

Incorporated as the Keene Lifeways Family Center
36 Carpenter Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431

Sophia's Hearth Family Center Web Site

www.sophiashearth.org has an overview of who we are, schedules of upcoming events, and more! Come visit!

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603-357-3755

Coming Activities: A Look Ahead

Summer 2003

June 23–27

HELLE HECKMANN and ELISABETH MOELLER-HANSEN

Two concurrent courses will be offered by visiting Danish colleagues. Elisabeth Moeller-Hansen, anthroposophic physician, will lead a course on the development and functions of the physical organs in the young child. This offering is for experienced Waldorf early childhood teachers. Concurrently, Helle Heckmann will offer a conference on her work at Nøkken with young children. We will have the opportunity to see slides of the brand new, 'Green' environmentally designed kindergarten home of Nøkken, just completed this autumn. Held at Monadnock Waldorf School, Keene.

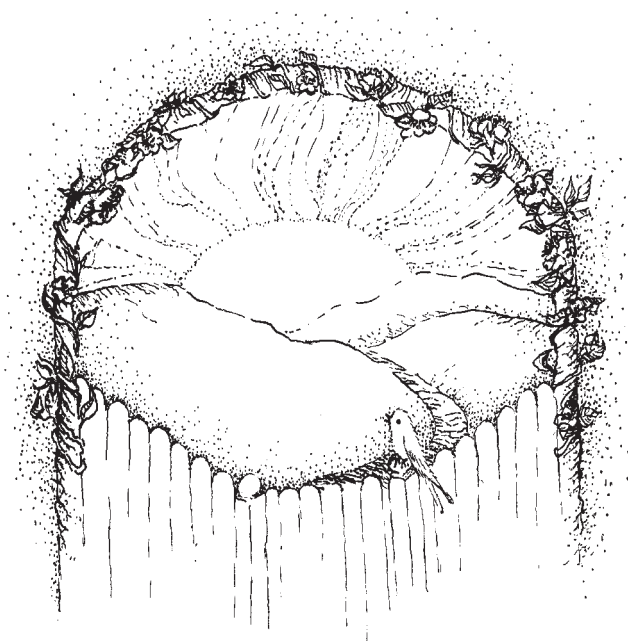
July 21-25 and July 28–August 1

Carol Pinto, Susan Weber, Jane Swain.

“The Child From Birth to Three”

A second offering of our two-week course: The Child From Birth to Three, focusing on the gifts of both Waldorf education and RIE™ (Resources for Infant Educators) to the young child and family. To be held at the Keene State College Camp, Wilson Pond, Swanzey, NH. Carol Pinto, RIE™ president and teacher, will bring the RIE™ focus during the first week, joined by Jane Swain and Susan Weber; Susan Weber and Jane Swain will lead the second week's focus on Waldorf education and the work of Emmi Pikler. Both weeks will be highly experiential.

*It will be a full summer. Courses will be popular, sign up early!
Please plan to join us as for a new experience, or as a return visitor.
More details are on our web site, or call us to register at 603-357-3755.*



the Garden Gate

WINTER 2003

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

the journal of Sophia's Hearth Family Center

...bringing current child development research and the principles of Waldorf education to a setting that nurtures family life, creating model programs for very young children and their families, and serving as a research and professional development site.

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Editor's Notes, Bruce Barlow

We wear many hats around here. You may have noticed that *The Garden Gate* is late. Among our hats are writing hats for material for this journal. We also wear construction, painting and moving hats, and recently we've worn these hats more than our writing ones in order to get our new home ready to welcome our expanded programs. It seems like it's always an exciting time at Sophia's Hearth (those who have spent time with Susan understand this high state of energy), but these days, with new space to ready and programs to contemplate, the excitement level seems ratcheted up even more than usual. New officers and continuity with the past bring their own energy, too. We had a marvelous summer schedule, and we wanted to bring you summaries of those experiences as well.

It all means we're late. We're sorry about that, but we think you'll understand, because ultimately we want to bring you a high level of quality in these pages, and sometimes that takes longer than we'd like.

By the way, our new home on Carpenter Street in Keene has exceeded our expectations. Not much to look at when we rented it, Hanspeter Weber, Susan, and an army of volunteers have transformed it into a warm, welcoming place for all. The process was as lovely as the result. Warm colors on the walls, soft lights, big windows, and an entry door you won't soon forget make our space very different from run-of-the-mill office space.

The world seems to be responding positively, as we have added new classes to meet an increase in families interested in our offerings. We have added a new teacher, Mary Triulzi, an experienced Waldorf early childhood teacher, who is coming to us from Hadley, Massachusetts a day a week to teach classes. Welcome, Mary! Is the interest in classes a surprise? I don't think so. Our new space is much more inviting than what we were using at Antioch New England Graduate School. We are grateful for the use of their space when we had it, make no mistake, but now we have space that is entirely ours, and we have made it much more pleasant for families and children. But Sophia's Hearth isn't a run-of-the-mill bunch. It is a privilege to be a part of this work.

Speaking of privilege, it is my privilege to welcome new members to Sophia's Hearth's Board of Directors. Tom Abert brings a wealth of business experience with AT&T and other significant places, with a special interest and background in marketing. He brings a wonderful positive energy, and many good ideas. Lynn Smith is a graduate of our baby classes, a corporate trainer, and she and her husband, Scott, are maintaining our website. Lynn has great energy and enthusiasm for our work. In speaking to the Board last night, she described what I characterize as hers and Scott's journey from "parenting" to "being parents". Amy Thacker joined our board quite a while ago (which reminds me how late these pages are!), but she has not been officially welcomed in these pages. Amy is an experienced Waldorf early childhood teacher, now working in the public school system. For the second year, Amy has carried responsibility for our vendor's booth at the Monadnock Waldorf School Crafts Fair, which garnered a lot of praise from the teeming masses who visited, and made us some money, too. More wonderful energy! We are proud to have the three of them a part of Sophia's Hearth, and look forward to a long, happy partnership. Welcome, Tom, Lynn, and Amy! Our little organization grows, and strengthens!

