

## Raise Children With a Wild Streak: Reader Comments

What a wonderful essay! Thank you SO much for writing it.

Excellent; I'm sharing it with my colleagues and students.  
JBarnes  
Chair, PS/CJ

Dear Mark,  
I was sent your article in the Charlotte Observer via an online link. Thank you for writing a wonderful and insightful piece. I agree with your views about education, scholarship candidates, and the young people 100%.  
Sincerely,

Lynn Seaton  
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USA

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your piece in the Charlotte Observer called "Raise children with a wild streak". I clipped it out and saved it as your piece really "spoke" to me as a parent and former educator. Currently, I am the PTA President of Selwyn Elementary in Charlotte, NC. I would like your permission to reprint your piece. I would like to use parts or all of your piece in our next PTA newsletter to share with other parents. How do I go about getting permission to reprint this? Can you give me your permission or do I need to also get authorization from the Observer?

I thank you for your time and for writing such a thought provoking piece. I look forward to hearing from you.

PTA President

Dear Mr. Pruett,  
thank you for your article, may I send it to my teaching friends in different countries?  
I have many universities behind me and was a perfect student, I got a gold medal and the top stipend at the university. This term has a cultural attitude, in some countries it is a high risk because the new level is prohibited. Such kind of country is Russia and countries around it. If you look at the map it is a huge space. Every initiative too. It is actually very dangerous. Do you discuss such issues in your lessons. Do your students have an access to different part of the world?  
Sincerely,

Shout it louder!

My own daughter was "frozen out" of UNC-Chapel Hill. Never mind that she had written a volume of poetry, composed 22 piano compositions, plus a 1230 SAT, a 4.5 GPA, National Honor Society, Governor's School, etc.

I guess she didn't have enough activities that were "traditionally valued"--and she was too honest to fake them.

I was a highly valued student--and arrived at UNC-CH not knowing how to live. I made it through, but those with different talents have made it better in life.

Thanks for taking on an education establishment that badly needs the challenge.

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*"It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot irreverence to their studies; They are not here to worship what is known, but to question it."*

*--Jacob Bronowski*

~Dear Professor Pruett,

I'm an English teacher at The Outdoor Academy, a small semester school located just south of Asheville, and my head of school just forwarded me an article you wrote for The Observer a few years ago. I think you hit the nail on the head, sir. Thank you for writing such a frank and insightful article. At The Outdoor Academy we've been doing what you describe for over a decade. We "Surround [our students] with books, not video games. Raise a garden... [and] Send them on solo trips." We're out here doing what Gary Snyder would call "the real work."

I'd like to invite you to come to our campus and see what we've got going on here. We're only about two and half hours from App. State. You can find out more about us online--just google us. If you're interested in visiting, please let me know.

Mark, I wanted to take the time to tell you I really enjoyed your article. In our current conformist society we have continued to "buck" the trend the same way my parents did. We were raised to explore, try new things and just have a good time. Academics were important, but they were not the only thing. I was very glad to read an article that actually celebrated this approach. In fact your article was so good, this is the only news article I have ever responded to.

Once again thank you for sharing you ideas and reaffirming our approach to raising our children.

Subject: **Great article - Charlotte Observer**

Hello -- I just wanted to let you know that your essay that appeared in the Charlotte Observer yesterday about raising children with a "wild streak" came at the exact time when I needed to read it -- very well written, thought-provoking and a "breath of fresh air" re: the big picture of parenting my teenagers ... thanks!

I enjoyed your article at The Charlotte Observer website  
<http://www.charlotte.com/mld/charlotte/news/15769490.htm>

I would like permission to reprint it on my websites:

<http://www.UniversalPreschool.com> (we oppose standardized childhoods)

and

<http://www.Homefires.com> (a resource for homeschool parents)

We are happy to provide a credit line and a link to your website (if you have one).

I look forward to your reply. :)

Diane Flynn Keith

Diane Flynn Keith  
Editor-In-Chief, <http://www.Homefires.com>  
Author of Carschooling, <http://www.Carschooling.com>  
Founder, <http://www.UniversalPreschool.com>

I just wanted to tell you what an awesome article you wrote!! Right on the money! I tried hard to raise my four children with this philosophy and they have turned out very well, each going his/her own way (and very different ways!) and making a success--not necessarily monetary--of their endeavors but they still know how to have fun! Thank you so much!!

I also would like to ask a favor:

My daughter, Anne Groebner, owns and runs a small sports newspaper in Pinetop, AZ called The Sports Zone. She prints about 10,000 every two weeks and does not charge for the issues. She does have advertisers but isn't getting rich by any means but she has a very loyal following among all the kids and their parents as she covers all the sports in the White Mountains. I edit the newspaper for her on-line. I wondered if you would let us publish this article? It would get good readership in that area and, perhaps, help some parents or children/teens to change their philosophies!

By the way, my grandson, Tim Wensil, is a junior at App State. I came up (proud grandmother that I am!) for honors day and was so impressed!

Thank you for your consideration,

I so enjoyed reading about kids on the wild side. Thank you for that. We have raised one of each, with the "wild one" being much more successful.

I enjoyed your article entitled "Raise Children with a Wild Streak," and I totally agree. I have a senior in high school who is definitely not a "cookie cutter" student. He refuses to bow to the stress imposed on students to be robots with lofty GPA's. It was refreshing to read that some schools still look for a spark in their students. Connor does his homework, studies for tests, and still takes time to play each day. He will not graduate at the top of his class, but he will be one well-rounded adult in a few years.

