

Incorporated as the Keene Lifeways Family Center
93 Roxbury Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431

Sophia's Hearth Family Center Web Site

The first phase of our Web site is up and running!
www.sophiashearth.org has an overview of who we are,
schedules of upcoming events, and more! Come visit!

www.sophiashearth.org
info@sophiashearth.org
603-357-3755

Coming Events for Spring and Summer 2002

Infants and Toddlers: How They Do Grow!

SUSAN WEBER AND JANE SWAIN

March 22 and 23

This weekend conference will focus on the physical development of the child in the first two years. Friday evening and all day Saturday at Antioch New England Graduate School. \$65.

Festivals of the Spring and Summer: Weaving a Thread though the Seasons

HELLE HECKMANN

July 1-3

Carnival, Spring, Whitsun, and St. John's Day: Helle brings her deep study of these festivals to life through lecture, slides, song, and crafts. All day Monday through Wednesday. \$200.

Music and Story—Delight for the Young Child

CONNIE MANSON

July 12-14

Connie is a professional puppeteer and an experienced Waldorf early childhood teacher. Music and story are the stepping stones to literacy for the young child, and the foundation for all language development. Friday evening, all day Saturday, Sunday morning. \$125.

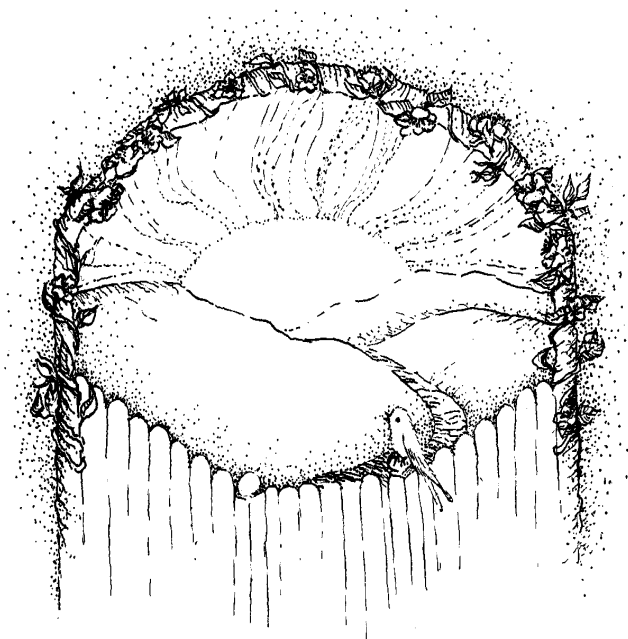
An Introduction to Waldorf Early Childhood Education

BETSI MCGUIGAN AND JAMES HILLIER

July 29-August 2

Betsi, from Monadnock Waldorf School, and James, from Lake Champlain, will lead this week of exploration of Waldorf education for children aged four to seven. All day Monday through Friday. \$375.

***It will be a full spring and 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

SPRING 2002

VOLUME 3, 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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The Garden Gate is the journal of *Sophia's Hearth Family Center*

93 Roxbury Street, Keene, New Hampshire 03431.

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Editor's Moment

Twelve pages! We're growing up! Warm thanks to all our authors who contributed to this issue of the Garden Gate. May your ranks multiply. My personal dream for the Garden Gate includes its growth in size, frequency, and circulation.

In our last issue, we asked for letters to begin what we hope to be an important forum on the issues surrounding child development and care in our modern world. We received four letters, three with donations! The fourth was Donna Steele's review of our new Speakers Series, which we have included in this issue. While we are deeply grateful that The Garden Gate would move people to send us money, it really wasn't what we had in mind. So, while I would never want to dissuade anyone from sending us donations to support our work, I would like to reiterate our call for letters about your experience: what do you do as a parent? What do you see? What questions face you as you work with or raise young children? We want to hear. It need be no more than a couple paragraphs. Please, take a few minutes and write us. Thank you.

Bruce Barlow



President's Message

Just before the new year, the board gave itself the luxury of spending a day envisioning our future. Bruce Barlow had given us a list of areas of focus for Sophia's Hearth in advance. Our pre-meeting "homework" was to pick our own three most important areas, and envision what these would look like five years from now. Quite an exercise for a four year old organization. When we met, we each listed our top three areas, and as a group we discussed a collective vision. It was such a treat to leave day-to-day matters behind and dream! As these ideas take more concrete form, we'll share them with you. In addition, we know that we have no monopoly on good ideas: write us with yours! What should Sophia's Hearth Family Center be and be doing in five years? Help us dream big dreams.

I am thrilled to make three major announcements. First, we reached our Annual Appeal goal of \$7,500, and nearly doubled the number of people who gave gifts to support our work. Thank you! Second, we have received a \$5,000 gift from the Rudolf Steiner Foundation to fund a professional development course in the summer of 2002. Third, we have received a second major unrestricted gift of \$40,000 from our anonymous supporter! We are deeply grateful for the recognition of the importance of our work, and the faith in our organization, that is coming from many places. The board has been discussing how we would use the anonymous gift to further our work. Last year, a similar gift spurred us to undertake the planning of our child care center, and we have made great progress. Now, we feel it is time to do something significant and visible, yet thoughtful and sustainable. It is humbling to think though all the considerations of responsibility and stewardship, and that's good.