Putting on my fundraising hat for a moment, I am pleased to report that we made our \$10,000 Annual Appeal goal, and even exceeded it by just a little bit. We are all deeply grateful for the support so many of you gave us for the 2002 Annual Appeal. Thank you for your faith in us and in the work Sophia's Hearth is trying to do. Our end-of-the-year appeal has also been a success, and continues to be, as more of you remember us in your charitable giving in the new year. We thank you and encourage all of you to help Sophia's Hearth with a gift of any size. Thank you for all your support: material, emotional, and spiritual.

Once again, apologies for our lateness, but we hope you understand. Come visit our new home!



Thoughts from the Executive Director, Susan Weber

As we step across the threshold into the first home for our programs, we have brought many visions and dreams into physical reality. We bring memories of the past and all the work that has occurred, and hopes for the future, as well. It is a special moment in which to look back at our founding vision, and those who took that first step together.

We especially send our gratitude to Ann Pratt and to Rena Osmer, these founders who imagined Sophia's Hearth Family Center as a way to manifest their understanding of the need for a center of this kind. As the first board president, Rena led the pioneering group from the first conversations to first conferences and programs. Ann offered her wise counsel and insight until life took her far from New Hampshire.

To the many others, in particular our second board president Caro Dellenbaugh, who carried that first flickering flame forward as its strength grew and brightened, we extend our warm thanks. To Randy Carmel, our current board president, who knew that a home was just around the corner (which, in fact, it literally is!) we share our gratitude for his persistence. Thanks also go to Lynn Smith, who actually asked the essential question, "Have you looked at that building on Carpenter Street?" (we had not). To each board member, past and present, we send our thanks for your devotion.

When Thanksgiving arrived, it was so easy to think of all that Sophia's Hearth has for which to be grateful! Nearly 40 families come now each week to their play groups in a classroom designed artistically and practically just for them and their children. Not only one, but now four days each week, passers-by see carriages and strollers parked on our porch—quite a change from October when construction ladders and paint cans were the decor. Beautiful hand-made cubbies are a practical home for each family's coats, boots, hats and mittens. Our tiny little shop now displays warm woolen mittens, bonnets, and crawlers; wooden toys, sheepskins, books, silks, and baby blankets. Our office works more efficiently than we dreamed possible, with enough space for the many functions that our organization needs.

Just like our parent-infant class's name, "Joyful Beginnings," this has truly been such a beginning. The work and celebration have brought together old friends and new, board members, parents, and staff to create this family center. Our welcoming celebration on November 19 brought both our Keene community and friends from afar, as we welcomed founding board member Ann Pratt. The future beckons with new classes on nutrition and cooking in our nearly completed kitchen, creation of warm clothing for our little ones, and expanded and continuous offerings for expectant parents. Our parent-infant classes are welcoming younger and younger babies to offer warm, secure support for the journeys of today's families.

Sophia's Hearth will be featured in the larger world at two major conferences in the coming year—touching both east and west coasts at the "Magical Years" conference in Sacramento, and the Waldorf Early Childhood conference in Spring Valley, NY.

This fall and winter have brought two very special new faces to Sophia's Hearth. Mary Triulzi is our new parent-infant teacher. She attended Rudolf Steiner College in the foundation studies program and the early childhood teacher training, and has completed RIE™ Level I training as well. I am mentoring Mary as she teaches two Wednesday play groups. This opportunity to share the journey of Sophia's Hearth with someone so devoted to families and little ones is pure joy.

We also welcome Meyrav Mor, who comes to us as our pioneer Antioch New England Graduate School intern. Sophia's Hearth works in partnership with Antioch to provide internship placements, and Meyrav is the first to be a part of our new center. She brings a rich background as a founder of the Tashi Waldorf School in Katmandu, Nepal, where her interest is deeply engaged in the cultural and social questions of bringing a healing, socially conscious educational impulse to a land where it is so desperately needed. The Tashi school also offers training for teachers in Nepal. We are delighted to have her warm presence with us this semester!

And so, to all our readers—friends, colleagues, families, those who gave gifts of economic support, physical labor, prayers and encouraging thoughts: again, we offer you our most sincere thanks. Come visit soon!

Susan Gray Weber

Former President's Message, Caro Dellenbaugh

It has been a privilege for me to serve as President of Sophia's Hearth for the past three years, and see a tiny organization blossom into a growing presence in early childhood education. Sophia's Hearth continues to grow its conferences, professional development classes, and parent-infant classes as fast as space will permit. That turn of phrase is not offered idly. It has become clear to me in my role at Sophia's Hearth, and in my role at Monadnock Waldorf School, that one's mission often depends upon, and can be constrained by, the availability of the right space in the right place.

Some of you may not be familiar with the interaction of space and mission. Imagine the needs of a child care center, at the heart of our mission. We need lots of clean, healthy space, with a kitchen, bathrooms, administrative offices, play room, nap room, an adult "hang out" space, storage space, adult and parent-infant classroom, good outside space for young children to play safely, and more. That's hard enough to find unless it is built new to specification. But then, it has to be located on a site that the city will allow to be used for childcare, with convenient access for parents, adequate parking, and nice, tolerant neighbors. That makes finding it orders of magnitude harder. We had a chance at such a location, with, for a start, adequate space. But the owner didn't want to get involved in selling to a not-for-profit organization with a volunteer board (another space factor we hadn't considered, but yet confronted).

