

Podcast 538: 1000 Hours Outside Challenge with Amy Wormald

Episode Transcript

Amy Wormald: You know, we've done now all kinds of outdoor adventures and challenges, but the thing that they have clung to the most is just their outdoor backyard small memories, and that's been pretty impactful for us too.

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, welcome to the middle of July.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, it's generally hot in most places, certainly in Oklahoma.

Julie Walker: Well, I know where it's not brutally hot.

Andrew Pudewa: The beach.

Julie Walker: The beach, yes, yes. It's a great, great place to raise your kids, and that's what I did when I was homeschooling my kids.

Andrew Pudewa: I grew up on the beach.

Julie Walker: And you grew up at Catalina Island

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And then we had a good ten years not too far from the beach.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: And then we left.

Julie Walker: Well, our conversation today is a little bit about your talk, *Nature Deficit Disorder*, and a lot about this idea of 1,000 hours outside.

Andrew Pudewa: Our good friend Ginny Yurich has written a book by that title, I believe.

Julie Walker: And we had her as a guest on our podcast.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, and some people have tried and found it's pretty darn difficult to actually do 1,000 hours outside in one year's time. But I mean, if you could, I'd like to do that.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: I think I got 1,000 hours in airports at this point in the summer.

I, I don't know how, I don't know how many, but it seems like it's just gone on and on.

Julie Walker: Yes. Yes. Well, every year your travel schedule is pretty brutal, Andrew. Yeah. So I want to let listeners, that we have a guest on our podcast, and if you are familiar with our *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, second edition, you will know this person, at least maybe not by name, but certainly by face.

We have someone as a guest on our podcast, Amy Wormald. So Amy, thank you for joining us today.

Amy Wormald: Thank you so much for having me.

Julie Walker: Amy has been a longtime family friend of the Walkers. In fact, her mom and I homeschooled our kids together 'cause I had boys, Debbie had girls, and so this was like the brother-sister thing. And you know Amy, I know you know what I'm going to say.

We had always hoped that perhaps that would actually happen. But that's okay. Amy has three adorable children, and I have a couple of grandchildren. So now your mom and I, Amy, are scheming to get maybe a couple of our grandkids married off.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, when I was doing those classes at Biola, your kids were in those classes. Was Amy in a class?

Julie Walker: Yes, she was.

Andrew Pudewa: So, because I remember knowing her when she was like early teens or something, and then she grew up, started teaching in a school. Do you remember what I said to you when you were going to go teach middle school science?

Amy Wormald: Yes, I was going to teach middle school science in California, and you said that I better be careful and get a shapeless frock. That way I can keep all of the boys in line.

Andrew Pudewa: shapeless frock. Otherwise, those poor middle school boys are going to be distracted beyond their means. But that was just my humorous comment at the time. You really haven't aged much at all, I'll tell you that.

Amy Wormald: Oh, well, thank you. Thank you. You both as well. It's great to be here.

Andrew Pudewa: No, I look old. I know that. But that's okay. I have 19 grandchildren, so I should look old/

Julie Walker: Well then, since I only have three, I should look young.

Andrew Pudewa: You do.

Julie Walker: Okay, well I'll just take that and off we go. So Andrew, you had said it's hard to get those 1,000 hours, and Amy did it last year.

Andrew Pudewa: What inspired you to undertake this kind of ambitious goal, and when did you start? And tell a little bit of the beginning of it.

Amy Wormald: Yeah, sure. So my family definitely enjoys being outside, and as Julie mentioned, I have three young kids spanning from five to ten now, and we decided to take on this challenge three years ago. I came across this, and we decided to start tracking our outdoor time, and I will admit that originally, I thought that we were doing plenty of outdoor time until I started actually tracking it, and we used Ginny's app to track our outdoor time together.

And so the middle of our first year trying this challenge, we realized quite quickly that we might not make the 1,000 hours, and I was really encouraged by the community just to take the idea of progress over perfection and really run with that. So we modified our first year to try to get 500 hours, and we did end up doing that, and the second year we attempted this, we increased it to 750 hours for the year.

And then we got really close to our 1,000 hours that year, but then not quite. And so this last year in 2025, we finally did it. We hit our 1,000 hours outside, and so it's been a really fun trajectory of just making really small changes over time that yielded bigger results. And so for us, that was our story of getting to this, this place.

