



# There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather: A Scandinavian Mom's Secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Confident Kids (from Friluftsliv to Hygge)


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Bringing Up B  b  meets Last Child in the Woods in this "fascinating exploration of the importance of the outdoors to childhood development" (Kirkus Reviews) from a Swedish-American mother who sets out to discover if the nature-centric parenting philosophy of her native Scandinavia holds the key to healthier, happier lives for her American children.

Could the Scandinavian philosophy of "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes" hold the key to happier, healthier lives for American children?

When Swedish-born Linda  keson McGurk moved to Indiana, she quickly learned that the nature-centric parenting philosophies of her native Scandinavia were not the norm. In Sweden, children play outdoors year-round, regardless of the weather, and letting babies nap outside in freezing temperatures is common and recommended by physicians. Preschoolers spend their days climbing trees, catching frogs, and learning to compost, and environmental education is a key part of the public-school curriculum. In the US, McGurk found the playgrounds deserted, and preschoolers were getting drilled on academics with little time for free play in nature. And when a swimming outing at a nearby creek ended with a fine from a park officer, McGurk realized that the parenting philosophies of her native country and her adopted homeland were worlds apart.

Struggling to decide what was best for her family, McGurk embarked on a six-month journey to Sweden with her two daughters to see how their lives would change in a place where spending time in nature is considered essential to a good childhood. Insightful and lively, *There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather* is a fascinating personal narrative that illustrates how Scandinavian culture could hold the key to raising healthy, resilient, and confident children in America.

Linda McGurk is a Swedish-American freelance journalist and blogger who lives with her family in rural Indiana. A nature lover and mother of two, she believes that the best childhood memories are created outside, while jumping in puddles, digging in dirt, catching bugs, and climbing trees. McGurk's writings about natural parenting and outdoor play have appeared in a wide range of newspapers, magazines, and online publications in North America as well as Europe, including *BonBon Break*, *Outdoor Families Magazine*, and *Childhood 101*. In 2013, she started the blog *Rain or Shine Mamma* to inspire outdoor play and adventure every day, regardless of the weather. She is the author of *There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather*. *There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather* 1

## A RIGHT TO NATURE

The wild is a voice that never stops whispering.

-DANIEL CROCKETT

When I went to Perth, Australia, as an exchange student in college, I really didn't expect to come back with much more than a great tan and a backpack full of good memories. Instead, I returned with a boyfriend from rural Indiana. On one of our first dates, he told me that as a child he used to build dams with debris in the creek in his backyard. In a different

creek in Sweden. I used to clear the debris from the stream so that the water could flow freely. We were immediately drawn to each other.

As it turns out, the unlikely union between a Swedish environmentalist and a Midwestern industrialist had more staying power than our families would ever have imagined, and after we graduated we decided to move to Montana, where my husband had spent many of his school holidays skiing with his family. Fresh out of journalism school, I got my first job working for a start-up internet business that might as well have served as the inspiration for the movie Office Space, complete with soulless cubicles, mysterious forms, and disgruntled white-collar employees, who were all kept in check by an overzealous supervisor. Still, the move was a smooth transition for me. The mountains reminded me of home, the wildlife was spectacular, and the intensity and length of the winters rivaled those of my homeland.

Bozeman, where we lived, was in the middle of a transition from sleepy ranching community with world-class fly-fishing waters to hipster college town and up-and-coming vacation spot for people from all over the US. This change was not well received by everybody, but with my Scandinavian lineage and experience with harsh weather I fit the mold of a "true" Montanan and was readily accepted by the locals. In contrast, anybody who was the slightest bit hesitant to driving in heavy snow or complained about the cold was jokingly dismissed as a "Californian," whether they were actually from the Golden State or not. Ironically, most of the people who complained about out-of-staters were themselves from somewhere else. Being a Montanan, it turned out, was not so much about the stamp on your birth certificate but more of a state of mind. Success was not measured by how many steps you had climbed on the corporate ladder but rather by how many days you had spent in a tent instead of a cubicle. Wealth was not necessarily measured by the size of your bank account but by how much elk meat you had in your freezer. Skills were assessed not according to what you had learned from a textbook but by how you handled real-life challenges like how to avoid getting buried by an avalanche or attacked by a grizzly bear.

I was clearly not in Sweden anymore. Most of the people I now hung out with put me to shame with their in-depth knowledge of nature and advanced wilderness survival skills. One thing was for sure: If I ever stood face-to-face with the Apocalypse I would grab onto a seasoned Montanan in a heartbeat and not let go.

But I noticed that, parallel with this hard-core outdoor culture, there were forces at work in American society that seemed to create a divide between humans and nature. One of the first lessons I learned in my new homeland was that pretty much all the things I was used to doing either on foot or by using public transportation in Scandinavia could be done without ever exiting your car in Montana. Here, you could go straight from your comfortably heated or air-conditioned house in the morning to your equally comfortable climate-controlled car and drive to work. Actually, this was the only way to get to work unless you lived within walking or biking distance, since public transportation was nonexistent. At lunch, you could go to one of a slew of fast-food restaurants with a drive-through window, idle in line for ten minutes, and then inhale your lunch while running errands in your vehicle. Returning a movie at the video store? There was a drive-by box for that. Mailing a letter?