Nevertheless we did find new space on Carpenter Street in Keene that will have a classroom for our parent-infant classes. We will see an expansion in our programs for parents and professionals, and make another move towards accomplishing more of our mission. It isn't a childcare site, nor can it be. But it is a good next step for us.

I remain on the Board and Executive Committee, while having more time to spend being the parent of a now high school age daughter. I want to thank all of the board members, and especially Susan Weber, for their support, help, and love during my tenure. Thanks also to all of you who have supported our efforts so generously. Special thanks also to our anonymous friends, whose gifts have meant so much to our growth and development. I wish Randy Carmel, our new president, a long and successful time on our board. He is a strong leader who, I'm sure, will take us far. All my best wishes go with him.



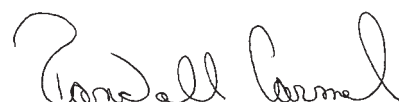
New President's Message, Randy Carmel

I am honored to be president of Sophia's Hearth and grateful to Caro for all the work she has done during her tenure as president. Thanks to Caro's leadership, and the sustained effort of all our board members, Sophia's Hearth is taking another step in meeting our short-term goals of finding new space and expanding our programming.

Recently, we leased 1200 square feet of space at 36 Carpenter Street in Keene, NH. The building that houses our new space is across from a playground, is easily accessible, and offers plenty of parking. Moreover, the space is located on the ground floor, has its own separate entrance, and is configured so that we can combine an administrative office and program space. We worked with the landlord and our own contractors to fix up the space to hold our parent-infant classes and the many other activities that will expand our offerings. It has an office for our executive director, a kitchen, a resource room, and a refurbished bathroom.

The board has had some lively discussions about how to further our mission within the context of our current space constraints. It became clear as a result of those discussions that we as a board are committed to offering infant, toddler, and preschool childcare. This is not only because of the overwhelming need for such services in our community, but because we believe that our center can serve as a model for other childcare organizations nationwide. However, given our space constraints and our development as a young organization, we cannot offer those services presently. For now we will reinforce our commitment to parent and professional education through expanded programming in parent-infant classes, educational workshops, lectures, and through our journal, *The Garden Gate*.

I feel confident that with our new space and the expansion of our programming, Sophia's Hearth will continue to strengthen and ready itself for our next step: a childcare center. My goal as president is to get us to that center while holding on to the warmth and nurturing of our participants, our board, and all our friends that makes Sophia's Hearth such a unique place.



Fleeting Moments

Steve Ryder

(Steve contributed to The Garden Gate once before. He's a second-time-around Dad with, as you may recall, a college-age daughter, too. It's clear that he still knows how to have fun. And he "gets it" in that deep way. He might even be having more fun this time around.—BB)

While sitting with a colleague at work several years ago, I was told that my coworkers were glad that I was not a coffee drinker. He said the last thing I needed was caffeine.

Finding time to live in the moment is a challenge for most of us these days. It is no wonder that children are often unable to cherish quiet time, when all too often adults are moving them on to the next event.

While working I rarely find idle moments, yet I cherish how much I learn from my two year-old daughter Lauren. The time I spend with her allows me time to stand still. While sometimes this is tough, I try my best not to think of other tasks during these moments.

I have been very blessed to spend a great deal of time with her. This has allowed us to have many special moments. We have a two-sided fireplace and we have created a game called "let's be silly". The game consists of running around the fireplace in one direction and then changing directions quickly, while each of the players says "going to get you". The game ends when Lauren wants to do something else.

This is usually followed by the infamous airplane ride. Lucky for me she is a good sport on this grueling event as it usually ends when dad gets tired creating turbulence in flight at the request of the passenger.

What child can resist string cheese? I only wish I had invented it, or at least bought stock in the company that makes it. This is a very special time, as the cheese may only be eaten at the dinner table or "sit on daddy". The other key component of this ritual: Lauren likes to have "this kind juice", which is a juice box with the little straw. Of course for this snack time the dinner table is never chosen.

Once we gather up the cheese and "this kind juice", the best part for both of us is sitting on daddy. This is about the only time she sits still on my lap. And she enjoys every last bite of the cheese and most of the juice. I cherish this time with her and spend it observing. In addition, it also makes it special when Mom offers to have cheese and juice, and Lauren prefers "sit on daddy." In essence, Mom can only take advantage when I'm not home.

While I do my best to enjoy each moment, there are times I have other things on my mind. Just last night she was not feeling very well. I had several things I needed to get done and was hoping for a speedy bedtime routine. We did our typical brushing

of the teeth, reading of books, and then said some prayers. Alas, it was time to lay her down and kiss her good night.

Since she was not feeling too well, she began to cry and I was thinking this was the last thing I needed, since I had some work to finish up. Nevertheless, I began to rub her back, which did not seem to help. On the inside I thought "Am I going to be here all night?" yet doing my best to not convey these feelings of frustration.

I began to think of what a wonderful child she is and how seldom she is fussy. In addition, I was thinking of when I am not feeling well, how difficult and even miserable it can be to fall asleep. Suddenly, I was no longer interested in finishing my projects and focused on the most important task at hand, which was to enjoy this moment and do my best to be with her during this frustrating time.

As a calm came over me while rubbing her back, her little hand reached out to touch mine. She gripped my index finger and held it. She suddenly stopped crying and within five minutes, she was sound asleep. Fifteen minutes earlier, I would have run out of the room thrilled that I could get some work done, but now, I no longer wanted to leave.

I stayed for another ten minutes just thinking about how self-absorbed we adults are at times. I believe she began to feel me relax and focus on her, which in turn had a calming affect on both of us. Finally, it was time to try and release the grip she had on my hand and heart. It was just another fleeting moment I will remember, since I may never have it again.

