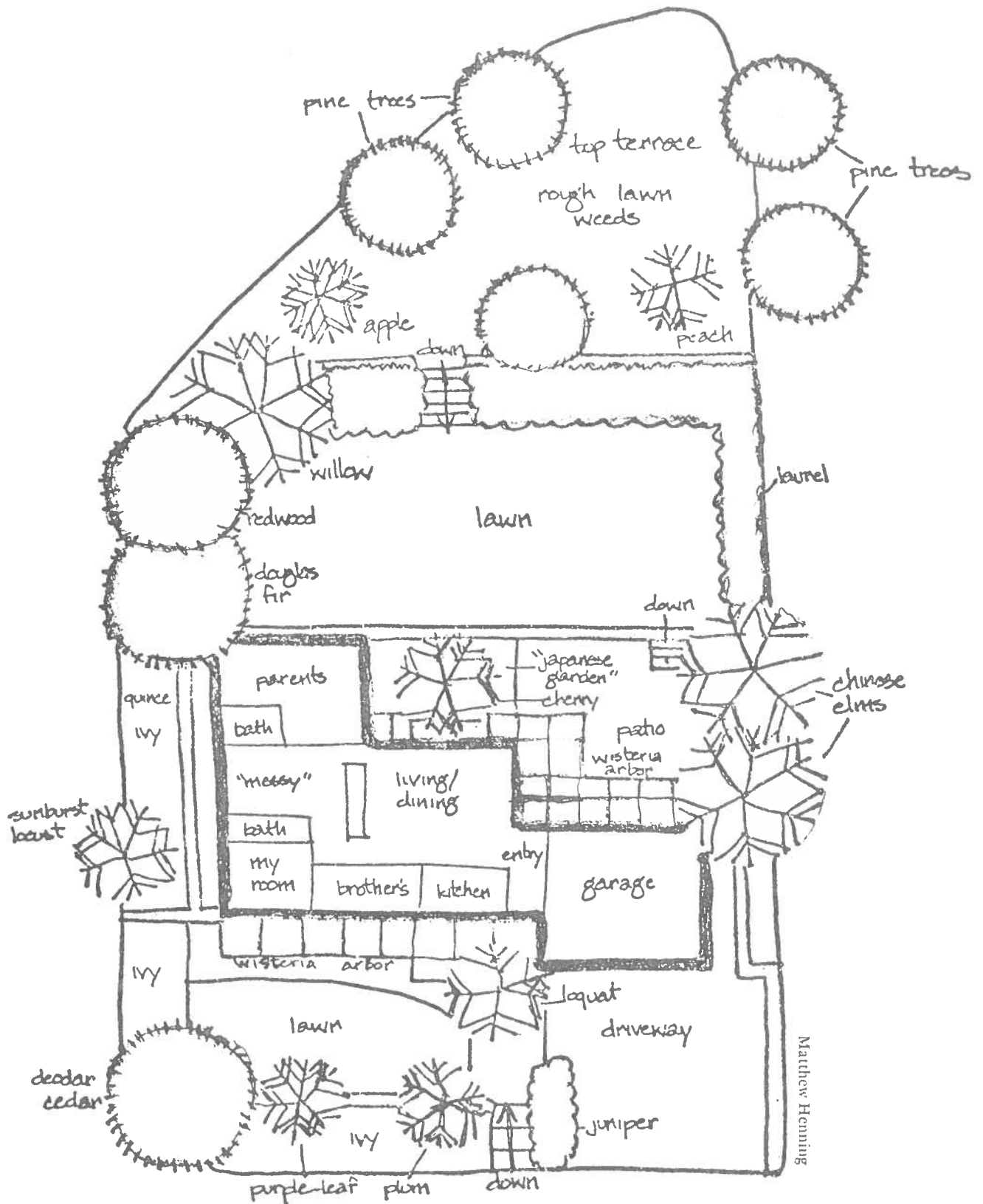
### *Hiding places*

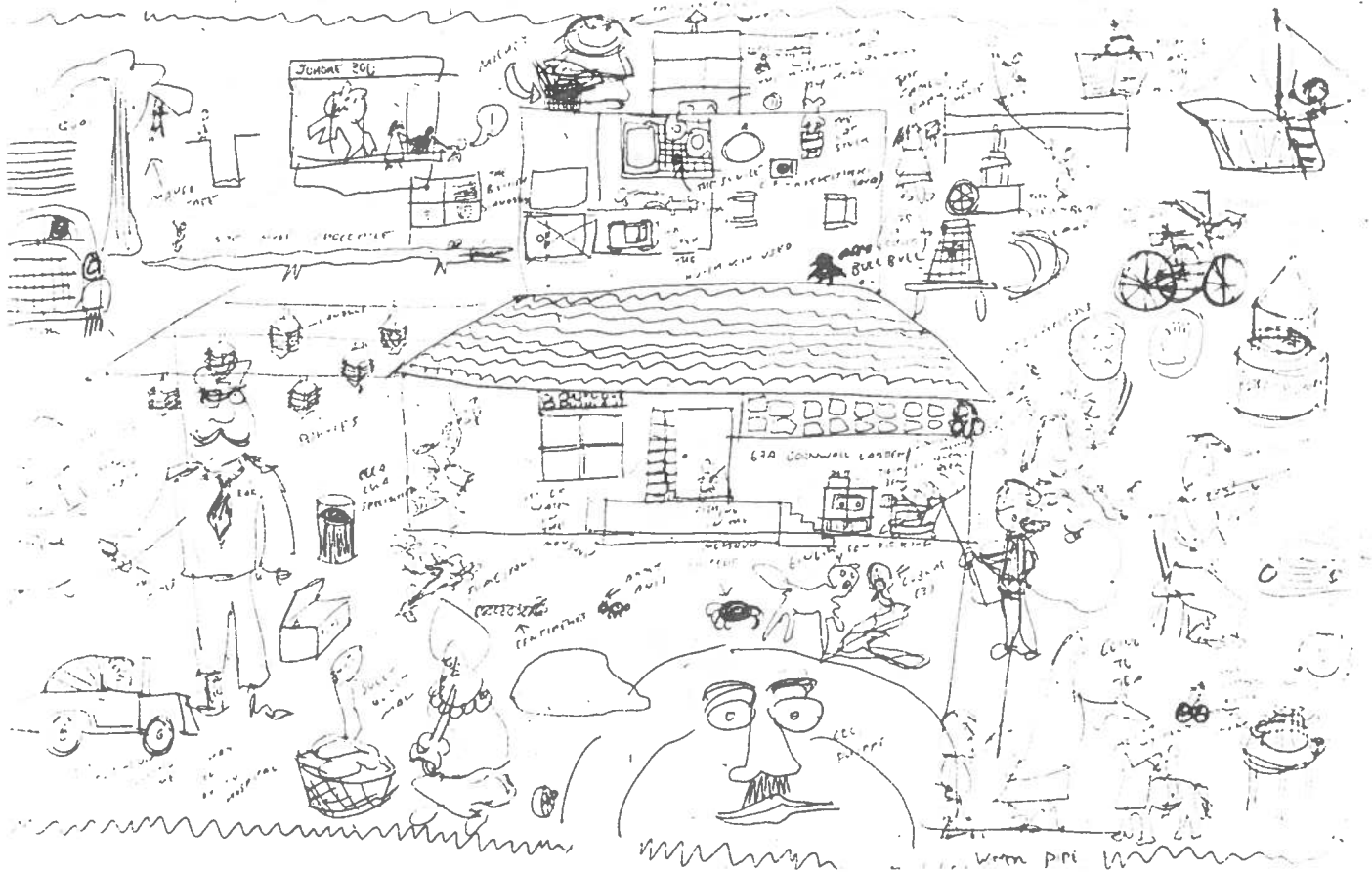
Another fascinating and recurring element in landscapes remembered from childhood is that of hiding places. Virtually every child from the age of six to adolescence (and perhaps even beyond) seeks out spaces and places where he or she can be private and hide from parents and from all but a select group of friends or siblings. The papers I have read and conversations with friends and students who were not a part of this sample confirm the near universality of this childhood experience.

Three kinds of hiding places appeared in my class sample: man-made spaces, such as culverts, shacks, porches, and closets taken over by children for their own particular use; hiding places molded out of the natural landscape; and places specifically constructed, such as treehouses or forts.

Found places originally were constructed or designated by adults for some function other than play. It is a tribute to children's unceasing exploratory powers that these treasure spots are found and inhabited. Here are descriptions of several fondly remembered hideaways: "There was this old shack on the hill behind Huber Park in El Cerrito. The shack was about to fall apart. About half the wallboards were missing. Most of the roof was missing. There was nothing to sit on but the rough board floor. This old shack was totally surrounded by lush greenery, much of which extended inside through the missing wall planks. It really seemed to be out in the jungle. In reality it was about thirty feet or less from an asphalt path which passed through the block and down to the park. A house with a yard was also about thirty feet away. My friend and I had a code word for it. We called it the palace. This word was part of a larger code which we designed to speak secretly about going to this place to smoke cigarettes. We enjoyed the opportunity to sneak away to this place for secret business."