Andrew Pudewa: So doing a little mental math, which I like doing, I'm thinking that this is somewhere around like 2 hours and 45 minutes a day average. Is that in the ballpark?

Amy Wormald: Yes. Well, what you will know probably about me that I do not love doing mental math, but I will say that we have found that we actually needed to take the whole year into account because we have now seen that historically we have months where we're not outside very much, like the month of December, for example. We have lots of Christmas parties indoors and things like that. And so we've actually accounted for the heat and the seasons and kind of our own personal lives, and we've realized that July is actually, that's coming up, it's our do or die month. We actually have to do more than an average. So we actually have a different average for every month for our family daily because we know that, some months it's just not as possible to get outside for, like, a certain amount of hours for the whole year.

Andrew Pudewa: Now you said the first year you modified it and you hit about 500 hours, and then next year you increased. So you must have seen some benefits from the 500 that first year, that inspired you to try for another year increasing. What were some of the significant things that maybe you expected to happen or maybe some things that you didn't expect and were pleased or surprised by?

Amy Wormald: Yeah, that's a great question. So I would say one thing that I was surprised at was it was kind of difficult to get my kids outside initially, but then once they were outside, it was easier for them to linger. And so we just started adding five minutes more. Let's just linger at this play date a little bit longer, at this park a little bit longer.

And one benefit I would say is their behavior naturally improves when they're outside. They are siblings, and as all siblings do, they bicker and have some challenges interpersonally. But when they're outdoors, a lot of that just really naturally diminishes. And so we found that.

We also, as a family, really love the idea of a slow childhood. And so being outside kind of yields that boredom sometimes that can also then increase creativity. And so we actually like the idea of our kids being bored sometimes and being outside in the backyard. They have to construct their play. They have to come up with things to do if they know they need to be out there for a little while. So we definitely saw some huge benefits from being outdoors more, not just with health and air quality and those type of things, but also just in their own creative, efforts and then also just their behavior too.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, I know that, I know this about Amy just because family friends for a very long time, but I'm not sure you know how committed she and her husband are to keep their kids from screens. And so I know that in your talk, *Nature Deficit Disorder*, you mentioned that a, a young boy didn't want to go outside because that's, he wants to be indoors because that's where the plugs are.

Andrew Pudewa: That was in Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*. He did some interviewing of children and put that into the book. I know Ginny knows that book. So, you have a backyard at your home, and does being in the backyard count?

Amy Wormald: Yes. So the nice thing about the 1000 Hours Outside challenge is every family can interpret it in their own way, what works best for them. For me, backyard time absolutely counts. Any time we're in fresh air. Obviously in an ideal situation, we would be in the woods, in nature, fully immersed.

But the reality is for my family, sometimes outdoor time looks like being in the dirt at baseball. It looks like being in concrete, taking a 20-minute walk around the neighborhood. So in an ideal situation, yes, but for our family, any time outdoors in fresh air counts. My kids have taken to camping in the backyard. We'll count that as outdoor time. So yeah, it's one of their favorite memories. In fact, it's kind of sweet. When I asked my kids, we've done now all kinds of outdoor adventures and challenges, but the thing that they have clung to the most is just their outdoor, backyard, small memories, and that's been pretty impactful for us, too, just to see that, yes, they love the big adventures. They love those huge beach days, but the things that are really the most memorable to them are bouncing on the trampoline outside or camping in a tent in our backyard. And I will say, our backyard is very small, so it's not an expansive place, but yes, for our family, even eating outdoors at a restaurant or taking a book outside, any of that counts for us.

Andrew Pudewa: You said your backyard is very small. It reminds me, I took one of my children to go and visit the home where I grew up and it's really interesting because I grew up...

Julie Walker: In Southern California. Okay

Andrew Pudewa: And when I went to visit it as an adult, my memory was that it was much larger and that the yard was much larger, and now it seemed as an adult, I think that's a pretty small place. So children who are half the size, the space is twice as big,

So you don't need a lot of space. I also remember, you reminded me, I don't have a lot of clear memories of being about five years old, but one of them definitely is that I had a tent in the backyard in Torrance. We lived in Torrance at, when I was five, then we moved to Palos Verdes. But I used to sleep in that tent in the backyard.