No need to get out of the car. Buying a six-pack? Give your order to the guy at the drive-up window. Even bank errands could be done from the driver's seat. At school, parents waited in their vehicles in a long, winding line until a teacher with a walkie-talkie called on their child to come outside. I had never seen anything like it.

Many roads lacked sidewalks, and just walking across the parking lot at the mall sometimes seemed borderline suicidal. Then again, assuming that I made it, all the stores I could ever need were conveniently located under one roof. I noticed that some people even went to the mall to exercise, walking or jogging down the long corridors. This phenomenon was so well established that they had a name: mall walkers. I was intrigued. I could understand why some older people would want to avoid slippery sidewalks or bumpy trails in the woods, but I saw people of all ages participate in this activity. What were they doing in here when the awe-inspiring Rocky Mountains-and all that they had to offer in terms of outdoor recreation-were just a stone's throw away? I obviously still had some cultural codes to crack.

Since so many people just seemed to be moving from one climate-controlled indoor environment to another, there was no need to dress for the elements, and I found that people often dressed as if they didn't expect to go outside at all, not even putting on a coat in the dead of winter. In one of my columns for a Swedish newspaper, I wrote that, due to the way American society was designed, most people could probably get by with walking less than a thousand feet per day. Now I was starting to think that this was an overly generous estimate.

Back then, I didn't reflect much on what all this might mean if we were to have children. We were too busy enjoying our carefree lives. The biggest decisions we had to make at the time were where to go camping and which peak to hike come the weekend, and we were pretty contented with that. But as I neared my thirties and the idea of having children beckoned, we decided that it was time to move back to my husband's hometown in Indiana to be closer to family. I was yet again about to embark on a cultural journey.

There Is No Such Thing as Bad Weather

In Scandinavia, where I was born and raised, it would be very easy to make excuses for not going outside. The northern part of Scandinavia-which truly comprises Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, but for all practical purposes of this book also will include our eastern neighbor, Finland, which shares much of the same culture-reaches well beyond the Arctic Circle, and the climate in the region is partly subarctic. Heavy snowfall is common in the winter, especially up north, although white Christmases are not guaranteed. The Gulf Stream helps moderate the temperature, especially along the western coasts, making it warmer than is typical of other places on the same latitude. Still, anybody who has spent a winter in Scandinavia knows that it is not for the faint of heart. Temperatures can range from Let's Bring out the Patio Furniture to I Think My Eyelids Just Froze Shut, but one facet of Scandinavian winters always remains constant: the darkness.

Each year for twenty-seven days, peaking with the winter solstice in late December, the

polar nights blanket northern Scandinavia. During that time, the sun doesn't rise over the horizon at all, and life enters the twilight zone. Literally. The south is less unforgiving, offering up to seven hours of precious daylight per day in January. Even then, overcast skies often submerge Scandinavia in a perpetual semi-dusk-like state that has a way of putting people's resilience to the ultimate test. How bad is it? Consider that in 2014 the Swedish capital of Stockholm logged just three hours of sunshine for the whole month of November, a new record. "People on the streets are ready to start eating each other," a friend exasperatedly reported toward the end of the month. "The zombie apocalypse is here."

Every Scandinavian has his or her own way of dealing with the dark winters. The Finnish stay awake by drinking more coffee than people anywhere else in the world. The Swedes build elaborate sunrooms and go on vacations to Thailand. The Danish have hygge, one of those unique phenomena that doesn't translate well but evokes images of a family cozying up in front of a fireplace, drinking hot chocolate, and playing board games. The Norwegians eat cod-liver oil to boost their vitamin D levels and seek refuge in their rustic cabins in the woods. Many a Scandinavian has dreamed of calling it quits and moving to warmer, sunnier, and more hospitable latitudes. Some entertain the idea every winter, and a few retirees actually act on it. But more than anything, Scandinavians get through the winter by maintaining a sense of normalcy. Snow happens. Sleet happens. Ice happens. Cold temperatures happen. Life goes on. The trains may not run on time after a big snow dump, but society doesn't shut down either. Weather-related school closures are virtually unheard-of.

In the spring, crocuses and coltsfoots start poking through the ground, the days keep getting longer, and vitamin D stores are finally replenished. In the cities, wool blankets pop up on caf  patios—a sign as sure as any that the season is about to turn. As the snowmelt starts to drip from the rooftops, survivors of the seemingly everlasting winter flock to the caf  s, wrap themselves in blankets, and turn their translucent faces toward the fickle sunshine. The fact that it's forty degrees Fahrenheit outside is irrelevant; by Scandinavian standards it's completely acceptable to enjoy a latte wearing mittens. And by June, when Scandinavians celebrate midsommar by making flower wreaths, dancing around a maypole, and worshipping at the altar of the sun that never sets, they are ready to recommit to their homeland, body and light-starved soul.