Charlotte, NC

Hip, Hip Hooray for your article "Raise Children with a wild streak." My husband and I are the happy and exhausted parents of six-year old triplets. We share in your philosophy about child-rearing and are striving to raise our three to think outside the proverbial box. I believe our children have "...a flash of determination, a streak of independence, a creative passion, an excited curiosity" that you spoke of.

I LOVED the paragraph where you wrote, "Surround them with books, not video games. Raise a garden or build a deck together." Currently, they are gardening a patch of land in our back yard and it's not unusual to see small collections of seeds in Ziploc baggies or someone snagging a Clementine to eat it and plant the seeds. For Christmas they have asked for gardening tools and a rock tumbler. On a recent car trip we asked them what a game boy was and it was funny but they really didn't know!

Congratulations on a well-written article! I look forward to reading more of what you write. Maybe one day we'll take a trip to Appalachian State and come by and say Hi!!!

Hello Mr. Pruet,

Just wanted to comment on your article in the Observer - excellent!!!

I know that my husband and I feel torn, at times, between what our society today is doing in terms of raising kids (all the extracurriculars starting at young ages, etc) and good, basic upbringing - just being a "kid". Our two children, a son, age 13 and daughter, age 11, love nothing more than just playing when they get home from school. We allow them to do this, no schedule attached, as much as possible.

We have a 13 year old son who marches to the beat of a different drummer. Sure, he has tried just about every sport out there and many other activities, but his favorite thing to do is play with his friends ("hang-out" even though their still playing at this age!) and skateboard. My daughter and he are building a "haunted trail" in our backyard for Halloween, and what great creativity! This is what kids should be doing!

It's refreshing to read your article - I wonder how many teachers in Middle School/High School share your sentiments?

Thank you,

Subject: **Yeah!**

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Mark....thanks for your article...a definite homerun. Although I was a "good boy" growing up, my parents always supported me and reared me in a way that caused me to "step out." I took on the challenge of a college summer job where I sold books door-to-door for eighty hours each week! The confidence and experience I gained from this still impacts my life 30 years later. One of my best pals and I went to Europe for 3 months just to bop around with a pack on our back during the fall of what should have been our junior year in college. We paid our way with our book sellin' proceeds and had an incredible experience. Many times since, I've had friends say they wish they'd done the book thing or the Europe thing. Or wish they'd started their own business. (The experiences of my youth gave me confidence to do that).

That's my story. I'm e-mailing YOURS to a bunch of parent/friends. Keep up the good work.

Dear Mark,

I just read your glorious (and hysterical) article in the Charlotte Observer that you sent me. Very, very entertaining and also sage advice. I can hardly wait to blow up my TV in the backyard with Peter and Loren. I KNEW we were saving for some good reason. (Take that, Fox news!)

Gotta get back to work. By the way, I think of you--and of course of your parents--on a regular basis. Your father has been a gigantic influence on me, and I try to imagine what he would do almost every day that I teach Research & Writing.

Dr. Pruett,

Thanks for your editorial in the Observer this morning. I too, long for the eighth grade student who has not been permanently anesthetized by standardized testing, overscheduled by doting parents, and are terrified of acquiring critical thinking skills. The mere thought of doing something own their own without necessary electronic devices is , well, archaic. I am fortunate to teach both tactile and thought skills and it still amazes me to see these two disciplines intertwine and show students that a skilled craftsman can be both writer and furniture maker. With your permission, I would like to use your piece as a fact/opinion writing catalyst during my observation by the downtown folks and see both student/administrator response. Thanks again for your work,

Enjoyed your column today in the *Charlotte Observer* bemoaning the lack of non-conformity (my term) among today's college students. I agree that "question authority" -- and everything else -- should be a prime motivator for kids of all ages. I too deplore the phenomenon of pre-programming children to behave according to a safe model. I did my best to instill a good sense of humor and anarchy into my daughters, now 21 and 24. They, fortunately, are smarter than their Dad. They have mastered the art of, as my younger daughter puts it, "nod and smile". In other words, don't rock the boat, put on a good face, be a good team player. This bodes well for their ability to retain employment. Alas, until the expression of healthy skepticism is accommodated by our economic and political system, you can hardly blame today's parents for succumbing to reality. Not many employees are protected from retaliation, and not everyone can become an entrepreneur.

Dear Editor:

ASU professor Mark Pruett says we are raising passive, incurious conformists when we need "stubbornly creative iconoclasts."

Alas, nurturing more of the latter is a tall order. Compulsory attendance and child-labor laws force children into the state schooling monopoly for most of their early years. There's little time for the "freedom, risk and a good measure of unstructured solitude" Pruett deems vital:

"The school system . . . has no place for the rugged individual," says Marshall McLuhan. School is "the homogenizing hopper into which we toss our integral tots for processing."

Thomas Alva Edison had but three months of formal schooling and one heckuva an early start on his 1,000 patents. Abraham Lincoln had one year (total) of formal education. Perhaps both boys' parents and their indifferent state governments were on to something.

Thanks! Finally some support for my 'intuition' vs. my parent's molding attempts. I'll share this with my HS English class. Can you direct me to the AAP report?

Thanks,

Grass Valley, CA

I just read your article "Raise children with a wild streak". I'm going to save this for a pep talk now and then. It is great.

