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Manuscripts

As stated in the Mission Statement for *Paths of Learning* (see <http://www.great-ideas.org/pathmiss.htm>), the purpose of this journal is to "encourage an understanding of education as a means of nourishing holistic personal development and a sustainable, democratic, and peaceful community life." To this end, we welcome manuscripts on any aspect of teaching, learning, and mindful living, written from diverse points of view and encompassing a wide range of educational choices.

Except in unusual cases, manuscripts should not exceed twelve pages. Submit three copies of the manuscript to the Editor of *Paths of Learning*, Richard Prystowsky. Manuscript submissions from youth (up to age 12) and from teens or young adults (through college age) should be sent to the appropriate editor c/o the journal's address or via e-mail. Manuscript should be double-spaced and printed in 12 point type. Submissions should be aimed at intelligent readers who, though interested in, might be unfamiliar with the subject matter being discussed. We also ask that authors demonstrate respect for persons holding alternative points of view, even if the authors passionately disagree with these views.

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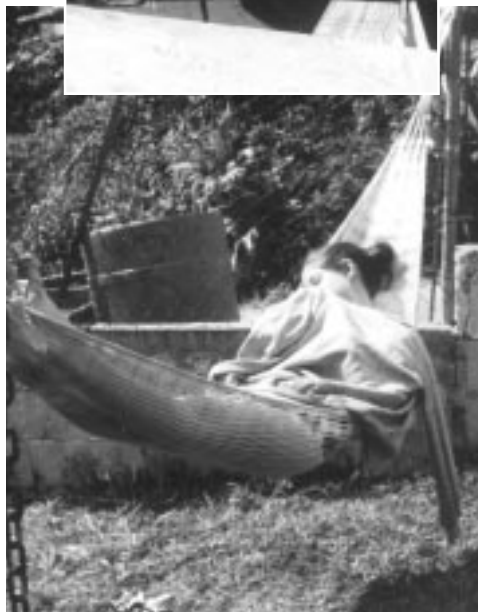
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Finding Connection at

“We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.”
 ETTY HILLESUM, from *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries, 1941–1943*

In the October 16, 2000 issue of *Newsweek*, there is a very short article entitled “On Spanking: New survey shows many parents think it’s OK.” In this article, we learn that, according to this new survey, and “[d]espite strong evidence to the contrary, 61 percent of parents of children under 7 think spanking is an appropriate ‘regular form of discipline....’” Moreover, the survey reveals that “44 percent of parents believe they’ll spoil a 3-month-old if they pick her up when she cries.” And perhaps most devastating and revealing of all, “40 percent believe a 12-month-old who turns the TV on and off repeatedly while her parents are watching is ‘trying to get back at them’” (p. 64).

I am reminded of what Thich Nhat Hanh writes in his critique of pillow-pounding as an approach to getting in touch with our anger: “...I don’t think that this is getting in touch with our anger at all. In fact,” he continues, “I don’t think it is even getting in touch with our pillow. If we are really in touch with the pillow, we know what a pillow is and we won’t hit it” (*Peace Is Every Step* 59).

Much of our work in alternative education and at *Paths* involves adults’ challenging but often rewarding attempts to find out how to be “really in touch” both with children and with themselves. If we pound the pillow, we hurt the pillow, and then, by extension, we hurt ourselves, at least insofar as we damage an item that could have served to support us. Likewise, harming others is tantamount to harming ourselves. Conversely, empowering children, honoring their dignity, ultimately benefits us all. Empowered children, we hope, will stand a better chance of becoming caring adults than will their disempowered, disrespected peers.

In the best cases, the pro-spanking parents represented in the survey noted above are probably well intentioned but clearly misinformed. In many cases, they are probably clueless about the causes and consequences of their behavior. My hunch is that most of these parents are unfamiliar with other paradigms of behaving, and perhaps, more gen-

erally, with other paradigms of living. Like the simple child represented in the Haggadah—a book, read during the Passover seder, that tells the story of the Jews’ freedom from slavery in Egypt, and that talks about, among other things, the nature and behavior of different types of persons (wise, wicked, and so on)—many of these parents perhaps don’t even know how to ask the very questions that could lead to their own liberation and happiness. Here, they might take their cue from those children who are engaged in a struggle to understand and experience new ways of being, such as the children represented in Bonnie Silva’s piece “Forked Tongues,” a short article having to do with breaches of trust: “[The girls are] wondering why mean-spirited, short-tempered people have the right to tell them to be kind and considerate towards others. They’re attempting to make sense of how one can learn good citizenship and be excluded from serving the community at the same time.” Indeed.

In “Community Homeschooling: A Day in the Life,” Van Andruss offers both an antidote to and a preventive measure against the formation of problems that lead to such a breach of trust between children and adults. In the small, rural, Canadian homeschooling community about which Van writes, we find adults and young people interacting meaningfully, with mutual respect and with a shared sense of purpose and commitment. This is not a homeschooling community without problems; rather, it is a community that weaves solutions to its problems into a healthy, holistic, organic fabric of interdependent living. Similarly, in the interview with Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn (“The Blessings of Authenticity: An Interview with Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn”), we find confirmation that, when we connect with ourselves, we connect with our children, and that when we connect with our children, we connect with ourselves. When we are present for and deeply honor our and our children’s lives, the Kabat-Zinns teach us, we can begin to accept our shortcomings and celebrate our happiness, all the while (or as much as possible) being aware of

the Spring of Love

the bliss that captures us in the present moment. Such are the familial roots and rewards of interdependent living, grown deep in the practice of mindful parenting.

In our journey towards making and sustaining these interdependent connections between adults and children, we discover, ultimately, the spring of love. Every great spiritual tradition teaches us the healing power of love. Many, if not most, great nonviolent movements for social change are grounded in love. In Jewish tradition, Rabbi Hillel, one of the greatest and most influential Rabbinic sages in Jewish history, taught that the commandment to love one's neighbor is "the whole Torah" (Buxbaum, *passim*). A personification of interdependence itself, Gandhi wrote that "Jesus lived and died in vain if He did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love" (26). More simply, and for some, perhaps more immediately, John Lennon sings that "love is the answer"—and then he adds, "and you know that, for sure."

Indeed, we know that, for sure, but in the soul-numbing world in which so many of us live, we also need to be reminded of this truth. In their own ways, the writers whose works we read in this issue of *Paths* so remind us. For example, Chris Mercogliano reminds us of this truth when he describes the community-based work in which the children from the Albany Free School engage. Here, Chris tacitly helps us to understand that the students' success is not measured so much by the extent to which the children help a small Puerto Rican village rebuild after a disaster, but, more significantly, by the manifestation of commitment that binds the students and the locals together. Absent this commitment, both parties might never have understood their interdependent existence. And though Chris never says so directly, one senses that the students and their hosts' relationship is grounded in love, and that the power of love generates their interactive behavior and mutual respect.

In an era in which notions of success have become so confused and confusing, we might easily forget that suc-

cess in any "educational" endeavor, whether this endeavor occurs in a remote village, in the home, or in a school of any sort, is manifest not simply in the traditionally understood accomplishments of learners (good grades, well constructed walls for houses, artistic prodigy among a family's children), but, more notably—and more nobly—in the extent to which all who participate in the teaching-learning experience honor the integrity of each other so that everyone can truly follow her or his bliss and, we hope, attain happiness. Not all of us will help rebuild a village thousands of miles from our homes; not all of us will have child prodigies counted among our family members; not all of us will achieve good grades or high test scores; not all of us will start a school. But all of us can honor others. All of us can connect deeply with children and with ourselves. All of us can love.

Kendra Weistar, one of the young poets whose work appears in this issue, writes about parents who beg forgiveness, but "Too late/Too hurt[.]" We need not wait until it's too late. All of us can love.

— Richard J. Prystowsky

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Forked Tongues

by Bonnie Silva

The President and Treasurer of the newly formed dog club **W.O.O.F.** bent low as they applied oil pastels to the border of their official club poster. "How about if Carol comes to the meeting?," eleven year old Tabitha suggested, "Maybe she can bring her dog grooming stuff." Ten year old Molly didn't answer her friend right away. She stopped drawing but didn't look up from her artwork. "Grown-ups wreck everything. They shouldn't be allowed anywhere near the club," she finally declared.

When Tabitha walked into the kitchen to replenish the official club snack tray, I asked nonchalantly, "Does Molly still belong to the sled dog club?" "No," my daughter responded emphatically. "A man came to the meeting with some Husky puppies that were really fluffy and cute. He was showing everyone how he trained them to pull the sleds," she continued.

"Molly said one of the boy puppies didn't understand the commands, so the man yelled at him, then he pulled the collar real tight, till the puppy cried. The puppy still didn't know how to do what the man wanted, so he kicked him right in the stomach." Tabitha's face grimaced as she finished the sad story. "Then Molly asked her Mom to take her home and she quit the club."

I didn't reply but sat silently steaming over the many contradictory messages the adult world had

thrust upon Tabitha and her best friend in just the past week alone.

First there was the school incident. After attending a special class in character education where a teacher discussed the virtues of honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, etc., the inseparable comrades met as usual in the cafeteria for lunch. A cafeteria aide decided she didn't like the noise level on one side of the room, therefore the entire group, including Tabitha and Molly, were forced to stand in line on the playground for the entire recess period which followed.

Then there was the visit to the animal shelter. The girls had begged me for a ride so they could offer their services on behalf of destitute cats and dogs. They also made me promise to wait in the car. I should have known better. Upon their request at the office window for a volunteer form, a woman with short hair and glasses snapped sharply, "Sorry, girls. Why don't you stop in again in ten years?"

Not so long ago, the husky trainer, the cafeteria aide, and the shelter staff person could have belonged to a club known in Native American Indian circles as the Forked Tongues. Often seen bearing a writing instrument in one hand and a whisky bottle in the other, this sleight-of-language crowd used written and verbal com-



a backdrop of media portrayals characterizing their age group as scathingly sarcastic, self-absorbed adult bashers.

The ice in my tea had long since melted when the sound of four skipping sneakers jolted me out of my pondering. The girls proudly held up their new dog club poster for my comment.

The phrase ALL WELCOME had been neatly inscribed by Tabitha in bold letters across the bottom. A closer look revealed Molly's fine print and state of heart. The words *only if you're under 18* stared back at me from under the non-discriminating invitation.

Despite the many times I and others like me have disappointed Tabitha, she always seems willing to give grown-ups another chance. Unfortunately, like those who have been betrayed or kicked in the stomach, it may be a long time before Molly will trust us again.

Bonnie is the mother of two homeschooling girls and an Emmy award winning writer/television producer. Bonnie remains committed to developing high quality, non-violent viewing choices for children and families. She is also passionate about creating places where captured wild Mustangs can live free again.

munication to bewilder and cheat an entire indigenous population.

Tabitha and Molly are endeavoring to fashion a sense of themselves amidst a modern camp of double talkers. These two honest, compassionate, and unselfish young girls are at once confused and angered by the mixed messages hurled at them from every direction.

They're wondering why mean-spirited, short-tempered people have the right to tell them to be kind and considerate toward others. They're attempting to make sense of how one can learn good citizenship and be excluded from serving the community at the same time. They're trying to figure out who they are against



The Blessings of Authenticity: An Interview with Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

By Charlie Miles and Richard Prystowsky

*This past July, Paths editorial assistant Charlie Miles and I traveled to Lexington, MA, where we interviewed Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn, the authors of *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*. The warmth, beauty, genuineness, and generosity that permeates their beautiful book also permeates their presence—and their home, where they received us for the interview. No matter that they had just returned the night before from a trip to Germany, where they had given workshops on mindful parenting, they graciously welcomed us into their home. As our children sat on the Kabat-Zinn’s couch, reading—attended to a few times by Myla and Jon, who wanted to be sure that they were okay (“Parents, you know?” Jon remarked to me with a smile and a shrug)—the four of us proceeded to journey through some of the key issues that have made *Everyday Blessings* such an inspirational gift to so many parents.*

Throughout this journey, Myla and Jon offer insights into how we might awaken to our true potential as full human beings. In this regard, the epigraph that they choose for their book—appropriately, from Rainer Maria Rilke—seems more than apt: “Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against the sky.” Deeply feeling such sentiments in our hearts, we can try to be fully present in our family lives, truly loving our children and ourselves, and honoring the spaces that we inhabit, including those that divide us but that we also share. Teaching us how to give ourselves permission to be present at and for our own family life, Myla and Jon ultimately bestow upon us their greatest gift, one that also forms our bond with them as co-adventurers on this most engaging journey of mindful parenting.

—Richard Prystowsky





Our Inner Landscape and Parenting

Jon: We're happy that you're here, and we're happy to do this.

Richard: We're so thrilled, I can't even tell you!

Charlie: Yeah. Out of all the interviews that I've done with Richard, this is the one that hits closest to my personal life. The others have been interesting, but this is the one that is closest to my heart. For that reason, I am most nervous about it.

R: Yes. With other interviews, as close as I feel to them, there is a distance, some space. But this is so much what we do and talk about, think about, that we are both a little nervous.

C: We've organized the questions with the assumption that many people don't know who you are.

J: That's a good assumption. We have no idea who we are, so why should anyone else? Of course, ideas are cheap.

C: How is your book different from the many child-rearing books that have gone before it?

J: It is not as if we have read all parenting books, but I think that we actually say something in *Everyday Blessings* about that. Most books give advice about particular kinds of situations and inform people about normative patterns of behaviors at particular ages. These books reassure parents that what's going on with their child is normal and give them ideas about how to work with it. A lot of parenting books are advice and information based.

There are very few books out there that are about the inner landscape of parenting itself, the actual experience, inwardly, of being a parent, about what's going on in your mind from moment to moment as you interact or interface with your children. What Myla and I tried to do is to paint the territory of the inner and the outer landscape between parents and children. We wanted to have the whole thing point to an inner discipline that allows people to cultivate more presence of mind—more open-hearted, less judgmental presence of mind—as they ride the moment to moment, day to day, month by month, year by year, ups and downs, and challenges of raising children.

Myla: I also think that a lot of books for parents are, in some ways, based on what to do in different situations. They may present different approaches to different situations. Sometimes they are almost like a cookbook, "In this situation, this is a good thing to do." Some of those books are actually very helpful because they give you ideas.

But, somebody once characterized our book as "how to *be* while you're figuring out what to do." In a certain way, when you bring awareness to your moments, try to be more present in your moments, a whole universe opens up for you, and you begin to see things you never saw before, both within yourself and also within your children. There is enormous potential

there for growing ourselves, through this process of becoming more aware—what Jon called "the inner landscape"—as well as for being more fully present for our children and in more nourishing ways. There is tremendous potential here for us, both as human beings and as parents, in working with mindfulness from moment to moment in our daily lives.

I'd like to clarify right now that when we talk about mindfulness in the work of mindful parenting, we aren't suggesting that people have to be meditators to be mindful. I myself don't have a formal meditation practice. Working with mindfulness from moment to moment in our everyday lives as parents can be extremely challenging, at least as challenging as sitting with legs crossed in a meditation hall.

We all know as parents that in one moment we might feel that everything is great; we feel very competent in our parenting. Our children are so wonderful. And then, in the very next moment, all hell breaks loose, everything falls apart, our kids are "terrible", we are terrible parents, things are incredibly chaotic and horrible and miserable. We ask ourselves, how did this happen?

It can be tremendously difficult to work with this constantly changing landscape which is parenting, being in relationship within the family. This practice, this moment to moment working with mindfulness in our everyday lives is a huge gift to us because there is so much potential for insight and deep satisfaction.

J: Maybe there are one or two more things to say in response to your question. One, Myla has alluded to: I think it would be absurd to say that in order to be a mindful parent you have to be a meditator who sits on a cushion or something like that since really, sitting on a cushion—for anybody who knows about sitting on a cushion—is not enough. There are many formal practices that one might be engaged in at one point or another, but the real meditation practice is how you live your life. From that point of view, what we are saying is that parenting affords an incredible opportunity for cultivating mindfulness in your life as its own spiritual practice, and a very arduous one, a very challenging one, and an extremely beautiful one. It is very, very human.

The Dalai Lama talks about basic human values, and says things like, "My religion is kindness. All we really need to do is to cultivate kindness." He doesn't go around saying that we need to do a lot of heavy duty meditative practices on the cushion. Mindful parenting is a way in which you can do deep spiritual practice without having to go on retreat. In fact, there is a whole chapter in our book about how it *is* a retreat when you take on having children.

The other point I would make is that there is no one right way to parent or to be mindful. This is why this book is different from other books and also more challenging, because it is not giving people advice; it is not saying, "This is *the* way to do it." What it *is* saying is that if you cultivate mindfulness, you will discover deeper forms of intelligence within yourself that might be useful, right in those moments when you are about



to lose it, when you feel overwhelmed by the challenge and the task of parenting. It is based on a trust in our own capacity to be fully present, fully awake, fully alive.