In the summertime, the weather can be a toss-up, occasionally sunny and warm in the south, where the majority of the population lives, but quite often cool, cloudy, and rainy. More than three days straight of temperatures in the seventies is pretty much considered a heat wave, and it's no coincidence that Swedish supposedly is the only language that boasts the word *uppeh llsvecka* to describe a break between two periods of intense rainfall. *Solfattig*—"sun poor"—is another commonly used Swedish weather term that speaks for itself. On those few precious summer days when balmy temperatures and cobalt skies converge in perfect harmony, anybody voluntarily staying inside would be declared legally insane. "Whenever the weather is nice, you really feel like you have to take advantage of it. That's what our parents always told us, and that's how I feel with my kids," says Cecilia, a mother of two in Stockholm.

Considering the capricious nature of the Scandinavian climate, it's maybe no wonder that the saying "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes" originated here. It probably started as a coping strategy, or was perhaps born out of defiance of the weather powers that be. If you were ever a child in Scandinavia, you've heard this phrase more times than you care to count, from teachers, parents, grandparents, and other adults in your life. As a result, Scandinavians grow up with a certain resilience to the weather. The children who once dressed in rain gear from head to toe to go out to recess or play in the woods after school turn into adults who feel a certain urgency about getting outside every day. "If I don't get outside every day, I go crazy. And if I don't have time to take my son out after work I feel guilty about it. I think it's a very Scandinavian thing to feel that way," says Linda, a Swedish friend of mine.

Several researchers have spent much of their careers trying to figure out why Scandinavians are so consumed with the idea of getting their progeny outside every day. One theory is that it is a form of precaution. We believe that outdoor play is good for kids, but we cannot necessarily pinpoint why. We can tell that it's not hurting them, and we worry about what would happen if they didn't have it.

The government is also heavily invested in promoting outdoor recreation for children and adults alike as a preventive health measure. For example, the health care system in Sweden's Skåne region encourages parents to get outside with their children from an early age as a way to prevent obesity and establish a healthy lifestyle from the get-go. "We all know that fresh air and movement benefit both your appetite and sleep," says an informative pamphlet for new parents. "That is true not only for older children and adults, but fresh air every day makes small children feel well too. This also establishes good habits and a desire to exercise."

The idea that fresh air and outdoor play are crucial to good health is so prevalent that it has even found some unlikely champions in the pharmaceutical industry. Kronans Apotek, one of the largest pharmacy chains in Sweden, offers the following advice for flu season on its website: "The first step toward fewer runny noses and less coughing is to let the child spend as much time outside as possible," the company says. "When children are outside, the physical distance between them increases, which reduces the risk for contagion through direct contact or the air. The more time spent outside the better."

Aside from the obvious personal health aspects, having positive outdoor experiences in childhood is seen as a way to build a lifelong relationship with nature. To paraphrase David Sobel, advocate of place-based education and author of *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education*, if we want children to care about nature, they need to spend time in it first.

"Do You Need a Ride, Hon?"

The sweet corn is just starting to tassel when we move cross-country, into a turn-of-the-century home in rural Indiana. We start the mother of all remodeling jobs, gutting the






house room by room. Around the same time, I'm starting to feel the ticktock of the infamous biological clock, which is interesting, since I've always felt awkward around children and didn't realize until I was in my twenties that I wanted to have some of my own. Now it's the only thing I want, aside from a new kitchen.

In between working as a freelance writer and tearing out carpet, I explore my new hometown on foot. With two black Labs in tow, I quickly become an object of curiosity. People that I've never met or talked to come up to me and start chitchatting like they know me, simply because they've seen me walking my dogs. Cars slow and people roll their windows down to shout friendly comments. On Facebook I get questions from strangers about my training methods, and people are constantly awed by how well my dogs walk together. (For the record, this is purely an illusion; in reality, they are constantly tugging in different directions. Barney, the youngest, was once singled out by a trainer during an obedience class as an example of how not to behave.) In Sweden my entourage wouldn't raise any eyebrows, as going for walks is a popular form of outdoor recreation all year-round. Here, I quickly become The Woman Who Walks with Dogs.

At some point in between refinishing the living room floors and painting the guest bedroom, I take a pregnancy test and finally see the two pink lines I c...

#### Other Books

There Is More, Founder and Global Senior Pastor of Hillsong Church and author of LIVE LOVE LEAD shows how, with God's power, you can believe and achieve a life that exceeds every earthly expectation. When you surrender control and follow God's guidance, you become empowered and equipped to do the impossible, reach higher, and go further than you could have ever imagined--giving Him all the glory. By building our lives around godly principles, surrounding ourselves with wisdom, and living for a cause greater than ourselves, we can effectively live out God's purposes and have an enduring impact. As Brian Houston has personally discovered, when we depend on Jesus as the source for our identity, our lives can be a lasting legacy that maximize the gifts He has given each of us as unique individuals. There is More is for anyone who wants to be challenged to live with expectancy. Ephesians 3 is a call to release the immeasurable potential within you and the exceeding, abundant, and above plans and purposes of a Holy God that are beyond your greatest imagination. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

     . Lewis could be talking about the kind of attitudes that are so prevalent not only in our churches but also in our families ... C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters: Annotated Edition (1942; reprint and annotation, San Francisco: HarperOne, ..."