

# TRAILS MIX

VOLUME TWO ····· ISSUE NO.1



# Hello.

Welcome to Trails Mix, an extra helping of Family Trails goodness. Each quarter, our #FamilyTrails community will receive a digital edition of the Trails Mix bundle packed with ideas and inspiration designed to spark more family adventuring and learning together. We'll also feature highlights from the best of Family Trails – the stories shared by our families around the world.

From recipes to activities to expert interviews, we hope you'll find that Trails Mix encourages your family to get out and get going – wherever the trail may lead you.

Have an idea for an upcoming edition of Trails Mix?  
Email us at **community@familytrails.com**.

To connect with thousands of other families learning through adventure, join the **#FamilyTrails** conversation on Instagram by following us **@FamilyTrails**.

*We'd love to hear from you!*

# TOYOTA FAMILY TRAILS

**TOYOTA FAMILY TRAILS** is an adventure brought to life thanks to a partnership between the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) and Toyota. Since 1989, NCFL has helped more than two million families make educational progress. We believe that all parents can help their children succeed in school and in life. The family unit is the one constant across the educational spectrum, but family engagement in education doesn't happen on its own. NCFL pioneered Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time,<sup>®</sup> bridging the gap that often exists between school, home, and community.

At Family Trails, we believe your family is the best teacher your child will ever have. Together, we hope to inspire parents and kids to let their imaginations lead them on a daily exploration and adventure through the world around them and the classroom of life.

## 04

### STORIES FROM THE TRAIL

Family stories are the heart and soul of Family Trails. Check out these amazing stories contributed by the Family Trails community to [familytrails.com](http://familytrails.com).

## 18

### SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Each month we're issuing an inspirational challenge to the Family Trails community.

## 26

### TRAILS RECIPE

This month's recipe, straight from the produce aisle, is a fun way to taste the rainbow.

## 28

### GUEST TRAIL GUIDES

New adventures lead to new moments and new memories. What's one new thing you'd like to try with your family this spring?

## 46

### ACTIVITY SHEET

Looking for something fun to do as a family? Our Spring Scavenger Hunt will have you on the move and on the lookout.

# CONTENTS

# STORIES FROM THE TRAIL

Family stories are the heart and soul of Family Trails. Check out these two amazing stories contributed by the Family Trails community and get to know the rest of our contributors by visiting [familytrails.com/blog](http://familytrails.com/blog).

Interested in submitting your own family adventure story? Visit [familytrails.com/share](http://familytrails.com/share).

*featuring*



## CHASING WATERFALLS



*as told by* NAOMI ZERVAS

**I really believe that by being outdoors, children can acquire a large amount of skills and develop great confidence, self-esteem, and pride.** At the beginning of our walk, it was drizzling a little and we were met by a large pathway of thick mud with the river running alongside it. We avoided the deep part, but the inevitable happened. Before we knew it, the boys' feet were coated in a thick layer of mud. (But a bit of mud doesn't phase us.) Before long, the pathway became a bit more interesting and the boys took the lead, navigating their way over rocks and negotiating alleyways of limestone carved into the rock.

One thing we try to do as parents is to take a step back to allow independence when dealing with outdoor obstacles, such as climbing over a fence or making their way over tricky paths. We really believe that by doing this our children learn how their bodies move and work in ways which will encourage their balance and awareness. We assist them when they need help, celebrate when they are successful, and manage the risks we take ensuring they are safe but challenged.

The paths on our walk were pretty tricky and it took us awhile to allow the children to navigate them. I find that when the path has more obstacles, the boys stay more interested and engaged as they are focusing on what is coming next. Unexpected snow started to fall as we approached the first waterfall. We watched the snow falling, dissolving into the water on its way down. We caught the falling snow on our tongues, watching it land on our gloves, at which point Tom reached into the rucksack for our warm hats and discovered a puddle of hot chocolate at the bottom. The flask had broken when it hit the floor. We decided to continue anyway (minus the hot chocolate.)



*"This was a first-time experience for all of us, and sharing it with our loved ones made it all the more special."*

NAOMI ZERVAS  
@as\_four\_we\_roam

Our goal on this day was to reach a waterfall we would be able to walk behind, something we thought would be a magical family experience. The path continued and the weather became more stable. The boys were intrigued by the tangled roots of the trees stretching across in front of us, and loved stepping in and out of the roots and balancing on them. We asked the boys where they thought the roots were coming from, and they tried follow them back to the source. The sun beamed down on us as we continued on our way, and eventually we reached a sign for the waterfall. There were over 100 steps down and they were slippery from the rain, but we held hands and descended to the river below.