When most people pick up a book on parenting, they want the expert to tell them something useful, not, “Just trust that at that particular moment, if you are aware of the ways in which you are forcing or clinging or holding, you may find a new way of relating, in that moment, that might be tremendously nourishing, not just for you but for your children.” That is a lot to ask from the reader. So, a good deal of the book is sculpted to try to give people a feeling sense of the landscape, as you move through it—through the stories we tell, through the various ways we approach the subject—so that people can almost, by osmosis, by reading the book, cultivate a felt sense of what mindfulness is. We haven’t written a Mindfulness Cookbook, with instructions like, “Step one. Breathe in. Step two. Don’t scream. Count to ten.” All of those kinds of things. We don’t do any of that. We just say that we are all infinitely more beautiful and more creative and more imaginative than we think. There is nothing better than parenting to push those buttons of emotional reactivity and blindness in us; however, we have the potential to really live our lives differently, and doing so would be good for our children and good for us.

R: You mention that you, Jon, have a formal meditation practice and that you, Myla, don’t. Many spiritual leaders would say that there are a variety of forms of meditation, only one of which involves sitting on the cushion. Would you, in that regard, say that parenting is itself a meditation practice?

M: Absolutely. I think that gardening can be a meditation practice. Anything in your life can be a meditation practice if you bring awareness to it, if you bring your full presence to it. I think that that is where the potential lies, in bringing that kind of awareness to all of our moments as human beings, whether it is in our relationships with our partners or with our children, or in our work.

J: Or with our parents, for that matter.

M: We see that a lack of awareness often generates huge suffering and pain in families, in organizations, in the universe. We live in a society with all kinds of time pressures and with the huge irony of having all of these *things* that are supposed to make our lives easier, but that then end up robbing us of huge amounts of our time and attention. I notice people with children talking on their cell phones, one more thing to take people away from the present moment, to take them away from their children. Not that we have to be with our children every moment of the day, but I think that the general trend in the society is toward more busyness and more lack of presence. Mindfulness can bring with it a wonderful new balance. Bringing things back into balance, we can wrestle with the pull of all of these things—TV, computers, phones, faxes—that are constantly pulling us away from *this* moment, *this* place. By making an intentional commitment to bring mindfulness into the home, to this moment, at least we have a way to work with the inevitable toxicity of the society that we are immersed in.

J: Mindfulness turns parenting into a meditation practice. Or, another metaphor for it would be a yoga practice—yoga and meditation, of course, being really the same thing. But people think about yoga as stretching, developing strength, flexibility and balance through stretching. Well, nothing stretches you more than parenting, which stretches you to and perhaps beyond your limits. Being sensitive to those limits while you are bending, while you are moving, is a core teaching in yoga. Yoga is about the same thing that meditation is about—understanding your truest nature in relationship to the whole world. If you see yourself as stretching, or cultivating balance or flexibility, then the opportunities to do that are just those things in parenting that we all find so unnerving, the things that frighten us and drive us crazy.

It is not the amount of stress we are under in any given moment that is the problem. The question is, “Can we work with it differently?” We aren’t saying that if you are a mindful parent you will never be angry, or that if you are a mindful parent you will never yell or that there won’t be any chaos in your family. We are certainly not saying that. We *are* saying that all of the normal emotions that we all have as human beings will be present, and the family will be more or less chaotic at different times. But if the whole thing is held in a certain kind of awareness, then we can navigate much more effectively through those ups and downs, and in fact, maybe take the edge off some of them or re-route ourselves in ways that make wiser use of the full range of human emotions. In this way our anger, for example, or our frustration or our disappointment doesn’t become toxic to our children, as it so often does when we start to say things to our child that are degrading or hurtful.

We all have the potential to become more aware of our emotions and how they manifest within the family. If we are angry about something, it may be perfectly valid to have the emotion of anger. We shouldn’t just suppress it, because it is not too healthy to just become the family doormat. However, if we rant and rave like a lunatic all the time, that is also not so healthy. Instead, we might embrace the feeling and ask what is really going on here. We might come to it with a degree of mindfulness. That is what is now being called “emotional intelligence.”

If you were to work with your emotions that way, as a parent, can you see that your children would pick up on that in ways that might be valuable to them? Research shows that, even from infancy, the back and forth between mother and child in terms of feeling, tone of voice, touching, all of those kinds of things enhance dramatically the interpersonal sensitivity, sensibility, and intelligence of the child.

Writing Everyday Blessings

R: In *Everyday Blessings*, you often refer to “life’s unfolding journey.” During your own unfolding journeys as parents, was there a point at which you knew for sure that you wanted



or needed to write this book? How, holistically, did the writing of this book come about and proceed?

C: And what, in your personal, individual backgrounds, brought you to that point?

J: That's a big one!

M: Like a lot of people, I had no idea what to expect when I had children, and I was unprepared for the wonderful strong feelings that I immediately had for my son, who was my first child. It was so powerful for me; the depth of those loving and protective feelings really took me by surprise.

I am a very intuitive person, and I knew, deep down, that I wanted to parent in a way that was more sensitive and heart-felt, trusting my own feelings and being in touch with who my son was. I think now that I chose as role models women who were actually being more present for their children, who were holding them, carrying them, nursing them, doing things in a more nurturing, connected way. I felt extremely happy and fulfilled and satisfied when I was able to be present in this way.

Over time, children grow and their wills develop and they become much more their own person. They begin expressing their own individuality, often by saying, "No!" I wanted to work with this in a way that was different from what I was seeing around me. I gave a lot of thought to my own experience of being a child. When I was growing up, there wasn't much thought given to the interior lives of children. They tended to be seen as tough and resilient. Dr. Spock ruled.

There wasn't a lot of awareness of feelings, nor a lot of awareness of what children really needed. I wanted to bring that kind of awareness to my parenting. For the most part, I found I was able to be more sensitive and attuned to my son.

▲ *If you are going to be bringing children into the world, why not give it everything you have got?*

I nursed him, and held him and developed a certain kind of sensitivity which I think was nurturing for him, and very healing for me. In some way, the moments in which I was able to meet his needs, to be aware of what he needed and to respond appropriately, to bring a heartfelt presence to my relationship with him—and of course, later, also to my other children—were transformative for me. Over the years, motivated by my children's wellbeing, I paid attention to my own inner process, what parenting was calling out of me, where my rough edges were, where my limitations were, and how I was working with them.

I was trained as a nurse, and I worked assisting at births in the hospital as well as at homebirths. I began teaching childbirth classes, and I think that in teaching childbirth classes and preparing women to give birth, I was bringing an approach to birthing that was totally in sync with mindfulness. Rather than using distraction methods, which were very

common in those days, the philosophy of our organization, which was called Birth Day, was to bring a more accepting presence to the pain, to the feelings, to really open up to what was happening within ourselves as we were giving birth.

I became very aware that both the women and men in the classes were growing through their bringing awareness to the inner landscape of the beliefs that they were bringing to birthing. What are the ideas and beliefs that we bring to birthing? What feels right to us? Can we bring awareness to our experience of being pregnant and birthing in a way that puts us more in touch with ourselves as we go through the process, and more in touch with our babies?

Birth is an incredible experience. We have a unique opportunity to actually feel what we are experiencing at an extraordinary moment in our lives, even if at times it is painful or scary. Most of us are used to distracting ourselves, or anesthetizing ourselves whenever pain or fear comes up. I was not a person who said, "Oh well. This is not painful." Yes, it is painful. But how do we look at the pain? Do we see it as something that is really terrible? Or can we look at the pain as something that is important and healthy and an integral part of this amazing life process? We can look at parenting similarly. Some moments are tremendously painful. There are moments when, as parents, we just can't believe how much pain we feel. But if we shut down, if we don't look at it, if we just shove it aside, then we do not give ourselves a chance to learn and grow from those experiences.

J: There are so many adults who will tell you that in some way or other, they were not really seen for who they were when they were children, that they were literally disregarded or disrespected in one way or another. At the Stress Reduction Clinic [at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, which was started by Jon and where he works], one

adult woman once told me something of her family history. There were a lot of children, and at a certain point her mother died. Her father

was a very prominent doctor in the community. From the moment the mother died, her name was never spoken; her existence was never mentioned. Her father remarried, and it just went on from there, because he thought it would be too painful for the children to talk about their dead mother. Well, the amount of damage that that denial caused their psyches was just unbelievable. It was catastrophic. We know more now about the dangers of this kind of emotional denial and neglect, but it is still extremely prevalent. In those days, what the father did was probably considered a fairly sensible way to cope with the situation.

So, I think that what Myla was saying is correct. I really like the way that in Chinese philosophy there is a saying: "No blame." People do the best they can. It is not that people

want to hurt their children. But as the generations unfold, hopefully in one way or another we are accumulating some



Richard, Jon, Myla and Charlie

degree of wisdom about the inner life of children and adults and how, when our soul needs are met as little beings, then the sovereignty and autonomy that we all desire for our children manifest, as opposed to being warped or squashed or locked into some kind of tiny space that is so small that it takes the rest of our lives to recover it somehow, if it is possible at all.

R: When did you know that you wanted to begin sharing all of this with others, in the form of a book? And how did that proceed?

M: Ever since the kids were born, I found myself thinking deeply about parenting and writing down some of my experiences with them. After a while, I realized that it would be very important and satisfying to try to articulate what I was exploring for other parents. At the same time that I was doing that, Jon was doing his work, and I think that there was a kind of coming together of his work and my work in the family.

I have always felt tremendous empathy for children who are



From *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* (NY: Hyperion, 1997):

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Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, and Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts. He is known internationally for his work in integrating mindfulness meditation into mainstream medicine. He is the author of the national bestsellers *Full Catastrophe Living* and *Wherever You Go, There You Are*.

Myla Kabat-Zinn, B.S.N., R.N., has worked as a childbirth educator, birthing assistant, and an environmental advocate. For many years she was Co-Director of Birth Day, a Boston area childbirth education organization.

The Kabat-Zinns are the parents of three children.



working together? The challenge is to be able to see the expectations we have and discern which are inappropriate and constrain their sovereignty.

not getting what they need emotionally. I wanted to do something that might affect the way that children are seen and treated by their parents. It can be easy for us to fall into treating our children the way we were treated as children. That's why it is so important to examine the expectations that we have for them and to recognize the judgments that may continually color the way we see things. We can find our hearts shutting down in certain moments when things are not the way we want them to be. And things are rarely the way we want them to be, especially because we have a lot of ideas about how things should be. Children can suffer greatly from that, from having huge expectations put on them, not only by parents but also by schools. How can we have appropriate expectations, expectations that help our children, that support their growth, expectations grounded in basic human values such as respecting each other,



We see a lot of suffering in our workshops. The people we were just working with in Germany [from which the Kabat-Zinns had just returned], —a different country, a different language—sat there with tears streaming down their faces because they were getting in touch with the pain of their own experience and wanting so much to be able to do things in a different way. And so out of that pain comes the impulse to be more conscious.

R: As you talked, I was remembering our children’s births. I can see how you and Jon so easily mesh, in terms of the work that you both do, you with childbirth and Jon with working with his patients, and how that work would come together in your parenting. That is a nice mix.

▲ What we are saying is that parenting affords an incredible opportunity for cultivating mindfulness in your life as its own spiritual practice, and a very arduous one, a very challenging one, and an extremely beautiful one. It is very, very human.

M: I feel that it evolved organically. For me it was a very inner process. At a certain point, it became clear to me that the unifying thread of my parenting, Jon’s work in the Stress Reduction Clinic, and my teaching in my birthing classes was mindfulness. I don’t want to give the impression that we had our children and then said, “We are going to be mindful parents.” No, we were parents and we had experiences, and out of that experience things grew and evolved.

J: It was actually somewhat different for me. I had been observing my parents parent me and my brothers every since I can remember, and have very strong memories of saying over and over to myself as a child, “When I have children I am not going to do it this way.” It is very vivid to me. I remember saying to myself, “These people are out of control and they don’t know what they are doing.” I felt that when I was fairly young, even though I was also conscious of how much they loved me.

I have always loved children, especially babies, and so I had the sense that I really wanted to be a father. I certainly wanted to have children. At that stage of my life, in the late sixties and early seventies, I was also getting more and more deeply into meditation practice and going on meditation retreats that would last from ten days to two weeks. I started that in the mid-sixties, and so by the time our first child came, I realized that becoming a father meant saying goodbye to that lifestyle. Most of the meditation teachers I was studying with were not married and did not have children. It occurred to me that as a father I was not going to be sitting a lot of long retreats; nor was I going to become a monk. I asked myself, “Does this path I am embarking on by becoming a father have the same potential for deep insight and understanding as any other path?” I felt, “Well I don’t know, but I don’t have much choice. It is either that or I just kind of go unconscious and on automatic pilot for the next twenty years.”

So I did have a strong motivation to bring as much awareness to my parenting as possible even before I became a father. I saw parenting, from the beginning, as kind of a long retreat. Perhaps this was just to make me feel better. My training and experience was in the Zen tradition as much as it was in Vipassana tradition, and I kind of grew up with one fairly wild and crazy Korean Zen master, Seung Sahn, who was a really wonderful teacher and who had a profound influence on my understanding of practice. It seemed almost axiomatic to me that this would be a valid thing to do, although perhaps not that easily understood by traditional meditation teachers. I felt that I wanted to be as present as possible for my children, and to see having children not as kind of a signature event on the pathway of becoming an adult—like getting a

raise or getting a better job—but as a fundamental human experience that had enduring value and enduring challenges and was the highest priority. And so... conscious parenting. If you are going to be bringing children into the world, why not give it everything you have got? And I still feel that way.

We wound up cultivating what felt like a really wonderful feeling-state between the two of us around our parenting. We saw a lot of things the same way. It is its own blessing when two parents look at parenting, at the challenges and the children, with more or less the same values, more or less the same framework, more or less the same desire for their well-being, and a commitment to be as present as possible to everything, including the pain and suffering, and to use it in some way. For me, that is meditation practice, whether you are talking about Zen practice or Vipassana practice; this is the core of the practice.

We had three children, and I had written several other books. It felt to me like a natural extension of our relationship, as parents who had worked together at that point for twenty years, to see if we couldn’t articulate some of the special texture and feeling tone of what we felt in our experience. We did not want to suggest that this is *the way* to parent, but to bring an orientation to the possibilities of parenting that could be tremendously valuable. So *Everyday Blessings* is our attempt to articulate, I think, what we experienced over the 24 years of our parenting in a way that might build on whatever one’s own strengths and limitations were already, to see if we couldn’t inspire or touch people to practice in this way.

M: I think it important to understand that we use the word mindfulness, but we also mean *heartfulness*. It is not intellectual, as you well know. We talk about affectionate attention. If we can bring affectionate attention to the difficult and stretching moments that we have in our experiences in the family, we have so much more potential for making more appropriate choices and to being more authentic ourselves.



We encourage parents to be more aware of their own feelings and to find appropriate ways, at different ages, to express them to their children. In situations where something makes you uncomfortable, it is important to know that it makes you uncomfortable, and if a child is old enough and it is appropriate, to be able to say that in a way that doesn't put a wall between you, but instead creates an opening. As our kids get older, it happens more and more. Sometimes we can walk around in a sea of worry and anxiety because we can't control things as much as we used to.

When our kids are little we actually have a great deal of control over their environment and their safety, but as they get older we have less and less control. We need to find ways to work with the feelings that come up and be able to see the things that we really do need to be worried about and distinguish them from those that are just creating a lot of tension and division. Was it Mark Twain who said, "I have had many tragedies in my life, most of which never happened.?"

It used to be that you would know the bad things that happened in your own little village. Maybe there was one "No-good-nick," or one person who had something really sad happen to them, or a few of this, or a little of that. Now, we read about every terrible thing that has happened everywhere on the planet, but very little of the good things that are happening every day, and so we can easily lose perspective and feel more and more uneasy and insecure. We need to look at that, to work with our feelings, to see what it is that we are taking in every day, and how toxic much of it is—all of those

▲ *We are all infinitely more beautiful and more creative and more imaginative than we think. There is nothing better than parenting to push those buttons of emotional reactivity and blindness in us; however, we have the potential to really live our lives differently, and doing so would be good for our children and good for us.*

thoughts, all of those fears, which really don't help us and which we just sort of transfer to our children so that they carry the anxiety as well.

Can we work more consciously with this type of situation? Can we see where our fears come from? Can we choose, perhaps, not to read every terrible thing that has happened, not to watch TV, not to fill our minds with all of this stuff, and start, instead, to look at what is happening in our lives right now? We need to have an awareness of some important world issues and local issues so that we can do good work and make the world a better place; but we also have to be self-protective and actively filter as best we can what takes up residence in the inner landscape of our being.