With dreams in our heads, we have returned to the work of making these dreams come true. We thank you for your continued interest in and support of our organization in all ways. Please keep sending your kind thoughts our way. We strive each day to be worthy of them.

Caro Dellenbaugh



The Needs of Our Children: Truly Universal, Truly International

Susan Gray Weber

Dornach, Switzerland. October 2001

In early October, 2001, not long after the enormous September events in the United States, four hundred participants gathered in Dornach, Switzerland to celebrate, to contemplate, and to share our work with the very young child. As part of the planning group, I had eagerly awaited this time of gathering for the second international conference on The Dignity of the Young Child. Following two years of intensive planning, from nearly every continent came midwives, physicians, nurses, therapists, teachers—all those whose caring vocations surround the family and its children during these critical early stages of life.

For three days we spoke, created art, listened, and best of all, *played* in the Red Axis, a giant sensory parcours-adult playground created especially for this conference by artist Hansjorg Palm together with children's movement therapists Stefan Krauch and Claudia Grah-Wittich.

Imagine a table so tall that adults can walk under, and chairs so high that one has to climb to reach the seat, just as the young child does. Imagine a balance beam stretched so far from the distance that it becomes merely a red string, inviting a long tippy journey just to reach the door's threshold. And then, when the threshold is attained, what awaits? A "bed" of half rounds of logs, wiggling and wobbling as your feet try to navigate them. What next? Many choices: climb in and bathe in your choice of dried cherry pits, bottle corks, or wheat berries (seeds) that stimulate your skin, wake you up to bodily senses in ways long forgotten. Follow your bath with a journey from vase to vase, plunging your hand into the unknown hidden substance contained therein. Prickles! Soft fluff... children's shoes—but all unseen by the eye. Then, enter a room of total darkness, sit down comfortably, and wait, and look, and wait, and look further until a red glow shines out of the distance.

For dinner? Find a partner, wear a blindfold or ear plugs, and experience the limitation of loss of one primary sense. Trust is essential as one gropes and listens carefully in darkness or looks on in silence.

Why was all this so fruitful and delicious? For those few days, each of the conference participants experienced the world—if only in a small way—as does the very young child. Our senses, our direct experiences, not our thoughts, came to the forefront. We felt refreshed, rejuvenated (note the root word, here—*youth*) and yes, a little wiser and more sympathetic as our senses, deadened and dulled by our very modern lives, came back to life.

It was also an opportunity to share the work of Sophia's Hearth with an enthusiastic workshop group from Australia, Brazil, Germany, and Spain, and to recognize that the opportunities and challenges, the needs and hopes for children and families are the same throughout the world. The hope for healthy, joyful, peaceful childhood as a foundation for all of later life lived universally among us all.

A most warm and special thank you to Jaqueline Bellamy, doll-maker most special for the gift of two loving, life-sized baby dolls who have joined our parent-infant and expectant parent classes.

We joyfully announce the birth of

Cora Angela Elliot,

who came to Adriana and Bruce

at home on October 21, 2001.

We were graced with her presence

for a short while at our Board retreat,

and saw a beautiful baby

and glowing mother.

All of our best wishes to

the Elliot family!



Respecting the Child's Inner Wisdom

Vanessa Mitchell

Vanessa is a student in Antioch New England's Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training program. Her visit to Lóczy and other centers is part of her work with her master's project on infant motor development. She has also taken the RIE™ I training in California. Thank you for sharing your experience with our readers, Vanessa!—BB

In October of 2001 the 2nd International Professional Conference, The Dignity of the Small Child, included a presentation of the concept of the small child according to Emmi Pikler. In the 1940s, Pikler, a Hungarian pediatrician, founded a unique orphanage, the Emmi Pikler Institute. Ute Strub, a kinetic therapist from Germany and Pikler's longtime associate, presented the basic principles of Pikler's approach to childcare. She also led a work group where she helped to deepen the participants' understanding of the characteristics of the first three years of life through experiments, discussions, and videos produced at the Pikler Institute. Following the conference I had the opportunity to visit the Institute, also known as Lóczy, in Budapest, Hungary. I observed living examples of the following guiding principles of Lóczy (outlined in *Lóczy: An Unusual Approach to Mothering* by Dr. Myriam David and Genevieve Appell):

- The value of independent activity
- The value of a special, "favored" affective relationship and the importance of giving it a form suitable to an institutional setting
- The necessity of fostering the child's awareness of himself and his environment
- The importance of good physical health as a basis for and, to some extent, result of the proper application of the above principles

These principles allow the child to have a guiding role in his development. I was inspired by the profound respect for the child's inner wisdom demonstrated at Lóczy. The children spend most of their day engaging in independent activity, during which they are free to choose the materials and activities that will benefit them the most. The children seem to instinctively know what they need.

As I observed the two-year-olds during this independent playtime, a little boy with curly hair sits on his caregiver's lap to eat. He holds a glass and drinks on his own while his caregiver gives him her full attention, allowing the other children to play with the various materials set out around the room. Some children are able to invent games for themselves without using any of the play materials.