There was the waterfall we had been desperate to see. It roared loudly as we approached, and we all stepped behind it, watching the water cascade in front of us. The boys shouted and screamed as the cold water sprayed them, and we held tightly onto each other as we walked through to the other side and back through again. It was like being transported to another world being behind this wall of water. We were all soaked, but so happy.

This was a first-time experience for all of us, and sharing it with our loved ones made it all the more special. Once we'd taken it all in, it was time to make our way back up those 100+ steps, back along the tricky path, and through the mud to the car where we had prepared a big flask of homemade leek and potato soup. It was the best soup we'd ever tasted after an incredible day of experiencing a range of weather amongst the waterfalls. On this day we persevered. We helped one another. We were independent. We were able to play. We were able to run wild. And we walked underneath a waterfall!



# STARTING *a new* GARDEN

as told by GILBERT CONTRERAS

**Moving across the country from a suburban city in Southern California to the mountains of North Carolina meant that everything is different and new.** New surroundings, new people, new streets, and we now also have four seasons. Growing food is a whole lot different now, too!

When we lived in the city, we had a small garden in our backyard. Our daughter, Penelope, was barely old enough to walk, and she would go out to our backyard and pick fresh veggies to eat. We loved that. Prior to moving, we stopped growing food for over a year while we searched for properties. When we arrived on our new land, it was essential for us to start growing food again, but we didn't start growing until about two months after we settled in.

We took family trips to check out different garden stores in the area and see what kind of foods were in season. We also visited various farmers' markets to see what other farmers are growing. It felt overwhelming trying to figure

out what and how to grow on a larger scale in a completely different environment.

One day we got tired of talking and thinking about it and decided to just do it! I tilled up a portion of the grass, and as a family we raked and removed rocks. It was an ALL IN moment where we got our hands dirty digging up grass and playing in the dirt in the hopes it would turn that area into our new food garden.

We went with what we knew how to do. We started digging up our garden like we had done in the city. The difference is that it was a larger scale and we had more room to grow. We made long rows for the garden and used hand tools such as a hand wheel plow. Penelope, our five-year-old, wanted to be part of it. Just by observing us doing it and talking about it she was inspired to help. Penelope began helping me plow the rows, using her rake to remove the rocks so we could start planting. We were all excited to start our new food garden.



When it's time to harvest what we grow, it always is a huge deal. We go out to our food garden as a family and begin testing the crops to see if they are ready to be picked. Usually, on a hot day we will end up staying out in the garden snacking and grazing through dinner, eventually picking out food for the next day's breakfast.

Every time we plant something new, we also learn something new. It teaches us not to take food for granted. It teaches us that real food is medicine. We show our daughter the importance of food seeds and that every time you plant a seed it encourages us to believe in the future and not to give up on hope.

We want our daughter to know where real food comes from and how to grow it. We are like our little seeds, change is a struggle, but growth is beautiful.

*"Penelope, our five-year-old, wanted to be part of it. Just by observing us doing it and talking about it she was inspired to help."*

GILBERT CONTRERAS  
@sewtheland



# EXPLORE FURTHER

## EXTENDED LEARNING *with* THE ZERVAS FAMILY

**1. Build your own backyard waterfall! Gather natural items such as soil, twigs, rocks and pieces of bark and use them to build a small structure resembling a cliff or mountainside.**

Use a hose to allow a light stream of water to flow down the structure. Alter the flow by moving or adding items to the structure and observe the different paths the water takes.

**2. Get out your watercolor paints and apply the concept of moving water to art.** Tape a piece of paper to a vertical surface. Before painting, have children brush the paper with a paintbrush soaked in water. Then begin painting your masterpiece from top to bottom and see how water and gravity work together to impact your design. Consider using a squirt bottle to lightly spray the finished piece for added movement of the paint.

**3. Explore Wonder #352 “Where is the Tallest Waterfall?” with your family at [Wonderopolis.org](https://wonderopolis.org).**

## EXTENDED LEARNING *with* THE CONTRERAS FAMILY

**1. Make your own tea! Herbs are easy to grow and harvest – they also have many medicinal qualities that support relaxation and good health.** Children can cut the leaves of herbs such as mint, chamomile and echinacea and use them to make hot tea. The leaves can also be dried for later use and can make great gifts for friends and family.

**2. As the winter days slip away, start preparing your garden indoors now.** Using an egg carton as a seed tray, have children poke small holes in each section for drainage and plant a small number of tiny seeds in each. As you plant, talk about what the seeds will need to grow and compare the seeds of different types of plants. Children will enjoy tending to their seeds and baby plants. When spring arrives, they will be ready for transplanting to outdoor pots or plots.