Recently, we visited the countryside in Norway, where life is very different from here, much slower, and much more simple. I felt a palpable difference in terms of the sense of people who are enmeshed in their environment; they belong, they know what they need to do, and they aren't running around doing a million things at once. It was a reminder of how things used to be and what it is that we are missing.

J: If you think about it, the world is changing so fast that no one really knows what an appropriate education for children would really be. However, there is a lot of evidence that if they don't feel good about themselves as adults, then that's not so good. If they have no way of reading other people's emotional states, then that is not so good. If they have no way of sensing their own emotional states, then that isn't healthy. Those are fundamentals that are independent of the incredible time acceleration and the stress that children encounter.

Developing a Practice

C: You say in your book, "As I see it, the challenge of being a parent is to live our moments as fully as possible, charting our own course as best we can, above all nourishing our children and in the process growing ourselves." What is a mindfulness practice? How might someone who has never engaged in it begin to develop such a practice in her daily life? What is mindful parenting? And does parenting mindfully cause us to grow ourselves?

J: A few small questions. I'd have to say that that is why we wrote the book, and the book turns out to be quite thick, because it is not so easy to get the responses to those questions across. I could easily say, "Mindfulness is a certain way of intentionally paying attention. And that way is in the present moment and non-judgmentally, as best we can in any moment." We might

be quite judgmental in a particular moment, but if we can even pay attention to that, then we won't judge the judging and have it be an infinite regress.

Myla used the term affectionate attention. The word for heart and the word for mind in Chinese and all the other oriental languages is the same word. So, when we talk about mindfulness, it is not just that we *think* heartfulness. It is built in; it is the same, if you understand it that way. It isn't some theoretical construct, not some intellectual pursuit; mindfulness understood this way is a way of *being*.

We talk about this in the Stress Reduction Clinic, too. We see meditation practice as a way of being, not as a technique. There are thousands of meditation techniques. In a sense,



they are like scaffolding used to bring you to a certain place. Once there, you realize that you have been in that place all the time, only maybe not aware of it. It contains this interesting and somewhat paradoxical element. Meditation is about waking up to who you already are; it isn't about changing or fixing anything. It is about being in touch with the full spectrum of your humanity.

That is easy to say, but it's not so easy to do. So that is where the discipline of it comes in. Mindfulness is a form of meditation that is spoken of as the heart of Buddhist meditative practices in all of the various traditions. The Buddha fundamentally taught mindfulness/heartfulness as a path to liberation, to understanding, to realizing what it means to be human. Mindful parenting would be the application of the practice, the discipline of it, to parenting. You have as many opportunities to do that in a day as you would to stretch in any other way, or to pay attention in any other way. In itself, it is a worthy opportunity for cultivating mindfulness.

How the children will be nourished comes, to some extent, from a fact that I spoke about earlier. A great many people report that they never actually felt seen for who they were in their family, or felt seen only on very rare occasions. Most of

▲ *We can find our hearts shutting down in certain moments when things are not the way we want them to be. And things are rarely the way we want them to be, especially because we have a lot of ideas about how things should be. Children can suffer greatly from that, from having huge expectations put on them, not only by parents but also by schools.*

the time they were seen through the lenses of their parents' expectations, and they would either conform to them or rebel against them. Either way they felt shaped by the lenses of expectations that their parents or other people, including teachers, were looking through. They were not really seen and accepted for who they were. They felt dis-regarded. The word "regard" is in "disregard." *Regarder* in French means "to see."

To actually be seen is a healing experience; to be heard is a healing experience. In that moment when we are acknowledged, i.e., touched, a sense of belonging is generated, a sense of authentication, a sense of respect, that is huge and can be completely wordless and can happen at any age. Perhaps you walk into a doctor's office and the doctor listens to you, and it is unbelievable. You practically want to break down and cry when any authority figure actually listens to you instead of just putting you through the gauntlet of ques-

tions to get the facts or the answers.

In parenting, as in medicine, the fundamental principle would be at least do no harm. This is the Hippocratic principle.

The doctor-patient relationship, for instance, is spoken of as a sacred relationship, but it is almost never actually treated that way. It is not held in awareness that way, although now we are teaching medical students to do just that.

The same goes for the parent/child relationship. I see it as a sacred trust. When we have children, what we are saying is, "I am being entrusted by the Universe to carry these beings to the point at which they can carry themselves. It doesn't happen overnight. And I will need to bring my full resources to bear on this." Well, who the hell can do this? It is an impossible job! So, in a sense, at the least we need to know that it is possible that we have a best self, never mind if we can be it. I think we are all incredible beings, geniuses, though highly stressed, moving very quickly, and caught in our own conditioned mind states and feeling states. The challenge of mindful parenting is to stop, to catch oneself from moment to moment, and see if we can't be bigger, if we can't have a bigger awareness than the kind that is narrow or, when we are really threatened, contracted and collapsed. This is, in many ways, a worthy and a sacred calling. The children get nourished at least in

our not doing any harm, and of course, much more so if we can be our best selves at least some of the time.

R: We used to say that kids should be seen and not heard, but what you are explaining is that they aren't really seen, either.

M: It can be easy to see your children when they are behaving or looking exactly the way you want them to. "Oh, this is my gifted child; this is my

beautiful child." Let me give you an example to concretize some of these ideas. Let's say that a child comes home from school. This child could be 8 or 10 or whatever. Before that child walks in the door, the doorbell rings or we hear them coming in, and all of a sudden we may find ourselves taken over by a whole bunch of feelings, preconceptions, and ideas. Now maybe it is that we are angry that he left his room a mess. Maybe we are worried that he might have a lot of homework, and maybe we are worrying that he isn't going to do his homework, or will need our help. Or maybe it is that we are worried about his friends.

Or perhaps something happened that morning, and we are still carrying a grudge. Or he walked in the door and his face is dirty, or we don't like how he is dressed. We have right here a wonderful opportunity to greet our child as he walks in the door, and what do we do? We fall into these reactive mind-states instead of encountering the present moment fresh. We



bring to this one moment so much baggage, so much that obscures our hearts, obscures our ability to see clearly, that we can't even welcome him home in a genuine way. We have that potential; we have that ability, because, in that moment, as they are walking in the door, we don't actually have to deal with the issues around homework, if there are any. We don't have to immediately deal with what happened this morning. We can make time for that later if necessary without having it ruin the present moment.

J: If you have no awareness of what Myla just sketched out, you are going to be caught. If you have an awareness of it, you have at least a fraction of a chance to step around it and just say, "Hi."

M: Or just see the child.

▲ *If we can bring affectionate attention to the difficult and stretching moments that we have in our experiences in the family, we have so much more potential for making more appropriate choices and to being more authentic ourselves.*

J: And to greet them in a way that creates a fresh moment. All of the things that you may be worried about might still apply, but when we are unconscious, they basically have us by the throat, and we have the child by the throat. We can create this very complex situation out of our own anxiety. It is unnecessary and just compounds the distance there may be between parent and child.

C: I really appreciated the discussions in the book about expectations, especially your saying that we derive our expectations of our children from our own childhoods, from what was put on us. We then project those things onto our children.

M: Yes. Sometimes the expectations that we have are really important and helpful. I think it is wonderful to have expectations that children should help out in the family, that everybody should work to support the family and the home, given that it is age appropriate. But we have to be aware of our expectations, first of all. If we aren't aware of them, they can just wreak havoc. And secondly, we have a choice, "Which of the expectations that I am carrying around with me are really helpful, and which of them are getting in the way? Which of them really have nothing to do with *this* child? Or this moment?"

I think that we have so many moments like that. There are appropriate moments for dealing with the fact that the child didn't clean her room, and we do need to talk about it and get her to take responsibility for certain things. There are appropriate moments for discussing our anxieties about certain things. Children can often start fresh in a way that we can't, especially when they are little. We can bring that same freshness to our lives with our kids. You have to think, "What would you want?" Very often, you know, when we walk in

the door, we can feel somebody judging us. As soon as we feel judged, something shuts down. What do we want? Now, maybe somebody doesn't like what we are wearing, but can they still see *us*?

I think that there is a wonderful feeling of safety and security when a child can actually express anger in the family and not be shunned, not be shut out. We have had so many people in our workshops who were not able to express feelings that were considered unacceptable in the family, like anger or frustration. In some families, those things were just not acceptable. The message that emerges is that there is only one acceptable way to be and when you are not that way, there is something wrong with you. I don't mean that our kids can just step on us all the time. It isn't a matter of

everybody just venting all of the time. This is life-long learning that we, and our children, can engage in by being in touch with and honoring what we are feeling and by finding appropriate ways to express it, so that we can be real with each other. We may even choose, sometimes, not to express it. It is an incredible

thing to start paying attention to all of the things that come out of our mouths. Some are better left unsaid, because they are useless, unnecessary...

J: shaming, or humiliating.....

M: In the extreme. We all fall into unconscious speech and things get derailed by that. If we have a thought, we speak it. Nowadays, if you have a thought you pick up the phone and call somebody—or click "Send."

J: And then say, "Ugh, I'm not sure I meant to send that! Maybe I should have had another thought first."

M: Bringing mindfulness to our speech, bringing mindfulness to our bodies, bringing mindfulness to our *being* gives our children the gift of our own self-awareness. We are much nicer to be around. It is very hard to be with people who are continually free-associating. So much of it is not helpful.

Mindfulness and Embodiment

J: And that brings up another point that I think we need to stress over and over again. Mindfulness has to do with being embodied. It is not a question of living our lives according to certain principles or theories. In this moment, are you here? Are you in your body? Are you aware of your inner landscape and the outer landscape and can you hold it in such a way that you don't just do that totally reactive, totally mechanical, totally automatic conditioned stuff that we are all completely prone to do?

Some people might think, "Well, if you are a mindful parent, you will be mindful all the time." I don't think it is humanly



possible to be mindful all the time—or even necessarily desirable. But to be even a little bit more mindful, even a little bit of the time, would be hugely healing. Myla and I don't want to create the impression that we think parents should be on the alert all of the time. That is not mindfulness at all. Mindfulness is a relaxed, open, flowing, attentive, openhearted presence. It is the landscape in which life unfolds, one that has potential for being together. You may not necessarily be *doing* anything, but you are *with* your children. You are doing what you are doing; they are doing what they are doing. That can feel so magical, because of the power of wakefulness and the power of presence.

I agree with Myla that our presence itself is a huge gift to our children. And that they see everything about us, our warts, pimples, all of the reactions, all of the incredibly mindless moments, is part of it. We may think that if we were really good at this we wouldn't have any mindless moments. We would never get angry. We would never lose it. We would never have some kind of seizure or spasm over, say, who the kids are hanging out with. There are all sorts of issues that will press parents' buttons. It's not about being a saint. It is about being real, and working with whatever comes up as if it were actually workable and important—not to try to fix it but to see deeply into it. Out of that inner work can come a new way of being.

R: In your chapter on family values, you say, “The emotional and physical atmosphere the parents create within the family sets the stage on which the ongoing development of a family's values unfold. The more that mindfulness can be brought to this dimension of family life, the more likely it is that the deep inner values of the family will be held in awareness and accorded priority in parenting decisions.” I have the sense, when I read passages such as this, that many of us reading your book will say either, “Ah, that's so true! I never thought of that,” or “Yes, that's true, I know that already,” and yet be unwilling, or unable, to “embody” our knowledge, to use the word that you yourselves use concerning our modeling or embodying our family priorities and values and the ways in which, as you write, we “conduct ourselves in the ordinary unfolding of our lives.”

What in your view accounts for this cognitive dissonance, this disjunction in what we know to be true already, on the one hand, and how we practice, on the other? How, in practical terms, can we engage in mindful practices that allow us to prevent or work through these disjunctions?

J: Wow! That is quite a large question. Well, I'll have a stab at it. I think it says some place else in the book, very early on, that mindfulness is not just a good idea. When you say to someone, “Maybe your life would go better if you just were more present for it and paid attention,” everyone's response would be something like, “Oh great! Why didn't I think of that! I'll just *do* it? Wonderful! Adios! See you later! No problem!” It doesn't work that way. It is good to be reminded of the value of present moment awareness, and some people might have a momentary kind of realization that says, “Oh my god! I know that, but I haven't been living that way.” But that

is where the rubber meets the road. That realization is just the first step.

The next step is to embody it or operationalize it or however you want to put it. I like the term “embody.” Any spiritual discipline involves the challenge of working at the edge, and in working at the edge we find that we have more potential for growing than we thought. Something may happen in the family, say, that causes me to contract, that causes me to become narrow in my thinking and hijacked by my reactive emotions. But even such a moment can itself be seen as an opportunity, in fact, a perfect opportunity, to expand my awareness to include my own feelings in this moment, and perhaps a willingness to try to read them in a way that creates more options for how I might respond in the next moment. There's a difference between *reacting*—which is mindless and automatic, and conditioned—and *responding*, which can be mediated by a moment of mindfulness and clear seeing. The discipline of mindful parenting or cultivating mindfulness in any aspect of daily life comes right in those moments in which you are willing to stand inside that moment and be more present without knowing what is going to happen next.

Obviously, as authors we can't convince somebody to do that. We can just try to create a lens through which a parent might take a look and perhaps resonate with what they are seeing and feel inwardly, “Yes, that makes sense. I agree with that.” But then, there's the challenge of actualizing it in your own life in any moment that matters.

M: I am not sure, but I think you are asking, “How do you do that?”

R: Yes, and as you are speaking I am wondering that it almost sounds as if what you are suggesting is that this disjunction between what we know to be right and what we do is probably always going to be there to some degree or another, and that the question is bringing awareness to the disjunction as it happens. We are never going to have a state in which there is no such disjunction. Is that correct?

M: No, I think there are times when there isn't that disjunction, where you feel as if you are appropriately present. You are aware that it feels right. Now, of course, it is like a yoga pose; you have balance and you feel it, and then all of a sudden you lose your balance.

J: But it isn't like, “Oh, you blew it!” because you lost your balance. Instead, part of the nature of being alive is that you go in and out of balance.

M: And our children learn from that. Our children learn from watching us, from seeing that we are working with it, and that we can actually acknowledge that we lost our balance. Parents are human. We all make mistakes; we all blow it sometimes; we all lose our balance. The question is, “Can we bring the loving compassion that we bring to our children to ourselves at such times?” And when we bring that loving compassion to ourselves when we blow it, our children learn that it is okay to blow it, that there are times when people do or say things that we later regret.



Of course, we also all have our moments of balance, of harmony.... Those are blessed moments. But sometimes blessed moments also happen when things are in chaos, because there can be some deep change that comes out of that, deep understanding, or something wonderful that emerges from pain and loss of balance. It is how we hold it, how we work with it. There is so much to learn from losing our balance.

R: Now, I am a reader, and I am reading this interview, and I come to the part where you just said, “How do we hold it? How do we do it?” I’m saying, “Yeah, that’s my question.” I know that in your book you mentioned the example of hitting your child and then apologizing, and so forth. You also make a point later that we shouldn’t make a habit of constantly having to apologize. How do I work with that moment when I know that what I just did wasn’t right, that moment of cognitive dissonance?

J: I want to zero in on your use of that term, because I am trying to wrap my mind around your question. When we say that we have made a mistake, what do we mean? What is a mistake? We aren’t saying that most of what we do are mistakes and if we were more mindful we would have fewer mistakes. A mistake is actually a *mis-take*; our perception is actually an incomplete one, or a mis-perception.

Why? Often because it is colored by emotions that arise in a particular moment, very often fear. We ask people in our workshops in what ways fear expresses itself in their parenting. The answers are infinite. There are so many things that we do out of fear, out of worry. In terms of cognitive dissonance, I think that it arises because people say, “Oh yeah. I know that,” but they don’t *really*. They aren’t really seeing clearly. People say, “Oh yeah. I know cigarettes are bad for me, but I still smoke.” But there is a certain way that people

▲ *Sometimes blessed moments also happen when things are in chaos, because there can be some deep change that comes out of that, deep understanding, or something wonderful that emerges from pain and loss of balance. It is how we hold it, how we work with it. There is so much to learn from losing our balance.*

haven’t embodied that knowledge that cigarettes are bad. They just kind of know it on a superficial level. A mis-take is when you believe the superficial reality without understanding that the surface is only a surface, and that there is a profundity beneath the surface.

In our workshops, we use the image of the well, for instance. You drop a pebble in the well in the form of a question, and you listen for the splash of the first response: “Why do I even care about mindful parenting? Why have I come to this workshop?” Then we have people follow the pebble down,

underneath the surface, listening for more than that first response.

Even the story we tell of Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady [recounted and commented on in *Everyday Blessings*] is about depth and appearance. In appearance, she was hideous. But Gawain recognizes something deeper, and he doesn’t get caught in the surface ugliness. So much of the time the dissonance happens because we will attach ourselves to the surface and get really attached to that and mis-take or forget that there is something much deeper going on. So then we throw our wisdom out the window, and we feel as if we are having some cognitive dissonance, conflicted, torn between what we did at the moment and how we feel in the next moment, or the next day.

