



Letters to Nature Kids

November 2022 🌸 No. 9



The steps up to Lone Point Shelter at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

Dear Nature Kids,

It's November, the month when we celebrate Thanksgiving. Close your eyes and think about the holiday and I bet the first pictures that come to your mind are about food, right? But remember what the word is about. It's about *giving thanks* or being grateful for the things in your life that bring joy and help us grow and learn and thrive. There are lots of people and places that I am thankful for, in addition to the food.

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Those steps up to Lone Point Shelter, for example. They are part of the path that leads through the refuge, and I am very grateful for the path. That path lets me walk through woods and prairies, up the ridge and down into little sheltered places with moss on tree branches and birds flying between the trees.

I'm more thankful than I can express for many of the people in my life, my wife and son, granddaughter Lilly, and people who are family because we have chosen each other. I am grateful for walking through woods and wading the creek with Elijah, who you have met in earlier letters. It is people and places that can turn my days into treasures. Maybe yours too.



A mockingbird going for a berry at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

What are you thankful for? Not that you have to be grateful **to** someone. The mockingbird does not have to be grateful to anyone for the berry he finds in the bush. But he might feel a bit of joy, a gladness for the generosity of life in this moment. His life may be hard some of the time, but right now perhaps he sees the world as a good place. Now I don't really know the thoughts of mockingbirds. But I do think that receiving gifts even as simple as something to eat can lead anyone to feel some sort of gratitude.

I suppose the bird might instead complain that the berry is too little, too dry, and he had to search all over just to find it. That sounds pretty unhappy, doesn't it? At least with humans that's how it works. When I allow myself to feel gratitude, the world seems like a much better place to live in.



A thunderstorm behind the demonstration prairie at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

The world sometimes brings beauty and wonder, and sometimes it brings pain and sadness. I am lucky that most of the time I can leave the sad part behind so that I can really be there for the beauty, wonder, and joy. So that's another thing I am thankful for.

I'm including photos from Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, one of the places that feels most familiar and welcoming to me. I will not forget standing in a prairie, watching and listening (from a safe distance) to a thunderstorm, or listening to a chorus of frogs calling from the marsh at night. There are other places like the LBJ National Grasslands where I feel like I *belong*. I've been lucky enough to visit these places so often that they feel like home. Just being in those places makes me happy, so I will add that to the many things I am grateful for this Thanksgiving.

Is there anywhere in nature that you visit so much that it feels familiar and comfortable? It could be a small place. When I was nine years old I became great friends with a vacant lot full of sunflowers and lots of green dragonflies. Sometimes a local park with a pond or small stream becomes a great place to explore. I hope that you have a place like that nearby, whether it is a vacant lot or a National Grasslands. I would love to hear from you about your adventures in such places.



A southern leopard frog at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

Something else for me to add to my gratitude list – you. I’m thankful for every “nature kid” who is reading this (and for the ones who aren’t). Every young person who likes wading in the creek or camping in the forest and who knows the magic of wild things. So many kids are pulled away from such things and forget them. And when we forget about those things, sometimes they are lost. We all need meadows full of tall grass and ponds where fish and tadpoles swim. You will be the ones who keep many of those places from being lost. You will keep them alive when you talk about them to others, reminding them about the magic. Sometimes you will protect them because you love those places, and people who care about you will therefore care about what you love.

It doesn’t always happen that way. You know that – you know that we don’t always get our way. But sometimes it does, and the more nature kids who love wild things and wild places, the more people will take care of them. Wouldn’t that be a great thing to put on our gratitude list? When a wild place gets protected, and some species of hawk or salamander will survive because it has a place to live, that’s something to be thankful for!



Tiger swallowtail, at the marsh at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

So, thank you for being who you are. I hope you have many things to be thankful for when Thanksgiving Day arrives!

🦋 Michael