**3. Explore Wonder #589 “How do Seeds Sprout?” with your family at [Wonderopolis.org](https://wonderopolis.org).**



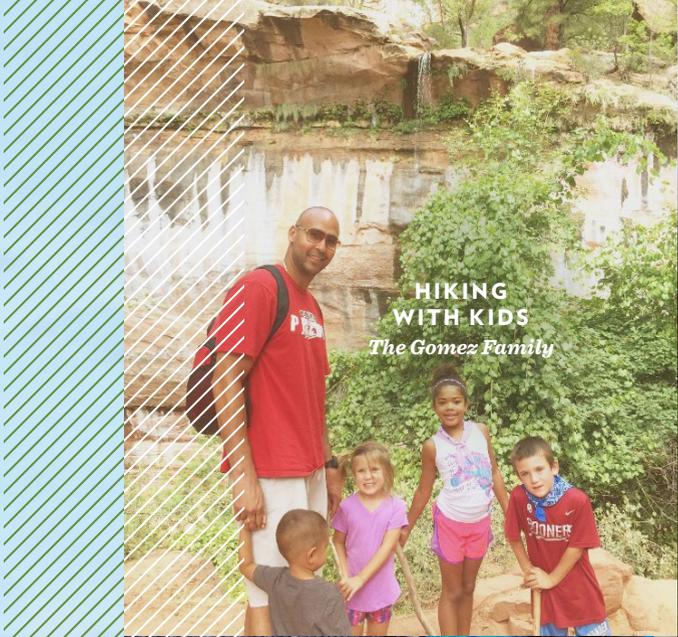
# MORE TRAILS & STORIES >



# MORE TRAILS & STORIES >



> AUTUMN AT LAKESIDE PARK  
*The Batson Family*



HIKING WITH KIDS  
*The Gomez Family*



LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONES  
*The Jaquet Family*



QUALITY TIME ON THE TRAIL  
*The Chambers Family*



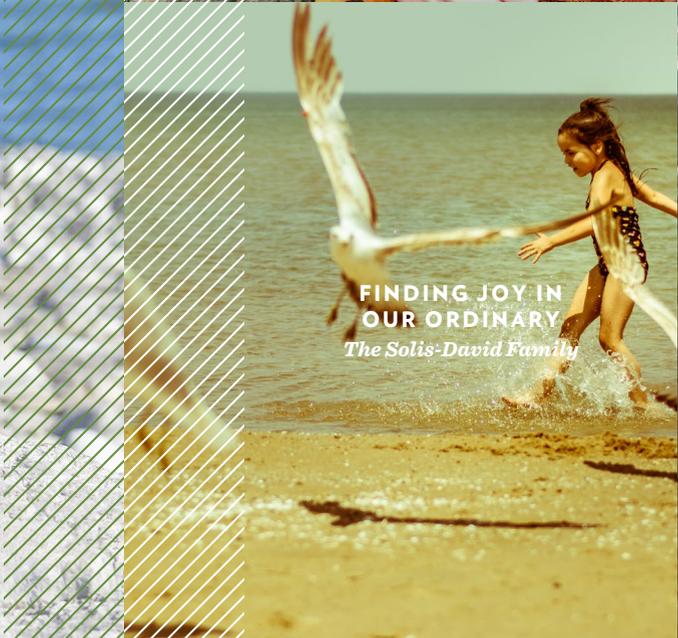
OPTING OUTSIDE  
*The Harper Family*



A YEAR IN SUNDAY AFTERNOONS  
*The McClain Family*



WALKING IN THE FOG  
*The Frederick Family*



FINDING JOY IN OUR ORDINARY  
*The Solis-David Family*



SANTA BARBARA BOTANIC GARDEN  
*The Mariscal Family*



BRIONES REGIONAL PARK  
*The O'Donnell Family*

TOYOTA  
FAMILY  
TRAILS

# Social Challenges

DEC.

JAN.

FEB.

MAR.

APR.

MAY

**Each month we're issuing a new inspiration challenge to the Family Trails community.**

The monthly challenge may come in the form of a visual prompt, question, or activity, and will always be designed to spark family exploration, adventure, and learning.

We'll collect the best of the best to share via social, on [FamilyTrails.com](http://FamilyTrails.com), and in Trails Mix. To participate, look for the monthly challenge prompt on Instagram. Maybe you'll see your family adventures in an upcoming issue of Trails Mix!

*Check out some of the highlights from our last few months* ➤

# CHALLENGE NO.1

DECEMBER

# Handmade



The holidays are here, and we're challenging our #FamilyTrails community to take a different approach on adventure by getting crafty with their kids. Our theme for December is "Handmade" and the hashtag is #FT\_Handmade.



