

LearningPlay



July 25 - July 30
For children 6 -14!

Arts, Nature and Maritime Summer Camp

Based at Big Basin State Park with outings all over Monterey County
led by Naturalist Nate Grieg and Maritime Academy Instructor Kelly Murray.

Daily music and dance classes by professional instructors/performers Katie Cameron and Pallas Sluyter.

Cost:

Weekly rate: "Club Med" family camp \$1000

or Daily Rate: \$150 per child over 6 years

Includes meals, transportation, and curriculum (to be sent out ahead of time).

Special Needs children welcome!

10% discount for siblings and if you invite a friend!

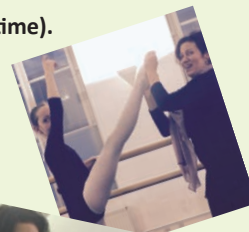
Visit LearningPlay.org for more info!

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email: chaia@learningplaywithchaiamay.com



Join us

as we stay in Big Basin State park and explore the "less-discovered" parts of Big Sur, Santa Cruz, Monterey and Pescadero.

We will be guided by renowned naturalist Nate Grieg, visiting biologist and photographer Ursula Esser, professional musician Katie Cameron and professional dancer, Pallas Sluyter

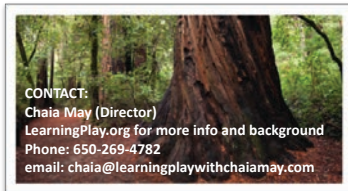
Family Night on Friday, July 29

Cost: \$1000
Includes meals, transportation, and curriculum (to be sent out ahead of time)

10% discount for siblings and if you invite a friend!

Also includes a Counselor in Training Program for children 12 – 14

Special needs children welcomed



Dear Families,

Now that Kelly and I are now finally rested, we are finding all these special moments popping up in our minds after an intense and joyful week. Due to the beautiful photographs of Katie, Nate, Maisson and Emad, we all get to feast on the visual delights.

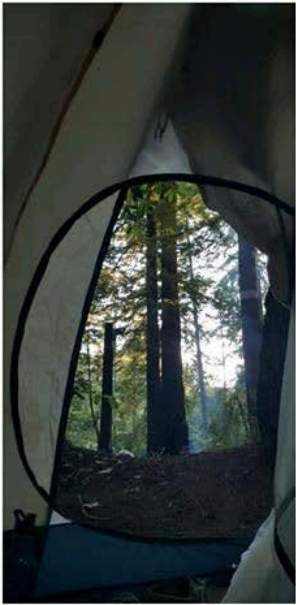
We also wish Nate a full recovery after falling on his vacation he took after he left our camp. He is doing well and his resilient attitude alone is remarkable and a great inspiration.

The list of highlights is long and the number of photographs we collected are many, so this will be only a piece of a much bigger puzzle. It is my hope that you will take from this a sense of what can happen when you combine nature, art, opportunities for leadership, acceptance, a child's wonder for music and dance, and responsibility for self-care as well as modeling care of others. It's ultimately, all about love, as I quote Kelly.



Noor was a great art assistant.





One of the more remarkable comments I heard was when Drew said to Thomas, “Nate cleared this tent in 2 seconds. He is the most amazing person I know. We can do it! It just may take us 30 minutes.”



Jay getting a head-start on setting up their tent!

Afterwards, he asked me, “Did you see how we got everything ready and out of the tent?” “Didn’t we do great?” Answer: “You guys rocked! Thank you!”

Kelly, Katie and I in particular were deeply touched by Maya’s presence experiencing each moment. She was a special gift on this trip. We were especially mesmerized seeing her fully take in the beauty of the forest on our walk to the creek. She would stop, look around, and say softly in deep awe, “The ferns are so beautiful,” or “The trees are so tall. They are so beautiful.” She would continue her path with a grin but only to Kelly’s singing “You can get anything you want at Alice’s restaurant!”