But what is fundamental is not really the dissonance; it is the mis-perception in the moment we acted. If we can literally and metaphorically, in that very moment of anger in which we are going to lose it, come to our senses—and parenthetically, that is why we can actually use that phrase, “coming to our senses” as a good description of Vipassana or of mindfulness—when we return to the original sense impressions, the original seeing, the original hearing, without being colored by our thoughts and opinions, then it is possible to see, not only the surface, but also the totality or the whole. And when I say “see,” I also mean “feel,” “sense,” and “touch.” This is not a theory or a good idea. It is a practice, an opportunity to step fully into that moment, to come to your senses. We are not saying that parents necessarily should formally practice meditation in order to be mindful in this way in such moments, unless they are drawn to do it, but it certainly can’t hurt.

For instance, over 12,000 people have been through our Stress Reduction Clinic over the past twenty-one years to be trained in what we call mindfulness-based stress reduction (or MBSR), which involves both formal and informal meditative practices. Most of those 12,000 people are parents. While mindful parenting is not part of the curriculum, their parenting can benefit as a side product of their taking the program. Their major focus is on

health concerns and on problems with stress and pain. But MBSR training certainly involves bringing mindfulness into every aspect of daily living, including the kinds of moments of emotional reactivity I was just describing, as well as training in the formal meditative practices. But remember, they are coming to us as medical patients, with cancer, heart disease, chronic pain conditions, and everything else. So we have to work with them in a particular way that is adequate to their needs. I am not saying that people who want to be more mindful in their parenting might not benefit from cultivating



mindfulness more formally, such as through awareness of the breath, or even formal sitting meditation or mindful yoga, or whatever, just that it is not absolutely necessary for cultivating mindfulness in the pleasant and the difficult moments that are a part and parcel of family life.

For parents who are interested in the formal practices, *Everyday Blessings* offers suggestions for at least the rudimentary cultivation of awareness of the breath, or feeling states in the body, because those can lead us to a more accurate seeing, more accurate perception. We mention two important instructions that I think are very important for parents to know about. One is to bring attention to a particular object, whatever it is, and then just attend to that object for a period of time. If it is the breath, then we attend to the *feeling* of the breath moving in and out of the body, the very sensations of breathing. The second is to begin to notice that the mind doesn't stay still for long, no matter what the object is. It will go off, and do something else. We try to be aware of where the mind went. In the knowing, we reconnect not just with the breath, but with the present moment. There are hundreds of different ways to do this; there are hundreds of different meditation techniques. But whatever method you choose, understand that when the mind goes off, you note where it has gone without judging it or yourself in any way, and then you gently bring it back; the mind goes off, you bring it back—and you do it for its own sake, to come to know your own mind, even when you are not being reactive, even when there are no heavy-duty emotional things going on.

Now, if something comes up with your teenager and the mind goes off, it might go off into kind of a tornado. You can even bring awareness to that. That will make a big difference between whether the tornado carries you into creating more suffering or whether you might do something different by working that edge. I don't know if that answers your question.

▲ *I think that we feel that we always have to have a solution, that we always have to fix situations, that we always have to know what to do. It is very liberating to understand that there are going to be lots of times, as a parent, that we aren't going to know what to do.*

R: I never thought of it like this, but I think you are right. I am thinking of so many examples in which I have seen this now, in which we talk about that cognitive dissonance, but that isn't really it, because we don't really know fully. The dissonance would be true if we really did have a full knowledge of what is "right" and yet acted differently. But in fact we don't really have that full knowledge.

Gandhi says that non-violence comes first and foremost by an appeal to the heart, not to the head. We know lots of things intellectually,...

M: That is why using the word "right" is not right.

R: Yes, which is why I gestured putting it in quotes.

M: It makes it more intellectual. If I only did the "right" thing.

J: And it gives the impression, which is wholly wrong, that mindful parenting is about perfect parenting, or the right kind of parenting. If only you were the right kind of parent, then you wouldn't be doing all these dastardly things that you are doing, and you would be so much more mindful and balanced and flexible and everything else.

Being Mindful, Being Real

R: You are saying that being a mindful parent is being an aware parent.

J: And being real. And knowing something about it. And embodying it, which means that we can't do it without huge compassion, because if you have a "mis-take," then there is no need for anger or self-blaming. But if you made a "mis-take," you are in trouble, because some stupid person in there made the mistake. Someone has got to be at fault. But if it is a mis-take, then what comes up is compassion, you know? Missed that one, so this happened. There is no blame, as the Chinese say.

We can be more compassionate with ourselves and realize that that moment is gone. I blew it or mis-took it, but now there is this moment. Life will always give you, as long as you are alive, the next breath, the next moment, the next opportunity, to come to it completely fresh, to come to your senses. You can practice, "the mind goes off, you bring it back, the mind goes off, you bring it back," even in the family. I wrote about how much I can get caught up in work

and am not present, or I am on trips or whatever it is, or I sort of veg-out reading the newspaper, or whatever, and I realize that I could live in my family and never really be present, even without traveling anywhere.

M: Of course, that doesn't mean that sometimes you

don't read the paper, or veg-out. But again, it is not taking things for granted, and really questioning. What are the things that I am doing that are really meeting my soul-needs and my children's soul-needs? What are the things that are getting in the way? If you spend all your time, every time you come home, reading the paper, being on the phone, this can become a way of life, of always tuning out. We haven't even gone near the whole issue of addiction here. The discomfort we have with feelings and with pain and with unhappiness leads to a lot of addictive behavior in this society. We try to escape from what it is that we are actually feeling. We deal with those feelings by trying to medicate



ourselves, whether it is with TV, or food, or this or that.

J: Or, in the family, certain strictures might exist around behavior. For example, “You have to be well-behaved.” I remember, as a child, teachers yelling at me, “Behave yourself!” I don’t think I put this in the book, but my thought at the time was, “What do you think I am doing? I am behaving myself. I’m behaving like the five-year-old that I am.” But of course, what adults really mean is, “Obey me.”

We were just in Germany, and people were telling us that there is a very rigid mentality in Germany. There is one right way to do something. It is a real challenge to get across the notion that there is no one right way, and that the real work here is to see the range of options in the landscape and to navigate on the basis of the moment-to-moment feedback you get.

M: It is not an intellectual exercise. I think it is easy to come away thinking that we have all these choices and now it is kind of like a computer game. We just choose the best approach. There is a huge element of intuition here. When you have awareness in this moment, your intuitive self guides you.

▲ *Sometimes, we are formed by our difficulties. It is easy to get into catastrophic thinking, to think of the worst thing that can happen. I think we owe it to our children and ourselves to really wrestle with that one, and to say, “Okay. I have been through a difficult time, but this moment is this moment. Right now, this is not happening. How do I want to bring myself to this moment?”*

J: Or you may not know what to do. And that is another very powerful thing, which we say in the book over and over again. It is okay to realize, “I don’t know what to do. I am at my wit’s end. I feel like I am going to explode.” That is a perfectly normal state for a parent.

C: Staying with that and not thinking “I shouldn’t be feeling this way” is really, really hard.

J: Yes, and remembering, “I don’t have to fix it.”

C: We so often feel that pain is something we are supposed to move away from and take care of, which is where your talk about addictions comes in. All of our lives are about staying away from pain instead of being open to exploring it.

M: Rather than moving into it, looking more closely at it. And sometimes it is looking more closely at the not-knowing. I think that we feel that we always have to have a solution, that we always have to fix situations, that we always have to know what to do. It is very liberating to understand that there are going to be lots of times, as a parent, that we aren’t going to know what to do. We are going to be really confused. And it is okay to just stay with that. This comes back to the

notion that mindfulness is not about being a certain way. It is not about always being calm. It’s not about always knowing what the right thing is to do.

J: Or being a perfect parent. If you are a perfect parent you have, of course, perfect children.

M: It is working with our moments and bringing a certain kind of loving acceptance to the difficulties and to ourselves and to our limitations. The kind of acceptance that we are talking of bringing to our children we have to bring to ourselves.

J: I want to put in a word here for mystery. I want to remind us that just being a person, having a body, is a huge mystery. It may seem strange to say that we “have a body,” because *who* has it? Growing up, living one’s life fully, these are things we take for granted and never think about, but they are hugely mysterious. We have a child, we see that child, and know both that we know who that child is and that we have no idea who that child is. The same is true of a relationship. That is something that is worthy of giving us some pause.

M: And some humility.

J: Yes, humility, too. When parenting children, what is most important is to tend to the relationship between us; to tend to that relationship is a long term thing that isn’t going to be blown by one thing here or there. It is a long-term *weaving*, if you will, of ties and threads of connectedness—by showing caring, and interest, and empathy, and acceptance, and

by honoring a child’s sovereignty and honoring your own sovereignty, so that you aren’t run over or forget about your own wholeness. There is nothing theoretical about it. It is moment by moment.

We tried to give lots of examples in the book of that. The opening one tells the story of when our son, Will, came home from college and of how bent out of shape I was about what time he got home and how I caught myself and luckily didn’t ruin a wonderful moment. I used that as an example because I think people will resonate with the notion that there are times when we can catch ourselves and not go a particular route because we know what doing so will do. It will color everything in a certain way. And then we are surprised by what comes because we did catch ourselves. In a sense, that is a snapshot of what we are asking people to do moment by moment. The camera is turned both outward and inward, simultaneously.

C: I loved that example, and also your example of when he wanted to go away to college and wanted to leave with a friend, instead of having the two of you drive him. We had a similar experience when our older daughter went away to graduate school at Cornell.



R: Yes, we had assumed that we would, of course, take her. Understandably, she wanted to make the cross-country trip with her boyfriend. Of course that made sense, and of course that didn't make sense.

J: Yes, we feel that there is something wrong with this picture. The parents are supposed to be taking the kids to college.

R: Yes, the way our daughter did it isn't how it is supposed to be!

M: Being able to see things from the child's point of view is an important piece of this. We need to be aware of our own feelings of disappointment and sadness. We can't *just* let go. First we have to acknowledge our feelings, then we have to make an attempt to see it from the child's point of view. Then, holding both in awareness—our feelings and their point of view—we can come to something that is much more nourishing and healing. What an honor for a child to know that we are disappointed, but that we aren't putting a huge guilt trip on them.

J: That our life will now suffer because we didn't get our way.

Everyday Blessings

M: You know, I also want to clarify something. I think we have focused a lot in this interview on difficult moments, but it is also important to bring awareness to the seemingly ordinary moments. Waking a child up, tying their shoes, combing their hair, making breakfast, driving them in the car are just ordinary moments that we have with our children, moments that we can actually feel, that we can actually be present for, and moments that can be much richer because of our presence. We don't want to lose sight of that. This is not just about learning and growing through the difficult moments; it is also about the small pleasures that we often miss because we are so automatic and so busy and so often taking things for granted.

▲ *Why do children love to hear about princes and princesses? It is because each one is a prince or a princess. Children are very often not in their true seeming and so it is a challenge for us to try to see, with our eyes of wholeness, who the child really is, and to see their beauty in their uniqueness, in their unique being.*

J: And that is, in many ways, a huge source of joy in parenting — to actually be fully present in those little moments. They turn out not to be little at all; they are huge. When you practice in this way, and it is hard to use the word practice without sounding like it is a rehearsal....

M: I actually feel a little uncomfortable with it, too. Sometimes I think it sounds very contrived.

J: But I notice that, if I am just observing a mother with her child, it brings me back to when my children were little. I was well aware, in any moment, that the child was digging in the dirt and that I was close by. I could be tuned out or tuned in. I could either be in my own universe and then every once in a while be in touch with the child, or I could really be present. One of the things that I feel strongly about is being as present as possible, and not cluttering the agenda with so many other things that the child ends up being last. Instead of thinking, "As long as they are safe, they are ok," or "Got through the playground today," to understand that "The playground is what life is all about today for me, as the father."

M: Without actually assaulting the child with your own needs.

J: Right, it is a subtle, intuitive thing.

M: You can have a child who is playing in the sandbox and who really just wants to play in the sandbox.

J: The last thing they need is their parent.

M: We have this obsession, sometimes, with making every moment a teaching moment. Presence does not necessarily mean that you even speak. Sometimes just quiet presence, just being there is wonderful.

First of all you get the pleasure of watching your child explore and engage in whatever they are doing, and also you get to be there as you. Otherwise, we might miss our lives, not be present for our own lives. It isn't just a matter of, "Every moment I am with my child I am going to engage them. I am going to talk to them, and I am going to play with them." Poor child. Children need to have their own space. So can we bring an empathic awareness to what our child needs? They don't need us, necessarily, to engage with them. At a certain point, perhaps, they do. When you bring that kind of sensitivity and awareness to the situation, it is magical.

It is so easy to get a skewed vision of what this means. You have seen people with children sometimes, constantly asking, "Okay?" There is a sort of hovering and questing. This is not about being obsessed with your children. Instead, this is about appropriate presence and awareness which encompasses the child and our-

selves, the air, the trees, and the world that we are in and that very often we are just not *there* for.

J: It is wakefulness, wise attention.

C: Jon, in *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, you wrote about Myla's saying goodbye to you, and how just the act of saying



goodbye was a present moment between the two of you. I felt deeply touched by that, and this has become one thing that our family tries to do, to make sure that, before we leave, we are fully present with each other.

R: When I say goodbye, I want to say, “I am here with you right now. I am hoping that things will be fine when I get back, but if they are is not, I want to at least have had that moment.” I try not to take things so much for granted. Sometimes we have certain experiences, losses or illnesses, that teach us not to take life for granted.

J: Yes, although sometimes you do have to have certain experiences to come to that realization, it isn’t at all inevitable. So it might be a good thing to come to it before you have difficult experiences that you are contributing to.

R: Yes, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Don’t wait until you have a toothache to appreciate your non-toothache.” And this is the point, that we don’t have to wait for a catastrophe.

Their Needs, Our Needs

In your chapter “Who’s the Parent and Who’s the Child?” you talk about needing to know how the child feels, what they need, what they want. You insist, here, about putting the child’s needs first. Throughout this chapter, without directly referring to Alice Miller, whose work you discuss earlier in your book, you explain many points with which Miller would clearly agree concerning our need as parents not to help create roles for our children in which they become the parent figures meeting our needs rather than vice versa. As you pointedly note, in such unhealthy circumstances, “the child’s own feelings, needs, desires get buried.” Would you please explain how mindful parenting can help us to avoid, as Miller might say, projecting our own narcissistic wounds onto our children, and then using our children to fulfill our needs?

M: Well, I think it is totally connected to awareness of that inner landscape. Everybody’s is different and it changes all the time. It comes out of our own experience. Some people seem to relate through their wounds. There are some people

▲ *I think that there is a wonderful feeling of safety and security when a child can actually express anger in the family and not be shunned, not be shut out.*

who don’t know how to relate in any other way. They have to relate through their pain.

Now maybe it is a temperamental thing. I’m beginning to think that part of this is temperament. Some people are just so sanguine, while others are very melancholic; then there are people who are always coming out of their pain. Now if you

aren’t bringing awareness to that tendency, it creates a lot of havoc, especially when you want your children to take care of it, when you have unmet emotional needs that you want your children to fulfill. If you are not aware of that, it is a huge burden for the children. Can we bring awareness to our own needs? Can we bring awareness to our pain and really look at the ways in which we bring that pain into our relationships in inappropriate ways?

Just to acknowledge, to hear in your own voice the heaviness or the pain, sometimes just over a simple exchange. “How are you?” can carry the weight of our own pain, can say, “Why haven’t you called me? I haven’t heard from you in such a long time.” [Deep sigh.] There is a difference between that and saying, “You know, it has been such a long time since we talked. I am really happy to be talking to you right now.” We are all to one degree or another at risk for unconsciously allowing such unacknowledged needs to get in the way. But we all can also bring awareness to them and choose much more consciously how we will speak, how we will relate.

J: And we all have the capacity to *not* let those unacknowledged needs get in the way, although sometimes it may seem, say in the case of our parents—it won’t happen in this lifetime. While everyone may have the capacity, it isn’t going to happen unless the person wakes up to this dimension of reality. But for many parents of all ages, that waking up does happen, sometimes in small ways. But small ways are, nevertheless, ways.

M: It might be that, for example, someone is always negative. If you aren’t aware of your own negativity, it just spreads. If everything that comes up is just seen in a negative light, nothing is ever enough; things are always seen through the lens of what is not right. Seeing life this way colors relationships and the experience of living. Can we bring awareness to the filters, to the things that cloud this moment? Sometimes, we are formed by our difficulties. It is easy to get into catastrophic thinking, to think of the worst thing that can happen. I think we owe it to our children and ourselves to really wrestle with that one, and to say, “Okay. I have been through a difficult time, but this moment is this moment. Right now, this is not happening. How do I want to bring myself to this moment?”