One little boy, Tercsi, climbs up the railing of a bed. Holding

on to the furnace cover, he pulls himself onto the windowsill. He stands up and looks out to the world beyond his room. This allows him to test his own limits and also identify the boundary of his environment. At one time the children at Lóczy were not allowed to climb up to the windowsill, but careful observation revealed the importance of this activity for the children. Now they are allowed to climb, but must not rough play or bring toys onto the windowsill. Szandra, a little girl who has strabismus (or crossed eyes), notices Tercsi. She also climbs up the railing of the bed. She holds the wooden fence and then pulls her belly onto the windowsill. She stays in that position with her lower body dangling over the edge. I imagine the deep pressure that she is receiving in that position. Children who are identified with sensory integration needs often are directed to activities and equipment that provide deep pressure. I wonder if Szandra is seeking out this pressure on her own. She seems aware of Tercsi, but the two of them do not interact. After a few minutes she starts to pull her legs onto the windowsill. This takes a lot of effort, but Szandra is persistent. She gets her legs up and moves into a kneeling position. From this position she is able to turn and sit with her legs swinging over the edge of the windowsill. Szandra smiles at her accomplishment. Tercsi also observes Szandra's new position. He sits down next to Szandra and imitates her. The two smile and laugh while swinging their legs up and down.

This moment does not just happen, but is the result of the effort and planning of many people. The "educarers," who care for the children, as well as psychologists, doctors, maintenance people, and the many other staff members at Lóczy all work together to create a safe environment where the children are free to develop using their own inner wisdom. Szandra and Tercsi are able to explore their gross motor development because of the faith their caregiver has in their ability to guide their own activity. Szandra pulls herself onto the windowsill despite her difficulty at first. Her caregiver is never out of eyesight during this process. I sense that her caregiver's presence is a quiet support and comfort during Szandra's self-directed activity. Szandra may have discovered a way to help her overall health by supporting her sensory development through deep pressure. Tercsi observes outside the window, fostering his sense of himself and his environment. He is able to see the grounds surrounding his room and watch the people coming and going outside. He is connected to the world beyond his room.

The Pikler Institute is a unique place, but it is also connected to a larger whole. This was very clear during this conference. Participants from thirty countries were introduced to the work of Emmi Pikler. Helle Heckmann, a conference participant who works with children in Denmark at her Waldorf-based child-care center, Nøkken, credits Pikler with giving her "the courage to work with children in a respectful way." Ute Strub, co-worker of

Pikler, helped to inspire “Spielend Lernen im SpielRaum für Bewegung,” a playroom for children’s movement development in Germany. This center is based on the work of Pikler and Elfriede Hengstenberg. They both were involved with the Sensory Awareness Foundation, which is a movement practice that works with everyday activities to help individuals rediscover their own organic wisdom. In addition, RIE™ (Resources for Infant Educators), founded in California by Magda Gerber, who worked with Dr. Pikler, has brought training and support to parents and child-care providers based on Pikler’s philosophy. The circle continues to widen due to the effort of Anna Tardos, Pikler’s daughter and current director of Lóczy, and her colleagues.

Anna Tardos met with me after each observation to discuss what I had seen. I spoke openly to her about my observations, gained new insights from her incredible wisdom, and got a glimpse into her responsibilities at Lóczy. Her workload is immeasurable. When I spoke with her about Tercsi and Szandra she was very interested in their activities and discussed their backgrounds and past activities with me. She has a personal interest in each child that lives at Lóczy and uses the observations and insights from all who have contact with the children. I was truly inspired by the work that I observed at Lóczy. Currently, Lóczy is in serious need for financial support. Please consider becoming a member of the International Emmi Pikler Foundation. If you are interested, please contact the foundation and they will be glad to supply you with additional information.

Conference on the Festivals of Autumn: A Mother’s Unique Experience

Lucy Ryder

Lucy is a board member and the relatively new mother of Lauren. She has a huge enthusiasm for the world, and for children, and we are grateful for her energy, and insights she brings to our board. She has graciously shared her experiences at our Fall Conference for the Garden Gate. Thank you, Lucy.—BB

I had been thinking about participating in the “Festivals of Autumn” conference with childcare provider and speaker, Helle Heckmann, when Susan Weber asked if I would like to be a guest participant on behalf of Sophia’s Hearth’s board of directors. I said yes with a bit of hesitation, unsure if I would find it would be much benefit, since I am a new mother with a 20-month-old, and not well-versed on the Waldorf teachings. Well, much to my surprise, it was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I found the information and activities of the conference to be useful in many aspects of life. I actually had the chance see the world through the child’s eyes—emotionally, that is, to use my imagination and do what a child does.

The theme of the conference was to study the four autumn festivals, their meaning and relevance to nature and the child. As we studied the Harvest festival, I enjoyed most threshing harvested grain and grinding it into flour for the bread that was prepared for dinner. It vividly depicts how we nurture the soil in the spring, reap its reward in the fall, and that each season brings with it miracles for us to marvel. The St. Michael festival is a celebration of courage, of overcoming our own inner vulnerable and fearful places. The Lantern celebration is marveling the beauty of light and sharing that light with others through the creation of home-made candle lanterns. We gathered at night, each with our lanterns, sang songs and paraded in harmony down a path in the forest to an open bonfire. This was a very moving experience to feel the power and warmth of light against the night sky. And lastly, the Advent Spiral: creating personal light with a small candle, to walk a personal journey in the growing darkness of the shortest days of the year, journeying inward to find that light and outward again to share it with others, to create the larger light that only a community of people can do.

