“Bring the kids, we love kids,” says my friend, May, who’s going.

May tries to convince me to take my three and four-year-old daughters, Amira and Alisa, to Sugar Plum Sangha in Ukiah for a tai chi and meditation retreat. It includes silent eating, silent walking, and silent space for individual reflection. Downstairs I hear a crash, and one of my kids screams.

“Ohay. If you say so,” I agree and hang up.

The next morning, I stuff Hello Kitty pillows into the trunk of my car. My kids race around the lawn and practice the tumbling they learned in gymnastics class. I congratulate myself on remembering to pack all our toothbrushes and study the directions to the retreat.

It’s two and a half hours from my house in San Jose, and the last thirty miles are on a one-lane dirt road through the mountains. In case we get lost or wrecked somewhere, I text my friend Ly so someone will know where we are.

“Did you pack snacks for the kids?” she texts back, “And toys?”

“Who needs special snacks and toys when you have vegetarian cuisine and the wonders of nature?”

My kids fall asleep in their car seats after eating fast food, as Toddler Radio plays on Pandora. We arrive at the retreat in the late afternoon and set up our stuff in the cabin.

“Wow!” my kids shout. They are deliriously happy to see bunk beds. They spend the next thirty minutes in motion. They climb up and down the ladders, peer over the top bunk’s railing, and launch their Hello Kitty pillows to the ground below. Eventually, other people trickle in and claim their bunks. I tell the kids to settle down. I worry that someone will complain about the meditation retreat being invaded by toddlers.

Instead, a woman says, “You’re such a good mother for bringing your children.”

I feel my anxiety subside. “Thanks,” I reply. “I was worried people would be upset. I figure, if the kids get really loud, I’ll just take them home.”

“No, it’s fine. We love kids,” she says. A moment later, a Hello Kitty pillow hits her in the back of the head.

We’re having lentil curry, rice, and pineapple for dinner. It’s really good. My kids eat the rice and pineapple and refuse to

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