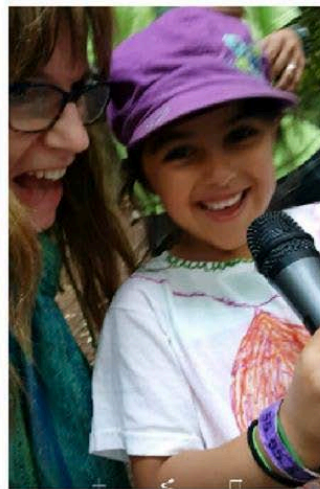
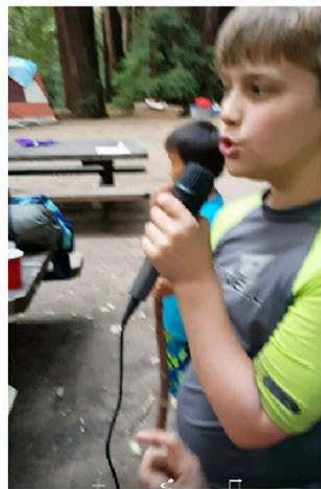


Anything to do with food for Maya is a favorite theme. ☺ She was thrilled one evening to be serenaded in harmony by Katie and me while Kelly played guitar. One of the children asked if she was “sick” mentally, and I reframed the concern of the young child to see how Maya experienced the world differently, with her own limitations yet also her own strengths and delights.



Everyone stepped out of their shell to try new experiences at camp. Katie taught the Karaoke program and joined our staff for the first time. She did a beautiful job showing the children the comfort and delight in creating music with their voices, including how to work with a microphone and how to feel the story of their songs. Niko, Darius and the little ones including Ashley, Ryan and Sally sang in front of people for the first time.





Katie lovingly supported Sally and Ashlee as they partnered for a few renditions of “Let it Go”, complete with swirling scarves and spins during the instrumental section. Darius showed rich emotion in his singing, as Katie supported him just enough to carry the rhythm and melody yet encouraged him to shine. She also sang a fun Louis Armstrong impersonation of “Mack the Knife that was unforgettable!”

On our first morning together, Pallas led a circle stretch and introduction around a big drum on which the little ones all started us off with their drumming skills.

Gus gets the award for the funniest t-shirt: a picture of a mosquito-bee as the theme of our last two camps. Thomas and Francesca really got into their t-shirt decorations as well; Ashley was very proud to show Katie her brother Thomas' artistic t-shirt. Sally's cool idea was to draw jewelry on the neck and sleeves.



On another morning Pallas took most of the adults to a peaceful meadow oasis among the redwoods for some light stretching and yoga. A few "additions" of little ones were there to "help" them along. Young Ryan and Ashley came along and rode their backs during Downward Dog. It was a relaxing experience, which Pallas artfully designed to be enjoyed by the wide variety of attendees from beginners to more practiced. All amidst the quiet redwood forest with the morning sun streaming through the trees. Katie was told her face looked younger after the session so Katie has great plans to take up yoga! She also offered ballet instruction and Sally "jumped" on that to learn a bit of technique. She also worked with Sally and Francesca on their stretching.



There was a lot to be learned about cooking for a crowd. Emily, Bahar and Noor took Kelly up on this education and were great helpers and chefs. We ended up with good 'ole camp food, including an amazing chili at the end of camp with Pallas making delicious corncakes to go with it. The corn came from Katie's amazing freeze-dried astronaut food, about which we all got an education as well.



One night we had a delicious barbeque feast generously offered by master chefs Maisson and Emad. Parisa and the Hong contributed some yummy food as well.



Little Katie had her first camp week, loved having “sleepovers” in the tent with her new friend Sally, and was very self-sufficient.

Darius learned knife safety and was very responsible with this new skill. He worked on his balance as well.



Francesca practiced the art of peaceful conflict negotiation, and was excited to contribute to the others with some impromptu karate lessons. She displayed her natural skill at running and athletics, as graceful as an antelope.



Gus created a challenge for himself to draw an animated figure for each person in the camp. Each summer Gus has exhibited more leadership skills, and this year was no exception. He had a quiet gentleness about him as he accepted the invitation to help supervise the younger children. As the winner of the “toothbrush-a-thon”, he took great joy in brushing with laughter and foaming at the mouth to our tune “Brush Your Teeth” (to the tune of “Let it Be”). He had us all laughing too.



Camping was a new and rustic experience for Parisa, but she participated in all the activities like a trooper. She even joined another mom or two in the parent karaoke, danced, and led me and Sepideh in a bit of meditation!

The Fayad family had not camped previously for so many days in a row and never as such a large group. They were wonderful with it, contributing their hammock, funny jokes and wonderful social energy.





The kids favorite discovery at our site was a sleek, highly polished-smooth fallen tree trunk, fun for any age to slide down. It was the kids' turn to lead the adults, as Camper Katie showed Teacher Katie and Teacher Chaia how to climb up on the tree and slide down it, much to the delight of all.





The "tooth" of a baleen whale

Emad braved the stench of a deceased beached baleen whale to bring back a tooth.

