



January 2014



King Street
Cooperative
Preschool

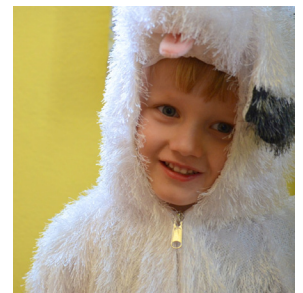
Free-Range Isn't Just Good For Chickens

By Teacher Jana

As a parent in the city, I've often felt that I'm living a grand experiment. My life as a child in Snohomish, a small town about 30 miles north of Seattle, looked very different than that of my own children. From a very young age I was afforded much independence and responsibility. In kindergarten, I began walking a mile to and from school with my older brothers. In second grade, I remember riding my bike across town to play with friends or swim at our local outdoor pool (complete with a high dive!) or get myself to softball practice. I subbed for my brothers' paper routes starting in fourth grade. That meant riding through adjacent neighborhoods, navigating dogs, entering yards of strangers and managing hefty loads alone. In sixth grade I got my own route, which required waking early and riding my bike about two miles in the dark delivering the paper. One end of the route was the "old town" business district of Snohomish that is now quaint and cute. Back then was a mix of hometown favorites like the bakery and variety store, alongside taverns and a XXX theatre where I had to step over spit and blood from bar fights the night before. Since I was also responsible for collecting the papers monthly fee, I had to knock on my customer doors asking for their payment, and be responsible for recording and turning that money in.

At times, I made poor decision about wasting my money, and there were times I was scared in the dark streets, but I learned better how to spend my money and how to be alert and watchful. I don't mean to give the impression that I was completely alone and abandoned; I know that my parents would not have allowed this freedom if they did not feel comfortable. There were family friends who lived along my route, and I knew I could run to them if I needed to. I don't remember it as clearly as I remember my independence, but I have vague memories of my parents driving me along the paper routes at the beginning; helping me brainstorm how to deal with non-paying customers and coming with me to talk to customers whose dogs had bitten me. They trained me, believed in my capabilities and sent me off - all without a cell phone. I bet many of you had similar childhood experiences.

So why do I feel like I'm living a grand experiment? I have long assumed that I couldn't provide this same type of independent childhood for my children in the city, and I grapple with questions like: "How will it look to raise kids in the city without the same freedom and independence I had? How will they learn the self-reliance, decision-making and self-motivation skills that I learned? Where are their chances to problem-solve, navigate, and take risks in the world without parents always watching over them?"



For some time I have been planning to read *Free-Range Kids, How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry)* by Lenore Skenazy. I put it off because I assumed that I would agree with everything in it. While I did spend a great deal of time nodding in approval, this book was written by a city parent. In fact, Lenore was prompted to write this book after she became a media sensation, designated "America's Worst Mother" after allowing her 9 year old son to ride the New York subway alone. I had accepted the notion that "times have changed," and I heard my small-town friends repeat the same mantra. It dawned on me that my resignation that city kids can't have the same independence as rural kids was totally off-base.

This shouldn't have surprised me, since I consistently quiz my city raised friends about their childhood experiences. They weren't much different than mine: taking the bus alone or with friends across Seattle, walking home from school parentless, going to the neighborhood park. In this book, Lenore challenges us to ponder this idea that "times have changed." The capacity and potential of children to learn and rise to the occasion is the same as ever. Lenore sites statistics that maintain

our country is actually safer than it was thirty years ago.

The obstacle to Free-Range parenting is that we are more aware of the dangers that could happen. We are less connected as neighbors and communities. With fewer children outside, the safety of the group is degraded. What we expect children can or should do for themselves has diminished. The focus of American parenting culture focuses on protecting children from the negative, while too often leaving out what part preparation has in their ultimate safety. As parents, we aim to keep our kids safe, and it can be difficult to see when preventing danger also prevents instruction and growth.