We are an unschooling, dedicated to the type of education you describe. My kiddos are still tiny tots. This article will be a good fuel-up for me for years to come.

Thanks.

Steubenville, Ohio

Mr.. Pruett,

You need to off campus more. The kind of spirit you're looking for is drugged and/or manipulated for years before you see it - why it's unrecognizable to you. The school system environment and methodology produces mediocre, passive, followers - generation after generation. Few survive to be what you describe.

Parents appear to be the villains, but they are \*following\* the school system's directive, to be good, passive consumers (of television, products, video games, etc.). Yes, there is a problem, in fact, a crisis for our society. But you are blaming the wrong people. The culprit is much more difficult to reach and impossible to change.

You're writing to the wrong people.

I just had to tell you what a gift your viewpoint article in the Observer was. My daughter, a Dec. ASU graduate, just left last week with two other ASU graduates with one-way tickets to New Zealand. They have no definite plans except to backpack and get odd jobs and experience life to the fullest. As a parent, I've been worried sick and your article was just what I needed! ASU definitely taught her to take risks, be independent, and be curious about other places and their cultures. Thanks for helping my husband and I feel like successful parents!

ASU alumni (1975,1977)

Hi Mark-

My 6-year-old was talking about eating play dough this morning and wondering how it tastes and I thought of your article. This from the boy who had a two-week scissors time out because he came home from school three times this year with holes he cut into his shirts.

I enjoyed your article, I wish more parents thought like this.

Mark,

I loved the article you wrote in Monday's Charlotte Observer. My husband and I are raising a strong-minded, very intellectual free thinker with a wide wild-streak. Our 16- year-old was born premature and we were told he would die. Instead, he lived, began reading at 18 months old, and had a 132 IQ at 4 years old. (Our pediatrician forced us to have him tested because he had never seen anything like it.) We have always encouraged him to buck the system (within the framework of rules) and teachers don't like that. Zach's math tutor just told him not to come back because he didn't bow down to her. I taught first grade for 28 years and I loved free thinking six-year-olds, but most of my colleagues did **not**. The majority of Zach's classmates can spit the information back to teachers but have a deep fear of expressing their opinions or having an idea of their own. Obviously, he is not at all like them. I am delighted to see that your qualifications for scholarships give credit for thinking outside the box. Your students are extremely lucky. I am hoping that Zach will eventually find a job that rewards quirkiness. Elementary school teaching did not and I chafed under rules for my entire career. I am now retired.

Keep encouraging the wild ones. I empathize with them!

I am an App grad and I read your article in The Charlotte Observer "Raise children with a wild streak." I agree with what you have written, however I have a son that is a senior this year and has applied to ASU. He is a little above average student and plays (one) varsity sport. He and I have done a lot of the things you write about and have a great relationship. He is a very independent, intelligent, creative young adult. The problem is he has a very slim chance to be accepted at ASU. The issue is that the North Carolina University system does not look for balance kids. This is what forces parents to focus on all the quantitative, fluffy activities to put on a college app. I interview and hire young adults all the time and the lack of balance kids coming out of college worries me as an employer. We need creative, independent, interesting employees in the business world today. I do not want someone that always agrees with management, but challenges management to be better. Thanks for understanding.

Mr. Pruett, if you are still interviewing students for college scholarships, we will find you, so remember that name! Inventive? Check. Restless spirit? You bet. Excited to have in class? Absolutely. A flash of determination, streak of independence, creative passion, excited curiosity? Yes, yes, yes and yes again!!

I thoroughly enjoyed your article, and was right there along side, cheering you on. (Particularly that paying little attention to the rules part, and, yes, I see blown up electric appliances in our future.) We are fortunate to have a teacher this year who appreciates our son's passion, commenting that "he adds a lot of zest to our class," and I applaud whenever I read articles such as yours.

Dr Pruett

I want to say thanks for your Viewpoint article in the Charlotte Observer. It really speaks to an issue I am dealing with in our home and for me, was very opportune timing. I have a daughter going to Myers Park High School . She is a sophomore in the full IB course of study. My husband and I have always said "Hannah is the definition of outside the box". She loathed Barney, loved Captain Underpants and reads "The Onion". She is a talented musician playing several instruments and sings. She reads voraciously and loves debate and Teen Court. She has no free time. Her grades are great-but this year in pre-Calculus ( in 10th grade!) she has run into a teacher who goes so fast that many in this very advanced class are failing-so now we have added tutoring to her schedule. Her father and I do everything we can to support her in these endeavors. We are often exhausted.

Your article gave me 2 things; first, hope that kids like her are appreciated and valued. Second, the decision to send her on a trip to DC next month with her Religious School Confirmation Class and actually miss a day of school. Before I read your piece, I was on the verge of flying her there instead of sending her with the other kids on the bus. This will allow her to have fun and bond to other Jewish teens-a valuable experience in itself.

I know she will pay the price of a day missed from school, but as you said, perhaps this will rekindle some of her spontaneity, irreverence and joy?

I told a friend of mine about the effect your Viewpoint article had on my point of view and she congratulated me -saying "It is true, an old dog can learn new tricks". I guess I 'll take that as a compliment and I hope you will accept my thanks.

Subject: **"Raise Children with a Wild Streak"--Mark Pruett's column**

To: opinion@charlotteobserver.com

Cc: pruettmw@appstate.edu

To the Editor:

Kids not only lack a "mean streak", they're not even creative anymore. But again, what would you expect from parents who shield their kids from all risks, not even allowing their kids to ride their bicycles helmet-free or allow them to play tag?