We learned from Nate (our Nature guide) that the big brushy mass was used to filter the water and collect krill. Emad was very excited to share his find with the kids.



Noor and Gus discovered the ocean shore quietly, each in their own deep thought. Noor, collected a large batch of shells amongst the beach and after scaling the rocks like a Billy goat, sat pensively looking out over the ocean. Gus continued with his anime drawings to the sounds of distant waves. Nate took a few kids up the rocks in the water to practice fishing, and they looked like pros.



The younger ones were thrilled running in and out of the water as the waves came in; Niko discovered a “spa” tide pool the size of a wading pool, with quite a few tiny crabs; Bahar touched what seemed to be a mottled sea anemone, saying “But it’s so soft and squishy! It’s so cute!” A trip to the ice cream store was a fine ending to an energetic beach day.



Darius fishing with Nate

Another “water day” Nate led us on a long walk through the woods to a beautiful hidden creek. We explored the creek and to their delight, the kids found a large crayfish (apparently doing a great job of convincing the kids he was a lobster) and yelled excitedly for Nature Nate to come down and pull it out of the water. He and Emad reached in and found not one but two! They explored the shallow creek beds, munching very happily on tasty seed butter and jelly sandwich quarters.







Everyone celebrated at the Wednesday evening music party that Katie and Pallas created. Pallas got everyone dancing, sometimes following her 'flash mob' creation or encouraging children and adults alike to move freely in their own style. She and Katie provided a great collection of songs and created the technology and spirit to bring the party to life. Nature Nate donned a DJ hat and funny sunglasses, and played the part admirably. One young girl put in a request to her father that he be like him as he was so much fun!



Niko also sang and danced, displaying talents I had never witnessed. Moms rocked who were dancing and singing and I understand the Dads bonded over fishing and chatting. More fun things you can only seem to do around a campfire: marshmallow roasting, singing folk songs, chatting and sipping hot chocolate in the morning, to highlight just a few.



At the end of the day the children romped around the wide, open private campground, with many early evening games of "Capture the Flag," organized by Niko. He showed remarkable leadership and organizational skills in the logistics of creating the teams and explaining the rules, one evening refusing to continue until he was certain every participant had a flashlight. No one was left behind. Luke apparently still talks about him at least once a week, particularly about how much he respected Niko's leadership skills---of course, not exactly in those words, but to that effect.



Nate led us on a hike deep into the woods to discover what he called an “Ewok Village,” a hobbit looking area filled with dozens of huts made of sticks leaned against giant Redwood stumps. We were not the only ones who found them fascinating structures, i.e. admire our state mollusk, the banana slug sunning on one!



We took a trip to the nearby shore with tide pools, ocean fishing and to Pigeon Point Lighthouse. This included a fascinating collection of information, photos and examples of the old lighthouse now stored in a small museum adjacent to the original structure. The generous guide stayed long after closing to share his passion with us, explaining about the fascinating and stunning 8000 pound Fresnel lens, a huge technical advance in its time.

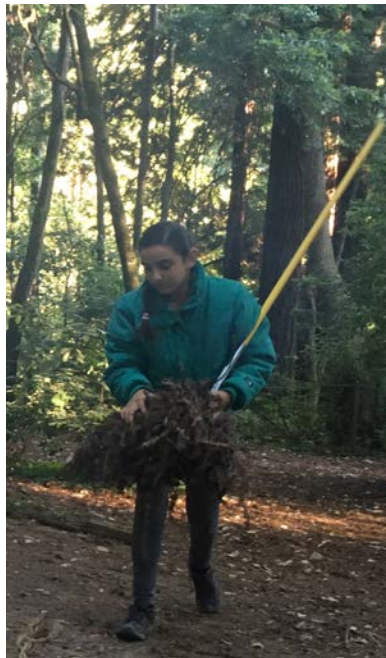


After we observed their interest in the site's history, we recorded a few interviews with children; the lighthouse captivated the kids of all ages. Bahar was filled with questions, Ashley explained what a lighthouse was for and Ryan was very engaged in questions about the beached whale. It was delightful, informative and looks like it should become part a TV show that follows kids traveling to discover and enjoy the natural history of their environment. My next project!



Among the food highlights were the barbequed chicken dinner, the PB&J sandwiches for lunch, hot chocolate for breakfast, and of course, Kelly's favorite, bacon. Emily and Noor broke up quite a few loose sticks to keep the fires burning.

