

October 2021 Issue 15

The We Turned Out Okay Playbook

by Karen Lock Kolp, M.Ed.

Helping you do what works for you...

Instead of treading the conventional path. Let's jump in!

Your Author Goes Camping: A Report from the Field

Welcome to Issue 15 of the *We Turned Out Okay Playbook*!

Somehow, I have arranged my late-summer and early-autumn to include several camping trips.

The first was a solo trip, and boy was I terrified about going on that one!

But I have learned that there's a certain kind of fear that must be leaned into, if you want to get to the other side. For me, the other side of that fear is exhilaration. That's exactly where I want to be, where I feel most in flow.

Here are some lessons I learned from that first trip:

1. I took way too much stuff. Like, WAY too much. I was thinking in terms of apocalyptic survival, instead of “weekend camping for one.”

Think I’m kidding? I brought not one but two tents! Just in case something happened to one of the tents I, would have the other one, or parts from it. And that’s just one small example... I wasted time and energy setting stuff up and then taking it down.

Never again. Lesson learned.

2. Being by myself – with no one but myself for company – scared me. What would I do with myself? And who am I being, when I am not doing?

It was hard, at least at the beginning. Then I started to have fun as I chose the hike I wanted; prepared food just for me; sat and looked at the view, with no one to please but myself; played with tarot cards; kept the campfire going both afternoons and evenings, and ate many s’mores. Yum!

It wasn’t until Ben and I prepared for our second trip that I realized that, during the first one, I wasn’t truly awake to the natural world around me. I hid from it with podcasts and music and other distractions.

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Something Ben said brought this home to me, when I pointed out to him that we would need to bring several device chargers “because I went through two on my solo trip.”

Ben: “How did you do that? I thought you went there to unplug.”

Me: “I did but [all kinds of justifications for why I did not actually unplug.]”

Sometimes one question, gently asked from a loved one, is all you need to get on the right track.

So the name of the game for this second trip, which I am currently on as I write these words, has been “unplug and be present.”

I am trying to truly listen to my thoughts and see them for what they are.

The truth is, a lot of my thoughts are fearful, gathered from movies and TV about all the bad things that animals and people do to others out in the woods. All the ways there are for someone to get hurt.

When those thoughts come to me I try to recognize them and realize they come from an anxious place. That inside me there’s a little Karen, who’s got her eyes on the horizon looking for danger all the time. When these thoughts and worries come up I am working

to say “thank you for keeping an eye out for signs of danger. You can relax because I am safe here and now. I love and appreciate you for looking out for me.”

On this trip, Ben and I have agreed that we will not talk about the news of the day, or any of the energy-draining stuff that so often comes up in conversation between two people living in this anxious, bad news-filled world.

As a result I have felt freed up! Freed up to listen to the crackling of the fire. The crickets. The breeze, the birds, the dew dropping from the trees. To think on who I am being, when I’m not doing. (A wonderful coach, Peleg Top, asks this question a lot.)

Ben and I discovered today that our hammock is made for two people! So we snuggled up together, watched the clouds reflected in the lake, delighted in birdsong and peace and quiet. Once, as a flock of birds flew just overhead I heard something I never have before: the sound of their wings flapping. It was such a beautiful quiet sound. Being in the hammock with Ben, hearing and seeing those birds, is something I will remember forever. So peaceful.

I hear other, less pleasant sounds as well.

I have not been camping since 2019, and out here in the deep woods, without any water or electricity or septic at the sites, that’s always meant folks camping in tents or pop-ups. It’s meant very few trailers or motorhomes. But now the vast majority of sites are taken up by folks in large travel trailers with generators, chugging out exhaust fumes and noise. Or folks blaring music, through *built-in speakers* on the outsides of their campers. Awfully hard to hear the birds or the breeze with all that going on!

In my state of trying to “be present,” I remember something that a coaching client shared at the beginning of the pandemic. It was in a letter she received from (I believe) a school official, who told about when they were in a yoga class one time and the person next to them snorted and breathed loudly, interrupting their practice and thoughts. When they took their complaints to the instructor, saying “this person is messing up my yoga experience!” the instructor replied “this IS your yoga experience.” Thinking on that story helps me accept that my camping experience includes generator noises, and music. It is different from before, and that’s okay.

I’m doing my best to remember to focus on what is in my control. I can come to present. I can relax my body. I can ask the question, “what can I create?”

I can create peace and quiet for myself by taking chair and sketchbook and descending 50 feet or so to the beach, so I am out of range of these sounds.

Once I created that peace and quiet by moving our hammock out of sound range, to a beautiful peninsula jutting out into the water. Wherever I looked I saw peaceful water, pines, and blue sky. I heard the birds and the quiet paddling of folks on the water.

This morning, a crying child woke me at about 3 AM. This was a moment where my unplugging and coming-to-present skills really shone! Rather than get upset, or put on a podcast or music to block feelings and emotions as well as sound, I gave myself permission to acknowledge and then let go of the fact that my sleep had been interrupted.

