

Book details lots of fun local things

Santa Barbara Fun: Yes, Virginia, in spite of fires, gang attacks and killings, bank robberies, stores closing like crazy because of ridiculous rent increases, bizarre notions of new Santa Barbara building designs, nasty and pouty politics, and lots of fog, Santa Barbara is still the place to have a heck of a lot of fun.

If you don't believe me, check out "Santa Barbara Fun" by Dana E. Fisher (dana@santabarbarafun.net), a local author.

"Santa Barbara Fun" has the subtitle: "for ages 1 to 100," and what is most charming about this book is all the photos of children exploring and enjoying Santa Barbara with their families. What follows are a few of the over 350 pages of suggestions and descriptions.

Of course there are the obvious: Stearn's Wharf, the Santa Barbara Zoo, and skating or bike riding along the beach. And then there are suggestions I haven't experienced as of yet.

For example, there is Lotusland, which is a public garden that operates in a private, residential neighborhood. Evidently, you must have a reservation (969-9990) between 9 a.m. and noon, Monday through Friday. Even if you don't particularly think you'd like to spend time walking around a garden, you will love this place, according to Dana Fisher.

"Madame Ganna Walska, an international performer, bought a 37-acre estate and botanic garden, and fine-tuned it to perfection over the next 43 years." She had a passion for rare plants and with very deep pockets could afford unusual

and spectacular plants from around the world.

If you are a member (fee \$50), one day a year, children of all ages are allowed in to attend a garden party with their families.

"Amazing arts and crafts for children, a storyteller in the outdoor stone-and-grass amphitheater, a magician, live music and ice cream celebrating Lotusland's anniversary, a professional photographer with dress-up props, and much more have been featured. Members' family day is in April."

"Turtle Dreams" is an educational experience for kids and adults. "When Jeanie Vaughan was eight, she fell in love with turtles and tortoises and knew she wanted to spend her life taking care of them. This non-profit organization, started in 1995 on her property, consists of Jeanie and her daughter.

They provide education about the conservation of turtles as well as rescue and rehabilitation. They accomplish this all on their own dime and by donations. She accepts only groups of visitors/volunteers. She has about 60 species of turtles including more than 500 of the shelled persuasion, some pig-nosed, some hinged, some box turtles, some smiling and some with "skirts."

She also has large iguanas, birds, and frogs.

This is a wonderful family outing for families, and children learn a lot about wildlife and individual efforts to protect animals.

Call for group reservations and directions: 969-4609 all year round.

Adventure Challenge at UCSB provides ropes courses. I've done this twice, and it is a blast for kids and adults. You do need a reservation (893-3737). Groups of up to 15 cost approximately \$300, and groups of up to 20 cost about \$400 for three hours of climbing a 30-foot wall with a harness, a free-fall swing, a platform jump, zipline, group games on the ground, and an indoor course. Open rain or shine.

Get a group of kids and adults together to share the expense and the fun.

Then there is the Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum & Library. Take Garden Street to Canon Perdido, turn left to 122 West Canon Perdido (730-1707) or www.quinlanmuseum.com.

There are more than 3,000 dolls and teddy bears, space toys, puppets, gift show and tea room for complimentary coffee and tea. Opened in 2005, the museum displays historical, contemporary, and ethnic dolls.

I do a lot of mountain hiking, but if you want something serene check out Toro Canyon Park for rock climbing, playgrounds, polliwogs, and hiking. Kids will love this.

It's nestled away from everything. Walk beyond the playground equipment to discover wonderful rock formations (for climbers of all ages), explore the creek, and search for bugs. Wear long pants and be careful about the poison

oak. Hike to the Gazebo and see the ocean view to the south. (969-3315 for information and directions; at the top of Sheffield Drive turn right at the stop onto East Valley Road; go several miles until you see signs for Toro Canyon Park.

A cool experience for your kids is the Overlook Café at the Santa Barbara Airport (964-7793). It is open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. There is no separate children's menu, but there are kid-friendly choices on the menu.

You can watch jets land and take off, passengers embarking and disembarking, luggage being loaded and unloaded. Great view from a window table or outside table on a warm day or if you're all bundled up.

Dana Fisher's tip: in order to get the outside or window table you want, put your name in and tell them you'll wait. Then walk downstairs outside in the back waiting area and check out the mechanical art, and walk around the airport.

These are just a few of the many, many examples from the book. The latter sections divide events into months so that you can make plans for events, festivals, etc. Definitely a worthwhile purchase — especially for you folks who are bored with doing the same old—same old with your kids or your spouse!

Dr. Laura Schlessinger is a best-selling author and internationally syndicated radio talk show host who writes a column for the News-Press on Thursdays and Sundays. The opinions in the column are Dr. Laura's and not necessarily the newspaper's. Readers may comment at www.drlaura.com. Write Dr. Laura c/o the News-Press, P.O. Box 1359, Santa Barbara 93102-1359.



DR. LAURA
Laura Schlessinger