There was much active discussion on the pivotal importance of the child’s first seven years of life, and the need for the child to be in nature to develop and to experience our human senses to the fullest. I now have a renewed understanding that we are all beings created and connected with the same goal: that the freedom of the outdoors offers pure endless creativity and a perpetual living playground for physical and spiritual learning.

The two most profound truths that I have taken away from this conference are, first, that “*we do not need to teach children,*” and that we as parents and teachers ought to refrain from our personal desire and need for gratification to instruct our children. When we teach, we rob the child of the pleasure and the learning experience of doing it for herself, and expressing it in her own creative way. This is perhaps the greatest challenge I face as a new mother... not to teach my child, but allowing her the freedom to learn on her own, through her own God-given senses, to experience life in her own unique way. And secondly, to remember that we are Earthly beings striving for the same goal: to love others and love ourselves. I have a deeper understanding that nature is at the base of our culture and our survival no matter where we are on Earth. Nature affects our physical and spiritual being, and each season brings memories of those past and the excitement of what lies ahead.

I look forward with even greater desire to enjoy moments with my daughter that will allow me to once again view the world through a child’s endless imagination. There is much truth to children keeping one young. When you actually begin to look through a window at eye level with a toddler, as much as possible I try to spend that time outdoors looking in.

Festivals of Autumn: A Teacher's View

Barbara Nardone

Barbara is a Waldorf Early Childhood teacher who presently cares for toddlers at Little Friends Farm, a child care center in Middletown, Rhode Island. Thank you, Barbara, for sharing your experience with us.—BB

The weekend of November 2–4, 2001 dawned more beautifully than one could have ever asked. The incredible New Hampshire weather allowed us to experience first hand working out of doors and reaffirmed for me how significant the relationship with nature is to our work. While the theme for this meeting was weaving together the festivals of the autumn, what I came away with far exceeded this intention.

We began on Friday morning with Helle speaking about Nökken and sharing slides of her work with the children. What became apparent to me was that Helle brings intense love and devotion to her art. Her thought, planning, and follow-through in every aspect of her work delighted me. She inspired me to be ever more conscious and attentive. This was only the beginning of a soul-inspiring experience.

What set this weekend in such a special light was that we worked. Talking was minimal with regard to Helle lecturing and what she said was so succinct and concentrated that a sentence captured it all. We began by counting off into four groups—one for each of the festivals—Harvest, Michaelmas, Lantern Walk, and Advent Spiral. Helle believes in bringing nature back into the Kindergarten as much as possible. This was so very evident in her festival table and all that she does. Her dance with the natural world is ongoing. Our first step was to create windows of color depicting imagery of our festival. The Michaelmas group gifted us with a room to which I cannot in words begin to do justice. I'm sorry to say that it had to be experienced. On a physical level the colors, objects and arrangement were a feast for the senses. As I stood in the space, bathed in this atmosphere, my inner self slowed to a moment of utter peace and tranquility. I felt myself to be in a sacred space permeated by the Divine. This was truly an experience that will live in me for my lifetime. For me the whole weekend was a series of such powerful impressions.

Our festival journey began with the Harvest. In slides and words Helle transported us to the Danish island of Fejo, and then invited us to sink our hands and wills into activity. We winnowed, threshed, ground, wove, baked, ate and experienced the bounty of the Harvest. We created a festival table from which we further created a fairy tale and a meal. Helle believes in using all that one is given and the fruits and vegetables that graced the table became the characters of a story and the ingredients for soup. I kept reflecting on the point and the periphery. Helle is so attentive to each and every detail and nuance, and so able to bring that attention back out to the whole. I personally challenged myself to wake up and strive for such awareness.

With each festival Helle walked us through her understanding and manifestation of its essence and then set us to work creating the tangibles—crowns for Michaelmas, paintings for lanterns, gathering boughs for the spiral. We worked individually and in groups, and as hours passed each festival came to life. There were two very moving experiences that I would like to share. One of them is a knighting for each child on Michaelmas. The setting is the park which the children and teachers go each day. One by one each child stands before Helle and is knighted. She is given a cape with the words “With this cape you will be protected and you will be able to choose good.” She is given a crown of copper with the words, “With the wisdom of the stars you will be guided in life.” She is given a bulb with the words, “With this you will plant a seed for the future.” Lastly, she is given a sword with the words, “With this you may guard the one who needs guarding.” We witnessed this ritual through slides and Helle's recounting. I can only imagine being a child and participating in such an event. Years later when she reflects back, how strengthened will she feel, and how deeply touched by such a moment? For many children might such an experience be a salvation? This too will never be forgotten. The second experience we actually took part in. Helle offered a basket of bulbs to the first person, asking her to choose the most beautiful. Then the person with the bulb was asked to turn to the one next to her and give the bulb away. Each of us had a turn to receive and to give. This was done in silence. When everyone had a bulb Helle invited us to go out and plant them. Camp Glen Brook will be well graced come spring!