(Yes, you will, Steve, just as you still have them with your other daughter. The kinds of moments change, but they're still there if we're attentive to them, and still wonderful.—BB)

View From the Nest: Parking Lot Fantasy

Adriana T. Elliot

As I leave the grocery store, the clerk holding the door open for my entourage asks with concern, "Are you folks okay or do you need a hand?" He is, of course, not the first one to ask me such a question. Hardly a day goes by without a concerned stranger reminding me how full my own hands are. Occasionally a kind soul will offer me some practical assistance, which, if I accept, I usually (and somewhat defensively) tolerate as a gracious gesture, not a necessity. These two hands have managed well enough so far, thank you very much, I'm doing just fine.

But today's cold wind inclines me to lean just a little more on the world, Mr. Grocer. I only wonder at what point, sir, I would stop needing your assistance. After you'd pushed my shopping cart to the car? Or perhaps after you'd unloaded the

baby into her seat and wrestled the toddler into his? Or once you'd patiently waited then mandated takeover from a five-year-old who's insisting he can buckle himself in but he can't. Yet.

Perhaps, sir, you ought to just get in and ride home with us because it is snowing, after all. The boys will want snacks handed back to them and they'll need coaching to keep the crackers and raisins in the bags. Someone is sure to spill something, and you could be there to pick the apple off of the sandy car floor and wipe it with a hanky wetted from the water bottle. Once cleaned, you could return the apple, reaching back between the seats to give it to its runny-nosed, red-faced, exhausted rightful owner. You could manage water-bottle patrol, keep track of the lid, and de-escalate squabbles between siblings before they turn into brawls over baggies of peanuts and which song to sing.

Come to think of it, sir, you could sing for us, too. And then make up an entertaining story for the eldest child once the other two have fallen asleep. You could adjust their sleeping little heads back against their car seats so they don't hang forward, bobbing up and down with every stoplight. That way I could just drive safely home and negotiate the slushy roads with full maternal attention.

Then, since you'll be there anyway, you could help us get inside the house, unload the groceries from the car, carry the sleeping toddler to his bed, and make lunch. That way I could get the baby changed and nursed and put my feet up for a minute while I sip that nice cup of tea you'd make for me.

That way I could collect myself, inside and out, enough to breathe to full capacity. Then maybe I'd know what to do next, when you have to go. Because you will have to go, won't you, sir? There will undoubtedly be other customers waiting for you back at the cash register, and a time card to punch.

Before you go, perhaps you could do me just one more little favor? Because the baby will have fallen back to sleep at the breast and there are mounds of dishes to wash. There is laundry to be folded, laundry to be put away, laundry to be washed, laundry to be dried, and laundry to be gathered up from underneath beds and behind doors. And dinner, of course, has to be planned and prepared. So, since I know you won't be able to stay long, perhaps you would just rub my feet for a few minutes. There is this sore spot under the ball of the right foot, and I sure would love for you to give it a little attention before I get back on the domestic treadmill. My husband won't mind a bit, I'm sure. I'll just tell him I needed a hand, and you offered yours....

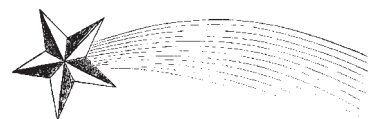
"Could you push the cart to the car for me, please?" I say out loud, as the baby latches on again and nurses in the sling, and I cross the parking lot with a little boy holding tightly onto each of my two hands. The clerk unloads the groceries, I thank him, and we say goodbye.

From inside the car I watch the clerk disappear into the store, pushing a long line of wire shopping carts. Snow gathers in

soft whispers against the windshield, and for just a moment, there is complete silence. In the grace of silence I remember that I will never complete every task before me. The stillness of this moment is all I really have. I feel my heartbeat sounding inside my chest. I see my hands on the steering wheel: capable, fragile, wind-chapped and human. In spite of nearly constant motion, these hands never tire. My feet may be perpetually sore, my back may ache from carrying children and burying anger, my head may pound from anxiety and exhaustion, but these hands, these very full hands, are my most faithful servants.

These hands are the ones my children pull on and fall into. These hands perform the intimate buckling and unbuckling of their world, in safety seat and high chair, bed and changing table, each piece of laundry folded and unfolded in an endless ritual of sacred maintenance.

Within me I hear an echo from our nighttime prayer: "From my heart to my hands, I feel the breath of God." Now the voices of my children stir my hands into motion once again, and we are riding home to the music of our blessedly resilient hearts.



The Dads' Corner: Mister Butts-In-The-Air

Bruce Barlow

"Butts-In-The-Air!"

Evan giggled as I grabbed him by the feet and lifted him so his backside raised enough to slip out his now well-used diaper. "Let's have a look. Oh, my! We have been a chow-hound lately. Time for a good wipe off! Butts in the air!" and I lifted him again and reached for the wipes to get at the cleaning chore. He kept giggling.

I loved changing Evan's diapers. It was another opportunity for playtime. I could usually tell when he needed it, often before he started crying. Furthermore, his "I need a diaper" cry was very distinct from his "I need a snack" or "I'm a tired guy" cries. I gloated over Victoria a little (well, more than a little) because I had a better batting average at understanding his cries than she did. He'd cry. "Snack time!" she'd say. "Nope, diaper," I'd reply. And I'd be right. After diaper he'd have a snack, maybe. I sometimes wondered if that snack was more to mollify Mommy than provide nutritional sustenance to Evan. Ten years later, he seems none the worse for it, though. But gloating seemed only fair, since the connection between those two was so strong.

