

Hay Isn't Just for Horses (shhh...it's for playing, too)

Transitions: The gifts of change

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**“We don’t stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing.”**

–George Bernard Shaw.

“Come on up, Mom,” my 13-year-old son shouts to me from one of the many bales of hay scattered among the fields of Appleton Farms, which borders Ipswich and Hamilton.

Watching him jump from bale to bale, I realize instantly that asking my son to go for a walk with me on this unseasonably warm Saturday is vastly different than the meandering strolls I have shared recently with girlfriends.

Appleton Farms has always been one of the places, in addition to Crane’s Beach, that I’ve claimed as my very own “heaven on earth” for its beauty and serenity. I never thought of it, though, as an athletic challenge.

“You’ve got to be kidding, I think to myself,” wondering how a mid-life woman with an injured shoulder is going to hike herself up a few feet onto the bale, and then leap from one stack of hay to another, not even sure if it is permissible for either of us to be on them.

Then, a daring voice inside me rings even louder. “Go for it, have fun with your son.” So, I heave myself up backwards, praying no one is watching this disheveled lady awkwardly trying to climb a bale of hay wrapped in slippery white plastic.

Reaching the top of the bale, I see my son smiling with pride that his mom can be “one of the boys,” much like he used to do in younger days when I would kick a football across the entire length of our front lawn. He’s got a new play mate on this day that his friends are scattered elsewhere.

Jumping from bale to bale is just the beginning of our adventure. Shortly thereafter, we are climbing a slope of leaves and dirt to reach the top of a place my son names Drumlin Hill. He informs me that “drumlin” represents the steep side of a hill formed by a glacier.

At this point, the hike ahead simply means to me another stretch of muscles I haven't used in a very long time.

Climbing down—slipping is a more accurate description—is far more challenging, but not enough to deter us from partaking one more time.

I finally convince my son that I need to simply walk for an hour as I was accustomed, enjoying the blue skies and beautiful clouds. He agrees, while along the way, tossing stones and jumping up high in the air to open the Kentucky Gate that allows horses to enter a certain field of pasture.

Then after discovering another stack of hay bales to pounce upon, we come across an older gentleman accompanied by a photographer. The elder informs us that we are soon to witness a scented run of hounds leading 90 horses from the Myopia Hunt Club through the fields. We hop up on a bale of hay to watch, taken in by the spontaneity of our adventure, and relieved we got off our walking path before all the horses came trotting forth.

Staying open to surprises and making time to play are part of life, too—even if like me, you have to spend Sunday on the couch recovering. Sore muscles are nothing in comparison to the contentment I felt from sharing an afternoon with my son connecting through physical activity. Boys may be boys, but moms can keep up sometimes. I will cherish the times I get invited along, even when forced to push beyond my comfort zone to try something new.

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