Why is this “Free-Range” idea important to ponder and re-visit? I’ll use my own children as an example. We walk or escort them on their bikes to school, about one mile away. My eldest is in second grade and my youngest is in kindergarten. I don’t even let them cross a street without me right by their side. My logic is the main roads are too busy, or the side streets are so full of parked cars there is too much danger in the boys not seeing a car or a car not seeing them. There are hills that I imagine my boys flying down spilling over into the road and into an oncoming car. Because of my stance, my boys haven’t really had to learn how to safely cross a street by themselves, on foot or on a bike. Sure, we go through the motions together, but I can tell they are just going through the motions because they feel so safe, they don’t even see the point. They also haven’t had to learn in great detail about their neighborhood, how to get around to places we frequent, or where their friends live in relation to us. They don’t have a map in their head of their greater environment. Without an adult present, they are pretty much helpless. And that is where I see my thinking needs to shift. I’m not teaching them how to keep themselves safe when I am not present. I’m preparing them to depend on others for their safety and protection. My job as a parent is to teach them to problem-solve, make decisions, fail and recover, and take reasonable risks in the world and in life. I won’t be present at all times, and that requires opportunities for independence. Even in the city.



Here is a look at the list I came up with for me to work on with my boys (8 and 5 years old) effective immediately:

- At the grocery store, allowing them to go to other aisles to find food and come back to me.
- Get or return borrowed items from neighbors on our block by themselves, and work toward expanding that circle.
- Walk to school without a parent at least part way, and work toward extending that distance. Find out who else from school may be allowed to walk with them.
- Ride their bikes around our block solo, or at minimum together as siblings
- Get and clean up their own breakfast, make their own school lunch
- Pick up litter around the block solo
- Tie shoes. (Yes, I admit it. Due to the invention of non-tying shoes, and my own rush, my boys do not know how to tie shoes.)

What does this mean for the preschool age and environment? Obviously, two and three year olds don’t have the same capabilities as my 5 and 8 year old. But the Free-Range parenting idea is really about a frame of mind; one that focuses on trust, rather than on fear. One that finds way to prepare children for the environment they are in, rather than solely focusing on preparing the environment around the children. One of the things that really attracted me to King Street Co-op five years ago was that I sensed the presence of this ideal of trust and preparation. These ideals are really at the core of the school philosophies: child-centered (we trust the ideas and play of children), family-based (we trust the many families of the co-op to care for our children), multi-age (we trust what children of various ages learn from one another), play-based (we trust that play is key to their future academic and social success), anti-bias (we trust all the ways that co-op families are the same and different in this world), and problem-solving (we trust that children will experience difficulty but can work to find solutions together).



Beyond philosophy and practice, King Street's physical environment is one that often challenges children and adults to trust neighbors, trust each other, and trust one's self. This is changing soon, but for nearly forty years the school's front doors have been unlocked. In my last five years at King Street I've observed children learning self-reliance and independence from the nature of the environment. Children at times use glass plates, hammers, graters, metal shovels, and the like. Children gauge their own limits, seek out solutions and communicate their needs in a huge physical space where an adult cannot possibly be right next to every child every minute. Children navigate large steps and terraces and railroad ties. Children get their own plates and cups for snack as well as clean them up. Children identify when they are hungry or need to go to the bathroom. Children assist in snack preparation and picking up equipment. In short, King Street by its very environment and philosophies allows preschool-aged children a great deal of independence and challenge, even as they are surrounded by adults who supervise, guide and instruct.



When adults teach and then trust in the abilities of children, the children come away with a sense of pride, confidence, resilience and trust in themselves. When children are allowed to take risks they learn how to be aware of what problems may arise and think through how to deal with and recover from those problems. When children are allowed independence, they make mistakes and then learn from them. But just as important, when we gift our children with opportunities for independence, they learn that the adults in their lives believe in them too.

It isn't as easy as it sounds. We all have our own personal thresholds of fear and trust. And often it varies depending on the topic at hand, due to personal experiences. So, how do we go about moving from our fears into trust? I highly recommend the whole book, but one tip that really resonated with me was the following:



Worrying is not an unreasonable thing for parents to do...After all, something could happen. The problem is the out-of-proportion worry. If you can just put the risk in perspective, the fear gets put in perspective too. To do that, many psychiatrists suggest making an actual, pen-and-paper list of twenty things that could possibly go wrong during an activity you're worried about and then coldly contemplating the list. Which things are really likely? What can you do to prepare your child for them? ...An exercise like this reminds us that we always have a chance to prepare our children for the outside world... Walk a kid to school, she has transportation for a day. Teach a kid to walk to school and she has transportation for a lifetime. (page 99)



I challenge you to think about what things you may do for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves. Or imagine your child absent of your presence, and assess what your child would or would not be able to do independently. Make some goals and a preparation plan. And if not Free-Range, than at least organic, vegetarian-fed, and plus Omega-3.