I think that that is where the potential lies, so that it is not as if we are pretending that we haven’t had difficult experiences. We are not squashing or ignoring them, but we are not necessarily being ground up by them either.

R: I love Miller’s work. I think that in many ways she is just right on. The sovereignty issue, which you discuss as some length in your book, runs counter to the way the culture at large, and many of us, understands our relationship to children. Much of what we do has little to do with giving them sovereignty. In fact, it is quite the opposite, and yet sovereignty is so



crucial, as you suggest in your discussions of mindful parenting. Can you please talk about what you mean by sovereignty, how to give it, why it is so important and so on?

J: My guess is that if you read the entire book you would not once find the phrase “giving them sovereignty.”

R: You say “according,” which you then parenthetically say means “opening one’s heart to.”

J: You have read this book in detail! That’s beautiful. The distinction is important to us, because what we are saying is that children are born with sovereignty. It is not a question of our giving it to them, so much as our not squashing it. So if you hold everybody’s sovereignty in high regard—not just theirs, but everybody’s—then, as we say in the book, it is not just a matter of Little Lord Fontelroys running around completely spoiled, entitled. Instead, according sovereignty has to do with asking ourselves who this child *really* is, in a feeling way. Because, as we said, we can’t possibly know completely, but we can hold that child in awareness and honor their true nature, which is another way of saying sovereignty. Sovereignty is the inherent nature of being of all people and children, in terms of authenticity, autonomy, and unique temperament.

M: Again, their true nature.

J: When there are no problems in the family, that is easy to do. The kids look great; you can see all their potential and everything else. When they want to go in a direction that we don’t want them to go in, then all of a sudden it is much harder. That is when you have to do what Myla is suggesting, which is to try to see things through the child’s eyes.

It is very hard to put this into one sentence, which is why we used a lot of examples in the chapter on sovereignty. Sovereignty is the child’s inherent state of being, which is, in part, uniquely that person’s and, in part, common to humanity, all together. It is the multi-dimensional beauty of the child. Honoring it requires first that you see it, or feel it, and second that you know how to hold it in a way that serves the deep inner needs of the child. It is not a question of power; it is not a question of entitlement; it is not a question of royalty; but to a certain extent it is related to the old, mythological meaning of princes and princesses in the fairy tales.

Why do children love to hear about princes and princesses? It is because each one is a prince or a princess. We need to see that, which is why we told the story of Sir Gawain and the Loathely Lady. She was not in her true seeming. Children are very often not in their true seeming and so it is a challenge for us to try to

see, with our eyes of wholeness, who the child really is, and to see their beauty in their uniqueness, in their unique being.

M: And part of *that* is seeing and knowing that we can’t see all there is to see, that there is that mystery, and that the child is going to have to find their own way. We hold that in awareness, not only the mystery of who this child is, but also the mystery of the path that they are going to have to take. We don’t know, but we support the unfolding of that, so that we aren’t deciding that it “has to be this way,” or, “This is the right path for you!”

J: One of the translations of sovereignty is “your own way.” In the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, in Chaucer, which is where the term comes from, and also in the *Loathely Lady*, the answer to the riddle “what is it that all women most desire?” is “sovereignty,” but it is also “her own way.” Not in the sense of “I want my own way,” but in the sense of having the freedom to explore the unfolding of my life as a full human being.

M: And so when Gawain gives her the choice of whether to be beautiful by day or by night, he is according her sovereignty, acknowledging her sovereignty. That is the beauty of that story, his being able to acknowledge that.

J: That question is such a mind blower. “What is it that all women most desire?” Imagine, they were asking that question! I love the fact that Gawain goes around and just asks everybody, and everybody gives him an answer and he writes them down and he knows, he knows that none of them is the correct answer.

That’s the deep intuition, and in a way what we are appealing to in the readers of our book, in parents, is the deep trust that we started out talking about. That trust says, “You know, there is more to being human than any of us know. We are trustworthy. We are really worthy of trust.”

A lot of the time we don’t feel worthy at all, because of our scars, because of the way that we were parented. We walk around feeling about as worthy as a cockroach. To begin to realize that we are trustworthy and our children need to know that we are trustworthy and to accord them their own path to adulthood—that’s a worthy work, and that, to me, is the work mindful parenting really is. And besides, we are on the same path as our children, only thirty years further along! So it is not like, “Well we know, because we are here.” It is all the same path, and maybe if we wound up parenting ourselves with a little bit more kindness, more awareness, that quote from Rilke in the front of our book would actually become a reality while we still have a chance.

Seven Intentions and Twelve Exercises

Editor's Note: The following excerpt from Everyday Blessings constitutes the book's "Epilogue," entitled "Seven Intentions and Twelve Exercises for Mindful Parenting."

Intentionality—Parenting As a Spiritual Discipline

Intentions remind us of what is important. When we form the intention to do something, and that intention in turn informs our choices and our actions, the chances that we will be sensitive to what is important in our lives increase greatly, and we are more likely to see the big picture. Our intentions serve as blueprints, allowing us to give shape and direction to our efforts, and to assess how we are doing as we work at developing something worthy of ourselves and our lives. So at some point, whenever that is, we have to decide what is really important for us, and then work at constantly keeping that framework in mind as things unfold.

In mindful parenting, certain principles are important to affirm from the very beginning. This does not mean that if we already have children, it is too late to become more mindful in our parenting. It means that we begin, when we are ready, wherever we are in our lives, and work with the here and now, formulating the intentions that are important for us to affirm and to implement, and that are realistic. Not only is it never too late to introduce mindfulness into our lives; the very moment that we make the conscious commitment to do so becomes the perfect moment to begin.

Here are some intentions that you may find helpful. Of course, you can also create your own.

INTENTION ONE: I will bring my entire creative genius to the work of mindful parenting.

INTENTION TWO: I will see parenting as a spiritual discipline, meaning that it provides me with every necessary opportunity to cultivate wisdom and openheartedness in myself, so that I may come to know and express my true nature and share what is best in me with my children and with the world.

INTENTION THREE: I will cultivate mindfulness and discernment in my daily life, especially with my children, using an awareness of my breathing to ground me in the present moment.

INTENTION FOUR: I will make every effort to see who

my children actually are, and to remember to accept them for who they are at every age, rather than be blinded by my own expectations and fears. By making a commitment to live my own life fully and to work at seeing and accepting myself as I am, I will be better able to accord a similar acceptance to my children. In this way I can help them to grow and to realize their full potential as unique beings.

INTENTION FIVE: I will make every effort to see things from each child's point of view and understand what my children's needs are, and to meet them as best I can.

INTENTION SIX: I will use whatever comes up in my own life and in the lives of my children, including the darkest and most difficult times, as "grist for the mill," to grow as a human being so that I am better able to understand my children, their soul needs, and what is required of me as a parent.

INTENTION SEVEN: I will fold these intentions into my heart, and commit myself to putting them into practice as best I can, every day, and in appropriate ways that feel right to me and that honor my children's sovereignty, and my own.

Twelve Exercises for Mindful Parenting

1. Try to imagine the world from your child's point of view, purposefully letting go of your own. Do this every day for at least a few moments to remind you of who this child is and what he or she faces in the world.
2. Imagine how you appear and sound from your child's point of view, i.e., having *you* as a parent today, in this moment. How might this modify how you carry yourself in your body and in space, how you speak, what you say? How do you want to relate to your child in *this* moment?
3. Practice seeing your children as perfect just the way they are. See if you can stay mindful of their sovereignty from moment to moment, and work at accepting them as they are when it is hardest for you to do so.
4. Be mindful of your expectations of your children and consider whether they are truly in your child's best interest. Also, be aware of how you communicate those expectations and how they affect your children.

5. Practice altruism, putting the needs of your children above your own whenever possible. Then see if there isn't some common ground, where your true needs can also be met. You may be surprised at how much overlap is possible, especially if you are patient, and strive for balance.
6. When you feel lost, or at a loss, remember to stand still, as in David Wagoner's poem: "The forest breathes..." Listen to what it is saying; "The forest knows/Where you are. You must let it find you..." Meditate on the whole, by bringing your full attention to the situation, to your child, to yourself, to the family. In doing so, you may go beyond thinking, even good thinking, and perceive intuitively, with the whole of your being (your feelings, intuition, body, mind, and soul) what really needs to be done. If that is not clear in any moment, maybe the best thing is to not do anything until it becomes clearer. Sometimes it is good to remain silent. [Editor's note: Earlier in their book, the Kabat-Zinns use David Wagoner's poem "Lost," which is "based on the Northwest Native American tradition," to help explain what we perhaps ought to do when we are lost, or "not fully awake." They write: "Perhaps what is most important is our willingness to be where we actually are and dwell here fully, in darkness or in light, without having to go anywhere else. Only then may we know where to place our foot when it comes time to move" (370–371).]
7. Try embodying silent presence. This will grow out of both formal and informal mindfulness practice over time, if you attend to how you carry yourself and what you project in body, mind, and speech. Listen carefully.
8. Learn to live with tension without losing your own balance. In *Zen and the Art of Archery*, Herrigel describes how he was taught to stand at the point of highest tension effortlessly without shooting the arrow. At the right moment, the arrow mysteriously shoots itself. Do this by practicing moving into any moment, however difficult, without trying to change anything and without having to have a particular outcome occur. Simply bring your full awareness and presence to this moment. Practice seeing that whatever comes up is "workable," if you are willing to stand in this way in the present, trusting your intuition and best instincts. Your child, especially when young, needs you to be a center of balance and trustworthiness, a reliable landmark by which he or she can take a bearing within his or her own landscape. Arrow and target need each other. Forcing doesn't help. They will find each other better through wise attention and patience.
9. Apologize to your child when you have betrayed a trust in even a little way. Apologies are healing. An apology demonstrates that you have thought about a situation and have come to see it more dearly, or perhaps more from your child's point of view. But we have to be mindful of being "sorry" too often. It loses its meaning if we are always saying it, or make regret into a habit. Then it can become a way for us not to take responsibility for our actions. Be aware of this. Cooking in remorse on occasion is a good meditation. Don't shut off the stove until the meal is ready.
10. Every child is special, and every child has special needs. Each sees in an entirely unique way. Hold an image of each child in your heart. Drink in their being, wishing them well.
11. There are very important times when we need to practice being clear and strong and unequivocal with our children. Let this come as much as possible out of awareness and generosity and discernment, rather than out of fear, self-righteousness, or the desire to control. Mindful parenting does not mean being overindulgent, neglectful, or weak; nor does it mean being rigid, domineering, and controlling.
12. The greatest gift you can give your child is your self. This means that part of your work as a parent is to keep growing in self-knowledge and in awareness. We have to be grounded in the present moment to share what is deepest and best in ourselves. This is ongoing work, but it can be furthered by making a time for quiet contemplation in whatever ways feel comfortable to us. We only have right now. Let us use it to its best advantage, for our children's sake, and for our own.

Picture yourself as a young woman who lost her father to cancer and lived with her single mother, twin sister and two brothers in the Pacific Northwest. Jenna Fisher was one such young woman whose family decided to come to family camp, a program offered at EnCompass. Moved by her experience she wrote the poem offered here. Jacinta Cruz attended trainings at the teen challenge course and teen leadership course before she was ready to assist as an apprentice leader for other children in the Learning Adventures. During one such program she wrote a poem during an afternoon of art and poetry in the Sierra Nevada wilderness. Kendra Weistar had trained and worked at EnCompass as a teen leader since she was 13. While offering to help the volunteers by taking care of their children while they worked, she wrote the poem shared here. Each young woman felt honored to share their innermost thoughts and feelings with you all through this Paths of Learning issue. These and many other programs are offered at EnCompass, which is a non-profit organization designed to support health and wholeness of children and families through an array of integrated holistic programs as well as engaging in the development of holistic education in both theory and practice. We hope you enjoy this sharing.

*Josette Luvmour,
Founding Director & Program
Facilitator, EnCompass*

This first piece was written by Jenna Fisher age 16. Jenna was a guest at our Family Camp program last summer with her mother, twin sister and brother. The camp was spellbound when Jenna read this to everyone at a teen expression activity.

At times I feel like an eagle on HIGH,
Able to conquer all in my playful sky,
But in the change of the wind, the blink of an eye, the storm hits
and I begin to cry, conflicting whether to live or DIE.
I fall into a daze of curiosity.
What brings about such animosity?
My hope and dream is to be enough,
But I look in the mirror and call my bluff.
I search the safe of my soul to unlock secrets of gold,
But instead find a deed stating "it's sold".
Then I ask myself, "should I die?"
Cuz life's not worth this CONFORMITY – this LIE.

Then silently the voice said, "NO".
It said "Use your Power, Jenna, be the GLOW."
Within you is Knowledge that no one else can preach,
Speak your truth, release the grief.

I wanted to be it's silent breath,
The truth the power – beauty's dissent.
I wanted to stay FOREVER in that RAGE.
Cuz in those moments there was no CAGE.

But the moments passing brought a change.
I gotta keep going even though it might seem strange.
Cuz I realize I'm here for a REASON.
I AM the SEASON.

I don't know what this life this strife is all about,
I can't define the exact route.
But I know when I'm really here,
It's that JOY, that PEACE, the LOVE, NO FEAR.

So enlightened by this for truth I must go on,
To the past, say so long
Face my destiny.
Be the Queen that reigns inside of me.

LOVE: Jenna

Kendra Weistar wrote this poem just after she turned 19. She had been doing quite a bit of childcare at the time, with children between the ages of 3 and 10, helping some adults in our area and feeling the pain of their needs not being met by their parents. Most of Kendra's life, she helped and worked at EnCompass building the Ropes Course with the teens, in Leadership Courses, Teen Trips, and many other outdoor adventure activities. She was home schooled and now is a freshman at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Children whisper	Parents beg
Hear me	Forgive
Hearts bleed	Too late
Bright mind stilled	Too hurt
Children speak	Parents sigh
See me	Could've...
Warm heart turns cold	Would've...
soft eyes flash	Should've...
Children ask	Parents ask
Understand me	Why
Harsh laughter	You didn't try
Aren't you cute	weren't there
Children sigh	didn't listen
Love me	Parents speak
He tries	How
She tries	She told you
Children beg	You didn't see
Want me	Wouldn't under-
He hurts	stand
Can't see	Parents whisper
Children scream	Never again
Help me	Never again
Can't	
Won't	There will never be
Children turn away	Again
Despair	
Anger	
Parent turns back	
Gone	
Lost	
Parents scream	
Come back	
Wait	

Kendra Weistar
1-31-99

Jacinta Cruz wrote this. She was a teen staff person at our last Holistic Learning Adventure (this is a 7 day course for kids from 9 through 17) and went out with the kids on many of the adventures. Jacinta is 18 now and on her way to Reed College this fall.

I circle round myself
Enfold and fold again
An egg in shell and shell and shell
A spiral with no end.

Life encasing life
Child makes new child
In the beginning was the end
And it's ending all the while.

Jacinta Cruz

TEENPOETRY



ON THE JOURNEY...

To Becoming a Charter School

By Franci Sassin

Editor's introduction: *Among the alternative movements on the educational scene, the charter school movement is one of the fastest growing. However, as many parents and others interested in becoming part of this movement discover, the bureaucracy and other red tape involved in the endeavor can be confusing, if not also daunting or overwhelming. Thus, we thought that it would be helpful for those of our readers interested in becoming part of this movement, as well as for those of our readers who simply have an interest in alternatives in education, to see how one group of parents went about the business of forming a charter school of their own.*

In the article that follows, we profile the journey of the Journey School, a charter school in Southern California that came into being because of the selfless dedication of a group of hard-working, committed individuals, among whom are Franci Sassin, the school's interim Facilitator and the article's author, and her friend Stephanie Edwards, whom the author had met through La Leche League. Fittingly, Franci uses the language of birth and childhood to narrate the story of this exciting school's development (the school is in its infancy). The purpose of this article is not so much to highlight the particular paths of learning offered by this school—though the article does touch on this topic—but, rather, to take us, step by step, through the process that eventuated in the school's coming into being. Along the way, Franci offers helpful tips and advice that she learned as her group engaged in the school's birthing process. Our hope is that this piece will serve as a useful guide, a work of inspiration, and a testament to the strength and spirit of grass-roots innovators who understand that to work for the welfare of the children is ultimately to work for the betterment of us all. (Note: If after reading this article you are interested in learning even more about the planning process that is involved in the formation of a charter school, and especially if you are interested in obtaining further information on or sample copies of the kinds of documents that are necessary in the planning, development, and implementation of a charter school, please write to Franci at either facilitator@journeyschool.org or info@journeyschool.org. You are also invited to visit the school's web site at journeyschool.org.)

Journey School was born on Valentine's Day, 2000.

The "parents" (our founding families) celebrated, marveled at the work we'd put in to "birth" the school, and then very quickly started thinking ahead to the many new challenges we would face as our school began to grow.