The kids pitched in to make one day's sandwiches, and were deservedly proud of their efforts, appreciated by all.



Niko and Drew helped Nate get the fires started very nicely for our campfires, both in the mornings and evenings.



Some mishaps turned out to be the highlights of the trip. Bahar and her mother Sepideh had gone for a walk and gotten lost. In their travels they met an interesting woman who gave them tea and somehow Kelly found them and saved the day by "rescuing" them.

One of the sweetest comments was from Thomas, who stayed the extra night with Niko and Drew:

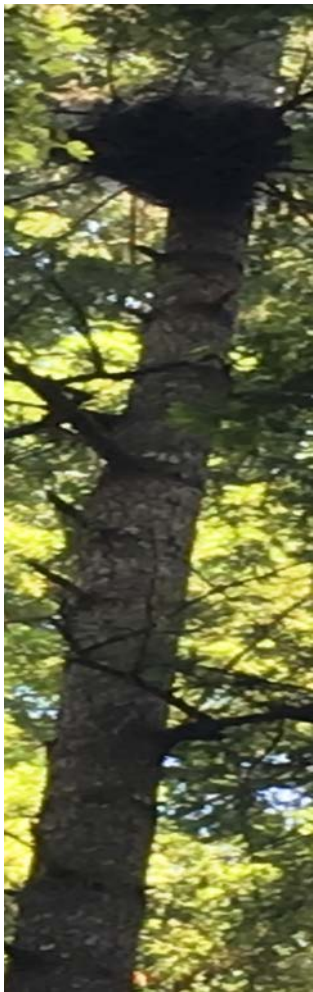
Thomas: "I got 5 minutes of sleep last night!"

Chaia: "What was the reason for that?"

Thomas: "We were having too much fun!"

What more can you ask? I think they will remember this for a long time to come.

I was touched by the stunning majesty of this park, somehow more beautiful than other redwood parks I had visited. Our unusually large camp space (designed for 75) provided ample space for our community of tents, Niko's "Capture the Flag" and lots of running and playing. This added bonus of having the large site was born from a dilemma when we lost our original site at the last minute due to a change in Federal use regulations and Kelly said "I am feeling Memorial Park." A brilliant idea, it felt like a gift from above for which I can only say thank you!



Bird's nest up very high in the tree.



Algae covered tree trunk, having survived a fire but not the axe of man.

I proudly beheld children participating readily with the food prep, like Bahar and Emily and Noor. I saw poignant examples of responsibility, such as Noor being upset that she would disappoint her father if she were not in his car at a certain moment and the teens taking responsibility for the younger ones.

I saw confidence grow overnight, like Sally and Camper Katie saying they loved sleeping in the tent and wanted to stay at camp for 10 days! I saw parents laughing and eating together, sharing their delicious food and rich conversation with the rest of us. I also saw adults and children alike help and jump in when we were really in a pickle having to change sites, offering to help carry food bags from the truck, organize cabinets, design meals with panache. Sepideh and the other moms pitched in with the little ones too, wherever needed.

A special thanks is doubly owed to Nate and Kelly, who managed the preliminary preparation, loading, unloading, set up and take down of most of the gear and provisions in addition to their regular food prep and cooking (Kelly) and nature talks and boys' watch/guidance (Nate). Their devotion, hard work, cheerful and humorous participation were appreciated by all.

All these highlights are what inspires us and encourages us to offer our wonderful staff as role models to the children and parents. I believe that Nate and Kelly's boy scout-honed characters and Katie's (as a mom of a boy scout) are stellar examples of what a grown up can be and do. I recommend the similar training to anyone who can find it.

I also appreciated the sacred moments of pure family play-time.





Yes, it was a fun-filled, busy and deeply joyful week. Notwithstanding the huge challenges of having to change our site at the very last minute, finding a new one and then changing yet again the final night. It was an experience to remember. We are cognizant of the costs, and I, Chaia, am particularly aware with a doubled commitment to be pro-active for next year in this regard. In response to this, I have already reserved and paid for the same site for next year on August 1-4th. We have discovered that Citronella candles can help us overcome the tyranny of the mosquitoes should they appear and have special bug spray to treat the tents. We will have regular runs down to town for those who need internet but still want to enjoy an internet free environment.





We received lovely comments from many families intending to come back, and friends on Facebook who said they would like to join us next year after seeing the photographs. We have Nate and Kelly on board, as well as teen counselors and artists who have expressed interest in joining us.