I began to follow my breathing (as I am learning to do using the Veterans Administration app, Mindfulness Coach), to relax my body, and listen to the night sounds around me.

When I settled back to sleep I had an amazing dream. In it, I sat in the driver's seat of a car that had grown wings and taken flight. Underneath the driver's seat was a huge bonfire; I knew it was there to propel me forward into my amazing future. Outside the windows I saw the world of natural beauty above which I flew. I flew along with friends and loved ones. I didn't know what the future would be but I knew it would be amazing. (It was a pretty great dream!) As I awoke I remembered my therapist, celebrating with me at the end of our time together – he retired in May after working with me for seven years – telling me “you're on fire right now.”

And, it's true! I am. I feel like a magician, honing my craft and wielding my tools for good, creating useful and fun things like this playbook, helping my coaching clients create real change in their lives. This dream affirmed that I'm a creative person who understands the power of intuition, is present in her life, and is pointed in the right direction.

And I never would have known or understood – or even have had that dream – without unplugging, *doing* and *being* in the natural world.

This month you'll have the opportunity to unplug, become present, and interact with nature.

You have beautiful and amazing ideas, talents, and experiences inside you. One way to tap them is to be outside. I'm excited for you, and for the journey that is ahead... Let's dive in!

October 2021 At-a-Glance & Calendar Expansion

Let's unplug! In this issue you will:

- Use the At-a-Glance Calendar to block out the time
- Practice being, instead of doing
- Record the thoughts and ideas that come up throughout this process
- Plan for unplugging time into November and beyond

You'll notice that this issue is differently structured...

Instead of daily check-ins, I've created weekly pages.

They are largely blank, but not completely (blank pages can be scary)... I share some of what I've created during my unplug time. I invite you to create in these pages as well!

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October's Playbook Use Instructions...

1. Use the At-a-Glance Calendar to plan when your dedicated unplug time will be.
2. Then, use the weekly pages to journal or draw or doodle, while you are outside unplugging.

The one Playsheet you'll find: High/Low/Hero/Funny. I always want that as an option for you, to remember where your kids are now and record the thoughts of family members.

Happy October – Enjoy!

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
3.	4.	5.	6.
10.	11.	12.	13.
17.	18.	19.	20.
24.	25.	26.	27.
_____ 31.			

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Ideas
	1.	2.	<p>In October: Use this blank October calendar to plan your dedicated unplug/outside time...</p>
7.	8.	9.	<p>Then use the following pages to immerse yourself in that time. Enjoy!!</p>
14.	15.	16.	
21.	22.	23.	
28.	29.	30.	<p>If you choose to keep going...</p> <p>Consider: How will you get outside, and/or unplug, in November?</p>

Let's jump into October 2021!

Week 1: Journal Space for Your Unplug Time

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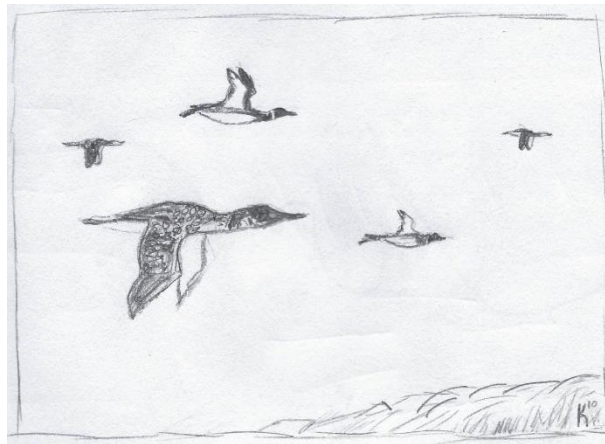


Figure 1/ The first drawing I ever made in the park. I called it Migrating Loons.

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Week 2: Journal Space for Your Unplugging/Outdoor Excursions

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*Figure 2/ I made this one in the park too, sitting in my favorite spot overlooking the pond; this drawing, and the previous one as well, are in the style of the great illustrator Joan Dunning. She wrote one of my favorite books, *The Loon: Voice of the Wilderness*.*

Week 3: Space for Your Sketching, Doodling, Journaling, etc.



Figure 3/ By the time I made this drawing – about a month after I started sketching in the outdoors – I had a proper sketchbook and was falling in love with the process. This is a pretty awful drawing! I wanted to share it here to show my progress. Prior to this I had been more or less copying how Joan Dunning did her work. This was the first effort I made to draw the outdoors without any style but my own... Rather than self-edit, tell myself "this is horrible!" and stop drawing, I worked to gently remind myself that drawing nature is a work in progress.

Week 4: Space for You to Consider the Question:

... Who are you being when you are not doing?