PHOTO AT LEFT: @september.dawn  
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: @chasing.pure.simplicity, @everyday\_films, @resplendentlife

# CHALLENGE NO.2

JANUARY

# Adventure Goals



January brings about a fresh start for all of us. What are your family's goals for 2017? We're challenging our #FamilyTrails community to make 2017 a year of adventure. Our theme for December is "Goals" and the hashtag is #FT\_Goals.

PHOTO AT LEFT: @katespiller  
CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: @willtheeasterbunnyfindus, @the.carter.crew, @wefoundadventure

# CHALLENGE NO.3

FEBRUARY

RANDOM ACTS  
- OF -

Kindness



In light of National Random Acts of Kindness Day (February 17th), we're challenging our #FamilyTrails community to spread a little love this month. Whether you're volunteering, cleaning up litter at a local park, or doing something thoughtful for a neighbor in need, share your experience with us by using #FT\_RAOK



PHOTO AT LEFT: @freshouttakes  
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: @thehouseoffigs, @la.holla, @babeur4

TRAILS MIX RECIPE #5

# WRAPPED -IN- LOVE



by KAYTLYN WEISS

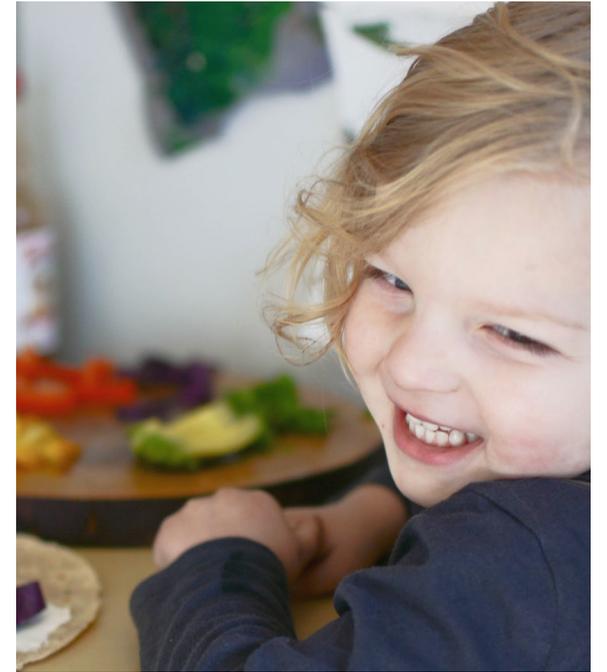
## RAINBOW WRAP

One of our favorite parts of homeschooling is the food. I love making themed lunches together to go along with the units we're learning, like green avocado "faux-gurt" during our gardening unit or heart-shaped snacks for Valentine's Day. Food is such an easy and accessible way to teach simple lessons. (And what's better than a finished project you can eat?!) Our time in the kitchen together is something I look forward to every day. I enjoy challenging our son with new recipes or foods that we have not tried before, and seeing his boundaries expand.

### DIRECTIONS

*1 tablespoon cream cheese spread on a whole wheat tortilla. Thinly sliced red and yellow bell peppers, carrots, avocado, lettuce and purple cabbage.*

*Arrange slices of veggies over cream cheese spread. Wrap and enjoy!*



While exploring rainbows during our weather unit, I couldn't think of a better way to show Mother Nature's technicolor displays than with fruits and vegetables. Our grocery store is full of vibrant colors, so we headed off to collect veggies in each shade of the spectrum. Not only is this simple wrap a nutritious burst of flavors, your littles will love tasting the rainbow!





# GUEST TRAIL GUIDES AHEAD

## Attention Hikers:

You are about to embark on a journey that will impact your family activities for generations to come.

Proceed with extreme excitement.



At Family Trails, we believe all families can learn and grow together through exploration and adventure. In this spirit, in each edition of Trails Mix you'll find feature pieces spotlighting a diverse range of adventurers from around the country, blazing their own trail.