While these were two exceptionally poignant moments, I felt the entire weekend was a collection of life-changing experiences. The working together that spanned the time was so rich and uplifting. I came home searching for ways to take the children out of doors more and to surround them daily with the ongoing preparation for the festivals. I find myself always asking why I do what I do and trying to be ever clearer in my striving to surround the children with real life, authentic experiences. Helle put before us several questions that I refer to often: How do we find a way for the young child to have a sense for life? What does the child imitate in the outside and what is the work of adults? How are all of the festivals connected to each other?

What I have said here is only a fraction of what Helle shared with us. She spoke about some festivals being cosmic and others being of nature. She spoke of the festivals as processes where the preparations come into the daily, practical work of the kindergarten. She spoke about purpose and purposefulness in all that we do. She inspired in me a new level of accountability. More so than ever I require of myself to know why. While Helle came to speak about festivals, for me what she said was much more far-reaching and encompassing. Something in me was moved during this conference that has offered new possibilities. I feel blessed and grateful for having been at Camp Glen Brook

for this meeting and I eagerly await weaving the autumn festivals into the summer when Helle returns. One last image to share is that while we stand in a festival, at that moment we bring something of the previous with us and we take something from it into the future. That though alone is humbling. May you find inspiration for your work as I did through Helle's sharing.

Sophia's Hearth Speakers Series

Donna Steele

We recently kicked off our Speakers Series at the Keene Public Library with a three-part offering by Dr. Suzanne Coble, a family physician in Keene and mother of eleven-year-old Galen. Donna Steele, a massage therapist, nurse and student of anthroposophy, attended all three evenings while being close to the term of her pregnancy. Unasked, she wrote a terrific summary for us, which is excerpted here. Many thanks, Donna, for the gifts of your attendance and for this information to share with our readers. By the way, her child, Jameson, was born October 16, 2001. Mother and son are doing very well, and have joined our parent/infant class. Congratulations from all of us at Sophia's Hearth, and welcome. Deep thanks also to Dr. Suzanne Coble, who fit three evenings into a doctor's and mother's schedule to help us.—BB

I attended the lectures hosted by Sophia's Hearth Family Center and Dr. Suzanne Coble. The topics were caring for the sick child at home, keeping children healthy, and warming parents' hearts. Each week the attendance grew in number. It would have been interesting to see what would have happened if the lectures continued!

Dr. Coble was the primary speaker at all three lectures, but it was really an open forum which allowed much group participation and dialogue. She presented with wit, wisdom, and hands-on experience not only as a doctor, but as a parent. The board of Sophia's Hearth was well represented and there were guest lecturers as well.

The first night we talked about childhood illnesses and how to treat them at home. Dr. Coble opened the discussion by having us recollect our own memories of being sick. These ranged from Vic's Vapo-Rub to chicken soup and ginger ale to the difference between how a mother and a father cared for you. It was a helpful tool to remind us what it is really like to be a sick child.

She discussed how illness is really an opportunity or a possibility for transformation in the child. If a child is properly supported through an illness, he may come out of it stronger, more incarnated. One cause of illness in children is a combination of vulnerability and exposure. A child is vulnerable when he is out of rhythm, there is family stress, or his warmth is jeopardized, to name a few.

Dr. Coble ended the session with a review of her first-aid kit—including band-aids, wound ointment, water or hydrogen

peroxide, ace wrap, splinter remover, gauze pads, anti-itch medicine (aveeno), butterfly band-aids (steri strips), poison control number and several remedies.

The second lecture was about keeping children healthy. Sleep, joyful movement, and opportunities for creative, spontaneous play were some of the topics discussed.

Twelve hours of sleep per night was recommended for children. They should be sent to slumber with a feeling of trust, and in the morning, feelings of gratitude should greet them; gratitude for a good night's sleep and the gift of the upcoming day.

Jane Swain, a pediatric physical therapist who is also trained in Spatial Dynamics, was a guest lecturer that evening. She discussed the difference between "fun" movement and joyful movement. Fun, as she described it, leaves you wanting more—bigger, faster and brighter. Joy leaves the child with a feeling of deep satisfaction and nourishment.

Infants need space and time on the floor. Their central nervous system is not finished developing at birth. A "map" is made in their brain by their own movements. The sense of the floor (pressure) is sent back to the brain. Fascinating! Being 37 weeks pregnant at the moment, I think of all the gadgets people have bought me—swings, jumpers, vibrating seats—when all I want and need is a warm, soft blanket to put on the floor for the baby.

She recommended that parents learn the games first before teaching the child. Do not use a manual with them. But we all remember how to play hopscotch, jacks, jump rope, or the many hours of fun you can have with a ball. Remember, Jane explained, children learn about movement from adults.

Because Jane is a professional, she did have a "textbook" of play—*Games Children Play* by Kim John Payne. It is available through the Anthroposophic Press (1-800-856-8664).

The third lecture was about warming parents' hearts. This was an inspiring discussion for me as I am soon to become a first-time parent. Susan Weber brought to light many simple, yet challenging ideas. She started with "we have to change to become who our children need us to be." Think about that. How willing are we to change—for anyone?—spouse, colleague, boss, friend—but for a child? I don't know yet, but I will soon find out.