Best of all was when we'd hear him fill it. Sometimes it would even be The Incredible Exploding Diaper. "Whoa! That's a big one!" I'd say as I whisked him off to the changing table before

overflow occurred (sometimes I was too late). Even only pee was often an event. Where did he keep all that inside? It felt like a gallon when hefted in soaked cotton. Amazing that the cotton diaper could absorb it all. I dared not wring it out, not knowing whether insurance covered such flood damage.

Do you love those cloth diapers but hate that washing chore? Grandma offered us three months of paid diaper service as Evan's birth present. Joyously and gratefully accepted! Each week the old plastic bin full of used ones was replaced by a clean bin of clean ones. We learned that diaper services have access to really lush, plush cotton diapers Not Available In Any Store. Diaper services often sell used ones, and even run through commercial laundry dozens of times they're better than what one can buy. I still have those we bought in my shop for car waxing and wood finishing. Used commercially. Used by us. Washed and bleached times uncounted. Don't know what I'll do when I run out. Make Evan wear diapers again? He'll probably be 18, and unwilling to make that bold a fashion statement. We used those cloth diaper covers that close with Velcro. Have we anointed Velcro's inventor to sainthood yet? If not, there is no true justice in this world. By the way, we stretched Grandma to six months of diaper service when we kept telling her how grateful we were. Grandma was always a soft touch where her only grandchild was concerned.

Mister Butts-In-The-Air! It's interesting for me as a non-professional learning bits and pieces about the RIE™ approach. It seems like I did a lot of that stuff, although maybe not as gently (but roughhousing is Dad's role, up to a point). I got his attention, we discussed getting a new diaper. He'd put his feet together for being grabbed and start giggling. I'd issue a blood-curdling "Butts In The Air" and we'd commence the process. We chatted while I cleaned him and got a new one ready. He was Mister Butts-In-The-Air at least twice each change, almost always with giggles. Usually more than twice because we both enjoyed it so much, we'd lift just for fun. We both decided to make the most of the experience and have fun. We did. Rushed? Never. Why rush playtime? And never the spraying Fountain of Youth, as many boys do on the changing table. That could be timing as much as temperament, but you won't convince me. Often the best times were the quiet ones afterwards, holding him close and rocking, gently now, side to side as he fell asleep. Either for a nap, if I were lucky enough to be home during the day, or after the night snack time, which always yielded the need for a new diaper as soon as it was over. They say eternity isn't everlasting, but rather is outside of any sense of time. Those moments of gentle rocking were eternity.

A friend told us that her granddaughter's first three-syllable word had been "disgusting!" She'd heard it said, and then started saying it, every time she was on the changing table. How sad, I think, because it speaks of an entirely different experience.

Pee and poop are a part of life. These days, as we eat good meals, our stock phrase is "Just think: it all ends up in Gerry Bell's shiny new truck," referring to the guy who pumps our septic tank. I enjoy my own constitutionals, and insisted on having bathrooms with good views and a space to set a coffee cup when we looked for a house in rural New Hampshire. I got them. Why shouldn't a baby's experience be as pleasant?

Dads! Assert your right to change diapers! You, too, can play Mister Butts-In-The-Air! It's fun! It's sweet! It's joyful, if you choose to make it that way. Diapering is just another part of life, and it can be a very special part. Mom will love you for it, too. And get Grandma to pop for diaper service. Buy used ones for waxing the car.

From time to time I still grab Evan's feet when he's lying on the floor and raise them to a robust cry of "Mister Butts-In-The-Air!" He no longer giggles at age 11 (he's Cool, but may he never be Too Cool). He just smiles (indulgently?) at this obviously insane being that is his father.

Book Review: Mitten Strings for God: Reflections for Mothers in a Hurry by Katrina Kenison

Reviewed by Amy Robertshaw

(Amy is mother of Isaac, and they are in one of Sophia's Hearth's parent-infant classes, coming all the way from their home in Vernon, VT. Thank you, Amy, for bringing this book to everyone's attention—BB)

These words on the book jacket leapt out at me: "I can only bring peace to my children when I possess it myself." What greater gift could I ever offer my children? This bit of wisdom alone was enough to pull me to this small book.

Each chapter is a gentle reminder to be vigilant to those special, often fragile gifts that create a peaceful childhood. Surrender. These are but a few of the powerful messages sent in this very quiet and simple book.

In reading this book I have opened my heart to a new realization: our time with our young children is so short. I must capture this time... open my arms and heart and embrace it! I must protect it from all the clutter of our culture and open up to the real treasures that the world quietly offers.

I am reminding myself lately that I am still on my own journey of growth and knowledge. My journey did not end (or even come to a brief stop) when my son's earthly journey began—although it has felt that way many times along the way. Rather, I am growing and learning in my gift of self—in my gift of motherhood. This book has given me many reflections in the art of those gifts.

May you bring peace to your children as well as to yourself.

Festivals of the Spring and Summer: A July Conference with Helle Heckmann

Martha Dickinson

(Martha, with the strong support of her husband Jed, has created a home-based early childhood program in Woodstock, Vermont. Jed joined her in Keene for this conference with Helle.—SW)

Helle inspired us with how she brings her work with the seasons and festivals to her kindergarten when she led July's conference in Keene. Her ongoing study of nature and the many-faceted connections between the festivals and their context in the year brought many questions and experiences to our group of twenty.

Helle focused on bringing the festivals to life: what this festival means to the teacher; how we develop within ourselves an understanding of both the cosmic and the natural aspects of each. This inner journey is most important for bringing to life the rhythm of the seasons, with the festivals weaving in, out and through them. Recalling festivals that have come and gone as we prepare for the approaching seasonal events is central. Reflecting upon what works for us, in our situation, becomes the foundation. Helle reminded us all that there are many ways to bring the festivals to life, remembering always the importance of daily rhythm, preparation work with children's parents, and our own consciousness.