featuring



**BROOKE  
FIELD**



**MARIA  
AGUINO**



## COLD DAYS *and* WARM MEMORIES

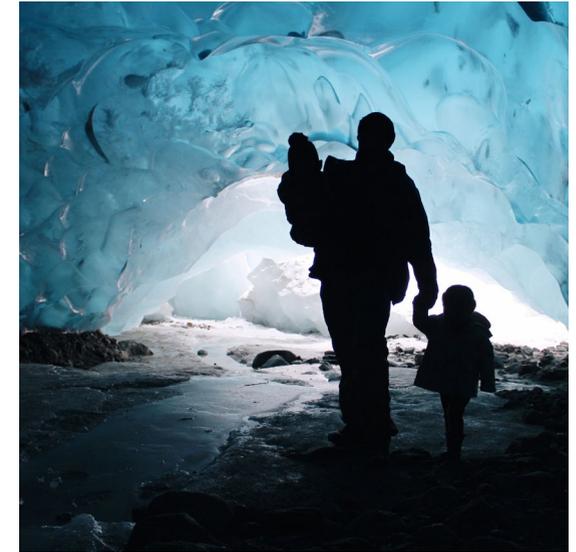
as told by BROOKE FIELD



**As a couple, we spent many weekends backpacking with a tiny two-man tent.** My husband, Garrison, always had to find the perfect spot to set up camp, secluded and preferably by a natural water source. We never thought we'd enjoy car camping or be a family who would seemingly pack up our whole house for one night at a crowded, drive-in campground. Fast forward several years and two babies later... We've now upgraded to a six-person palace and our hiking packs have been replaced with child carriers.

Even though our oldest child is turning three, we still consider ourselves new parents. We are still learning and navigating through the simple everyday tasks, as well as figuring out our family goals and priorities. I have a feeling that I'll feel new to this gig for a while longer, with each season of parenthood requiring its own adjustments.

After five years away, we recently returned to our home state of Alaska, but to a new region with a completely different climate than we were accustomed to. Southeast Alaska is located in a temperate rain forest, and Juneau ranks #1 as the least sunny city in the United States. The dreary weather can be really discouraging! That said, living in the state capital gives us a unique opportunity to see the local side to a city that attracts around two million visitors each year.



*"Getting outside as a family helps us focus on and appreciate this beautiful earth. It keeps us grounded."*

BROOKE FIELD  
@brookefield

So here we are as a young family, in a new city, trying to figure out a new rhythm for our outdoor adventures. And hopefully, enjoy this time to grow closer as a family and raise strong, brave kids who don't rely on material things to bring them happiness. Just because it's not currently realistic for us to head out on long backpacking excursions doesn't mean we have to stay home. Naptimes will have to be skipped, tantrums will most definitely be had, and I'm bound to forget someone's rain gear or not bring enough diapers at some point. We'll learn something new on each outing and adapt as we go.

Getting outside as a family helps us focus on and appreciate this beautiful earth. It keeps us grounded. We forget about toys and TV shows and get to just breathe. When we're out hiking as a family, we get to focus on the kids and our marriage, and have the best, most productive conversations. During those long talks, we dream big and problem solve. The kids eventually tune out our ramblings and tune into nature. The day might have started out challenging at home as we tried to get everyone dressed weather appropriate, but when we find our pace on the trail, each of our moods improves dramatically.

Before we move away at the end of this year, I want to feel satisfied that we explored all we could. I don't want any regrets.

One big item on my bucket list was to visit the local glacier's ice caves as a family. The trail is long and not known to be well marked. On top of that, no one recommends hiking there with kids. Since this is our last winter living here, I knew we had to take our opportunity, when the lake froze over, to cross the ice if we were realistically going to make it as a family. We attempted three separate times during cold spells of 5-10 degrees Fahrenheit, having to turn back around the halfway point because the kids were not enjoying the cold. I know it's important to stay flexible because I fear pushing the kids too hard could result in them resenting being outdoors. I figured we missed our chance, but was happy that we had at least tried.





Then came a beautiful weekend, with temperatures just barely below freezing and light snow flurries. I knew I had to convince Garrison, the more cautious one in our relationship, to help us get there! We had finally learned what gear we needed to keep the kids warm, which was a game changer. We crossed the ice together, enjoying the journey like we were on an Arctic expedition. The ice caves were absolutely amazing to experience in person, the coldest shades of blue I've ever seen. They would be worth the trek along the trail in summertime, but nothing makes me happier than being able to see them together as a family.

I'm not going to lie and say our kids didn't refuse to wear hats or cry on the entire way back, but my daughter often talks about this excursion as a happy memory. I think she understood that it was important to me, and recognized the beauty even if her ears were cold.

Memories of our time here in Juneau will be filled with whale watching while my husband fishes off the shore and I hunt for seashells with the kids. Picnicking along the river. Each of us carrying a kid while we spend the days hiking long past naptime. Blueberry-stained hands and boots covered in mud. Soaking up each rare, sunny day at one of the rocky beaches. Getting barely any sleep, but breathing the freshest air in the tent. We won't remember the whines or tears. Our family memories will be sweet and fulfilling. They'll help us stay close when inevitable struggles and trials hit. I hope my kids will lean on the healing powers of nature, just as I did.

