

Go Outside and Come Back Better: Benefits from Nature That Everyone Should Know

Ron Lizzi

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Inspiring readers to explore the outdoors, this stunning photo journal offers a fresh perspective on the pleasures of nature.

“From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters,” sang Woody Guthrie, “this land was made for you and me.” We all memorized the folksinger’s words as kids, but how many of us have actually ventured out to those majestic trees and rolling waves? Too few, according to avid hiker, photographer, and now author, Ron Lizzi. In an effort to get us all out there into our lands, Lizzi offers *Go Outside and Come Back Better: Benefits from Nature that Everyone Should Know*. This vivid photo journal offers 160 awe-inspiring landscape photographs from across the United States, along with inspirational messages from the author and quotations from naturalist John Muir to create a cross between National Geographic’s field guides and the popular *Blue Day* gift books by Bradley Trevor Grieve.

Lizzi looks at nature from a fresh perspective and even coins a new word: “awezure,” which he defines as a combination of awe and pleasure. Lizzi’s dictionary also includes terms like “matterdays,” or the days that have the greatest impact on a life. While the unique concepts Lizzi attempts to capture with these terms are compelling, their use doesn’t always illuminate their meanings. When he writes that “with awezure’s peace, there is never a sense of idleness,” for instance, readers may struggle to understand exactly what he is trying to convey.

Words, however, are a small part of Lizzi’s book. Foremost are page after page of clear, colorful photographs, taken by Lizzi over 1700 miles of hiking in nearly 500 national, state, municipal, and tribal parks across America. You’ve no doubt seen dozens of images of the Grand Canyon, but did you know about the picturesque Weir Farm National Historic Site in Connecticut, developed by painter J. Alden Weir as a place of inspiration for fellow artists? It’s stunning. Lizzi lets us see the variety that exists in our parks, thereby whetting our appetites for our own explorations.

Lizzi’s images not only portray the beauty of our natural places, but also highlight the relationship between humans and the landscape. Many of his pictures feature people in nature rather than a pristine landscape. This is a world to explore, Lizzi seems to be saying. Frequent quotes from the wilderness writing of John Muir further highlight the ways nature affects us all: “Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.”

Go Outside and Come Back Better doesn’t try to be comprehensive. You won’t find an A-Z listing of national parks in these pages (although Lizzi does provide an excellent index). Instead, he offers a sampler of sorts, with images and words to pique your interest in nature and show how your life might improve by spending more time there. SHEILA M. TRASK (Fall 2013)

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