"e need more students like the ones who leave after graduation to work as missionaries or in the Peace Corps. More like the ones who start successful businesses while in school. More like the ones who find the courage to go overseas for a summer or a semester because they know their own worlds are far too small."

I agree. However, considering the student loan and credit card debt that students generally have when they graduate, even those who would like to cannot afford it. Similarly, a summer or semester abroad is often economically out of reach. Financial aid programs seldom fund organized study programs, and taking a semester/summer/year off for world travel--even on a shoestring budget--is not only too expensive in and of itself but young people who do that will be dropped from their parents' health plan and will lose eligibility for financial aid. As for successful businesses started in school, between classes and bussing tables to pay tuition, who has time for that?



subject: **your article was fabulous!**

Thank you so much for your article on "Raising Children with a Wild Streak."

Wow! I can't tell you how much I am relieved to find that I am not the only adult in the universe who thinks kids don't need to be run through a gammut of AP classes, dozens of extracurriculars, "the right church," appropriate volunteer activities, etc. I was starting to think that I was lazy and my kids were directionless..... flamenco one year, soccer the next, starting a fairy house village the next... starting a pet sitting business the next... never the same thing twice...

Now I also feel better about letting my kids run around naked in the back yard when they were little!

If one of them ever lands at your University,.... I promise that they won't go outside naked anymore... I can't make any other promises though.

Thanks again - you made my day!

I read with great interest your article on high school students seeking scholarships. it is floating around some of the homeschool lists.

It's been my impression for a very long time that the American school system is developing "Plug-n-play" citizens. Sad, but true as your article so describes. It's one of the reasons my student is no longer in the school system. The student you are describing as being desireable, is a homeschooled student.

I write a small electronic newsletter that is starting to have a bit of a following, I am going to include a link to your article in our publication next month.

Article well done!

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Best Regards,

<http://www.brightkidsathome.com>  
<http://www.eclectictelegraph.com>

Dear Dr. Pruett -

I enjoyed your article, and beyond this, I found relief in it, both as a parent and as a teacher of poetry who consistently discovers a yearning in students to know what they're being educated for. Your article gives an idea of this what for, and of the pleasure to be found in living with gusto and appetite and adventure. Thank you.

Your words and vision also prompt me to share this link below, to a site that describes an internship program in the south of Costa Rica. My husband and I run it, and we're always looking for quirky, wild, lively students from all disciplines, who in fact not only know how to spend a day alone, but who would relish a few open-ended, rich, and creative months in a foreign country, working to conserve endangered rivers, and not working - sitting by these same rivers quietly.

Perhaps you might have quirky, creative students in mind?

<http://www.yale.edu/tri/partners/RioArte1.html>

Thanks again for voicing what too many parents feel, looking at their weary over-burdened children.

Dear Mark,

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your article this morning in the Charlotte Observer. You touched on something I have suspected for a while now...the kids we are raising live by the rules and have learned how "to play the game". We have praised high grades, community service and doing the right thing all the time. It sure makes life easier when parents can feel like they did their job well and their kids are the product of that.

I can say all that, because as hard as my husband and I tried to do the job right, we still somehow raised kids who buck the trend of the "perfect teenagers". Our son, a senior, is the one who brings home the report card full of C's...but under teacher comments it might say, "outstanding conduct" or "really enjoy this student". Even after having him tested and discovering his IQ is near genius...he has never really been motivated to apply himself. Was it interesting? Was it controversial? Was it different? These are the questions he lives life by. When he was younger, it was a big treat to let him go to Goodwill with \$5 to buy the most interesting electronic unit he could find...so he could take it apart...and yes, things did get blown up.

There has been much hand wringing and sleepless nights as I wondered over the years how he would ever get into a good college. My friends would always assure me that even if Josh didn't take the civilized method of being successful in life, his enthusiasm and quest for living would default in success somewhere, somehow.

As I write this, he has made plans to graduate mid-year and travel to Austria for a semester before attending university in the fall. At the music store he works for, he has earned top sales for part-time employees out of eighty-two stores. He also purchased a pair of those rollerskate shoes (online in size 11) and does his best not to get caught zipping around the hallways at his school. We've never worried about him using drugs or alcohol, and appreciate that he still likes to spend time with his family (on occasion :) But, he will likely never be an A student, will always push the limits and will likely always have a "wild streak". After reading your article, I can now admit I'm grateful.

Sincerely,

Dear Professor Pruett,

I enjoyed your article titled "Raise children with a wild streak" in a recent issue of The Charlotte Observer (<http://www.charlotte.com/mld/charlotte/news/15769490.htm>).

Do you retain the rights on your articles? If so, would you consider giving me permission to reprint your article for the next issue of my Carolina Homeschooler newsletter? I know that your article was not written to be a homeschooling article, but it truly validates everything we try to do as homeschoolers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmly,  
Dianna Broughton, Editor  
Carolina Homeschooler  
<http://www.carolinahomeschooler.com>

Mr. Pruett (Mark),

Hello! I just had to write after reading your "wild streak" article that was posted on the Carolina Homeschooler website.

I totally agree with your "philosophy of education." Our son, 8, is not involved in any planned extra curricular activities. We tried Little League baseball ....and he was too bored waiting in the outfield for the ball to come to him. He did Russian dancing and played in the grass to keep from falling asleep! We tried soccer but he spent most of the time pulling his shirt over his head to see if he could run and keep his eye on the ball with his hands straight above his head holding his shirt over his head, covering his eyes - he was 4 & 5 then. So, this year, no organized sports for our son until he shows a true interest in a sport...which may be never.