I look forward to each new opportunity to find a piece of ourselves outdoors. To become stronger and more aware. To push ourselves, as individuals and also together, as a family.



**NEW FOUND  
ACCEPTANCE**  
*in*  
**JOSHUA TREE**

*as told by* MARIA AQUINO

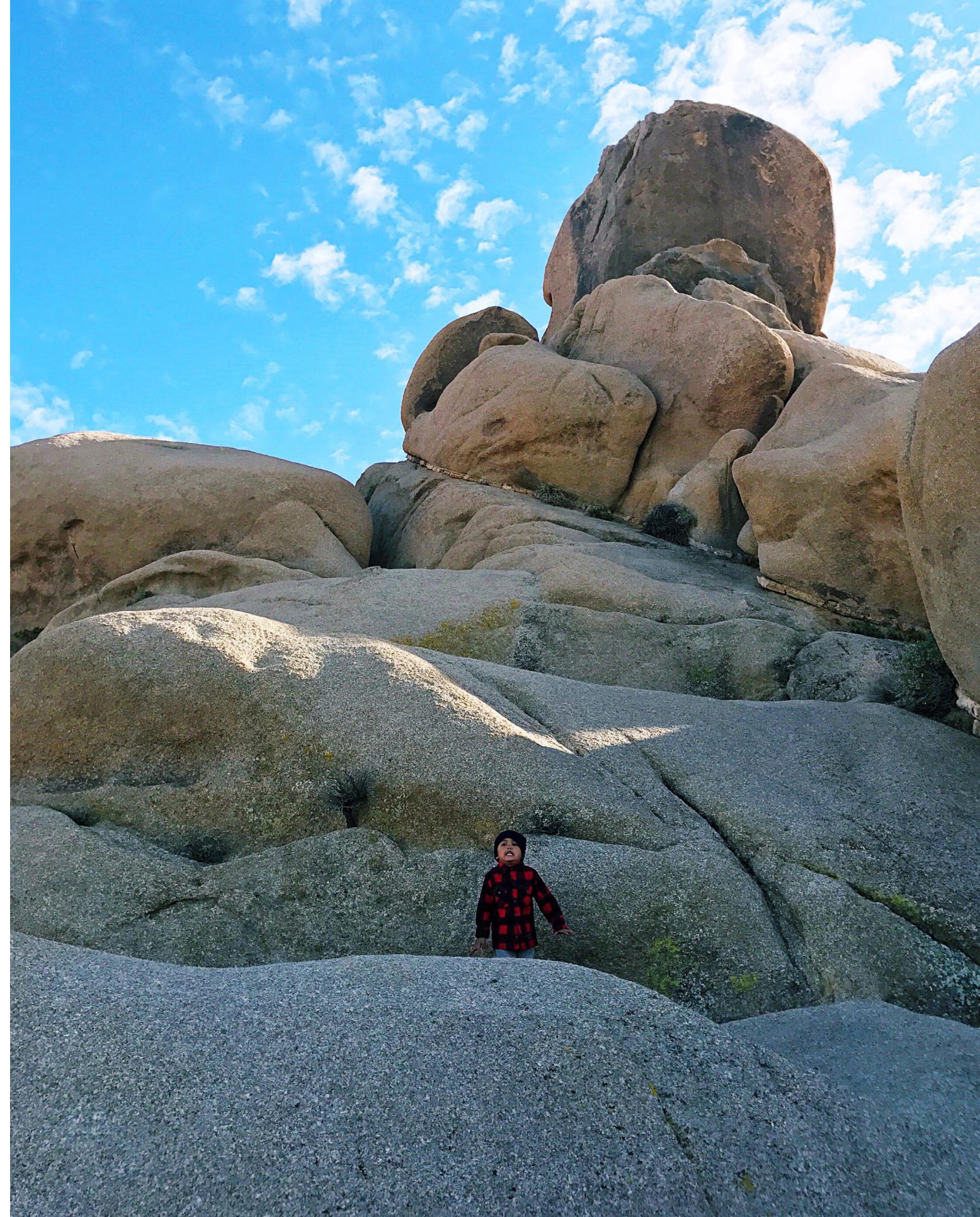
### Pre-parenthood, my husband and I worked in the environmental industry.

For the majority of the year we would report to a mountain or a desert, occasionally the urban jungles of Los Angeles, but without a doubt we were on our feet somewhere outside. It also happens that my husband and I met in the middle of the Mojave Desert doing environmental fieldwork. Environmental surveys were my favorite type of fieldwork. This entailed walking transects in vast undeveloped lands for miles and miles. There would be several mornings where my boots would hit the ground at six a.m. and would not stop hitting the ground until nine hours later. I would stare at my feet as one foot took a step after the other. Over and over, step after step. This image is so vividly engrained in my head.

