

Nana Jean: Growing Focused Human Beings

While each of us is born into and becomes part of a culture, language and place, within those parts of our lives are many different opportunities that help us become unique individuals with unique contributions to our local and global communities.

I help my grandchildren make their way in the world with their passions through what I call the “Eight Year Old Trip.” As each of my four grandchildren hit age 8, I identify some great and wonderful interest of theirs and take them on a trip to explore it.

By helping each one of my grandchildren become immersed in one of their interests, I hope to broaden their understandings. I also hope to give them viewpoints and language (both technically and linguistically speaking) that will help them pursue those interests as they grow.

When Ainsley turned 8, she had read J.K. Rowling’s series multiple times and the “Wizarding World of Harry Potter” had just opened at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. I flew from Oregon to New York City to pick her up, and we enjoyed three days of just Nana and Ainsley. What a revelation! With only one youngster as a focus, we ate when she wanted to eat and did what she wanted to do! She grew up a lot in those three days: very little whining, and her clear requests were usually answered by me with a *yes*.

After Ainsley, I began to wonder how to bond with and support Jamie. Jamie has talked about turtle conservation since age 4. Would his parents allow me to take him out of the country for **his** 8-year trip? Where could we go? His mother found reasonable fares from NYC to Costa Rica. And we were off: first to find a suitable project, and then to make detailed plans.

We ended up at the “Refugio Mixta del Vida Silvestre Romelia” near Montezuma on the Nicoya Peninsula, an organization that protects olive ridley sea turtles as they hatch and return to the sea. It was an adventure into Jamie’s interest and also into a unique surrounding culture. We used my very limited Spanish, and his better Spanish to navigate the area and work



Jamie in the Vivero (hatchery)

Here is an example of what we did:

“Jamie and I are sitting at the hatchery (*vivero*) at 9:20 AM, 50 minutes into our 2 ½ hour shift. Fidel and Eoghan left, tired. They had been exhuming nests and digging the dirt out. The nests will air out for a day and then clean sand will be added in preparation for a new nest. When they were exhuming the nests, they found 21 little turtles. We watched two that were just coming out of the shell to complete their hatching. We felt the turtles probably would not survive or get to the surface without our help. There was one little hatchling that we had to help just a bit at the beginning of its slow but steady crawl

towards the sea. As the water reached it, and it started to swim away with one flipper poking up on a stroke Jamie said, ‘He waved goodbye to us.’ Another time, as three turtles that he had named swam away, he said, “Good life, Jamie! Good life, Fidel! Good life, Bob!”

This trip certainly ranks as one of the top ten weeks of my life, and I am certain Jamie will never forget it either. One of the other workers on the project said, “He is ridiculously smart for his age. He knows so much. He uses many words that an eight year old shouldn’t know, like ‘endemic’ and ‘marsupial.’ There will be something very wrong in this world if he does not become a biologist or conservationist. The world needs enthusiastic people like him.”

Two grandchildren have passed age 8, and there are two more to go. Chance likes to bike, hike and climb. Perhaps a trip to Utah for canyoneering and biking? And Bella—Will it be her fluent Spanish? Ballet? Singing? People skills? We’ll soon see.

—Professor Jean
Moule, Oregon.