What our son loves to do every day: build forts with sticks and stones, create moats and roads in the mud filled with our well water and then get covered in mud so much that he truly needs a bath before bed, collects tadpoles saving them from our evaporating dry creek, creates "inventions" with all kinds of recycled materials, takes apart old baby toys to see how they make noise and music, takes apart computer keyboards and old phones to see how the wires connect...

I won't go on and on, but you get the point. Our son is a motivated learner - hands-on experiencing and living life every day. If we do have a family day with scheduled activities all day (which is rare), he complains that he has not had his free play time to think and invent!

I write you this because we live 5 minutes from Duke University, 10 minutes from UNC-CH and our area has a high concentration of adults with their doctorate degrees. My son's friends are so busy with soccer, violin, gymnastics, piano, etc. that it takes an act of congress for us to schedule a play date with a friend. One mother told us, "I am so sorry that we cannot do any play dates Monday through Friday, our daughter is just too busy." Too busy to play at age 7???? Our family swims "upstream" from the culture when it comes to raising "unhurried" children.

Our son does have goals that I am sure will change as he grows. Currently he desires to be an astronaut on the space shuttle (typical childhood dream), but here is the twist, he wants to be an astronaut on the space shuttle who has his medical degree, who is trained to conduct experiments on the shuttle to discover new medicines and invent new things/tools/equipment. Pretty cool!

The other amazing thing is that we adopted our son at the age of 15 months from a Russian orphanage in Siberia where he experienced TOTAL neglect and was never held. We decided to home school our son because he was having panic attacks at school and is having some stressed attachment issues. His orphanage trauma re-surfaced at age 6. He is healing as he spends more time with us at home. We have full confidence that he will totally recover from the first year of neglect because he is already an awesome, loving, bright and energetic child! (And his sister who is 10, is also quite creative. It has not been easy raising two energetic, test the limits, creative children...but it also is never a dull day at our home!)

Take care - I loved the article!!!! I am also truly concerned that this generation of children is too hurried and too stressed out by the age of 10.

P.S. Please excuse any grammitcal errors as I am not as bright as my children!! I graduated from UNC-CH and lived a somewhat hurried childhood myself!

Durham, NC

Subject: **Loved the article in Today's Observer**

Dear Mr. Pruett,

Interesting read...especially the part about giving teachers a gift - HAH. Teachers HATE kids like that. I know first hand from having four wild, wonderful kids. When my oldest, now 21, was in second grade I attended a talk for parents of newly selected "gifted" students.

The speaker was Ann Udall, then director of the CMS "gifted" program. And I will never forget that talk. Staring boldly out into that sea of smug yuppie faces, perched on the little tiny library chairs at Dilworth Elementary School, she said: "Most of your children are NOT gifted. They are GOOD STUDENTS. Most teachers, who get to choose the kids considered gifted, tend to be GOOD STUDENTS. Because of this, many of the gifted children in this school and in most schools will never be identified as gifted, and in fact may even *struggle* through school and never be thought of as any thing but a pain in the backside by most teachers." The silence was delicious!

Over the years whenever I have been a little embarrassed or defensive about the opinion held of one of my children by a GOOD STUDENT, I remember her words and they give me great strength and resolve. And I think her assertion may explain why you get to interview a steady stream of GOOD STUDENTS. It is no accident -- they know what the currency of success is now - it is conformity.

And colleges, even "hippy" ASU, feed this fire with gasoline. What if one of those "wild" children you long for applied for a scholarship? You would promptly and unceremoniously reject them!

But I hope that people like you who work in academia will start to realize (as your article suggests you do) that the future of the world is in big trouble if access to higher education and leadership opportunities is limited to the GOOD STUDENTS.

Thanks again for the article, I enjoyed it.

Regards,

I really appreciated your article about raising children with a wild streak since 3 of my 4 homeschooled children have that recessive gene. I jokingly call my near perfect nieces the "Stepford Children" (after the old movie the Stepford Wives) and feel so defeated after visiting with my inlaws and realizing that I am raising Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Pipi Longstockings .

When my son was in 1st grade in public school, his teacher always commented about his inability to stay focused, constantly challenging her suggestions and non-stop talking. Being concerned, I met with the guidance counselor to discuss the possibility of ADHD. The counselor agreed to meet with \_\_\_\_\_ a few times then get back with me. He told me during our next meeting that \_\_\_\_\_ was definitely not ADHD and that testing would be a waste of time. Surprised at his quick rush to judgement, ( and secretly wishing for a chemical cure for my wild child) I nearly passed out when he said, " Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, I believe you may be raising the next Bill Gates". My immediate response to him was, "yeah right! I could also be raising the next Unibomber! too"(I know perfectly well this can go either way)

Let's face it, most public school teachers like nice compliant,, bright and agreeable students (and honestly it makes it easier on us Moms too).As a mother and homeschooler, I've learned that trying to reign in a child to fit a perceived mold is not only exhausting ...it's counterproductive. It is refreshing to hear that my children's "uniqueness" might be appreciated and even desired by colleges. Thanks for your insight.

