

What Happened to All That Time?

Making the most of what's left of summer — for almost no money, with the people you love.

Remember the first week of summer? When it stretched out in front of you like a long, golden road with no end in sight? All that time. All those plans. The lazy mornings, the big adventures, the "we'll get to it" list a mile long.

And now... the evenings are getting cool. There's a different smell in the air. The store displays have quietly swapped sunscreen for binders, and somewhere in the back of your mind, a little voice is whispering, *wait — what happened to all that time?*

If that whisper just gave you a small pang, you're not alone. Every parent I know feels it: that end-of-summer ache, half "where did it go" and half "we didn't do enough." So let me say the kind thing first, and then the fun thing.

The kind thing: You didn't waste the summer. The ordinary days — the cereal-for-lunch, sprinkler-in-the-yard, nobody-got-dressed-till-noon days — those *are* the summer. You don't need a single big-ticket trip to have given

your kids a good one. Let that guilt go. It's not invited to the last few weeks.

Now the fun thing: there's still time. Real time. Enough for a handful of small, sweet, almost-free days that your kids will remember long after they've forgotten whatever was at the mall. So here's my gentle nudge for these last weeks of summer.

Get to the Water, Not the Mall

If I could hand you one rule for the rest of summer, it's this: **head for water, not stores.**

The mall costs money, ends in a meltdown by the food court, and nobody remembers it. But water? A lake, a river, the ocean, the neighbour's pool, even the splash pad down the street — there is genuinely nothing more relaxing, less expensive, or more fun. Kids who are cranky and over-screened transform the second their toes hit cold water. (So do tired parents, honestly.)

You don't need a plan or a packed cooler. Throw towels in the car, grab whatever snacks are in the cupboard, and go. The best summer afternoons are almost always the unplanned ones.

11 Almost-Free Ways to Squeeze the Last Drops Out of Summer

1. Sleep under the stars — in your own backyard

Drag the mattresses, sleeping bags, or just a pile of blankets onto the back lawn and sleep out under the sky. Free, magical, and the kids will talk about it for years. Bonus points for finding one constellation together before everyone passes out.

2. Throw a "use-what-we-have" picnic

You don't need fancy food. Sandwiches, cut-up fruit, a bag of chips, a blanket, and a spot — the backyard, a park, the beach, the riverbank. Eating outside makes the most ordinary lunch feel like an event.

3. Make a beach-wood wreath

Next time you're near the water, have everyone collect smooth, weathered pieces of driftwood and beach treasures. At home, tie or glue them onto a loop (a bent wire hanger works) for a wreath that hangs on your door all year — a free souvenir of this exact summer.

4. Build a river-rock picture

Collect interesting rocks from a riverbed or shoreline, then arrange and glue them into a picture on a board or in a frame — a sun, a fish, your family, whatever. Cheap, creative, and a keepsake that outlasts any toy.

5. Have a free "staycation" night

Pick a country, make its food (even a simple version), play its music, watch a show set there, learn three words of the language. You "travelled" for the price of groceries — and the kids think you're a genius.

6. Host a neighbourhood water day

Sprinklers, water balloons, hose, a few cheap squirt toys, and an open invite to the neighbours' kids. The grown-ups get lawn chairs and cold drinks; the kids get the best afternoon of the week. Everyone goes home happy and tired.

7. Go on a sunset chase

One evening, pile everyone in the car or walk to a good open spot and just... watch the sun go down. Bring a treat. It costs nothing and it slows everybody right down.

8. Run a backyard movie night

A laptop or tablet, a sheet on the fence or the side of the house, popcorn, blankets, and the stars overhead. It feels ten times more special than the couch — and it's free.

9. Do a nature scavenger hunt

Write a quick list (something red, a heart-shaped rock, a feather, a sound you love) and send the kids — and their friends — out to find it all. Works at the

park, the woods, the shore, or just the block.

10. Catch fireflies or go stargazing

An empty jar (with the lid loose, then let them go) or just a blanket and the dark. Wonder is free, and there's a lot of it overhead in late August.

11. Make a "best of summer" memory jar

Set out a jar and some paper scraps. All week, everyone writes down their favourite small moments and drops them in. On the last night before school, read them out loud together. Cue happy tears.

The thread running through all of these: almost no money, the family together (and friends pulled in), and a memory made. That's the whole recipe. You'll notice not one of them needs a credit card or a reservation — just a willingness to say yes to something small.

Pull the Friends In

Here's a tiny secret that makes all of this easier: *you don't have to be the whole show*. Invite the neighbours. Text the cousins. Tell your kid to bring a friend. A backyard campout, a water day, a picnic — they all get better, cheaper, and less work for you when they're shared. The kids entertain each other, the grown-ups

actually get to chat, and everybody's making memories at once.

Why This Matters More Than the Mall

Years from now, your kids won't remember the stuff you bought them this summer. They'll remember the night you let them sleep on the lawn. The lake you drove to on a whim. The driftwood wreath that still hangs on the door. The picnic that turned into a water fight. *You*, present and a little sunburned, saying yes.

That's the good stuff. And the very best part? It's almost always free.



I turned all of this into a printable toolkit — the almost-free idea menu, a backyard campout checklist, a beach-treasure craft guide, a staycation-night planner, and a family memory-jar template. Stick it on the fridge and start saying yes.

Download the free toolkit

So no, you didn't waste the summer — and there's still time to make these last cool-evening weeks count. Throw the towels in the car. Drag the mattress onto the lawn. Say yes to the small thing. The binders can wait a few more days.

Go get to the water, friend. 

A quick safety note: Water is wonderful and worth a few common-sense precautions — active adult supervision near any water, life jackets for weaker swimmers, sun protection, and a check that swim spots are safe and supervised where possible. **About Thrive Momma Coaching:** We support mothers and their supporters with evidence-informed coaching, practical tools, and a whole lot of compassion — for every kind of family. This content is for general education and coaching purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical, mental health, or therapeutic advice. Thrive Momma Coaching provides coaching within Canada. Visit us at thrivemommacoaching.com.