A remembrance from a boyhood in Los Angeles: "The one place which held a lasting fascination for our group was a drainage ditch about six blocks away. It seemed to us





like an actual wild stream complete with dense vegetation, frogs, snakes and feral cats. The ditch was about twenty feet across with water two to five feet deep and ran for two miles between vacant lots and backyards. To reach it you had to crawl through a hole in a barbed wire fence which made the ditch seem a forbidden place. It was a hangout for our group from ages seven to twelve. The ditch played an important role in our lives; it was the only wild place in acres of tidy suburbia. Besides being a place of childhood play, it was also the location of my first experiences with sex and drugs."

Or this woman's memory of a walk-in closet: "It had doors that could be opened from both the inside and the outside and a light within. The closet was large enough for three people to fit in, but I often liked to close the doors and lock myself in to play house or read books."

Sometimes it was not a man-made space that was discovered and claimed, but a particularly evocative natural setting. A woman who had lost her mother at an early age described a secret place at the back of her house: "I remember the mud shining and wet, slicked down after a rain. It smelled special too—extremely musty, damp, and secretive. Together, the mud, the dark, and the running water encircled me. My feelings about being thus enclosed were ambivalent. Because much of my early life was so traumatic, I deeply appreciated feeling 'cared for' by this place. But sometimes, I was afraid of my lack of control over it. I vividly remember when my good friend Laura (my ex-stepsister) and I were exploring the creek. We picked our way over the big stones until we reached a big tunnel. Poking my head inside the tunnel, I saw a painted skeleton on the wall. I screamed and tried to run but couldn't because of the swift current and all of the big rocks."

Whether these places were called forts, dens, houses, hide-aways, or clubhouses, whether they were found, modified, or constructed, they all seemed to serve similar psychological and social purposes. For some, the hiding place was a microcosm of "home"—a place to prove that a child, too, can create a house and play at adult roles. A slight predominance of female students reported this function. One wrote: "There was a brick wall around the base of the tree, topped with a wooden bench that I turned into a play kitchen. There was enough room inside the well for me and the tree, and I would stand inside and 'cook' on the wooden counter and then serve my dishes to my imaginary friends who sat around the counter. I liked playing house a lot, but only when I was alone, because that way I could be mother, father, brother, sister, dog, cousin, and everyone else. I played with my brother in the treehouse, but never in my 'kitchen'—that was my secret game."

However, when parents created such a space, it was not the same. Structures built by doting fathers or grandfathers rarely had the appeal of owner-built homes, as this man found: "Soon after moving in, I carried left-over building materials up the hill and built a tree house. We soon had quite an extensive structure up there on the hill in the trees. But we were constantly tearing down, expanding, rebuilding. The fun of having this fort was in constantly changing it, and not just enjoying it, as it was . . . After a few years of using this structure, my father, delighted with the arrangement we had created, decided to construct for us a new fort up on the hill. However, this structure was

carefully designed and built out of more permanent materials by an adult, and while we enjoyed it for a short time, the simple fact that it had been built in a manner not meant for alteration quickly led us to abandon it for our old fort, where we could easily and continually manipulate our play environment."

An architect who had grown up in a Dallas suburb described the professional landscaping of an adult-designed "special place": "The play yard I shared with my brother and sister was made 'beautiful' and 'ordered.' A playhouse with operable windows, shutters, window box, and dutch door was built. It was white with a shake shingle room and (I don't believe it!) an angled redwood deck. Out from the deck was a marble chip play area. Over the marble chips, hanging from a fine old tree, was a rope swing with a metal disk for a seat. Ivy had been planted all around with metal edges. This had all been put in the shaded corner where the grass had failed due to the lack of adequate sunlight. I remember this play area with mixed emotions, but primarily one of childhood misunderstanding. It was soon apparent to me that this design was cosmetic and not really resultant from any needs of our childhood play. Somehow I could not fathom why I had not been consulted because I was convinced I could have done a better job. After all, when you fall off the swing onto a bed of jagged marble chips or try to run across them barefooted, it becomes readily apparent what a mistake the designer has made. The 'maintenance free' design had obliterated the area of lawn where we could dig in the dirt without ruining the grass. Consequently I tried other means to manipulate the environment. While playing fireman one day I had the hose and a hammer (my hatchet) and because the 'whole town' was burning down, I clang-clanged over to the rear door of the garage and broke out every pane of glass, stuck in the hose, and turned on the water full blast!"