Canton, GA

Yes yes yes... we want our children to think, ask questions, think about what makes them happy and why. We want them to question the rules and authority and to dare to make a difference. We want them to be brave enough to make a stand and be in trouble for the right reasons. Unless they learn to run the world through their own filter they are sheep in the world just wondering about.

Filling up all of the children's time doing rather than being leaves them little time to figure out who they are. How can they know what they believe if they don't know who they are. Such greatness can come from boredom. Why deny them that space? Are we so afraid they will choose to be themselves instead of being us that we will give them no choice?

We homeschool so that we can give the children copious amounts of time to fill as they will. We have creative, thoughtful, children who will know what they believe and who they are. We are not trying to keep up with Jeniffer or Johnny next door... we are not part of the factory environment. WE don't care if they don't look like everyone else.

It is nice to hear academics stand up and say kids need time to be kids.

Dr. Elizabeth Klein

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Your article was e-mailed to me by another homeschooling Mom. What you've written is what we know and the reason why we chose not to send our children to school. It's insane that kids are indoors for 6 hours or more a day and then come home to do yet more reading and writing.

I have five kids, all of whom have taken college classes -- and all have done well after never having spent any time in a classroom prior to the college experience. We never followed curriculums, didn't enforce school lessons, and yet every one of them has known what they needed to do to get the most out of their college experiences. My oldest daughter rode her bike solo across country when she was seventeen, taught herself how to cook, and just started cooking at a vegetarian restaurant. My oldest son traveled to Alaska and Hawaii when he was 16 and 17 and is now a firefighter out west. My younger daughter is taking a semester off from college to immerse herself in the Spanish language in Spain -- and on and on.

The only difference between my kids and other kids is that my kids had the time they needed to figure out what they wanted to do with themselves.

Dear Mr. Pruett,

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciated your article on raising a child with a wild streak. I can't agree with you more. I am a full-time mother of four children. I teach creative writing classes in my home to children and teens. My students all fit your ideal. They are curious, energetic, creative, and ambitious. They love to read. They love to play. Their parents take them on field trips everywhere just for the fun of it. And most importantly, these kids love to learn.

What is so special about them? These kids are homeschooled. I have homeschooled my own kids for eight years. This year my 12 year old announced she wanted to "try" public school. She's attending eighth grade at the local junior high. She is enjoying being with all her friends, but often reports to me how boxed in she feels in the classroom. There is no spontaneity, no individualism, no heart to her education. I've been in her school and I remember what it was like being in school myself as one of thirty others crammed together desk to desk like sardines in a can. Everyone does the same thing, must give the same answers. Though my daughter is by no means a straight A student, she is fiercely independent, unwaveringly self-confident, and insists on doing things her way.

Quite frankly, I'm proud of her. At eight years old she created her own candy-making business and sold homemade chocolates to help pay for her violin. She has earned a black belt in karate. She is an accomplished pianist. She also loves rock music, hangs out with her friends, and is the only girl in our neighborhood who can skateboard. She knows she is different from the other girls at school and she doesn't care one whit.

I suspect this is the kind of thing you were talking about in your article. I know dozens and dozens of kids like that. And they've all been homeschooled.

I applaud your article. I'm going to keep it and show it to everyone I know. And I sure hope your university accepts homeschoolers, because who knows -- my daughter might apply there one day.

hi mark,

i could not agree more with your article in the charlotte observer...i like your ideas...

...like many other 'things' in life, there's a tendency to over rate 'education' as many 'forget' about the real, enduring and durable kind of learning, the kind of learning that comes with some measure of freedom and a wild streak to try new things and to do old things differently...as you say, to take risks...

...didn't someone say, 'so much education, so little wisdom...'

...as homeschoolers, it is a balancing act for us here in singapore...

my boys, 7 and 6 do not attend mainstream schools (we have to apply for permission to be exempt from the compulsory education act), and i try very hard to give as much free and exploratory time to read, imagine and manipulate whatever that comes to mind! and my boys, in my opinion, are the better for it and original, so to speak...

...'unfortunately', when it comes to testing time, i am 'forced' to teach to the test...make them practise taking tests, etc...and my boys, i know, will become pretty good test-takers...

have a blessed christmas...all the best...

, a singaporean

My wife and I enjoyed your article "Raise Children with a Wild Streak" that appeared in today's Charlotte Observer.

We are fortunate to have two children that have a lot of the attributes you say are missing in college applicants you see. One of them is a 5 1/2 year Senior at App (due to changing his course of study) . He is majoring in Graphic Design with minors in Computer Science and Business. You may see him on campus as he is quite recognizable with his red, spiked mohawk. This is from a young man who never wanted to stand out through out his K - 12 years but on the eve of his departure for college, dyed his normally brown hair a bright red (with help from his mom). As a pre-schooler, he didn't want a coloring book, rather a blank sheet of paper and his crayons suited him fine. My wife was distressed one day when his pre-school teacher called her to say that he didn't color inside the lines on coloring book pages. My wife felt that she had failed him somewhat in this respect because she had never told him that it was a requirement to color within the lines. So, if you see a 6' tall guy on campus with a spiked, red mohawk, please say "Hi" as I'm sure he would like to talk to you. His name is Chase Gordon and a poster of him buying a book is currently on display in the bookstore.

