

An Arizona Arbor in Summer

This is why I live here,
this immaculate occasion once
a day. Desert turns to fairyland,
early-morning light turns drab
dead gray to glory, wind stirs
sunlit leaves like thirty kinds of
lettuce, green and gold, green
and gold, limb motion whispers;
creosote and squat mesquite
quiver in devotion —
sweet-smelling, sunlight-drenched, still
cool and fresh and equal to the
coming heat.



Whatever dark things happen in the night,
the morning sunlight washes them away
and we accept another virgin day.
I wonder—How can people find
the world such a contaminated
kind of place when sunlight
reaches into every pore of
being—sanctifying, desiccating foul
detritus of anxiety and indolence?

And when we let it in, the purifying sun
burns away the rubble and the wreck of yesterday.
All forgiven! Nothing to regret, no debt to pay,
and we are not the creatures of our past, tainted
by allegiances that didn't last, crippled by a
choice to take a winding road that led to
nothing but experience.

We're as we were that first day of the world
when we were set upon a mountaintop and given
everything our lives could hold.

June 1997

See More Sunrises

The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. —Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature
Nature is the opposite [that is, reflection] of the soul, answering to it part for part.... The ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim. —Emerson, The American Scholar



Journalist and child advocate Richard Louv discusses the problem of nature deficit disorder in his new book, *Last Child in the Woods*. "Never before in our history have children been so separated from nature," Louv tells *The Early Show* co-anchor Harry Smith....

Louv claims that, according to recent research, lack of direct contact with nature is connected to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He also cites statistics showing [that] children who play in nature perform better at school....

"Biologically, we are still hunters and gatherers.... What happens to the human organism when you take nature away from it and replace it with television and computers? I call that 'cultural autism' where children's use of the senses is reduced to the size of a screen, like a computer. Only in nature are we using our full senses all at the same time in a positive way." —CBS, *The Early Show*, May 9, 2005

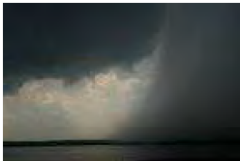
You know those bromides people use to cheer you up? *Tomorrow is another day. It's always darkest before the dawn. Hope springs eternal. Every rose has its thorns. Every cloud has a silver lining. Into every life a little rain must fall. Above the clouds the sun is shining. After the rain comes the rainbow.*

Don't they just make you want to spit?

When you're wallowing in discontent (for whatever reason, from a bad hair day to a compound fracture), do you really want to hear Ethel Merman booming, "I've Got the Sun in the Mornin' and the Moon at Night" or have some perky Pollyanna reminding you that *he is happiest who hath power to gather wisdom from a flower?* Why do people say these things?

Because they're true

After we've been living on earth for a while, observing the patterns and cycles of nature—day and night, summer and winter, storm and sunlight, decay and renewal—we begin to internalize and generalize from the natural world. We learn to



take certain things for granted and to not be disconcerted by them—thunderstorms, for example (unless we are a certain type of dog that perceives every storm as a New and Completely Unexpected Type of Event and quivers under a bed until it's over).

take certain things for granted and to not be disconcerted by them—thunderstorms, for example (unless we are a certain type of dog that perceives

The same is true of the household routine. Mom and Dad go out for dinner and Mrs. Featherstone, who makes us go to bed immediately because she doesn't want to be disturbed during *Jackpot Bowling* on television, comes to babysit, and we put our goldfish, Wilbur IV, who has died, into her purse. But we endure Mrs. Featherstone because we know that Mom and Dad will come home while we're asleep and Mrs. Featherstone will go back to her cave.



So when I read about these children who have been kept in closets and basements for years, I am doubly appalled. Besides the general horribleness of it, imagine what it must be like

to have no firsthand knowledge of the basic cycles of life and nature—to literally *not* know that every morning brings a new dawn.

Millions of tiny diamonds

On a magnificent summer morning I watched the sun rise over the Missouri River and the prolific farmland of western Iowa. The hills across the river were invisible under a great white pillow of cloud through which poked a few church spires and grain elevators. So much vapor rose from the river itself that it might have been on fire. Gradually the bright green and yellow fields came into view and the vapor turned crystalline, like millions of tiny diamonds ascending, hovering, and rising again.

It dawned on me, as it were, that such displays are always available and much more satisfying than whatever I am usually doing when the sun comes up (sniffing at a pile of clothes to see if they're clean, licking the bottom of a frozen-yogurt carton, looking in the mirror and frowning at my jowls).

I vowed to spend more time outside the closet I keep myself in... to watch more sunrises and

remember that we really *are* new every morning... to grow more flowers and walk outdoors in every kind of weather except "obscenely cold" or "the U.S. Weather Service has issued a tornado warning for eastern Douglas County because a funnel cloud has been sighted in the general vicinity of Mary Campbell." But, hey! I live in a basement.



Household Hint: How Not to Look Like an Unmade Bed

Keep dirty clothes and clean clothes in separate heaps so you don't have to sniff them. Some people fold their clean clothes and put them in drawers or closets.

In Arizona I hung my just-washed clothes on a clothesline in the sun. In the summer, by the time the last of the load was up, the first items hung were usually dry. Ideally, they would be very slightly damp. I would smooth them on a clean table, fold them carefully, and put them in a large, rectangular, well-ventilated basket—the clothes that might otherwise require ironing on the bottom, heavier things like jeans and towels on top. The combination of dampness, warmth, hand-smoothing, and weight did as good a job of "ironing" as an actual iron. In the ventilated basket, left outside or on the porch, mildew didn't have a chance to form.



Now that I live in Nebraska and have no yard to speak of, I apply the same principle except I put the slightly damp, carefully smoothed items on the dryer and set heavier items, fully dried, on top of them. It's a good idea to put something smooth, such as a dishtowel or pillowcase, between your cotton blouse and your bath towels. Otherwise your blouse might end up covered with towel dents. As long as the dryer is running, the bottom layer of clothes will dry quickly.



You can do this with things like rayon dresses, too, on which you don't want conspicuous "fold marks" to appear. Fold them carefully and place them under the heavy items, as above. After, say, half an hour they should be smooth but still damp. Hang them on padded hangers, preferably not in a crowded closet. Smooth or pull to get rid of any incipient fold marks.

Is this making any sense to you at all? If not, please send me a self-addressed stamped envelope and I will mail you a set of illustrated, step-by-step instructions.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.