We invite you to share this with friends who might be interested in joining us next year. We are already planning how to enhance our program and with added structure, deepen what was an already rich and happy (albeit itchy) experience.

Enjoy the Fall!

Sincerely,

Chaia, Kelly, Nate, Katie and Pallas



Katie Cameron

Katie is a single mom who raised two Eagle Scouts and a merit badge counselor of multiple badges. She was a double major in college in Music Education and Performance. She is very artistic as well, photography being a strong skill.

She toured as a singer for five years throughout the US and Germany, opening for acts such as Waylon Jennings, Ricky Nelson, Freddie Fender and ZZ Top. Sang Jazz standards with Count Basie's band.



Kelly Murray

Kelly Murray is a former Maritime Academy Instructor and Engineer, Retired LT. Commander, US Navy, and the father of four strong young adults whom he home schooled and led both in Sea Scouts and Robotics groups while raising them. He also received an M.A. in Business.

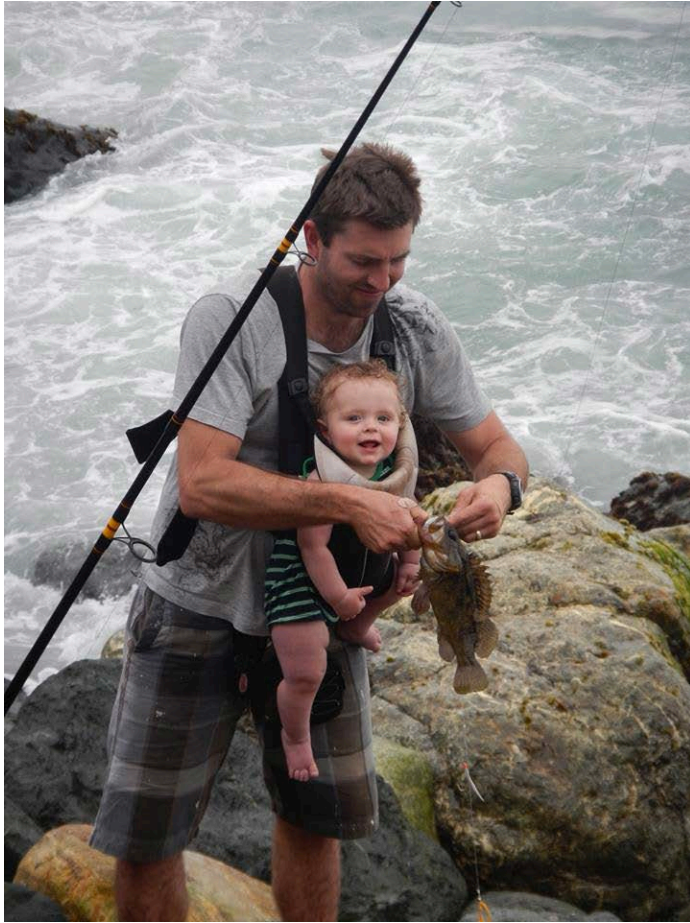
He worked as a "marine cowboy" rescuing shuttles from the ocean for NASA and was certified to navigate any kind of vessel on the sea. Later on he worked in solar engineering, and presently mentors a number of young people typical, atypical and all charming including working as the sports instructor for LearningPlay Second Sunday programs and as a core instructor for Iron Into Steel.



Chaia May

Chaia is an educator in the Bay Area with over 30 years of experience in working with children both typical and atypical. She has written 15 books, runs a music studio and directs a year long “out of the classroom” experience for youth emphasizing nature, sports and self-development. Chaia is a vendor for Ocean Grove Charter School home school program and a former national speaker on Sensory Integration in the Classroom. She is the proud parent of two daughters, Hannah and Ami, one now a chef and one a student of voice, composition and arranging at Berklee School of Music in Boston. She lives in Menlo Park, CA.

She is now trying her hand at writing math curriculum with humor and storytelling, children's stories and a classical music curriculum for children. She has a business called LearningPlay which includes the Classical Music Institutoot, Iron into Steel Youth Mentorship Programs, LearningPlay camps and LearningPlay Publications.



Nate Grieg

Nate is a lifelong outdoor enthusiast and educator, and has spent his life exploring the wilds of California and Western United States. His areas of expertise include natural history, microbiology, hydrology, navigation, hiking, fishing, and camp craft. Nate believes that every person can better themselves by enjoying a relationship with the natural world that surrounds them. His goal is to provide avenues for the youth to find inspiration and ambition for the challenges of everyday life through outdoor experiences.