With a particular reverence for nature's color palette, Helle described the changing light throughout the seasons as we move from the darkness of Christmas into the middle of winter and its lengthening days. She encouraged us to see the colors in nature that are present at each festival.

Photos of her work with the children revealed a simplicity and forthrightness when a kindergarten is created with strength and love. Helle has found that as she strives toward greater simplicity, the experience for the children deepens.

We were busy. By the end of the three-day conference, we had made a wool felt flower fairy, decorated windows with tissue "paintings," baked a glorious "sun" loaf of bread, created impromptu stories and simple puppetry. We had boiled eggs decorated with plants and dyed in onion skins, dyed woolly fleece and sewn fluffy chicks; found feathers, beeswax and pine cones to fashion birds in flight (my daughter loved this bird which dangles from a piece of string at the end of a found stick). We had blown and painted eggs to hang, and teased each other with a treasure hunt and a rollicking egg roll to see the sun rise! Our meals were lovingly prepared by the group. We made food choices for their seasonal appropriateness and their color.

I'm sure we all share my gratitude to Sophia's Hearth for sponsoring Helle's work with us. I'd love to know how everyone is growing their expression of the year in festivals, and hope we can gather again.

Summer Conference: Music and Story— Delight for the Young Child

Lynn Smith

(We warmly welcome Lynn Smith, a woman of seemingly boundless energy and good ideas, to Sophia's Hearth Board of Directors. And, she can write, too! Thank you, Lynn, for your thoughts on this conference, and for volunteering to be a part of Sophia's Hearth—BB)

Little Prince lives in a little house with a little quilted bed in the woods. He comes out during special occasions and likes to partake in adventures with my two and a half-year-old son. Little Prince commands a certain respect and can take a wild moment and calm it right down.

Little Prince is a simple marionette puppet made from silk and wool. Even though Little Prince has a voice like mommy, my son talks directly to Little Prince as if he is the only person around. The Little Prince came home after a magical workshop with Connie Manson: Music and Story—Delight for the Young Child, on July 12–14.

I wasn't sure what to expect from the workshop. After all, I told stories every day to my toddler and I sang little songs to him occasionally. I learned that stories are not the same as reading books, and that singing to our children is so important. Our children, when they are little, do not care that we cannot carry a tune.

Connie is a professional puppeteer and an experienced Waldorf early childhood teacher. Connie's style is that of a highly skilled puppeteer and storyteller. Her voice is like angels and her demeanor is gentle and calming. As the mother of an energetic son, I found myself wondering how many years of training it would take for me to be able to capture my son's attention with my feeble attempts at a story and the crackling sound of my songs.

However, Connie worked with the group and taught us how to sing and tell stories. We learned songs and stories appropriate for different ages. We ventured out into the sun and learned how to make simple puppets with silk squares that we hand dyed with all natural dyes. It was magical to see 17 puppets come to life in a "dance" as we learned about our puppets. We created and directed our own puppet show for the others.

While the puppet shows and the marionettes provided for a wonderful and magical setting, Connie also provided us with ways to use song, stories, and very simple hand puppets to help transition our little ones from one activity to the next. Connie shared a few very simple and practical tips for incorporating music and stories into the lives of young children:

- Discover your inner storyteller by keeping a journal. Each day write three pages about anything. After a while the stories will start to flow.
- Find a little animal friend that you can use in a series of little stories. Children love to hear about little animal friends that take part in everyday adventures.

- Put yourself or the child in the story. I have tried this with my son and he is fascinated.

In the workshop we learned how to make a makeshift bunny out of an ordinary handkerchief. When needed, these little bunnies are quickly created in front of the child and magically become a little bunny. These simple puppets help to soothe boo-boos; they persuade brushing of the teeth when nothing else works. It's amazing how magical a little cotton bunny can be to a little person.

As I continue to work with my son and bring the magic of story and puppets and music into his world, I can see that it is truly helping his to develop into a happy and imaginative child. The workshop with Connie was a true learning experience.

The Child from Birth to Three: Impressions from the Two-Week Summer Course

(Our two-week course this summer included a week with Susan Weber and Jane Swain, and a week with Carol Pinto from RIE™, Connie Manson, and Susan. Rather than a detailed report on the course, we chose to give you comments from the class evaluations and letters we have received subsequently. We hope it gives an impression of the feel of the class, which, as I am told, was the most amazing part of a rich two weeks. Thanks to all who contributed their thoughts. And thanks to all who attended.—BB)

"I was able to gain experience of what it's like to be a young child/infant by being allowed the time and space to live through my senses... and really physically having experiences to help integrate this information into my being."

"This week captured my whole being. I was totally entranced into, and by, the time spent on conversation, pondering, learning, thinking and doing. The information I received is so vital and so wonderful that I hope it will always be with me. The ideas still don't stop coming to me, causing me to want to act on them and tell everyone around me about them."

"I have recently started a daycare in my home. I knew that I wanted to work out of Waldorf principles, but I had very little idea of how to do that. My background is not in education, and much of it is a mystery to me. This workshop was a real life-saver for me. It gave me an overall picture of the young child so that I have a better framework for making observations. It gave me practical ideas and it gave me a chance to experience things about the senses and movement that are familiar, yet new.

"Movement, art, friendship, working together to penetrate who are our young children, how can we embrace, nurture, and set them free?"

"Our week has supported our work, encouraged us to go forth into the great unknown, to 'OBSERVE, for this is where we will find all of our answers.'"

"We leave with practical knowledge, compassion for our parents, and much more consciousness."

"Learning out of experiencing a new perspective was the most

profound aspect of the workshop."