Susan also reminded us of our resources available to us as parents—faith, community, and nature. It is important to have faith in your child that she is in her own journey and you as a parent are not responsible to fix it all or to make everything perfect. What a relief!

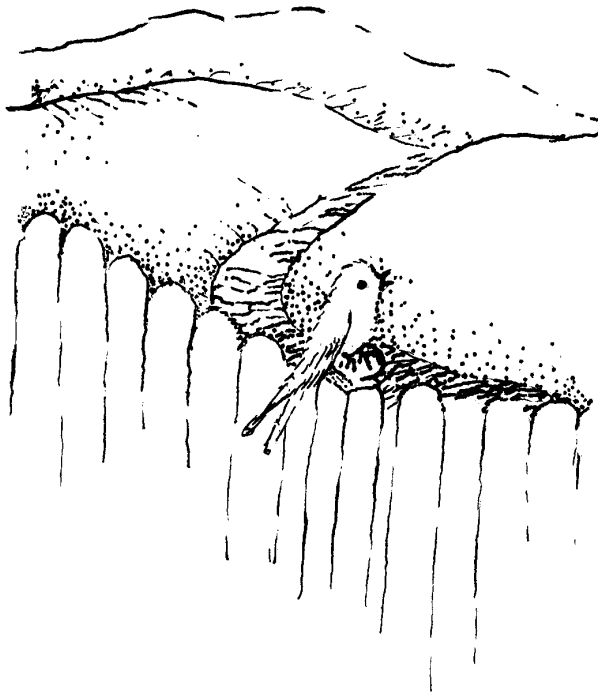
Support yourself with people you can trust, who you can be yourself with and who you can fail in front of and still be loved. This is your community. Bruce Barlow reminded us of the importance of making your own community if it is not readily available—many are disappointed when they don't "find" a community when they expect to. We do not all live across the street from our extended families. Make community where you are.

And lastly, use the power of nature. Susan states, “children experience objective goodness in nature.” Nature is all around us. Isn’t that why we live in New Hampshire? A great example is the oxygen mask on the airplane. Parents are instructed to put their mask on first, then child’s. This is not an act of selfishness—this is survival for both of you. How can you nurture others if you have not cared for yourself first? Eating well, getting enough sleep, setting goals for yourself—these tasks do not take away from your child. They enrich your own life, thereby having so much more to give your child.

Dr. Coble reminded us that first and foremost the child is an individual, a spiritual being. We must show love and respect for the child and thankfulness to the universe of this gift. We can do this by peeling away the layers and working with and from our hearts. We need to expose children to our honest work. We need to show tolerance—to all. Everyone is an individual—a spiritual being. This is what we want to nurture in ourselves and others.

And lastly, to learn to really listen. You can really perceive the spirit of the other when you listen. If someone is really listening to us, it creates, comforts, and recreates us!

So much was brought in these three nights. I am grateful to Dr. Coble and Sophia’s Hearth for this offering of wisdom, humor, love, and acknowledgement of children and parents. How lucky we are to live in a community where there are professionals to help support these valuable and precious relationships.



The Dads’ Corner: Guy Time

Bruce Barlow

“Nana, you’re going to Santa Fe with Victoria if we have to come to Kalamazoo and shove you on the plane!” I said.

“What about Evan? Who will take care of him?” She challenged.

“What am I? A potted plant?” I barked, “I can’t wait to have him all to myself!” Evan was a little over two.

Victoria’s favorite aunt had succumbed after a long fight with cancer. Nana’s only sister, she was an artist on the Santa Fe scene and full of life to the end. Nana was hesitant, but there was no question of her going with Victoria. They would meet in O’Hare and continue out to New Mexico. I would have four days on uninterrupted Guy Time with my boy. I had called my understanding boss and said “Death in the family! Gotta go! Not sure when I’ll be back! Taking care of Evan solo while Vicky’s with family.” He was totally sympathetic, understanding, and maybe a little envious.

Well, we did it all, and what a great time! It may seem remarkable to many moms, but not only did he not starve or drown in his own eliminations, he thrived, we bonded even more closely, and after four days I was more energetic and refreshed than at the beginning. We had complete freedom to do what we wanted, go where we wanted, eat what we wanted, nap when we wanted, and cuddle all night long. And we survived!

It’s funny, now, but I can’t remember clearly many of the things we did. I know we went to the Illinois Railway Museum, where they have dozens of vintage trains, and operate one each day on a stretch of track they maintain. We went, totally underdressed for a chilly day, but brave troopers that guys are, we stayed, rode the train several times, saw all the beautiful restoration work, and stopped for ice cream on the way home (yes, we were freezing, what’s your point?). We played with his toys. We read picture books. We snacked (I knew better than to deviate from Vicky’s dietary recommendations too much). We took afternoon naps (a luxury. As a consultant, clients never paid me to nap, even though they probably should have). We went to bed at 7:30 and cuddled all night long. We even did a little housework together, just to lighten Mommy’s load when we let her back in the house. Mostly, though, we just hung out. I recognized what a wonderful opportunity this was to just be with him, present in the moment and attentive to only him.