At the time that I compose this article, we are immersed in one of the most demanding phases of our school's development: we are transitioning into being new "parents" of a high need "baby." We have many dedicated people working to get all of the operational details and the educational program into place so that we can open in the fall. (Note: Following submission of this article, Journey School opened in San Juan Capistrano, CA on September 13, 2000 with approximately 90 students.) For this reason, I will try to let our documents speak for themselves. Lots of time, effort, and collaboration have gone into creating this body of work; a sample has been included here to give the reader a sense of what went into our school development process. There are many excellent resources and "how-to" guides available for the serious charter school developer. We hope this article will give a small bit of insight into our own unique "journey" towards becoming a charter school.

Our founding group of parents shares an interest in natural and holistic birth, parenting, education, and living. One of our founding parents began comparing the process of having a child to the development of Journey School. We have found this analogy quite appropriate, often humorous, and very inspiring. We expect that the challenges and rewards will be similar to those of parenting. It is our hope that the school and its community will grow, develop, mature, and have a long, successful life.

FAMILY PLANNING: The history

Just as many people spent years dreaming about the children they will have someday, Stephanie Edwards always had dreams of starting a school. She pursued her goal of becoming a teacher and taught in the public school system for ten years. After she became a mother she learned about attachment parenting and joined a playgroup through La Leche League. As her children grew, she began to look at educational alternatives in light of her experience both as a teacher and a mother. She had learned to believe in and trust children's natural abilities to learn and grow. When she discovered Waldorf educational methods, she found that it meshed well with her teaching style and beliefs. Meanwhile, she had started a small developmental pre-school out of her home that met the needs of the playgroup families. Stephanie and I had originally met through La Leche League, and I joined her pre-school. As the children of the pre-school grew older, the parents were faced with what alternatives were available for their children's education. The closest Waldorf School is approximately a 45 minute drive from South Orange County, where we live. In addition, the private school tuition was a financial challenge for many of the single income families. There appeared to be a need for a second Waldorf school in the southern part of the county.



Franci preparing the charter for submission. stephanie.

CONCEPTION: The idea

At about this same time, the concept of a charter school was introduced by one of the parents. The idea of being able to offer a Waldorf style program in the area and have it be available to any family regardless of financial resources was very appealing to the group. (Of course, readers interested in starting a charter school need not model one on a Waldorf approach to education; we simply found that this approach works for us.) Many had a strong belief in the public school system and were intrigued by the idea of working within this system, yet creating a unique school that matched the needs and values of our families. Stephanie and I researched the charter school avenue further by attending an intensive Charter School Development Center (CSDC) workshop, which the CSDC calls a “bootcamp.” We came away with enthusiasm for the idea and a clear picture of the next steps:

- ❖ To decide as a group that we truly wanted to create this school as an alternative not just for our own children, but for the entire community. It was clear that this project would take much more effort than would be required were we to participate in any other program—either public or private—already in existence.
- ❖ To be sure that the entire group of founding parents shared a common vision for the school before proceeding any further.

GESTATION: The planning phase First trimester

Using our planning grant as a guideline (see Sidebar B), we began to work on the different aspects of school development. The effort was named “Journey School Charter Project.” Before proceeding further with the history of the project’s development, let me tell you how we came to name

Franci Sassin lives in Capistrano Beach, CA, with her husband and two sons, ages 6 and 9. Franci left paid employment as a veterinarian to become a stay-at-home mom six years ago. She became actively involved in her children’s schooling five years ago. She served as the Charter Project Coordinator for the Journey School Charter Project and is currently working as Journey School’s interim Facilitator. In addition, Franci does volunteer work at the local animal shelter and treats local wildlife out of her home.

the school. The name derives from a favorite quotation of Stephanie’s, “Childhood is a journey, not a race...,” a saying by someone named Karen Ray. Stephanie kept this quote on display on the wall of her preschool for years. When in the earliest planning stages of the charter school we were trying to choose a name, we thought about names that would illustrate our mission and goals. In the process, we came to feel that this quotation concisely expressed why we were seeking to create this alternative—and so the name Journey School seemed to follow naturally. We later learned that the end of the quote reads, “Learning should be the same.” Our school’s motto has since become: “Journey School...where education is a journey, not a race.”

Very early on, we created a “core group” of developers from among the families involved so far. Our “Waldorf specialist” also became a member of the core group. We organized four committees with responsibility for planning different aspects of the charter process. This is one way to accomplish the many tasks that are required for putting together a successful charter petition, and ultimately, a successful school. Our committees were as follows:

1. *Educational Committee*: Responsible for the curriculum, assessments and governance frameworks. These would be based on such frameworks found in Waldorf education, but would blend other philosophies, as well as aspects of public schools, to create our own unique program. One teacher with Waldorf experience and one teacher with public school experience headed this committee. The knowledge and balance of this combination was very beneficial to the project.
2. *Business/Finance Committee*: Responsible for planning the detailed budgets that are part of the requirement for submitting a charter petition. A sound financial plan is crucial to the success of any school. Often, development groups are very passionate and knowledgeable about education, but they are not very business savvy. Many resources are available to help in this area. We used the business world knowledge of some of our parents, researched public school finance (primarily using CSDC resources) and then tailored the financial plan to our vision for a charter school.
3. *Networking Committee*: Responsible for initiating networking at many levels. Our planning grant listed the different levels as follows: Parent, District, Community (to include businesses, community groups and educational institutions) and Broader (to include state and national charter school resources). We ended up focusing much of our

energy on the parent and district levels. We needed to expand our parent base and get the word out about our proposed school. The networking committee developed an introductory packet to the Project accompanied by a questionnaire. The responses were used to generate a database. We also needed to develop a good working relationship with the local district in preparation for submitting the petition. As a member of this committee, I began attending all the school board meetings and learning about the structure of our district. We also had to develop a contract with the district in order to access our grant funds. (This process, while frustrating at times, proved to be very important groundwork for our later work.) We also accessed important charter school resources such as the California Network for Educational Charters (CANEC). Through CANEC conferences, we were able to make contact with other schools across the state that were using the Waldorf approach.

4. *Site Committee*: Due to the extreme difficulty charter schools face in obtaining suitable facilities, we wanted to get a head start in this area. Ultimately, since we had difficulty getting very far without our school's having any official legal standing, most of the work of the Site Committee began after the charter was approved.

Second trimester

The children of the development group were continuing to get older despite our best efforts to stop them! We were committed to trying to open the school in the fall of 2000. In the fall of 1999, the California Department of Education released another round of grants. This time, our goal was to apply for an implementation grant, which assists with start-up costs. In order to qualify for the grant, applicants had to have an approved charter by Feb 21st, 2000. A quick look at the calendar told us that we had a challenging feat ahead if we were to make the deadline (see **Sidebar C**). After consulting the district's calendar, we set goals for each step. We prepared a rough draft of the charter petition in a few weeks and had it reviewed by our legal counsel. Using planning grant funds, we had retained a lawyer with a great deal of experience in charter school law. This was crucial to our success. We distributed the rough draft to the key members of the district staff for review. This helped identify specific areas of district concern. Meanwhile, we worked on creating our "supplemental package." Because the charter is a legal contract with the charter school's sponsor district, care should be taken on what material goes into the charter itself. The supplemental package provided backup information, support, research, reassurances, etc., as well as the financial plan that is required for submission with the charter.

Third trimester

Using the database we had generated, we began circulating the charter for signatures. We announced the date of our public hearing so that we could have a strong show of support at the district Board meeting. After we officially submitted the charter with all the necessary signatures on the charter

petition, we continued meeting with key district personnel and other interested parties, such as the local representatives of the teacher's union. At our public hearing, we had several speakers give short presentations in support of the charter. We also had a "sign-in" list of all those in attendance and submitted it into the School Board's public record. Several members of the community submitted letters of support. The district Board members had a chance to ask questions of the lead developers. Our agenda item lasted over two hours, but by the end, most of the concerns had been raised and discussed.

The vote on the Journey School charter was scheduled for the next district Board meeting, on February 14, 2000. We negotiated some last minute additions to the charter and went before the Board. We received unanimous approval—**Journey School was born!!** One of the founding parents had thought ahead and brought valentine pencils that said, "Happy Birthday Journey School." Everyone, including the district staff and Board members, got a kick out of that little memento.

Between our public hearing and the final vote, we were very busy preparing an application for the implementation grant. The application was due February 1st; we met the deadline, and on March 10 we found out that we were awarded funds. If the Board had not approved the charter in February, our application would not have been read. Thus, our diligence in planning, we saw, had paid off quite well.

INFANCY: The implementation phase

During the implementation phase, we will need to lay the foundation for the school to grow beyond its initial founders and gain its independence. As was the case during the planning phase, our grant proposal is providing the outline and timeline for our work now. We have several main areas being developed concurrently:

1. **INCORPORATION**: In California, charter schools may choose to become non-profit corporations. Having this status can help make a school more independent and also help limit its liability. The corporation's governing body was named the "Journey School Council." Because charter schools are public agencies, the Journey School Council members are public officials and must follow the same laws that the district school board follows. Concerning these matters, good legal assistance is, once again, invaluable.
2. **SITE**: Once we had an approved charter in hand, the Site Committee got moving. Within a few weeks, several different options had been explored. These included renting office space, sharing space in church sites during the school week, and purchasing property to use first with temporary structures, then with a building. We spent a lot of energy researching the property purchase because it seemed to have so many wonderful possibilities. When developing property, charter schools in California must follow a somewhat different set of rules from the ones followed by other entities. This makes for a complicated process and therefore a lengthy one. Ultimately, the Journey School Council decided that it was too big a risk to purchase property when we hadn't even completed

enrollment yet. We also approached the district about using district property. Although our district is very overcrowded, again, we had good timing. Several new schools are opening this fall in our district, and the district has agreed to lease us some portable classrooms that are being vacated and would otherwise be moved elsewhere. This will only be a temporary solution for us—we still face a long road to finding, financing and creating the permanent home for Journey School.

3. **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM:** The first phase involved preparing our fairly lengthy application materials, holding parent meetings and beginning enrollment. We began recruiting and interviewing teachers in preparation for forming our first classes. The next phase will involve intense work on the curriculum and assessments and development of the parent handbook, volunteer plans, etc.
4. **BUSINESS PLAN/BUDGETS:** Since all of a charter school's public money is tied to enrollment, the final school budget must wait until enrollment is underway. In California, funds are based on the number of days students are in class each year (average daily attendance, or ADA). This system is complex and requires a lot of paperwork, auditing, and so on. A myriad of other details must be worked out and put into place, too, such as details having to do with insurance, school policies, fiscal systems, etc. We suggest having, early on, a thorough, written business plan that addresses these details.

TODDLERHOOD: School opens!

Journey School must soon move beyond its "parents" to the larger community. We must build on old relationships and establish many new ones. We know there will be lots of "dirty diapers" but look forward to the joyful moments when we will watch the children learning, singing, playing, growing.

During the last two years, the founding families have come to believe very strongly in this program. It is quite different from other educational programs available in our area, both public and private. One of our biggest challenges has been our aggressive timeline. Our own children were growing up, and we needed to provide for them. While working on the charter school, we had been teaching our own children in a small homeschooling co-op setting, using a Waldorf based program. Because we are the first group in our area to try a start-up charter school, the process has been new ground for all the entities involved. We have been successful partly because we have had good timing and are located in a very open-minded district. Our sponsoring district does a good job with the state curriculum, has high parent satisfaction ratings, and has innovative leadership. But the major reason for our success so far is alluded to in the following line from our application letter: *"The number of hours given by our founding families in order to open Journey School is truly inspiring!"*

As we embark on the next phase of this journey, many of the adults involved find that our feelings mirror those of my son, who is a student at Journey School: We are excited about having a "real" school, but also a bit apprehensive about leaving our sheltered world and facing the challenges ahead.



CHARTER SCHOOL CHALLENGES

When you begin to plan a charter school, you must leave the world of education and enter the world of politics. Notwithstanding this, you must never forget your vision and must recognize if negotiations begin to compromise the integrity of your program. The following areas are possible "trouble spots" during phases of charter planning and operations. Each is accompanied by the advice that the Journey School founders might give.

1. *The sponsoring district:* Your relationship with your sponsoring district will be long term. It is crucial that you establish a good working relationship by developing a process and identifying people who can find solutions. *Advice:* Remember as you start up that you are entering "their" territory. The more information you have and the more professional you can be, the better. If you make a mistake, or are intentionally setting up a school program different from the district's programs, recognize and admit this move. In addition, attend school board meetings, talk to other charter schools in the district (if any), and learn about the protocols used within your district, the political climate, and the key players in your area. Remember that you can promote your alternative without bashing public schools.
2. *The bureaucracy:* Often, you may question the benefit of accessing public funds because of the frustration involved and the "strings" attached. In particular, the reporting, oversight and accounting of funds are quite complicated. You will likely experience many delays, and politics might play a part in reviews and decisions. *Advice:* Be prepared for these possible problems! Ask lots of questions and network with other schools as much as possible.
3. *The politics of educational reform:* Charter schools are a small piece of the overall movement for educational reform. While it is important to focus on your school, don't

forget that there are greater political forces at work. You will need to be involved in the political scene at many levels. In these different forums, expect to meet others with whom, despite your common interests, you disagree on other issues. Even within the charter school movement, there are many different beliefs about education. *Advice:* Be aware of these forces, monitor them, and participate as much as possible through the media, advocacy groups (like CANEC), state legislators, etc. Remembering that you are a representative of charter schools, strive to be a positive role model. Stay open-minded to the other viewpoints you encounter along the way.

4. *Local politics:* This issue often arises when a charter school is looking for a facility. Although you are enthusiastic about your new school and have children's interests at heart, you may encounter those who do not share these feelings. *Advice:* Be prepared to promote your school at all levels in a positive way. Focus on the benefits of your school to the community at large. Engage local business and community leaders to be part of your development process.
5. *Standardized testing:* California requires all charter schools to administer all state standardized tests. This is their attempt to compare charter school programs with other public school programs. The current trend is to put more and more emphasis on these tests and have higher consequences for schools based on test results. Our district also requires charter schools to administer district-wide standardized tests. *Advice:* Very early on you will need to decide what role standardized tests will take in your school. Some schools embrace these tests as an opportunity to demonstrate the success of their program. In other schools, these tests may not correspond to or align well with a particular school's educational program and/or philosophy. Before you go down the charter school road, you must address this issue head on. Put some thought into where these tests will fit into your school's overall accountability "package".
6. *Parent Community:* One of the strongest aspects of charter schools is the level of parent involvement and commitment. However, the school will bring many people together who have diverse opinions, cultures and needs. This can be a source of conflict and day-to-day crises. *Advice:* Have a strong mission and vision, and use them to engage and educate all of the parent community. Have your governance structure clearly articulated and strive to make the admissions process one of "self-selection." Create well thought out grievance procedures and problem solving strategies that address many different situations. Put these procedures and strategies into place as early as possible. Don't hesitate to use objective mediators when you find that they are needed. Develop strategies for continuing to receive the input of your parent community so that, as the school grows, it can continue to meet the needs of its families.

If all goes well, your school's biggest problem will be having a long waiting list.

SIDEBAR A

Journey School's Mission Statement

[Author's note: The Charter School Development Center (CSDC) materials suggest that development groups start with a mission statement to "design down" from. The creation of our mission statement took almost two months. It was the most collaborative venture I have ever worked on. Energy was put into every word and sentence. At the time, we decided to describe our program in the statement rather than simply using the Waldorf name. This was partly because we felt that many in the community would not be familiar with Waldorf education and partly because there was (and is) a controversy over bringing Waldorf to the public school system. In any event, we present below our mission statement for the benefit of readers interested in starting charter schools in their communities and for the general interest of readers investigating alternatives in education.]

Philosophy:

We at Journey School believe in the preservation of childhood and in an educational environment that is an extension of the family. We are a community of committed parents, teachers and students working as a dynamic triad to develop each child's full human potential. Active parent involvement in the life of the school is essential. Every teacher's expertise extends beyond the classroom to all school aspects. Students contribute their innate love of learning and unique talents. We believe that the synergy of these elements creates an atmosphere of optimal learning.

Educational Approach:

Our developmental approach recognizes the whole child: mind, body and heart, these three elements will be integrated and equally emphasized in each child's education. We will accomplish this by:

- Immersing students in one academic subject block at a time while integrating literature, music, movement and visual arts into the daily lesson.
- Enhancing every child's education through specially subjects such as foreign language, gardening and performing arts.
- Fostering imaginative thinking through storytelling and creative play.
- Teaching students to create their own lesson books.
- Establishing a long-term, student-teacher relationship extending beyond one year.
- Providing in-depth narrative assessments of academic performance, social skills, work habits and individual growth.
- Introducing technological media and textbooks when developmentally appropriate.