In 2013, my husband and I had a bouncing baby boy (Liam), and a second bouncing baby boy (Finn) came three years later. Our environmental days were dwindling down exponentially due to family life. Because we no longer met the fieldwork opportunities at our employment, the hubby and I would adhere to an outdoorsy lifestyle on our own time, hence #professionalweekenders. Liam has been on several camping trips and,

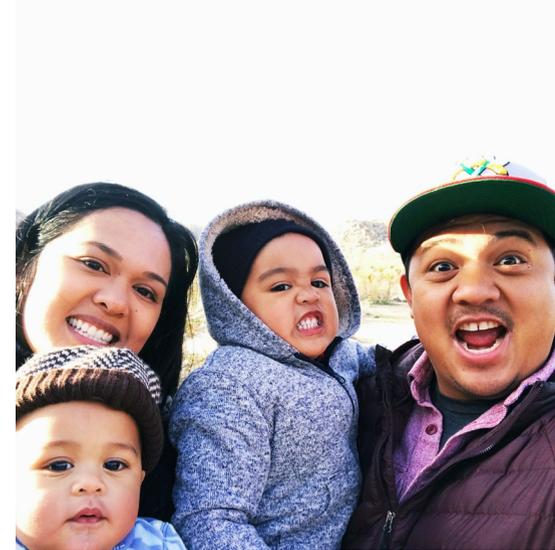
at six months, Finn already has two camping trips under his belt and several day hikes, too. We have such a blast on our family adventures. Before each one ends, we are already planning the next. Hence, Joshua Tree.

Joshua Tree National Park is the perfect distance away from the Los Angeles County to do a weekend camping trip. Of course, we wanted to go in the peak season, late winter through early spring. This is prime time for Joshua Tree. Southern California winters can be very temperate with very little rain. Not this year! Inclement weather had spoiled several weekends over a couple months and poo-pooed our much-anticipated camping trip. We postponed Joshua Tree three times. I was feeling really down and could sense my anxiety creeping up because I had not partaken in my self-prescribed therapeutic hiking. It had been a few months since our last camping trip and a few weeks since our last hike. Consequently, I was feeling particularly disquieted when we faced another rainy weekend in the forecast. Alas, my husband and I threw our hands up and decided to go anyways.



Turns out the weather forecast was not what it claimed to be. Joshua Tree was gorgeous. The sky was blue and the sun was bright. The air was cool and maybe a bit cold but the rays of sun were warm to the touch. The first day was spent walking around the different areas of interest. We lingered longer at one site to fire up some charcoals and grill up an early dinner. This was where Liam was no holds barred in developing his scrambling skills. He was really going for it! No amount of yelling was going to warrant him more cautious. My husband had to do a lot of scrambling that day just to keep up with Liam. I was secretly reveling in the thought that Liam was sure to be exhausted that night and sleep early. Wrong! Liam spent the evening by the fire with mom, dad and lil' bro until all our wood was gone.

The next day we went to Hidden Valley and set up shop there for food. There was a lot to explore; plenty of rocks to climb and one nature trail. I was so looking forward to finally hiking a trail. I was so excited that I started the trail with Finn and Liam on my own while my husband was cooking up some food. It is a one-mile loop, and believed I could easily do it. Of course I could walk it pretty quickly and be back in time for food, but I had two littles with me and second guessed myself after about one-tenth of the way. I had my ergo baby for Finn, but Liam was on foot. We left Liam's child carrier backpack at home because he had outgrown it. I eventually gave into Liam's pleas and I carried him piggyback while Finn was in the ergo baby, his little face facing my chest. What a sight I was!



After food we all went to the trail to give it another shot. I was really happy. So happy. Normally a one-mile easy nature hike would take around 30 minutes with both kids in a carrier. But since Liam is too big for a carrier, he would have to be on foot for most this hike. It took us over one hour to walk the entire loop. It was excruciating. Liam did not want to walk at all. My husband had to switch from piggyback to shoulder sitting and piggyback again. We switched kids at one point thinking I had better chances of encouraging Liam to walk. He occasionally would walk try it, but after five steps he'd change his mind. It was continuous delays every 10 minutes. Towards the end, I lost my patience and just walked, ignoring Liam's pleas to wait for him and his daddy. I just had to walk. I needed to put one foot in front of the other over and over. I needed to feel that rhythm of a hike. I needed to see my footprints in the dirt. So I did just that. Yes!