Our other child is a girl who is a Senior at UNC. She is a determined, yet independent person majoring in Biology and Math (her idea! - because she likes both) who on her own initiative decided in her junior year that she would study abroad for a semester. A number of her friends were heading to the UK or Europe to study and we assumed she would go there also. But no, she decided to go to Australia. Here was a person we always thought of a non-risktaker deciding to go half way around the world to study without knowing anyone there. She chose the college to attend, planned the trip, and spent almost six months there on her own. We found that this non-risktaker, while in Australia and New Zealand, went parachuting, walked on a glacier, went hang gliding, and snorkeled on the great Barrier Reef (seeing sharks, rays, and sea turtles in the process). Some of these we knew of before hand and some (skydiving!) we learned of after the fact. Just tonight she stated, since she is in a quandary over what to do upon graduation, that she is seriously considering signing up for a ten month tour with Americorps. After reading your article today, we are a little more accepting of this possibility than when it was first mentioned.

In summary, we agree with your article and wanted you to know that there are young adults out there that do have the attributes you feel are needed. Also, there are a number of their friends that have these attributes.

Mr. Pruett,

My mom sent me your article about children with a wild streak with the subject heading "Does this sound like you?" I have to admit, it certainly does. I've always been very independent, and my parents fostered that with books, a bike, and free reign of the backyard.

After

two years in a Waldorf-style preschool, I was home schooled all my life (except for two weeks in public school as punishment), graduated at 16, went to a community college for three semesters, and am now at St. Olaf college planning to graduate in three years. I love traveling-- when I was 16 I went to Spain for two weeks alone and had a great time, which is part of the reason I chose this school. I've found it to be a really

good fit for me-- people don't stare when I come into church with lace-up leather boots peeking out under my skirt. I know college is a time to express oneself, and I feel that many people aren't taking advantage of the opportunity.

I was wondering if you thought that the school system is conducive to creating the kind of environment needed to produce, well, interesting

kids? To me, everything seems so mainstream and boring. I have a lot of friends who were in public schools, and I have a lot of friends who were home schooled, and the home schooled ones are by far quirkier. I know that the stereotype of children who have been home schooled is that

we are socially inept, but that is usually only if the family is extremely religious (and mine isn't). It seems to me that the alternatives of either over scheduled activities or both parents working

molds children in the school system to be essentially clones (albeit clones that excel at different things).

I think that homeschooling really allows the child to find activities they enjoy. How many applicants do you interview who have been home schooled? What is your impression of them? Do they have wider varieties of interests? I'm really curious to see how we compare to the rest of the country.

Subject: **"Raise Children with a Wild Streak"--Mark Pruett's column**

To: [opinion@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:opinion@charlotteobserver.com)

Cc: [pruettmw@appstate.edu](mailto:pruettmw@appstate.edu)

To the Editor:

The reason that kids don't get to experience a "wild streak" is because their parents have organized their lives 24/7. However, the reason parents do this isn't necessarily to benefit the child, but to satisfy their own ego. This, in turn, is because the parents see their children not as separate beings, but as extensions of their own selves.

What parents need to do is let go of their kids. Of course, I don't mean let them run wild with no supervision or discipline whatsoever. I simply mean to let their kids be kids. Let them play on their own with their peers. The result will be creative, energetic, well-adjusted kids, who will be that way because their parents had the strength to let their kids be kids.

Sincerely,

Charlotte, North Carolina



Mr. Pruett,

I very much enjoyed your recent article in the Charlotte Observer (Raise Children with a Wild Streak).

We're actively involved with the unschooling "movement"---for lack of a better term---and we have seen many of the same things you have.

My 18 year old son leapt out of private, college-prep school at the end of sixth grade---already with some of these same signs you wrote of. He took over 18 months to "deschool"---to heal from the overwhelming structure of his schooled life. That year and a half was mostly spent sleeping, watching TV, playing on the computer, and talking to friends on the phone. It was painful to watch, but he desperately needed to decompress from the stress of the previous eight years in elementary school.

He slowly began to blossom and come out of the darkness that had enveloped him.

Our initial goal for his education was run-of-the-mill, traditional prep school-to-college-to-grad school. Dotting all the i's and crossing all the t's. Over-extend to over-impress.

But as he progressed in school, we watched him sink lower and lower within himself. We watched him go from bright and curious to dull and bored. Grades were arbitrary. Learning wasn't FUN any more; learning was a chore and something to be avoided. By sixth grade, he was done.

We chose to pull him out and homeschool him. My research led to UNschooling, a word/movement coined by John Holt, an educator and school reformer of the 60s and 70s. We haven't looked back.

Unschooling is simply learning with passion. With curiosity. Without coercion.

Unschooling has led him to rediscover himself---at a very young age. Most of his schooled friends haven't even begun that journey.

He's been to Australia, Seattle, Germany, London & Scotland, Vermont, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and Oregon without us. That doesn't begin to touch where we've gone as a family. He's formed two small businesses and pursues music and art with a passion. He's at a friend's house right now learning to bake bread (not one of my strengths!) and leaves tonight at 7:00 to play Blue Grass at the Evening Muse in Charlotte.

He's interested and interesting.

There are not enough hours in a day, days in a week, and weeks in a year to do all he wants to do. He can't inhale it all fast enough!

My only issues with your article: your suggestion to "make" children do things. We've never "made" him play hooky---"Hooky" is his life! We've never "made" him cook supper or clean the house---he's eager to do that on his own because we model a love of cooking and cleaning for each other---they aren't "chores."

And video games: Cameron has never gotten into them, but our younger son loves them. They are no less educational than books---there's LOTS of learning in games. They're full of interactive learning---not passive, like books. Books are wonderful; book worship is not. In \*our\* world, EVERYTHING is educational!