GOALS:

The goal of Journey School is to preserve each student's natural joy of learning. Our graduates will be literate, creative and vital individuals. They will possess problem solving, communication and life skills. Our school community will promote critical thinking, interdependent relationships, reverence for life and for the environment. Each individual leaving Journey School will be empowered to follow their unique path within the diverse global community.

Excerpts from the Planning Grant

[Author's note: Journey School has a history of good timing. California passed a new charter school law that took effect in January 1999. Among other things, this law made it easier for start up groups, such as a group of parents, to submit a charter petition to a district. It also made it harder for districts to turn down a charter petition—for example, districts would have to prove that the school didn't have a sound educational program. The federal government has a charter school grant program that is administrated by each state. When the California Department of Education (CDE) released a new round of planning grant applications in the fall of 1998, our group decided to apply. We now had a deadline to begin working towards.

We attended a grant writing workshop offered by the CDE and followed the advice we received there to research and write our grant proposal. The grant was submitted in March 1999, and we were awarded funds in May of 1999. This award was a big boost to the group—we began to think we might actually be able to do this! In addition, the grant proposal really laid out the steps for successful charter school planning. We now had funds to access professional resources that we needed to complement our development group's expertise. Our biggest expenses were for legal services (for reviewing the charter itself) and for the copying, mailing, and traveling we did during the networking aspect of development. We also hired a Waldorf consultant to assist in developing our educational program. It is good to remember, though, that many groups are able to successfully accomplish these same goals without the aid of planning grant funds.]

Abstract of the Application

The vision for Journey School began with a small group of parents who were seeking a more developmental approach to elementary school education than is available in our area.

We are now exploring ways to offer this type of educational opportunity to families in South Orange County, regardless of socio-economic status....

Our student goals will be centered around the "mind, body and heart" concept, while our goals for the school

will be centered on modeling the type of community and collaboration that our children will need to be successful in the 21st Century.

During this grant project, we will further define and develop our educational, business and networking capabilities, ultimately leading to an approved Charter Petition. In addition, strong evaluation strategies will be put into place to evaluate first our Charter Petition, then later, our organization and overall program. Our vision calls for developing a school where students, teachers, parents, the district, and other community members are interdependent and maintain mutually beneficial relationships.

Currently, we are a parent group with large amounts of energy, enthusiasm, expertise and networking skills, but with limited financial resources. To make our vision a viable reality, we need to broaden our resource base and retain appropriate expert consultants. Grant funds will provide start up funding to enable us to accomplish these goals.

(PARTIAL) DESCRIPTION OF GRANT PROJECT GOALS AND ACTIVITIES FOR APPROVAL OF A CHARTER PROPOSAL

Grant Project Goals and Objectives:

Our primary goal by the end of the project is to have a completed charter petition and all necessary supplemental plans ready for approval by the CUSD Board of Trustees. A strong support system will also be established creating a sound base for the implementation phase.

Tangible Work Products

- Charter petition drafts and revisions
- Curriculum, assessment and governance frameworks
- List of available funding sources, business plan and preliminary budget
- List of district contacts
- Site selection guidelines and a list of site options
- Written timelines and goals for each task area
- Promotional materials for recruitment and for presentation of the charter
- List of community contacts



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE EDWARDS

SIDEBAR C**Charter School Development Process and Timeline**

[Author’s note: California law spells out the legal boundaries for evaluating charter school petitions (in all likelihood, so does your state’s law). In California, a charter may be submitted with signatures from either 50% of the teachers interested in teaching at the school or 50% of the parents interested in having their child attend the school. Once the charter has been officially submitted with the appropriate signatures, the district (or other sponsoring educational agency) must hold a public hearing within 30 days. The vote on the charter approval must occur within 60 days of submission (both parties may agree to a 30 day extension of these deadlines if they feel that one is needed). The following timeline illustrates how the Journey School developers planned this phase to coordinate with the district’s meeting schedule and the CDE grant schedule.]

Oct, 1999	CDE releases charter school grant “request for applications”
Nov 23, 1999	Charter and supplemental information submitted for district staff review
Dec 17, 1999	Charter, charter petition and supplemental information formally submitted
Jan 10, 2000	Public Hearing at district Board Meeting
Feb 1, 2000	Deadline to submit charter school grant
Feb 14, 2000	District School Board votes on charter petition
Feb 21, 2000	Charter approval deadline for 2000 round of implementation grants
Mar 10, 2000	Grant awards announced
July, 2000	Grant funds arrive from CDE
Sept, 13, 2000	Journey School opens!

SIDEBAR D**List of Required Elements for a School’s Charter**

[Author’s note: Be sure to familiarize yourself with your state’s Charter School Law. Under California Charter School Law, every charter must include more than 14 required elements. As updates to the law are made, new issues must be addressed in the charter. There are many excellent resources that can serve as “boilerplate” samples for the charter document. Organizers must then flesh out this framework (preferably with the help of legal counsel) to meet the needs of their individual schools and districts. On its website, the CDE publishes the charters of all its charter schools. We include, below, a listing of a charter’s different required element. (The elements in this list, phrased as such, replicate the table of contents in our own charter.) The charter petition per se is comprised of the signatures collected and submitted along with the charter; these two elements, combined, must be submitted as one item in order for the would-be charter school to qualify for consideration by the sponsoring entity.]

1. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
2. MEASURABLE PUPIL OUTCOMES
3. METHODS TO ASSESS PUPIL PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING OUTCOMES
4. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL
5. EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS
6. HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES
7. MEANS TO ACHIEVE RACIAL/ETHNIC BALANCE REFLECTIVE OF THE DISTRICT
8. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS
9. FINANCIAL AUDIT
10. PUPIL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION
11. RETIREMENT SYSTEM
12. ATTENDANCE ALTERNATIVES
13. DESCRIPTION OF EMPLOYEE RIGHTS
14. DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS, OVERSIGHT, TERM AND RENEWAL
15. SEVERABILITY CLAUSE
16. OPERATIONAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Resources for Considering the Charter Alternative **Compiled by Robin Martin**

If charters are an option that you would like to consider, below are just a few places to start your research. In addition, get in touch with another charter school in your district, and ask questions about the political hoops through which they have had to jump. As Franci mentions in her article, to plan a charter, you must be willing “to leave the world of education and enter the world of politics.” On the more hopeful side of things, you can read some of the materials and guides by the Center for School Change and Joe Nathan.

Charter Schools Around the Country

U.S. Charter Schools, <http://www.uscharterschools.org/> - provides information on charter legislation, key contacts, school profiles, web site participants and other interactive features for each state in the union, along with startup and assistance information.

Center for School Change, <http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change/> - offers an array of research and resources compiled by Joe Nathan and his staff. While they have a particular focus around the opportunities created in Minnesota, they also look quite thoroughly (and optimistically) at the charter movement nationwide. From the second edition of the Charter School Handbook (1998) to an interesting sounding reported entitled “Making a Difference? Charter Schools, Evaluation and Student Performance” to various works on parent/school partnerships, you will find a wide array of relatively inexpensive publications by the Center. To order a listing or specific copies, contact the Center for School Change at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 301 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, or phone (612) 626-1834.

Center for School Reform, http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools/ - maintains a section in its web site “About Charter Schools” which is quite extensive about charters around the country, on topics from program notes to money matters. Site includes a U.S. map where you can browse to your state and see the related laws and status of charters in your state. They also publish several books about charter schools today, a roadmap to the movement, and a charter school directory. 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 204, Washington, DC 20036, phone (800) 521-2118, e-mail cer@edreform.com.

Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education, a book by Joe Nathan (1997). Describes the history of the charter school movement and the patterns that current charter-school advocates may find themselves repeating; offers examples of existing charter schools, enabling legislation, and community reaction; and presents guidance for charter school developers and operators. (Published by Jossey-Bass, and probably available at your local library.)

Journey School, <http://www.journeyschool.org> – for an update on how this particular Waldorf charter is coming along, its calendar of events, and general school information.

School Choices: Charter Schools, <http://www.schoolchoices.org/roo/charters.htm> – scheduled to post more information on some of the long-term pitfalls in terms of political and economic views on charter schools, as compared with the short and medium-term benefits that are popularized.

Charter Helpers in California

Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform: A Study of Ten California School Districts - <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/docs/charter.pdf> – This 66 page PDF file takes a few minutes to download and requires Acrobat Reader on your computer. However, it may be worth the wait, as it provides readable and rigorous research. This 2.5 year study examined the most prominent claims of the charter school reform advocates and compared them to the day-to-day experiences of educators, parents, and students in charter schools. It describes 15 specific findings about what has really been happening with charter school reform in California. Overall, the study found that what advocates claim about charter schools is not representative of what is really happening.

California's Charter School Development Center, <http://www.cacharterschools.org> – Of the California resources she knows, Franci recommends this as the best on charter schools. It gives workshop schedules, an electronic “tool box” on the basics through the complexities of becoming a charter, and California charter school news, publications, and sample documents.

CANEC: California Network of Education Charters, <http://www.canec.org> – links you to charter schools in California, hot issue topics in legislation and advocacy, interactive services to members, answers frequently asked questions about charters, give operational and renewal guidelines for California, and much more.

Some Words of Caution: Ironically, although I have met many educators who have consciously chosen not to go the charter route, there are very few resources that explain why. Presumably, they do their own research and simply don't bother to publish it. From informal chats, I've gathered that some of the most innovative alternatives don't “go charter” because there are simply too many external regulations and hoops to jump through that some educators feel might compromise their focus—philosophically and practically. Of course, there are also some states, such as my own home in Iowa, where teacher unions or other political pressures continue to keep charter schools from even becoming an option.

Community Homeschooling: *A Day in the Life*

By Van Andruss

I

It's 8:15. I wake up with my partner Linnea in our outdoor bed under the orange tarp, get on my clothes, and stagger in sandals down a well-beaten path to the house. The air is chilly. It is May. Snow lies on the mountain ridges. There's a wobble in my walk. Wonder why. Not enough sleep. Up late again last night after the Song Circle, reading, having my habits. Entering the house, I detect an odor of propane in the air. Got to work on that fridge again, there must be a leak. Light the woodstove, take the chill off the house, put on water for coffee, quietly push open Raven's bedroom door so she can get used to the idea of waking up. Wash my face, my eyes, with cold water at the sink. Look out the window. What's happening in the world today? I can see the chickens milling about in their yard. The big barred-rock rooster prances on the roof of the chickenhouse. All around the yard the balsam-root sends up sunny yellow flowers. Going to be a clear day.

We are enjoying the peace and quiet of spring break-up. No logging trucks. The roads in the high places are muddy. Logging is the big issue where we live. Forests of ponderosa and fir cover the slopes. We are located 250 miles from the city center; the nearest town is twenty miles down a perilous dirt road.

Linnea comes into the house, washes up and starts her Tai Chi exercises. Ignoring her bizarre body movements, I make coffee and take a seat in my favorite soft chair to begin the day reading. But first I jot down a quick reminder to mention the business of slavery in connection with *Huckleberry Finn*, after which I read a chapter from that excellent history of Mexico, *Triumphs and Tragedy*, by Ramon Ruiz, that has enlivened my

morning coffee hour for two weeks (thanks to my young friend Myles at the town library and to the inter-library loan service).

I am recalling last night's Song Circle—what a serene, harmonious event that was. Our community has created many beautiful songs. Music expresses our concerns, our solidarity. Last night's gathering was occasioned by a friend just returned from a trip to Ontario. In the big log house, people sang, accompanied by guitars, mandolin. There was fruit cake topped with apricot preserves, and other sweet things, and we drank beer and felt blissful.

I will tell you some more about this community because it's important to an understanding of our school. We are now about forty-five people, who journeyed to this sanctuary from scattered points of the continent, arriving over twenty, thirty years, and nestling into the hills where two rivers meet. We are within walking distance of each other. As anyone could imagine, our relations are complex. Some people are closer than others, but generally speaking, through long familiarity, we have become like relatives. Our hanging together as a body is not surprising. We have seen the wisdom in community. Our aim has been to settle down in this valley and survive; better, to prosper through cooperative means. It is a good strategy in a turbulent world to take a stand in one place, learn all about that place, protect, and care for it. We are alternative people, and our kids have grown up in an atmosphere of alternative thinking and action. For years they've played on the periphery of talk circles. They've heard all they need to hear about peace issues, non-violence, consensus decision-making, conflict resolution; they've listened to lengthy discussions on ecology, forestry, organic foods, racism; they've peddled their

bikes through Peace Walks, marched in demonstrations against Toxic Waste, paraded through the main street of town on Earth Day, camped out at Bioregional Gatherings. It follows, then, from our way of life and our idea of local self-government that we should create our own form of schooling, and that we should school our children at home.

The kids who come to our house are dear to me. We have known each other for years. As I consider them, what strikes me is the stability of their local conditions compared to those of my personal upbringing. I wonder what difference it will make in the long run to their character. In the rural public system, kids are scattered far and wide and are bussed to a central point. There they have the dizzying job of adapting to a motley society of unfamiliar peers/adults in a regulated, often oppressive, atmosphere. With only a couple of exceptions, the kids featured here have not been to public school. Nor have they grown up in the city, where I am assuming most people grow up nowadays, and they have been living beyond the reach of TV. As a result, their “psychology” is not wholly commercialized and they retain a fresh (unself-conscious) approach to experience. Already, of course, they have been conditioned by contemporary popular music—rap, ghetto protest, heavy metal—the kind of music that comes from crowded urban centers. And they know what’s going on in the Youth Culture through contact with friends who live in the local town, which is a small-time intersect in the grid of a vast business empire.

The Home School has functioned for three years. It takes place in our house four days a week, Tuesday through Friday, from 9:30 in the morning till one or two in the afternoon. We’ve got about ten students, ages five to seventeen, divided into three classes, A, B and C, with the A Class being the oldest and the C Class being the youngest. Linnea and I are the teachers. She teaches Elementary Math and French, and I carry on in English and Social Studies. This year, Math and Science take place in town at the Adult Learning Center for the older boys, and it goes quite well, thanks to teachers like Ed MacArthur and Alice Kidd.

I must speak for a moment about our daughter, Raven. She is the only one who has a bedroom in this house and is fourteen years old and holds strong opinions about things going on here. It has not always

pleased her that we have turned our house into a school. Her privacy has suffered, her room made into a kid’s center. Furniture is used roughly, the door is slammed, pictures have fallen from their hangers, elbows have poked holes in the drywall. This is lamentable. If she had a choice, she might rather wake up quietly and alone in the mornings, or sleep in till eleven. On the other hand, at times she says it can be okay, and she reminds us of what we talked about before, that this might be the last year anyhow. It’s quite possible kids will prefer to go to high school in town, now that the school bus has agreed to drive out this far.

Our house is a rectangular box, 60 by 24, forty-five feet of which is one long room consisting of kitchen, eating area, living space. In one corner at the far end is the so-called classroom, an area about 12 by 15, occupied by a long, sagging plywood table and six or seven chairs. Along one wall stand high bookshelves with space for artistic supplies, colored pencils, paper, paints, chalk crayons, as well as the utensils of scholarship—erasers, scissors, compasses, protractors, and so on. On another wall hangs a Peter’s Projection map of the world. A globe of our planet is suspended from the ceiling. Serving as a visual aid on one side and shielding my beloved Heintzman grand piano on the other is a green-colored blackboard attached to a wooden frame on wheels. Around the room are windows with a view to the open fields of the valley and the monumental Coast Mountains.

I hear Raven getting up now. I know because the stereo just came on. And Linnea has finished her exercises. While I scramble the eggs, we talk over the program of the day. Any big changes? Shall we have a reading circle, a talk circle? No. Let’s go on and have a typical day.

We’re just finishing up breakfast when Teddy struggles with the door handle and enters the scene. He’s one of our younger students and a lifelong friend, nine years old. Often he shows up early. His dad says that’s because he’s up at 7:30 and gets restless hanging around the house after breakfast. Raven feels compelled to remind him of his error. “You’re here early again,” she says. Teddy don’t say nothin’, he just smiles. Then he turns a little serious. He wants me to know that unfortunately he forgot his ten sentences at home again. He’ll be sure to bring ‘em tomorrow.

Van Andross, co-editor of *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (New Society Publishers, 1990), lives among friends in the mountains of British Columbia. He has been a long-time student of the American philosopher Fred Brown, and presently spends the greater part of his time teaching, writing, gardening, and defending his local watershed against the destructive forces of industry. He is a husband, and the father of one charming daughter.

Then I hear laughing. It's 9:20. Must be the girls. Heather with the red hair steps through the door with her notebook under her arm, and here's her sister, Lena—small, freckled, athletic Lena—from another family that gets up early. And then Laura, Teddy's older sister, comes in with her books. Tall, slender, blond, and immediately behind her is Kenny, also blond and blue-eyed. Well, these are radiant-looking characters and it is a great pleasure for me to greet them in the morning.