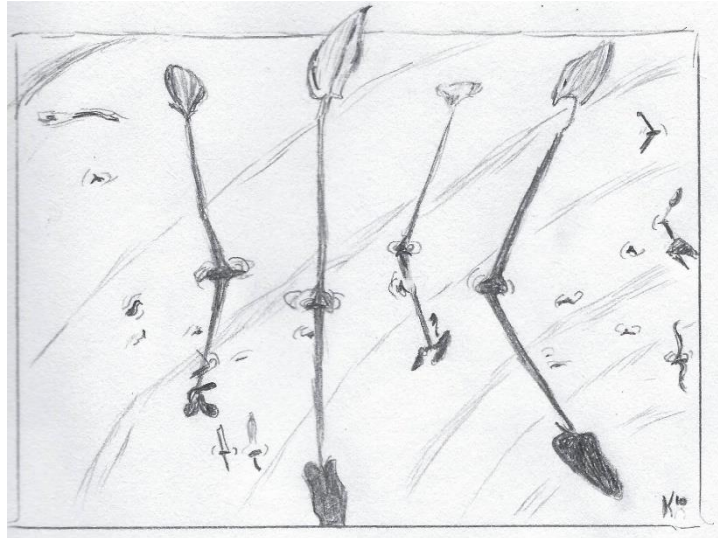


Figure 4/ The day after I made that not-so-great drawing, I drew this one. I discovered that I was much happier drawing tiny pieces of what I saw. I call this one Marsh Family, and it's a keepsake of one of the lovely camping trips I took this September.

Playsheets

If you know me, you'll know I'm not a fan of worksheets. But I really wanted you to have a place to collect your thoughts in a worksheet kind of way, so I developed these Playsheets instead!

Playsheet 1: High/Low/Hero/Funny... In each issue of the *Playbook* we play this family game, where everyone shares about the best thing that happened to them that day, the toughest thing about that day, and who was a kindness hero for them that day – and/or, what entertaining or funny thing happened?

We play this game each and every month so you can enjoy looking back on your child's highs, lows, heroes and funnies over your *Playbook* subscription! This gives you a record over time so you can see how they change and grow.

Family Member	High	Low	Hero	Funny

Hello from The Dream HQ

The column where each month we visit a wonderful place for mindfulness and relaxation: Karen's Dream Headquarters.

We step into the glade of the Dream HQ, and we take in the view:

Just in front of the Big House is something new: a map. One of those maps that one often sees at a trailhead, sheltered from the elements by Plexiglas and with a cute little wooden roof above. What is this map of, we wonder? Stepping forward, we see that it is a map of the entire Dream HQ!

22 The Apple Orchard through the woods to the north. The trail up to Waterfall Pool, with a special marker to remind us of the cave behind the waterfall there. The grassy plains and winding river along a trail above Waterfall Pool – a new place to explore! The coasts and islands of Long Lake. The southeastern woods with the awesome treehouse-tree. The maze and gardens behind the Big House. We even see us, standing in front of the map, waving to ourselves.

As we look longer we discover that, in each area, special items have been set out for us, ways to interact with the natural world, and to observe it as well.

Places to *do*, or if we choose just *be*.

The map shows us that in each place we'll find:

- A hammock
- A small table and comfortable writing chair
- Our favorite refreshments
- Paints, easel, and canvas – also, a print-on-demand camera

- Food to share with the forest creatures if we so choose (one way in which the Dream HQ is different from our world: this practice is encouraged and treasured, as any creature we encounter is a friend)
- A dotted journal, wonderful for writing, drawing, designing, and doodling
- A whole host of writing utensils to enjoy with the dotted journal

In the lowest right corner of the map is a note...

“In these places and with these tools, magic is made. Enjoy!! Love, Joy and Honey”

(Along with the note we see a picture of these two friends and Dream HQ residents, the larger-than-life woman named Joy and her companion, Honey the winged horse.)

We realize that, in today’s visit, we may not be able to experience every single place on the map. So we choose the one that feels best in this moment and strike out for that place.

And we have the loveliest time. The weather is perfect; the time of day – or night – is exactly what we most need right now.

The images and writing we create make us feel alive, as do the vistas and animals we meet.

We’ll come back to enjoy other areas on Joy and Honey’s Trail Map.

We know that the weather will always be what we most wish. The time of day also.

We know that this place waits for us, and is ready to welcome us whenever we want to be here.

All we need to do is close our eyes and step into the Dream HQ.

What's coming up in the November *Playbook*?

In the penultimate issue of the *We Turned Out Okay Playbook*, we're taking stock.

We ask the question: what do I really, really want in my life?

What do I want to say goodbye to, and eliminate from my life?

Yes – it's finally time to go big, and perform an audit not just on our energy, but on our lives.

Get ready for an experience that is intuitive, playful, thought-provoking, and life-affirming!

Coming soon, right into your mailbox...

Have a great October and we will see you next month!

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