That feeling lasted for a hot minute because I immediately realized I was being crazy and slowed my roll, rejoining my son and husband that I had so abruptly walked away from. I needed to be with my son. I needed to see him enjoy the outdoors, oblivious to the frustration of his parents. Yes, this hike was taking forever, but I was with my precious family. I was feeling ashamed for the moment of defeat, but I think because I was able to have a change of heart and accept that a lesson was learned. I had to accept that it will be a long time until my boys reach an age where they can walk on hikes for good periods of time. I accept the victory of having even making it to Joshua Tree after all the weather uncertainty. Gone are the days of trekking through the desert for miles and miles. Here are the days of acceptance for victories – both big and small.

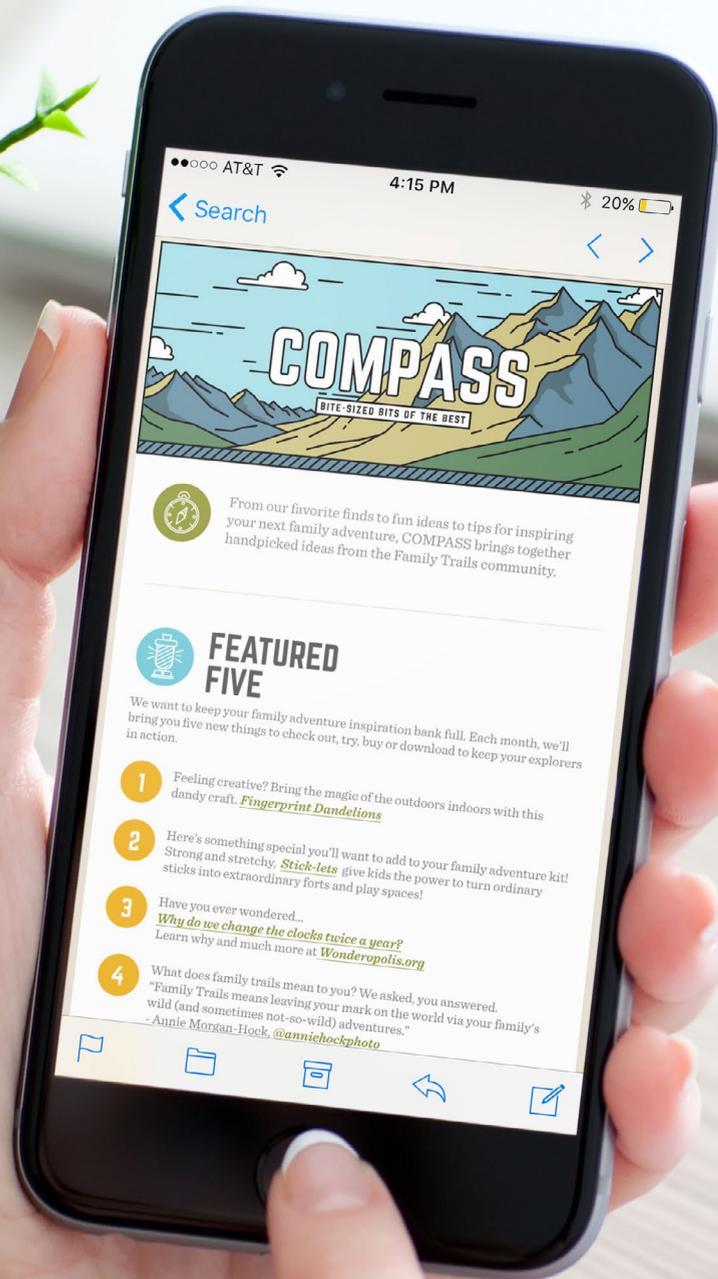


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**COMPASS**

THE NEW FAMILY TRAILS  
NEWSLETTER

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# SEEK AND EXPLORE, IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD!

DOWNLOAD > [familytrails.com/scavengerhunt](https://familytrails.com/scavengerhunt)

## SCAVENGER

### IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

One of the best parts about family adventure is that discoveries can happen right in your own backyard! Is your family ready to embark on an adventure for a Family Trails scavenger hunt. While you're on your mission to find these items, take time to talk about all the ways you see spring coming to life around you.

- 1 Find something just starting to grow
- 2 Find something rough and something smooth
- 3 Find a squirrel eating
- 4 Find a train of ants
- 5 Find a feather
- 6 Find a twig
- 7 Find a flower petal
- 8 Find a nibbled leaf
- 9 Find dewy grass
- 10 Look for a spider web

You did it! Now that you've found all 10 items, it's time to get crafty. Use the twigs, leaves, and other items you collected to build your own butterfly.

TOYOTA  
**FAMILY TRAILS**

CREATED BY  
**ncfi**<sup>™</sup>  
National Center for  
Families Learning

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