

NEWSLETTER

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FIREFLIES

I love to visit my family in Michigan in the summer. I love to watch my grandchildren growing up by leaps and bounds. I also love to watch the fireflies as fireflies are not part of the nightscape in Arizona where I live.

Fireflies have always fascinated me. They have a magical quality. I think of them as random acts of beauty. At dusk I love to focus my eyes on a patch of darkness and watch for the first firefly of the evening. Then I let my eyes wander until the next firefly lights up just for me.

The science of fireflies is just as exciting as their beauty. They have special cells in their abdomen that can make light by means of a chemical reaction. Fireflies produce "cold light" with 96% efficiency. The ordinary light bulb we use has only 10% efficiency as the rest of the energy is wasted as heat. The chemicals fireflies use to produce light are used in research of cellular energy to study human cancer and heart disease.

I was just introduced to the newest member baby of our family, a two-week-old baby boy. I watched his eyes as they learned to search for and then focus on his mother's face. Yesterday a neighbor brought her two-month-old baby to visit and his eyes searched for interesting things to look at including my face, my dog licking his toes, and the chandelier above his head. I hope both these boys get a chance to look for fireflies with their big blue eyes.

Our eyes are designed to focus, watch, and search so we can get to know our world. Gaining complete control of the tiny eye muscles is a baby's second big accomplishment after smiling. These two early skills are connected. Babies search for a human face and smile when they see one. Later they learn to search for the toy they dropped and stare at a new or unexpected object.

Sometimes I worry about children whose eyes are glued to electronic gadgets. Kids today spend so much time on their hand-held video games, computers, and cell phones that I wonder if they even LOOK at their friends. How is this generation going to perfect the art of reading facial expressions or body language?

And what if these children never look up from their gadget long enough to see a firefly? What a sad thought!