I came to have even a deeper understanding of the cheerful chirps and words he used. I had a much better sense of what he wanted or needed at that moment, and I had thought I was already pretty good at that. I set a goal of noticing some developmental change in him each day. I had always been amazed at what I would notice after being out of town on a business trip for three or four days. Could I see changes each day in a two-year-old? Yup. And what a thrill! I should have kept a diary. Four days,

and he never once cried or seemed unhappy. I think Mommy was a little dismayed that we didn't miss her more. We did miss her, but we didn't need her to take care of us.

I learned how important it is to have access to your belly button. Evan never really sucked his thumb or had Linus's blanket. Instead, he needed to stick his finger in his belly button for that little feeling of security. So when in those overalls, the side button had better be undone so the right hand can sneak in there. Come on, you do something like it too. I put my thumbs in between my index and middle fingers when I'm uncomfortable. Victoria always notices and points out that my thumbs are safe. I think Evan has outgrown his belly button now that he's ten. At least I haven't seen him look like Napoleon lately.

Was my style of care different than Victoria's? Absolutely. Would she have approved of everything we did? Absolutely not. More the reason to get her out of town for a while.

We tossed her out again a couple years later when her dad passed away in the summertime. Same arrangement, just as much fun. Five days alone together. We went to the Children's Museum, the train museum, the airplane museum. We ate hot dogs, we ate guacamole in a tortilla bowl, and then ate the bowl! We played. I tried to teach him something at one point and, as I had to learn again, he didn't want to be taught. He wanted to discover and learn. Come on, Dad, get with the program. Same goal: see a change each day? Yes! Remarkable! Then we drove to Kalamazoo to join the family gathering. I don't recommend death as an excuse for Guy Time, but it happens, and we took advantage of sad times and made the best of them. And they were the best.

Last summer, since it had been so long, I was pining for Guy Time. So instead of throwing Mommy out, we Guys took off for the National Warplane Museum in Elmira, NY for two nights and a couple days. I had made arrangements for him to sit in the cockpit of an A-10 Warthog (one of his favorite airplanes). Two nights in a row at Pizza Hut! Krispy Kreme donuts! An indoor pool (and a beloved Jacuzzi for Daddy's sore back) playing catch with Splash Bombs! Driving six hours each way through Vermont and New York (Evan slept most of the way). Spending a long time with the volunteer in charge of restoring the A-10, and climbing into the cockpit! Junk food in front of cable TV, with Evan in sole command of the remote control (Dad only insisted on muting the commercials. Evan insisted mostly on Discovery Channel and Animal Planet, to my relief). Sin and degradation were ours! But mostly, we were together: chatting, playing, and just being. I didn't set the goal of seeing changes. He has grown up so, and is so sophisticated in his experience of the world, that I felt it would be a setup for my disappointment. I still worked hard to stay in the moment, but in a different way.

I miss the old days of belly buttons and chirps. I love who he is and what he is becoming, but the first two Guy Times are among my most treasured memories, and I'm grateful that we had those

times. We will have lots more Guy Time. Even if it's just taking him for a day to do what guys do (whatever that is—we like miniature golf and ice cream cones, and taking cruises in the convertible), letting Mommy do whatever Mommy wants to do.

Gotta be careful, though. When he was little, I was in sole charge after dinner, including putting him to bed, which was made easy by him having a double bed right after his crib. It had plenty of room for Wrestle and Play time, and cuddling for the half-hour or so while he settled down to sleep. After a while, though, Mommy butted in and demanded equal cuddle time, so we had to start alternating nights with him. Then they talked me into bunk beds when we moved to New Hampshire, and Evan likes the top bunk that, with our low, vintage New England ceilings, I can't climb into. So while alone in the lower bunk on alternate nights it's still pleasant, but not as nice. When the world is spinning down, you make the best of what's still around.

So dads, assert your rights to Guy Time (or Gal Time), even if it's only for uninterrupted time after dinner every night, and rediscover just how wonderful it is. Shrug off those disparaging comments from your better half (in my case, better three-quarters, and I admit it freely) and understand that you can care for even the smallest infant with little risk of death or starvation (although Guy Time takes on a different character during the breastfeeding period. We solved that by having me in charge early on weekend mornings, when we guys typically awoke at 6:00, had a quick Mommy snack, and then played quietly while Mommy slept). Take coaching graciously, but with a grain of salt, be yourself, and work hard to stay present in the moment.

And remember: if coaching gets too much in your face, give Mommy a Time Out in her room.



View From the Nest: Lost and Found

Adriana T. Elliot

38 Weeks Gestation

Dear Little One, you are coming to join our family. I long for you, eagerly anticipating your arrival as I would that of an honored guest: wondering when you will get here, trying to stay calm and patient, attempting to occupy myself with other things, yet looking up anxiously at the sound of every car in the driveway, at every ring of the telephone. Could it be...? Of course not. I will undoubtedly be the first to know when you're really coming, and besides, shouldn't I be savoring this last bit of quiet time, so close with you? I know I will miss being pregnant, but I am ready for this pregnancy to be done, and for you to come into my arms, nurse at my breast, snuggle at my side. I miss you, even though we haven't met. I want you, even though you are right here. I need to touch you, see you, smell you. I'm in love with you, I'm awed by you, I'm so full of YOU, and I'm ready for you to come OUT already! In spite of all of these feelings, I have no choice but to accept you in your own time.

