Nothing is better for a little boy than turning off the TV, going outside and getting dirty. They know it's been a good day when there's a dirty ring around the bath tub, and they fall asleep before their head hits the pillow.

That never changes for some of us.

When the warm weather arrives, I sometimes find myself looking out the window of my office like an inmate staring through the bars of a prison cell. Don't get me wrong, I love my job, but sometimes I feel like moving all of the furniture in my office outside.

When the days get longer in the springtime, my son knows he doesn't have to ask if we can go fishing or find something fun to do outdoors when we get home. We usually change clothes as quickly as possible and race out the door with my wife Jamie shouting instructions such as "be careful" and "don't be late for supper" in the background.

On Saturday we didn't have to worry about making it home before supper got cold because we would be cooking it ourselves. Hot dogs cooked over a fire was the only thing on the menu.

James got an indoor play camping set for Christmas, and he has been wanting to experience the real thing ever since. I've "camped out" with him a few times in the living room and usually woke up around 3 a.m. with a sore back from sleeping on the floor. Jamie and I took him camping with us a couple of years ago, and although he had a lot of fun early on, he woke up crying in the middle of the night and we had to pack everything up and go back home.

James was so excited that his eyes got big every time we mentioned camping last week. I was pretty excited myself, and my only concern was whether or not he would make it through the night. But there's nothing more relaxing for me than a night under the stars, so I was willing to take the risk.

After a little fishing, we built a big fire and Jamie and baby sister Elsie joined us for hot dogs before heading home. After the girls left, it was quiet except for the many sounds of the outdoors.

James was fascinated as I explained what creatures were making the sounds we were hearing. If you just sit back and listen to the sounds of nature, it's like listening to a symphony orchestra.

It was so peaceful to be away from computers, television and telephones for a little while. Sitting by the fire, James and I talked more than we ever have before.

I got a lot of insight into his four-year-old mind. I was surprised at how much he remembered as he talked about things we did a couple of years before.

I was even more surprised to see how much he understands. James lost both of his living

great-grandmothers this year, and he has had a lot of questions about death lately. His explanation about how they are in Heaven now and how we'll be joining them someday was not only accurate in my mind, but it was also refreshingly simple and straight to the point.
On a lighter note, he also asked questions about the opposite sex.
"Why do girls always get mad about stuff," he asked.
"They don't always get mad about stuff, son, but you'll spend most of your life trying to figure out what makes them happy," I responded. "I'm still learning about that myself. Fortunately for us, a sincere effort is usually enough."
We talked about many other matters before we finally retired to the tent, but the biggest surprise of the night came when James apologized for his behavior at a wedding reception we had attended earlier that afternoon. He had a meltdown during the reception and broke just about every rule in the book, but he had already been punished. Normally he wouldn't have mentioned it again.
"Daddy I try to be good all the time, but sometimes I just wanna be bad."
With those words he summed up in simple terms what has been my problem my entire life.
"Me too, son," I said under my breath, trying to suppress a laugh. "Me too."