Julie Walker: At five years old

Andrew Pudewa: At five years old. I think my parents were a little, I don't know, less worried about the world as many parents are today. But it was a backyard, and it was fenced in. But it actually makes me want to buy a tent and sleep outside with grandchildren so they can do that.

Julie Walker: Well, let the grandchildren do it, Andrew. I know that being comfortable is more important as you get older, right?

Andrew Pudewa: It is, but I need to give myself a goal. Like, maybe I could get 100 hours outside. Since you can set your own goals, I should probably get the app and just start tracking. What other kinds of places did you find were particularly apt for going to or being at where there was that beautiful balance between boredom and creativity, and then an environment that stimulated the creativity?

Amy Wormald: Yeah. Well, I will place the caveat that where I'm at it's pretty warm in the summer, and so anytime we can add water, it's always a benefit because

Julie Walker: Well, I just want to say, you've got this lovely beachy background there, but you're hours from the beach? Yeah, they're in the desert, so it gets pretty hot, yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: And even if it was close, it's Southern California, so traffic.

Amy Wormald: Yes, that's

Andrew Pudewa: go ahead, water

Amy Wormald: Yeah, so I would say anytime we can add water, we've found that that's really helpful for extending the play. Also just the sensory input from water is great, and just as, like, a sidebar, I will also say, just circling back to one of your previous questions about benefits that we've seen from being outdoors, two of my kids have more sensory sensitivities, and they've participated in occupational therapy and some other supports.

And this last year, we dropped OT for my daughter because we enrolled her in a homeschool. They homeschool. My kids homeschool, and we enrolled her in a homeschool nature class so that she is by a lake and having some of these more natural opportunities more often. And we found that that was really beneficial.

Of course, her homeschool teacher for that class is great and has supported her through that. But that's been another huge just benefit that we've seen. But I would say anytime we can add water, anytime we can add friends, that is great. That positive peer pressure when they see somebody else stomping in a rain puddle, they're more apt to jump in, too, and then also not being afraid to change the location.

So we've made a list of all of our local parks, and we have now visited all the local parks, but sometimes they are done pretty quickly, and then we move on to a different park. So just not being afraid to change it up. But one place that's new to my kids is, we have a new skate park, and so they've been taking their scooters and their skateboards, and they've been kind of experimenting and, and getting more used to the pump track there.

So that's been a fun new place, but definitely not on a day like today, where it's 100 and the asphalt is really hot. That's... Today is more of a water day. But yeah, there's been a lot of different places that we can go, but I do think adding in friends and also just having... We have friends that also are doing the challenge too, and that always helps, just having that positive peer pressure.

Julie Walker: That's a great idea, yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: You mentioned stomping in puddles, and there's certain behaviors that seem extremely typical of young children, boys in particular, stomping in puddles. Another one I noticed, and I'm wondering if you've noticed this, that boys even up to 12 or so, if they are walking along a path, they will find a stick,

Julie Walker: Oh, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: right?

And then they will use the stick to whack anything that is within whackable distance as they are walking along the path.

Julie Walker: Anyone, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And I was watching my six-year-old grandson doing this. We were in an archery thing in the forest, and he's whacking, and I just thought, "No one ever taught him to do that. It's an instinct." But then I thought, that whacking, making noise, stomping, like that's a natural repellent to predators and snakes and things. Like if some snake was around and heard everything getting whacked, that snake would get out of there. So it made me realize this is maybe an instinctive survival thing, and even though moms don't quite get it, and it's kind of irritating when the whacking is happening too close to you, it's probably an ancient embedded instinct, for boys to protect all, all around them.

Amy Wormald: Well, Andrew, I will say that we have a stick collection. We pick up sticks wherever we go, and my son has started whittling so he definitely has now like pointed sharp sticks too. So we, but we love it.

Andrew Pudewa: If the noise doesn't repel the predator, it's skewer time.

Amy Wormald: Yes. Yes

Andrew Pudewa: Have there been any moments of danger or fear or concern that caused you to think, "Ooh, maybe this isn't great," or do you just say, "Well, this is just part of it. This is part of the adventure"?

Amy Wormald: That's a great question. I would say there have been two times with coyotes, who are kind of my nemesis. I am not a fan of coyotes, and we have a dirt path that extends through our neighborhood, a small trail, and we ride our bikes on the dirt path. And so my son is 10 now, and we're definitely giving him some more freedom because that's part of our parenting philosophy, incorporating some risk and allowing for safe risk to happen.