"This week has deepened my superficial understanding of child-initiated activity. Not just its importance, but its essentialness in our development as human beings. A young child is called to move. We need to listen to these silent calls, observe and learn to perceive them, and so develop a relationship with the child of love (respect)."

"As the need for quality childcare grows, and the children who are being cared for are younger and younger, our need as caregivers to deepen our understanding of the newborn to age three child becomes ever more acute. This week has awakened in me a sensitivity for the child birth to three that will reverberate in my work long after this conference."

"The key words we have heard over and over again: R-E-S-P-E-C-T, C-A-R-E, and O-B-S-E-R-V-A-T-I-O-N before intervention will live on in me as I go back to my work with young children."

"Rudolf Steiner's teaching for the teachers: 'Receive the children with reverence, educate them in love, and send them forth in freedom.' takes on an even deeper meaning for me."

"Spending time with people of similar ideas made this time enthusiastic and interesting. Opened my mind to new ideas and desire to try new things."

"...Mostly, my thoughts are ones of profound gratitude for being awakened to new thoughts, ways of thinking about new relationships. The conference, though titled birth to three, really was about human to human relationships and how to promote healing in our world, one tiny step at a time..."

"As an expectant mother, these two weeks have been invaluable. I entered into prospective motherhood with excitement and wonder, mixed with confusion and fear. These two weeks have helped me immensely to clarify innumerable questions I had about parenting and childhood development. If only every prospective mother could have this! Most helpful for me was the focus on the concept of observation. It was a relief to be told that I could allow my child to develop autonomy from day one! The concept echoed my own belief system, but I would not have known how to put it in practice until your course. If possible, I would recommend that a short training such as this be offered alongside birthing classes to expectant mothers at such venues as women's centers, midwife birthing centers, and hospitals."

"...I felt that the blend of Carol's thought-provoking discussions, video examples, and facilitated self-reflections has really helped me internalize all the information presented. The music presented by Connie was so inspiring, just simply inspiring! Just learning about the joy to be found in songs, stories, and puppetry through the expressions on Connie's face brought me back into the world of the child..."

"It has been a wonderful week for me. It has opened my soul to this realm of the young infant. I'm very inspired to continue learning through Sophia's Hearth, and to help contribute to its development..."

Celebrating the Festivals of the Seasons—Nature's Gift

by Helle Heckmann

(Words are a poor substitute for the experience of Helle's inspiring teaching, but we recognize that many of you are unable to come see her in action. Here are her words, which still paint a rich picture. Helle will return to teach with us in June.—BB)

I often ask myself: "What is it that makes me call my kindergarten a Rudolf Steiner kindergarten?"

Inside me, it is my own search and working out Rudolf Steiner's ideas, as well as using a spiritual view of people. This takes place constantly in me. It has nothing to do with my physical surroundings, and yet interaction with one's surroundings is itself an educational process, for without such interaction individuality is itself pointless.

But what do these thoughts have to do with working with children? Everything and nothing! Everything, because our pedagogy is based on imitation and example. Nothing, because we use no indoctrination, and don't wish to create a hard-set picture of what each child should be like.

When I meet the children, then, how can I let them be free and still give them a way to create forming forces, and strengthen their will so they can meet life with self-confidence and empathy?

In other words, how do I bring childhood's gifts to today's child: total acceptance, innocence, faith, and trust? For me, it has always been to experience Nature, its constant changes and transformations. Never the same, and yet recognizable. For me, being in Nature, and working with it with thoughtfulness and respect, lets me bring to children (and adults) an experience of forces far beyond our understanding, and in that way awaken their sense of wonder. This sense of wonder, I believe, is essential to the development of a child's life forces.

NATURE CELEBRATIONS AND COSMIC CELEBRATIONS

Nature is at the base of our culture and our survival. We adapt our existence according to the natural forces we encounter. Nature's celebrations, therefore, must always be an expression of our surroundings. For me, the Cosmic celebrations are different. They take place at the same time all over the Earth, because they come from a realm far above Nature that we experience directly.

Let's take Easter as an example. In Denmark, Easter falls with Spring, so we mix the Nature and Cosmic celebrations. This expresses appreciation for the arrival of Spring after a very dark period. We paint (a pagan custom) and we let the Easter Bunny hide eggs that the children must find (the hare is used as a fertility symbol). We roll those eggs down a hill so that the hard-boiled eggs split in two and the yolks roll out, a symbol for the Sun force's release and ascension of Christ as the force of spiritual empathy. It works quite well, because we mix the old traditions with

Cosmic celebration. It all feels good because we have the seasons we have. But what happens in the southern hemisphere of the Earth? There it is Autumn. For us, that is the Lantern celebration as a Nature celebration, whereas Easter is a Cosmic celebration. It means the raising of the Christ force in the South must convey a mostly inner enlightenment, while in the North it can be an external experience in Nature as well.

I want to give a picture of how we practice our celebrations so that they appear as parts of a whole instead of isolated from one another.

WHAT CELEBRATIONS WILL I HOLD?

I have chosen celebrations that I feel are relevant for our kindergarten, given the cultural background of my children.

I have chosen a daily rhythm that builds on outdoors experience, because many of the children are city children with limited opportunities for movement because of traffic, small apartments, and an indoor life based on sitting (computers, television, etc.). Because we have a delightful garden and beautiful surroundings (swamps, cemetery, and soccer field), it is quite easy for us to include these in our daily life. Every morning we spend the first two hours outside. We walk 20 minutes, spend one hour at a specific place, and walk home again, simply so that the children can move. We have about 25 children from 1 to 7 years of age.

On our daily walk, we experience of the four elements: the wind, whistling or calm, the Sun's fiery warmth, when it comes out. We feel the wet rain drumming, or we splash in the puddles; we see the Earth's changing states: wet, dry, planted or bare, and so forth.