Due Date Day

Beautiful morning clouding over to windy evening, storm brewing, new moon. I sleep deeply and easily on alternate nights, and on the nights in between I am anxious, restless, and alert. The light is too bright, the room too warm, no position is comfortable, and every tightening of the belly puts me on red alert. Am I afraid of birth? Or of having three children? Or am I just anticipating the birth with too much excitement? My inner experience is so intense and all consuming, and I can do absolutely nothing about it except to pray for patience, acceptance, and the ability to surrender to what may come. I send breath and love to melt and soften the tension in my solar plexus. Loving this baby, I imagine heart and body opening outrageously, as they must. As they will.

Midnight: Five Days "Overdue"

This is truly the darkest night of my soul. In spite of the crescent moon, in spite of prayer, in spite of meditation, in spite of massage, good diet, loving husband, supportive friends and family, in spite of everything, tonight I am at the mercy of the shadow. I am drowning in the sadness, engulfed by the terror of the unknown, helpless in the face of my weakness. I see myself at my ghoulish worst: prideful, arrogant, small minded and tight fisted and peevish. Every limitation, every kink in the texture of my inner fabric is highlighted tonight, as I undergo an excruciating revelation of my own humanness. I try to beat the demons back with yogic breathing, with warm milk and toast, with visualizations of inner harmony, with confidences to my husband, but nothing works. I have no choice but to ask for help. Alone and shaking in



the darkness, I pray as I have never prayed before. Sobbing, I beg for the strength to accept myself as I am. Please angels, St. Michael, God, and any ancestors who may be aware of me, though I am small, insignificant, a speck among millions of specks, I am all I have to work with, so please help me to grow, help me to make it through another day, help me to understand that I need help.

Noon: Labor Starts

Bright bright light too too bright I am bathed in love in sweet slow rhythmic waves of purity and I am laughing. Washed clean and empty and yet oh so full. I laugh and I laugh and I moan and I am here. Nowhere else, nobody else but me and you and me and you and we are finally—yes Finally—HERE.

Baby

She lies sleeping peacefully beside me. She is round. She is golden. She is beautiful.

Sleep

unspeakable beauty
your hand limp and tender
your face open in surrender
in sleep
the diaper pins
oil
ointment
clean diaper in its wrap
all await you silently
sacred objects at the altar
in the stillness of your breath
in the patience of our bedroom
this house
our place of worship
and you
my little one
our reminder
of God's presence
in our midst

Day Five

Up out of bed a bit now, I must give up the bliss of constant intimacy with the baby, and begin to have more contact with the rest of the family. For the first time since her birth I notice tension, impatience, desire to get things done, tightness in the belly. It is terribly sad. The first few days postpartum were so precious, so slow and easy and simple. Just she and I. Snuggling, nursing, pooping, sleeping. Now that I am away from her sometimes, even briefly—to eat or to shower—I long for her like when I was pregnant; I miss her; I ache for her sweetness against my skin.

Day Six

Dear, sweet baby, last night I lay in bed beside you and your papa and I wept for love and sadness and joy. I wept along with my womb, weeping blood over the loss of you; placenta gone and buried; you who were a part of me now separate, beginning this earth journey that is entirely and uniquely your own. I have lost you and found you all at once: desperate for you to come to me, I yearned for your arrival, and now that you are here I already begin to lose you, as you move farther and farther away into your own future. So I wept for the painfully eternal love that is motherhood. I wept in gratitude for your strength and health and beauty. I wept in appreciation of this sacred early time with you, and in sorrow over how quickly it will pass and

fade into shadows of dim memory. I wept for the woman you will become, in awe of the feminine and in pain over the inevitable struggles of being female.

Yet, Little One, the world is good. Sunlight fills the room as the clouds part and I bury my face in you, drinking in your scent. I know by the smell of your neck that the world is a good place.

Day Twelve

I am longing for her; I am hoping she'll keep sleeping. I am enjoying my separateness and independence; I am yearning to touch her, smell her, gaze into her bright eyes. Tonight, alone while all three—THREE!—of my children sleep, and their father is out, I lie on the floor and feel the weight of my body, my bones, my mortality. I wonder at the conflicting forces in my soul. I am consumed by the impulse to give selflessly, to abandon all restraint and live in service of love, in devotion to intimate bonds of human kindness. Yet I can be equally overwhelmed by the impulse to pull back, be separate, know myself, feel independent, and clarify my boundaries. Paradoxically, I must do both.

Postpartum

Soggy milk-soaked shirt, mountains of dirty laundry.
Red blood, white milk, golden curds in my infant's diaper.
Ravenous appetite and unquenchable thirst.
Release into timelessness, flood of love, tide of life.
Resisting formlessness, fear of openness, self protection in presence of expanding heart.
She squirms on her sheepskin and stretches toward waking.
Exquisite.
I sit six feet away.
I seek the balance:
retain enough perspective to see us both clearly,
immerse myself in the oceanic love that surrounds us.
Open heart, clear mind.
Faith
in the good and holy ground we tread together
as family
as humanity.