For many children, the hiding place is that corner of the environment that they personally are able to build, maintain, and modify. Sometimes when a group got into building "houses," the question of property rights reared its ugly head. Was this an imitation of adult behavior—or an innate territorial imperative? One student recalled, "Territorial pressures would build up and would finally erupt into a spontaneous rockfight. Actually, now that I think about it, they weren't that spontaneous because I remember we would stockpile rocks for a few days and then as the taunts flew we would get into the dirt clod fight. Invariably the victors of the fight would be the ones whose fort held up. The battles took a heavy toll on the structures. Most of them would be total wrecks because when we ran out of rocks, we would go tear each other's fort down. After the fight, the site would be abandoned, new alliances would be formed, and a new site somehow selected and the process begun over again."

Though I can offer no proof that such experiences of environmental manipulation are sustaining to a child's ego, the tone and emotion of these recollections fifteen to twenty years later suggest that something more is gained than the outward symbols of construction. These structures are often our first attempts to create something outside of ourselves, to service our basic psychological needs. Small wonder that kids are not grateful when someone "does it for them."

A third significant function of a hiding place is the creation of a private spot—a niche of one's own in the sometimes confusing world of adults, family tensions, school, and growing up; a place to create a fantasy world or look at "forbidden" magazines. One student described such a hideaway in the rafters of a garage as "a secretive, cozy place among the brass trunks. We played here on rainy days because it was a warm spot near the roof, especially when the dryer was on. Our cat had several litters of kittens up there, which was a real attraction for us. I remember liking it up there because it was a two-story place, and our house was only one story. I felt that I was above everything, hidden and secretive. This spot was even more attractive to me in the sixth and seventh grades when I would retreat and write in my diary or read Nancy Drew books for hours."

Sometimes the hiding place presented mixed emotions of serenity and excitement. Spaces such as caves whose innermost depths are never explored; dark and spooky culverts that are penetrated further as age and daring permit. The combination of a place of security and a place of daring is curious, but perhaps fulfills that duality we all secretly seek—of feeling safe, sheltered, and private, yet at the same time wanting to be stimulated by excitement (and fear is indeed one form of excitement). A secret cave played in as a child by a landscape architecture student from Bronxville, New York, fulfilled that need: "One could always hear the leaves, either because the squirrels (or mice!) were rustling beneath, or the wind was making them speak. This was such a special secret place. Only my sisters and my very best friend and I were able to share its secrets. It could be damp and cold and frightening or provide a secure hiding place. Until the time I reached my teens, this cave was a magical, mysterious place for me to play, to sit, to climb on rocks surrounding it, to hide with my girl friend (to pretend to be hiding from my parents), and to explore. But I could never violate its secret or magic by going to the full depth of the cave."

#### *Suburbia: Shangri-la or sterile prison?*

In comparing the childhoods of American and Third World students, I was immediately struck with how narrow is the average American—particularly suburban American—child's view of the world. Not only do they not see their own fathers and mothers at work, they frequently see no one at work but the Safeway checker. Contrast that situation with the childhood of a woman city-planning student who grew up in a small fishing village in Cyprus: "I could see the first fishing boats returning to the small marinas after a whole night's fishing trip. I could distinguish the bell tower of some church popping out from the olive groves. I could hear the ding-dong of a flock passing by on its way to the grazing fields, and see the shepherd playing his flute, followed by his dogs. In the evening the same scene would be repeated with different colors in the background: the flocks coming back to their stables, the farmers returning home after a hard day's work, and the boats leaving for night fishing. At night everything was so quiet and peaceful, you could hear the noise of the boats' engines a few miles away in the sea, and also the crickets in the bushes."

The environmental and social richness of an urban

neighborhood in Macao provided this architecture student a variety of experience with people, buildings, and activities virtually unheard of in an American city: "My whole block was occupied by small warehouses. In front of our house, there was a major traffic artery. It was divided by a row of a hundred-year-old big banyans. Besides the little warehouses, there were a number of construction workshops, material factories, and a low-income neighborhood school, market, tea restaurants, and food vendors. On the sidewalk were craftsmen working, housewives with their grocery baskets, old men smoking under the shades, children playing different games, vendors selling their food or items. Around the corner of the school, there was a piece of undeveloped land. During daytime, there were temporary booths for businesses such as hair cutting, shoe repair, noodle selling, key making. At night, the place would be lighted by kerosene lamps, and numerous things began to happen. The number of mobile food vendors increased tremendously; old-fashioned Chinese opera began to start; tables for chess competitions and fortune telling were set up; and different people sold their handmade products. It was the major area for our neighbors, especially the working class, to relax, to socialize, and to enjoy. The crowd would not disappear until midnight."