So we were letting him ride quite a bit ahead, and there was a coyote that came in the path and I realized, I'm not close enough that I can intervene, and it wasn't needed. The coyote ran away, it was fine. But it just... There's been a couple moments like that. My daughter thought a coyote was a dog one time and wanted to run over and pet the dog.

So there have been some times where there's learning opportunities. It hasn't made me want to stop being outdoors. It's just made me realize that sometimes we need some education beforehand, you know? Like, "This is a coyote. Let's not go near it. Let's not touch it." And like knowing what to do if you do encounter things. 'Cause in real life, we're all going to encounter obstacles and potential dangers, and having those small risks now I feel like will help them when they encounter bigger risks in their personal lives when they're older.

Andrew Pudewa: Good. I am reminded of the book *Bud and Me*, and I mentioned this in the *Nature Deficit* talk. Do you know this book, Aimee, Bud and Me?

Amy Wormald: No. And I'm an avid reader, so I have to add this to my list.

Julie Walker: This is for your son, Amy

Andrew Pudewa: Well, with a caveat. This is the story of the Abernathy brothers who sometime in the first decade of the 1900s, when they were literally seven and five years old, they rode their horses from Oklahoma City to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Their father took the train, and they all met and had dinner with the governor.

And the next year, when they were eight and six, they rode their horses from Oklahoma City to New York, and their father took a train, and they had dinner with Teddy Roosevelt. And then the next year, they were nine and seven, and some magazine that got wind of this thing, because they were very famous at the time, offered them some sum of money to ride their

horses by themselves from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and this is the story of many of the adventures they had along the way. And it's just mind-blowing. As I was reading this, I thought, "Where is the mother?" Like, how... Their father was the U.S. Marshal for Western Oklahoma, I think, or Oklahoma Territory or whatever. And I just thought, "This is mind-blowing level of

Julie Walker: Freedom?

Andrew Pudewa: freedom, adventure, danger, confidence." Like, few children would ever have that thing, that type of experience in this modern world. But it gives you a vision of the competence and capabilities of children, and I think we, sometimes we need to be reminded that young children, put in circumstances that require it, can be very resourceful and intelligent.

Julie Walker: Yep. Well, and I have heard her, Amy say several times in our conversation, "We," and, "I," and so congratulations to you, Amy, for getting your 1,000 hours outside. And did you get a prize?

Amy Wormald: Well, so I will say that as a family, we set the goal that if we made it to 1,000 hours, my kids wanted a gigantic cake with sprinkles with 1,000 written on it. And then secondly, they wanted to go on an adventure. So as a family, we did that. They got gigantic slices of cake, and we went to, ironically, an indoor water park at Great Wolf Lodge to celebrate. But yes, as a family, we did celebrate, and it's been really great for all of us just to extend our time outside.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, hopefully you will have some opportunity to travel across the country a bit and stop and visit us in Tulsa, Oklahoma. We have the best city park in the whole country.

Julie Walker: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: And all sorts of interesting lakes and trails and, and things. We do, however, have ticks and chiggers.

Julie Walker: and a lot of heat,

Andrew Pudewa: and a lot of heat.

Julie Walker: especially in July and August.

Andrew Pudewa: But if it doesn't kill you, it'll make you tougher, right?

Amy Wormald: Yes, that's right. No, I would love to visit. Thank you. It's a great place and, even with those pests, we feel like it's worth the outcome, just with a little preparation.

Julie Walker: Yep. Well, thank you, Amy, for being a part of our podcast today, and, hopefully you will be an inspiration for some of our listeners to... I mean, it's the middle of the year. Maybe they could get a couple hundred hours.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, set your own goal.

Julie Walker: Set your own goal. Right. Right. And we'll put some links in the show notes for the app that Amy was referring to, and of course, to Ginny's books.

Amy Wormald: And I would also encourage them, they could start at any time. You don't have to start in January. Your year could start now as well, and you could.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that's right. You could start your year whenever you're... There's a fiscal year. Why not have an outdoor year?

Julie Walker: Yeah, there you go.

Andrew Pudewa: You start at any date. Okay

Julie Walker: Sounds great.

Amy Wormald: Just jump in. Thank you so much for having me today. It's been a pleasure.

Julie Walker: Thank you,

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you. God bless you

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