At the same time, Nature frames different pictures around us, which change during the course of the year. Each time has its own quality, and each season makes us remember the previous one and look forward to the next one. Nature helps us remember experiences and build joy for coming ones.

The seasons never really start or end, they are more like a wheel that is constantly in motion. If two seasons don't lie next to one other, then they reflect one another over the ones in between. For instance, our children always start singing Christmas songs in the late Spring, just before Summer. They dance around spruce trees that have sprung forth shoots and look just as if they had decorated themselves the way we, in Denmark, decorate them and dance around them at Christmas.

These complementary celebrations take place to a large extent at the same time as the real seasonal celebrations. That is where all our pedagogical work lies: We carry out the celebrations so that there is a context with the whole course of the year, a weaving in and out from one to the next, and yet some kind of an orderly sequence. We work to have the creative forces clearly shine through, because all of it has meaning, nothing is indifferent. The art is to understand Nature as a rhythmical breath instead of a beat that ticks separate events.

HARVEST

To start with harvesting time is like going directly to the end of a good book. At harvesting time we harvest our diligence! On the outside, we harvest the crops given to us by the Earth, depending on how good we have been at observing Nature, at sowing in a timely manner, and at taking care of our crops.

On the inside, for me, harvesting grains is an archetypal experience. I still ask myself whether it is artificial to bring my children to the countryside to see a farmer harvest with a scythe and gather sheaves to bring back to the kindergarten. Nowadays children know that all this is done with huge machines and they cannot connect a scythe with a grain field (if they have seen a scythe in the first place). Anyway, I stubbornly keep the farm visit for all families as a shared outing and a sensory experience, because I see some archetypal movements in the sweeping of the scythe through the grain and in the sound of the meeting between scythe and grain. As we stand outside in the field, we hear the wind, the sky is high above and we can see far on every side. To have seen the farmer's genuine movements makes it possible to make the right movements during singing games. I think that is very important—to be able to imitate the proper movements. Children need genuine actions.

After the farm visit, we take about 14 days to “harvest”. The grain stands in sheaves in the garden to be seen and touched. We sing harvest songs, and after a couple of days, we thresh the grain. All the children stand in a circle, and as we sing the harvest songs, we go around the small harvest sheaves. When we get to the part of the song that says: “Do you know how the farmer threshes on lo”, we all bend down, take a sheaf and thresh the grain from the ears on the white sheet that lays in the middle. We repeat that threshing motion time after time, some of the children with great care, some with a lot of force, while others simply watch (the small ones are sleeping). Seeing the grain jump out of the ears is magic that is commented upon with excitement. When all the bundles have been threshed, two adults grab each end of the sheet, as the children stand a bit back to the side, and 1,2,3, we throw grain and chaff in the air. The wind will blow the chaff away and the grain falls back, nice and clean into the sheet.

To feel grain is a blissful experience. “Me too!” “Me too!” All the children stream by and bury their hands in the heap of grain, a magical moment.

After that the small hand-driven grain mills come out and the children take turns grinding (we have about 7 mills for 16 children). For days, they grind and grind to make flour during the afternoon. On our morning outings, we take along the straw, which we adults—helped or watched by the children—make into wreaths and braided objects. We sing as we work. It is an industrious time.

Harvest work takes place all over the garden. Fruit, berries, and vegetables must be harvested—at different times, though—and they must be processed or dried. Flowers must be watered, animals must be fed, and rabbits must be shorn. It is a wonderfully

industrious time with lots of work to do. We end with a harvest celebration to which the parents—who bring homemade cakes—are invited. We have baked bread and prepared elder flower juice (from before the Summer vacation) so that we are reminded of the magical time from the days before Summer, when all had a different color and even the air was different. On the day of the celebration, we go to a special place where we churn cream into butter in jam jars and bring it back home. We then dress with festive clothes. The children have brought special fine harvest clothes (with ‘fine’, I don’t mean new or expensive, but clothes they connect with harvest time, celebration, and joy). We all get ready and admire each other. We shed the old and renew ourselves.

In a long line, we go to the kindergarten’s room, which has been decorated with harvest sheaves, rosehips, wild flowers, etc. It is so beautiful! We sit by a long table and today the children get to ‘butter’ their own bread, decide themselves what they will have on their bread, and kindly ask to be handed this or that. There is abundance, many children get their fill just by looking. After that comes the harvest story. It is told out in the garden. From the fruit and vegetables the children have brought themselves the day before, one of the caregivers has prepared a story: “The king invites people to a harvest celebration, because the princess wants to get married...” The children are as quiet as mice. After the story, it is time to play in the garden, where children can repeat the story or invent new ones, or simply play in peace and quiet. The adults are busy in the garden, preparing the tables for the parents’ visit.

When the parents arrive, they wait in the garden by the entrance of the kindergarten and deliver their cakes to the caregivers. When all have arrived, we all go in a singing chain to the garden towards a pile of straw. There the parents sit and weave a light wreath or something like that. It is important that the parents have something to do. During that time, the children play around in the garden so that the parents can catch a glimpse of children at play. After half an hour, all are invited to the tables and we sing our mealtime song. Then we eat, we chat, and we chew. All get a beautiful wreath to take home, to be hung by the entrance door; or to be laid on a table to be decorated again with various flowers. The wreath is kept until Advent Spiral time, at which time it is brought back to be transformed into an Advent wreath with spruce branches from the spiral. In that manner, harvest time and the Advent Spiral time mesh with one another, even though St. Michael and the Lantern celebration have occurred in between.

With this abundance of harvest time, and the weaving of the seasons, I hope to give the children an experience of wonder that comes from a deep experience of Nature.