Our Favorite Things King Street Style

Books

Zach loves the Magic School Bus Series.
Zoie is hooked on The Owl and the Pussycat.

Nathalie loves books, and has several favorites to share:

Everything I Need To Know Before I'm Five
Scaredy Squirrel
The Curious Garden
She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain (Jonathon Emmett version)
Stagecoach Sal
Bugtown Boogie
The Neighborhood Sing Along
The Emperor of Absurdia



Karen, Darian's mom, loves to remind the kids that Monster's Eat Whiny Children (by Bruce Eric Kaplan). For some reason they find that book hysterical.

Teacher Jana has a new favorite book in Free-Range Kids by Lenore Skenazy

Clothing Shops

Just Between Friends Consignment Sale - A twice a year in Renton (near Ikea). So many items priced really low. The real problem is how to narrow down what to buy! (www.seattlejbfsale.com)

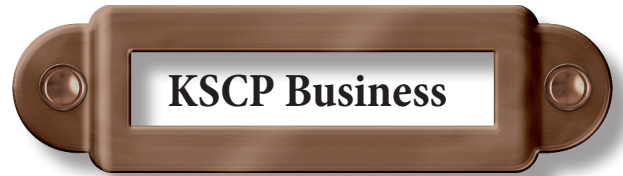
--Sarah (Layelle. 4)

Kids on 45th in Wallingford - a great consignment shop that has toys and clothes. We give the kids a dollar or two for them to pick out their very own toy with their "own" money.

--Karen (Darian. 2)

Colors

Zach - all of them!
Zoie - purple



Giving Letter Update

As of January 1, we have raised over \$3400 in our annual giving letter campaign. This money goes directly towards supporting our school with scholarships, new equipment, supplies and more. Thank you to everyone for participating, and especially to our hardworking Giving Letter team.

Auction Update

Is March 22 on your calendar? That's the date of this year's auction!

Date: March 22

Time: 2:00pm

Place: Washington Hall (153 14th Ave)

Cost: \$15 adults/\$5 kids for presale

\$18 adults/\$5 at the door

\$5 raffle tickets

REMINDER: Each family is responsible for turning in two procurements. As soon as you get them, turn them in to the fundraising team so they can update the catalog.

If you are stuck for procurement ideas, talk to Colleen (Henry and Olive), Kelly (Pete) or any of the Board members for ideas.

Stuck for things to do on rainy days?
Check out these local events!

Free park day
January 20, 2014

All national parks
Entry is free at Mount Rainier
and Olympic National Parks on
Free Entrance Days in the
National Parks. Expect more
people and less parking than
usual.

Chinese New Year
February 1, 2014
(11 a.m. - 4 p.m.)

Join the Lunar New Year Celebra-
tion in the International District,
which includes lion and dragon
dances, drumming, martial arts,
a costume contest, face painting,
games, and cheap food. Free.

Children's Film Festival
January 23 - Feb. 2, 2014

See the best and brightest in
international cinema for children
ages 3 to 12 at the Children's Film
Festival Seattle at Northwest Film
Forum.

<http://childrensfilmfestivalseattle.nwfilmforum.org/>

Improvised Music Festival
February 6 - 8, 2014

The Seattle Improvised
Music Festival celebrates
musicians who are dedicated
to playing free-form music.
Most events are on Capitol
Hill.

Ground Frog Day
February 1, 2014
(11 a.m. to 1 p.m.)



Snohomish Ground Frog Day is
the West Coast's Groundhog Day.
Enjoy kid-friendly activities and
see Princess Amphibiana arrive on
a fire truck with a frog named Sno-
homish Slew. Free two-hour event
in downtown Snohomish, known
for antique stores.