Thank you for your thoughtful article! Best of luck at AppState!

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I read your article in the Charlotte Observer and had to write to you. You've describe our son to a tee. He is curious, inventive, and quite independent for his age. He loves to explore, visit the library, and find out how things work. He is five years old, and I've got to tell you I don't know how we're going to make it through school. He's in kindergarten right now at a local public school, and it worries me that he'll lose his curious creative spirit before he ever goes to college.

In public school you have to color in the lines, or you're made fun of. In public school there is no time for exploration because the teachers have x number of days to prepare the children for the test. In public school inventiveness is frowned on while conformity is encouraged. Curiosity ? The teachers don't have time. Independence is not nearly as important as speed and neatness, in public school.

I don't know why we're sending our son to public school. Why would anyone send their child somewhere they might lose their natural curiosity ? One answer is the state law that all children have to go to school. I've thought about home-schooling our son, but that can be as expensive as private school. There has got to be a better answer for parents. I guess the state of NC needs to get the elementary teachers and the college professors on the same page.

So, I'm open to suggestions. I want to encourage our son to be curious and creative, but Monday-Friday we have very little time left after school and school work are done.

I just finished reading your article entitled "Raise Children with a Wild Streak". As a homeschooling mother of 5, I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed your perspective. It is refreshing to know that folks like yourself are looking for more than the "standard resume".

We are all ready doing many of the activities outlined in your article. I got a chuckle out of your chemistry idea of blowing up a television in the backyard. Although we do own a television, it is only used for the occasional movie and for watching NOVA as a family every Tuesday night.

My oldest son had some medical issues that got me started on the homeschooling path, but I continue to homeschool because it allows me to provide much of what you suggest in your article. I want my children to know themselves and to discover what their passions are. I want them to have time to pursue their passions. I don't want them selecting activities because it looks good for college. I want them to have experiences beyond same-age peer groups. In my mind that just can't be accomplished with a school day that is 7 hours long, containing only 15 minutes of free time. Not to mention the after school time that would be taken up by homework or extra-curricular activities.

I don't mean to sound as if I am bashing public schools as I am sure that there are many public school systems out there doing admirable jobs. Unfortunately South Carolina's public schools leave much to be desired in my most humble opinion.

Anyways, I thoroughly enjoyed your article and I thank you for having put my mind at ease a bit. I am worrying less about college applications and interviews now.

I wanted to let you know I really enjoyed your article "Raise Children with a Wild Streak", I found it thought provoking and I believe you have hit on an important problem with today's parents and teachers. This is one reason we've decided to unschool our children.

However, I do believe that your quote "surround them with books, not video games", is, how do I say this, ancient thinking. Don't get me wrong, my family LOVES books, and are all avid readers. But we also LOVE video games. My husband is a computer guy, and he basically troubleshoots systems all day, and gets paid for it, video gaming is troubleshooting. Too isolated? Both my children play with their friends via a wifi connection, get together with friends to play video games and even call or email one another to discuss video games. Video games taught my son to read, he gets stuck and needs to look up cheat codes, he orders magazines to see the latest game coming out, etc. Too stationary? You've never played dance revolution then! Too violent? There are plenty of games that aren't violent and well, in Disney and many children's books, most parents are dead! :-D

Have you ever read Steve Johnson's book *Everything Bad is Good for You*? I think you'd find it very interesting, but here is a quote I love from it:

"Imagine an alternate world identical to ours save one techno-historical change: video games were invented and popularized before books. In this parallel universe, kids have been playing games for centuries—and then these page-bound texts come along and suddenly they're all the rage. What would the teachers, and the parents, and the cultural authorities have to say about this frenzy of reading? I suspect it would sound something like this:

Reading books chronically under-stimulates the senses. Unlike the longstanding tradition of gameplaying—which engages the child in a vivid, three-dimensional world filled with moving images and musical soundscapes, navigated and controlled with complex muscular movements—books are simply a barren string of words on the page. Only a small portion of the brain devoted to processing written language is activated during reading, while games engage the full range of the sensory and motor cortices.

Books are also tragically isolating. While games have for many years engaged the young in complex social relationships with their peers, building and exploring worlds together, books force the child to sequester him or herself in a quiet space, shut off from interaction with other children. These new 'libraries' that have arisen in recent years to facilitate reading activities are a frightening sight: dozens of young children, normally so vivacious and socially interactive, sitting alone in cubicles, reading silently, oblivious to their peers.

Many children enjoy reading books, of course, and no doubt some of the flights of fancy conveyed by reading have their escapist merits. But for a sizable percentage of the population, books are downright discriminatory. The reading craze of recent years cruelly taunts the 10 million Americans who suffer from dyslexia—a condition didn't even exist as a condition until printed text came along to stigmatize its sufferers.

But perhaps the most dangerous property of these books is the fact that they follow a fixed linear path. You can't control their narratives in any fashion—you simply sit back and have the story dictated to you. For those of us raised on interactive narratives, this property may seem astonishing. Why would anyone want to embark on an adventure utterly choreographed by another person? But today's generation embarks on such adventures millions of times a day. This risks instilling a general passivity in our children, making them feel as though they're powerless to change their circumstances. Reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one. The book readers of the younger generation are learning to 'follow the plot' instead of learning to lead."

A parody, I know, but you have to admit...a pretty good one! Again, I really did enjoy your