Perhaps I am romanticizing poverty by labeling this environment as "rich," but certainly this young woman recalled her childhood with great warmth and wonder. She wandered blocks from her home at the age of four because everyone knew her, spoke to her, and looked out for her safety. She contrasted this experience with her confusion at emigrating to suburban San Francisco "where no one spoke to each other and all the houses looked the same."

This young man spent his childhood in such a place: "The yellow-stucco-with-brown-trim house had a very generous front yard and backyard, which I used for a variety of games. We installed an aboveground plastic swimming pool, which we enjoyed during the summer. The neighborhood was a friendly one populated with parents and kids who interacted with each other. The neighborhood kids used certain family rooms, driveways, lawns, and parts of the street for every game and form of recreation imaginable—from indoor games of marbles, billiards, slot car racing to outdoor games of football, baseball, boat racing in the gutters, tying our enemy to a 4 x 4 post and leaving him there until his parents rescued him. I remember feeling very comfortable in the surrounding two blocks. We used them intensively in the pursuit of recreation."

But it is not just that suburban children lack a view of the working world of farms and the experience of raw nature; some expressed a sadness that they rarely had been exposed to the richness of city life. Ironically, the suburban child, whose parents' choice of location is often justified as "good for the children," may be deprived not only of a holistic view of life/work/community, but also shielded from both True Nature and the guts of the city.

A woman who grew up in a California suburb described her regrets: "I have come to realize that my quasi-suburban upbringing did little to foster any security or ability to handle life in the Big City. While I feel that exposure to the outdoors is extremely important to childhood, I feel it is equally important to be comfortable in urban areas."

Another woman remembered: "Though I lived in suburbia, I feel like I practically grew up in the city. Every Sunday my mother and father would take us somewhere for the day. We usually ended up in San Francisco at the zoo, in a museum, at a play, movie, shopping, restaurant. Those Sundays were very significant in forming preferences for later in life. My ideal environment is a combination of the ocean, large green open space, and a close urban environment."

It was very noticable that when asked to describe the ideal environment, very few suburban-raised children chose a suburban locale. Most opted either for the city or the "real country." In contrast, children growing up in the city or the country mostly described environments similar to those of their childhoods. One landscape architecture student grew to hate his childhood environment: "During my early teens, my friends and I began to feel a deep contempt for our homes, our school, and the bland suburb where we had had the misfortune to grow up. Whenever possible we would hitchhike to the beach or nearby countryside. Our main activity was getting high on hash or LSD. This period of my life, from ages twelve to fifteen, is highlighted by memories of some very good acid trips in some beautiful, natural settings. During this period of my life, I first began to develop an aesthetic awareness about the world around me. I realized the possibility of really perceiving the environment around me, seeing, not just looking. However, this same awareness also intensified my feelings of depression about the blandness and uniformity of my suburb environment. Particularly strong was the feeling of being trapped there. Fortunately at the age of fifteen, my family was divided by divorce and I went to live permanently with my grandparents in the countryside. In contrast to the suburbs it seemed a paradise."

More suburbia seems inevitable, but the setting need not be so sterile for children. We could learn from the Dutch, who are starting to incorporate tracts of "wild landscape" into their housing projects, because these patches are much more heavily used by children than the neat lawns and flower beds prescribed by adult designer aesthetics. Are not "wild preserves" in suburbia much more significant in terms of day-to-day use than the "wilderness areas" saved for an elite band of adult backpackers?

Suburban and urban school districts should be encouraged to see periodic environmental education trips to contrasting environments (from inner city to true wilderness) as basic learning experiences for children, not as extras. Wild playground or nature areas should be incorporated in every grade school, but especially those set in the city.

If more multi-family and cluster housing seems economically inevitable—and even preferable for many adult social and functional needs—how can children's needs be taken care of? The private yard may have shrunk to a patio or balcony in such housing, but in return the community gains a communal open space. However, if we continue to landscape such spaces in the "clipped lawn" aesthetic, we

will soon find children seeking hiding places under the backstairs, beneath the juniper bushes, and behind the garbage shed. With careful forethought to the needs of the exploring child and the danger-seeking child and the private, daydreaming child, we can revise our views of the urban and suburban landscape to allow for spaces where clubhouses can be built, streams explored, and trees climbed. If we don't, we are depriving the next generation of environmental experiences whose worth we have only begun to sense. Sad to report, we know more about the ecology of many wild animals than we do about our own children. □

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