

Go Where the Wild Things Are

Live out loud and in full color.

– USA Olympian Jeff Olson

ONE SOURCE OF BOREDOM, DISAPPOINTMENT or discontentment with life isn't so much that things are going badly. The true source of the disappointment is knowing deep inside that we have settled for "good enough" versus being truly alive or, as some people put it, "living out loud."

One of Dave's closest friends is former downhill skier Jeff Olson, a two-time Olympian, three-time U.S.A. champion, and Pan Am Games gold medalist. Obviously Jeff has been more than mediocre when it comes to athletics. However, as he's gained wisdom with age, his focus has changed from first-place finishes to family and faith, from victory to vitality. Several years ago, he wrote the following reflections, slightly edited here:*

I live in a nice suburban home. A home with white walls and white trim. Very white . . . too white. Antiseptic white.

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You don't find that kind of white in nature.

John Eldredge wrote in his book *Wild at Heart*, "A man's soul cannot be suburbanized." When I read that passage, something stirred deep inside me. My heart roared with quiet desperation. Like a defiant prisoner of war, I knew deep down I was not meant for this antiseptic, "nice" domain.

Through God's grace, I discovered a wonderful book entitled *Romancing Your Child's Heart*. That book and its authors helped me realize that "suburbia" is a state of mind. Suburbia is middle class. Suburbia seduces you into comfortably numb living and parenting . . . "good enough" kind of living. It was a watershed moment for me. Deep inside, I knew that I was not meant to be a "suburban" (no pun intended) and just good enough. God had much bigger plans for me.

I am now on a grand "treasure hunt" with my children. Not a nice, clean Easter egg hunt at the local manicured golf course but an Indiana Jones kind of adventure . . . messy, crazy, dangerous, swashbuckling, roller coaster—an epic, mythic tale.

Eldredge also writes in his book, "Don't try to be 'nice' . . . do what makes you come alive . . . God needs more of those kind of people!" This notion is based on the fundamental premise that, at its core, the Christian heart is good. Therefore, it is okay to lean in to your passion . . . go with your gut . . . dust off your doldrums and come alive. You will bring glory to God, and your kids, if you have them, or others who see this change will join you.

I want my children to grow up living, breathing, and experiencing their Mom and Dad as fully alive. *Life is Beautiful*—remember that movie—regardless of the circumstances. True beauty breathes authenticity. If you have kids, would you rather have them say, "Dad's a really nice guy / Mom's a really hard worker" or "Dad rocks / Mom's got game . . . They really inspire me"?

Let's face it—there's enough darkness and dreariness all

around. It beats us down and beats us up. Tempts us to revert to the mean, the average, the good enough. But good enough is not good enough. I want to find the “shire” in life . . . that incredible lightness of being that comes with God’s grace. My vision of heaven is like the hobbits’ shire [in *The Lord of the Rings*] . . . a green, lush wonderland full of wonder and adventure and color and kinship.

So there I was, one summer morning, looking at my pathetic white suburban walls . . . watching my kids play with their numbing, plastic, unimaginative, non-toxic, non-flammable toys . . . and I got an idea. “We’re going out,” I said to my three beautiful young daughters.

“Daddy, nooooo . . . we’re playing with our toys,” they protested.

“You want toys,” I said. “Wait till you see the toys God made for us. . . . Let’s go.”

After much whining and moaning and creative wooing, they acquiesced. Daddy might be going crazy, but they were getting to go along—cool.

“We’re going to get wet,” I warned. So we put on our adventure tennis shoes and set off to where the wild things are . . . in our case that would be Bear Creek that runs alongside our subdivision. There is a paved bike trail alongside Bear Creek. We have been on the path hundreds of times, walked down to the water’s edge many times. But we had never ventured off the path, offshore, and into the creek—“the road less traveled.”

At first my girls wouldn’t go in. They didn’t want to get their shoes wet. They had never done that on purpose before. “Dad . . . no way, we’ll get wet!” they pleaded.

“Yahooooo! Exactly! Come on in . . . the water’s great!” I cheered as I sat down in the middle of the creek. I was alive! I was going to get my nice, clean little girls muddy. But I couldn’t force it. My youngest daughter, Siena, had wanted to come in before she started thinking. She hesitated after she

observed her older sisters' faces (suburbia boxing their spirits in). My oldest daughter, Annecy, ventured in slowly, measuredly, and then squealed with rookie delight. Siena followed her in with innocence and joy restored.

I had to strike a deal with my stubborn daughter, Bella. I promised that if she came in, she could push me over in the creek. Her face lit up, expressing "I'm in for that!" She instantly forgot about the shoes and was with us moments later savoring the deal. As I fell backward, pushed with full exuberance, I saw her come alive, fully alive, along with the rest of us.

We set off upstream, taking turns as "leader," forging our way around bends and into the unknown—on high alert for new things, wild things, slimy things, special things, God things . . . his fingerprints. We laughed, we listened, we touched, we smelled, we saw, we splashed, we absorbed it.

Even the ordinary can be extraordinary when you're in awe. Finding God's grace and fingerprints right before your eyes makes any parent—no, any person—young at heart. And being young at heart makes all things new and every day great.

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IF YOU WANT TO FEEL GREAT TODAY . . .

You must define "you," because you are more and bigger than the "box" that defines you, and has most likely been imposed on you by others. Break free, beyond your bounds. Add some zest to your life. Follow Jeff Olson's example and explore God's "toys" with your children, if you have children. Do it by yourself, if you don't. Read books like *Wild At Heart* and *Romancing Your Child's Heart* for innovative and energizing ideas, then turn the best ideas into action.