

Sense of Place – JSE Post Card – Columbia, Maryland



After having moved almost every year of my life, my family settled in Columbia, Maryland when I was nine. In a community designed around an expansive system of natural areas, I only had to walk to the end of our street to reach a path through woods and streams where I regularly played for hours. After moving away for college and work, I returned home, literally to the same street I grew up on, with my husband when we decided to start a family of our own. As a mother to young kids, I have found myself turning to nature more than ever as a source of inspiration, a place for play, and as a salve for stress. We delight in appreciatively exploring our surroundings, often the same places I played during my own childhood, both independently and together, and come home with stories to share and natural treasures to show. More often than not, though, our spontaneous outings to nearby nature find us almost entirely our own. I became inspired to create a family nature club, Columbia Families in Nature, to help families spend time enjoying nature together. During our first event I watched children and adults gather together around the stumps of trees chewed down by beavers to get a closer look at the tooth marks. The simple joy that came from sharing in this discovery was contagious. In ways both planned and unplanned, such experiences have been a part of each of our 80 events to date—sometimes it is a toad that crosses our path or the first taste of ripe wild raspberries. Each time the smiles on the faces of the children and adults alike suggest that the bonds of connection and caring are growing. I am hopeful that over time such experiences will bring participants closer to each other and their ecological community as well as motivate their sustained care for the natural world. I certainly attribute my deep, lasting connection and commitment to the Earth to the sense of place I cultivated during my childhood days of playing in nature.

With gratitude,
Chiara D'Amore
Columbia