After a few jokes, we get up from the breakfast table and deposit our plates on the kitchen counter. Linnea invites Teddy to his math lesson in the Addition, an outbuilding with a small classroom apart and undistracted. After brushing my teeth, I call out briskly, "Well, what do you say, friends, shall we go to the long table?" and the day begins.

II

Taking seats around the table, these are the kids of Class B, all girls except for Kenny, and ranging in age from eleven to fourteen. My notebook lies open before me so I won't lose my way. From a file folder I hand back yesterday's corrected homework. While this is going on, around the table each student reports on last night's novel-reading. Comments are short. Next, we get out our written homework and read aloud. These works, it so happens, are poems and short stories. On another day they might be journal entries or book reports or brief essays on a theme. We always share what we've written, in order to socialize our labors. Heather sits on my left. She begins reading the second installment of a story about a girl who got both a new horse and a new boy friend at the same time. An amazing piece of good fortune, we all agree. Next, Kenny reads his page about a submarine on a dangerous mission involving a sack of gold and threats of violence from the Aliens. Right now Kenny's in a science fiction mode. While reading along, he occasionally pauses, unable to make out a word. He knows what I'm thinking. He knows I'm thinking he needs to be able to read his own handwriting. Next, Raven leans on the table and reads an episode from her Western. It's a hot desert and the two riders dismount in a rocky oasis for a drink of water. They're tired, they've been riding since early morning. But look, there's a cloud of dust on the horizon. Looks like horses coming their way. This can only mean trouble. Raven is in a phase of reading nothing but Louis L'Amour. She says she's read about sixty of his books. I'm not sure I believe her. Then Lena recites in her soft gentle voice a shy piece about water, how it flows, how you can roll, bathe, swim in it, diving from the rocks in the summer at the swimminghole. Now it's Laura's turn. She prefers writing poems. This one is about growing peas in the garden, watering,

weeding, opening the pods, and eating right from the vine. With short, snappy phrases and catchy rhythms, Laura finds a way to make her lines original.

We pass papers around and go on to spelling. For a student here, spelling quizzes happen daily and are just part of the routine of English Studies, like warming up exercises. Fifteen words a day. To my surprise the kids enjoy memorizing. A certain amount of rote learning seems to suit them. They take pride in knowing a thing the way a spelling word can be known. A question with a definite answer offers firm ground to stand on. And if all goes systematically and affably, what could be happier for fixing the rudiments in memory? Often it is up to a student to compose the list. It can be thematic, about plants, forest animals, wilderness landscapes, physiology, cooking with herbs. This morning Laura has prepared a string of carpentry terms. Planer, caulking, lintel, etc. First she reads out the list and people write down the words, then she gives the correct spelling. This exercise doesn't take long.

Afterwards it's Lena's turn to announce the fifteen words she's looked up for tomorrow's session. They are difficult, esoteric. There are giggles around the table. I say, "Listen, about these words, Lena, wouldn't it be better to pick out vocabulary that we are all likely to use?" No, no, the friends say, they like hard words. Oh. I sit back. "Abysmal, abjuration, anti-clericalism...." When words come up with obscure meanings, I'm happy to explain them. I don't take my definitions from a dictionary unless I have to, preferring my own versions. This is a joy to me, defining and discussing the meaning of a word. It gives me the thrill of bringing something new to the person, opening another window on the world. About the word "abysmal," for example, there is so much to say—its origins, appearance in literature, its place in everyday use.

Now comes my five to ten minute English lesson—you might call it the main lesson—on the three uses of the word "to." People have trouble keeping these three words discreet: To, two, and too. The first two are easy but t-o-o wants to be used where you might equally say "also." It's a small issue, eh?, easy to draw attention to. So much the better. As in any art, written English consists of many small concerns or problems that, once isolated, can be made clear. I write these words on the green blackboard, give illustrations, go around the table eliciting further comment. No questions? Good. End of lesson. Ten minutes is my theoretical limit for treating a formal issue in the use of English. My aim is to reach an understanding with the least amount of fuss. Repetition is taken for granted. I will go over this little threesome again, though not endlessly because, through reading their written work, I will know who's not getting the point, and I will take the matter up with them individually.

At this moment in my hour, a variety of things can happen, but today we move on to reading aloud from



Portrait in May of students and teachers among the wild blooming balsam root.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. I read to the kids practically every school day, either stories or histories. I often do the reading myself in hopes they will become enthralled. I want to cast over them the spell of literature, free of stammering or hesitations. Reading aloud by students I treat as a separate activity and I especially encourage them to practice at home. While listening, they often take out paper and colored pencils and draw a picture, which seems to help retain a focus. It is not distracting to draw while reading progresses, as might be supposed; or let's say, it's hardly distracting compared to what happens when, their eyes free to wander, they start paying random attention to each other.

Huckleberry Finn goes down very well today. Despite its violence and peculiarly American brand of ignorance, it appeals to the young ones. Part way along, Teddy arrives after his math lesson in the Addition. He often joins us during the reading period. He certainly enjoys hearing the adventure of travel down the Mississippi on

a raft. Kids appreciate the jokes and the unconventional behaviors of the main characters and the sentences are colloquial and accessible. In twenty minutes the hour is up, but I read on for an extra five to finish the chapter. I guess I'll handle the slavery issue tomorrow. At this point, everyone is glad to get up and stretch. Only thing left to do is assign homework. People come up one at a time, we talk briefly about what is to be done, and both write down in our notebooks the agreements we have reached. The students know what is basically expected of them. They are routinely expected to do about an hour's reading and to write a page or two. Topics vary. I ask them what they might like to write about. I especially encourage letters to friends and relatives. This is using homework to further connections with others. Seldom do we experience any difficulty arriving at assignments. Each one has a novel on the go. There is the spelling list. The only thing left to be decided is what to be writing about, and that will mainly depend on the interests of the individual.

For any teacher, it is wonderful to sit quietly by with pen and notebook while a student tells you what they will do for homework. Tomorrow, after the morning chores—the reading aloud of our written stuff, our spelling, our lesson of the day—we will switch over to Social Studies and read another chapter from George Woodcock's *A Picture History of British Columbia*, which we are using as a textbook.

I would like to talk for a few moments about books. I regard it as an important topic. School studies center on a good library. First among priorities is instilling the habit of reading. In the choice of books, I want to put before the young people a subject matter that appeals

Imagine if schooling were intended, not simply to prepare you for the job and marriage market, but to edify your whole person and especially to call out your natural talents.

while satisfying certain very flexible ethical and educational requirements. These requirements, in case there's any question, are theoretically to be derived from one's community, or in the absence of community, from one's household. Of course, certain authors can easily stretch the tolerance of an ethic. A writer like Mario Puzo, known for his novel, *The Godfather*, is a case in point. It is true that in Mario's books there is violence and sexism. But the writing is easily grasped, powerful, full of action. I recommended his novel, *The Sicilian*, which I found and read myself from the shelves of the town library and passed on to the older boys, who devoured it with pleasure. They saw its faults (chauvinism, bloody violence) and also recognized its greatness. Action and adventure are desirable.

For younger minds, between ten and twelve, stories cannot successfully plunge beneath a certain depth of human experience. Neither lengthy self-examining nor cold philosophical inquiry will turn them on. They are most comfortable with the colorful surface of things. But from whatever they dip into they will encounter values and they will take many of those values for their own. This is why choosing suitable books has always struck me as one of my most important functions, and I'm always on the lookout for good ones, especially stories, picture histories, illustrations of place.

What has amazed me in the younger class, Class B, is the enthusiasm with which the students greet musty old classics like Homer's *Odyssey*. Of course, I edit as I read along. You have to when the action descends into long-winded rhetoric. Yet Greek myths are always well received, in whatever package. I have read them aloud with great success from coloring books. The younger students are also enchanted by Santillana's *Gil Blas*, full of picaresque farce and chicanery, and the begin-

ning chapters of *Don Quixote*. Less surprisingly, the Arthurian tales, and numbers of operatic medieval romances, have stimulated interest. Linnea has had good success with *Mists of Avalon*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Starhawk's *Fifth Sacred Thing*.

One more word about books. In a good home library you should be able to find out something about most anything, even if very little. Encyclopedias are helpful, though usually so conventional or pseudo-scientific in their views that they often spoil potentially interesting topics. While this is especially true of the adult Britannica, the Junior Britannica, even if a little out of date, remains accessible to young minds. All information in encyclopedias is flawed by patriarchy, the bias of politics and worship of empire. Treated as introductory, such books can be okay. It is to be assumed that one will soon move on to other sources.

The same flaws show up in school system textbooks. They tend to glorify belligerent nationstates, romanticize power struggles, and support the industrial machine. Again, however, they have their uses. One selects the articles that help. An instance in point is our British Columbia history textbook. It provides the story of building roads through the Cariboo during the gold rush, and does a pretty interesting job. Pictures make dead words come alive. So let textbooks be supplementary while informal books, even popular market books, provide the main reading matter. Along with the official BC history textbook, we turn to things like *The Freedom Seekers*, by Daniel G. Hill, on blacks in Canada; or *Her Story: Women from Canada's Past*, edited by Susan E. Merrit. In these books we get a better idea of the social conditions of the times.

III

Older students bike to school or walk. Coincidentally, they are all boys—young men. They get here at 10:30, sometimes earlier to do a little homework before class. Today they are outside playing basketball below a hoop and backboard nailed to a fir tree in our front yard. I get my notebook and call out, "It's time to get underway," and saunter casually to the nearby Addition. Usually they follow without delay, in fact chide me when I'm late (they want to get this thing over with). When the five of us crowd into the room, another 12 by 15, it's ludicrously full of bodies. We sit around a plywood table. Hanging in front of a picture window is another green blackboard. There's a schematic map of the world on one wall depicting nationstates, capitals, etc., and on the adjacent wall, a satellite photograph of North America, and a display of Andy's current art work. On the table is stacked a variety of picture and reading books relevant to our subjects, as well as magazines of general interest, atlases, volumes of encyclopedia, dictionary, and thesaurus.

So this is Class A, all male, from ages fourteen to seventeen. We greet each other this morning and converse for a few minutes about the heavy snow pack in the high mountains. Will it flood this year? At least there'll be plenty of water for our gardens. Jody, a slim long-legged youth who never stops getting bigger, sits across from me. He has red hair and shining brown eyes. He likes to lean back in his chair. His notebook's open in his lap. He reviews the day's spelling list while we talk. Next to him across the table to my left is Michael, a year older at fifteen, and even bigger, and the most vocal of the boys. To my right is Andy, built strong and stocky, a young man endowed with great physical stamina. Taking a seat away from the table in the stuffed chair is Sid (another Huck Finn) a red-haired, lanky youth, who acts out his ambiguity about education by remaining half in, half out of class activity. This behavior, which would be unacceptable in a "normal" school, seems O.K. in an alternative one and is typical of Sid's behavior all around.

I would describe my relations with the boys as congenial. I know them well. Fortunately our relations are fairly unspoiled. While I am inherently under suspicion because of my age, at the same time I have not seriously lost my temper, yelled at, insulted or injured them, which is important for what we have to do together.

I will have two hours with Class A, dividing the time between English and Social Studies. Last night's assignments are handed in. Jody tells me he wasn't able to finish his essay on Mexico which he had hoped to turn in days ago. We talk about that. I get in my two cents worth about making the time, by conscious effort, by planning. These comments are not new. Moving on,

Community remains the wider school, the educator of the broad person, the primary source of practical and social skills (while education, regarded philosophically, means being brought into the established forms of your community—if you're lucky enough to have one).

Michael says he found his study of the Persians interesting in the illustrated archaeology book. He wants to do another chapter in the same book, maybe the article on the Etruscans for tonight's homework. Fine. That would be good. I open the subject of last night's reading. Michael again takes the lead. He's deep in a book called *The Middle Passage* (by Charles Johnson), dealing with the awful events on an American slaver ship. He says he'll bring the book to class tomorrow and read us an episode. Jody is reading the all-time favorite, Louis L'Amour. Andy says he's trying to get into *The Count of Monte Cristo* (one 19th century novel

is required reading this term), but he's finding it hard going. Michael breaks in. He says, "Andy, don't worry, I just finished *The Three Musketeers*, it's terrific, I'll pass it on to you." Sid's reading articles from an anthology of local BC histories. He holds up the magazine-type book for all to see. It's a story about Frank Gott, a local native man who had been a war hero, but who had a sad ending. He shot a meddling game warden and was hunted down as a fugitive.

On to spelling. Twenty words. I made up the list for today. It consists of a variety of words that I have chosen from the dictionary, as well as misspellings from their papers and vocabulary derived from current topics. Jody and Michael like the words to be hard. There seems to be an invigorating rivalry going on between them. Andy and Sid are in a different category. They don't expect to be on top of spelling at all. Do the best you can, I advise them. Andy applies himself to the list anyway, which I read aloud, and then Jody spells out the words and people are free to correct what he gets wrong, but only Michael speaks up. I read the new list for tonight. Here are words, some of which are chosen more for growth of vocabulary and pronunciation than for spelling, words like "pot-pourri" or "ramification."

I hand their papers back from last night. These are stories, two of which we have already shared aloud. They were developed from a list of ingredients that we made up together—places, characters, things like a motorcycle, a hairbrush, a cheap ring, and a yappy terrier. Events like finding a hundred dollar bill in the parking lot of the Country Store.

Michael reads his mixture of the ingredients. It's a blood-thirsty tale. His stories are coming under the nightmare influence of Stephen King. Next, Andy reads out his version. It, too, is full of dramatic action, distinguished by occasional flourishes of flowery speech. Sid says he's still writing his story (which I happen to know is about the full-grown cougar he encountered last summer on a ridge behind his place). I don't say anything in judgment of the stories the boys are writing unless I have a positive suggestion to make. Where there is effort I am complimentary, because I am a sincere admirer of their works and because only encouragement helps.

The young men in this room speak freely. I might not want to repeat their exact words. They do not conspire to please me or act polite. Their opinions are strong, their standards critical. They are not particularly interested in the subject matter of schooling, which makes their apprenticeship a challenge. By and large, they like reading, and I take what advantage I can from that. But I put considerable energy into not saying too much—no long involved comments, and no lecturing without ample warning. I make suggestions. I stack books in front of them, invite them to browse. Each book is picked off the library shelf with a certain per-

son in mind (though you never can tell what book will appeal to a person as it passes under their nose). When the boys act out their lapses of interest and don't do their assignments, I try various remedies. If a re-awakening does not soon follow, I shift to a fresh topic. The rule with me is to keep the school subject matter as free from bad associations as possible. Pushing a person to be interested in your topic could damage the sensitive relations between you. Moreover, it's not my function to be commanding people what to do, and if it weren't that these young men are aiming for a high school diploma, and are compelled to satisfy institutional requirements, there would be no call to apply pressure. Imagine if schooling were intended, not simply to prepare you for the job and marriage market, but to edify your whole person and especially to call out your natural talents. In such a world, the student would be supported in finding what was most interesting or appropriate to be learned.

A question arises at this point. Without institutional standards, are we adequately preparing our youth to step out into the Real World? Maybe, maybe not. Who can say how things would go if they plunged into the big city experience, for instance, in which even those brought up in that setting tend to flounder? But here in

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a rural situation, and with a community to back them up, the most liberal form of schooling seems worth a try.

At this point, Jody reads his report on elephants. He's normally a good student, but impatient. Last night he must have been rushed for time. Whole passages have been lifted directly from the nature magazine that was his source. All the listeners know these are not his sentences, and being an honest kid, he straightforwardly acknowledges they are not. This sort of plagiarism does not upset me. At worst, one learns something from copy work, and it's not without its value even as practice in writing sentences. Here and there Jody has put things in his own words. You can tell where this happened in the last paragraph, and I congratulate him on that much and urge him to keep trying to convert resource texts into his own way of speaking.

Anyway, the hour is up and we take a break. Next period will be Social Studies. When I leave the Addition, I pass by Sid who continues reading from his

BC history anthology. Odd, to see him reading quietly, all of us leaving. I don't say anything to spoil the occasion. I meet Raven and ask her how it went with Teddy. In the last hour she's been helping Teddy get his story together for our annual literary production, the *Valley Kid's Review*. She says, "Fine," as if how could there be any problems in writing?

IV

At the main house, the kids are socializing on the front porch. Linnea's class is out. We make sandwiches for lunch. I walk up the driveway to the shed and look for the new sturdy hinges I bought in town to repair the garden gate. Coming back I stop to admire the mountains and green carpet of meadow dotted with yellow. BC is a paradise, and the month of May is inspiring around here, everything succulent before the dry season sets in.

Perhaps this is the moment to make a few more general remarks on schooling. I'll try to be brief. About the experience of schooling itself, it seems like a special kind of activity, as skiing or karate or woodworking is special, possessing its own routines, methods, tools. Certainly it is a bookish (nowadays computerish), and in some ways a bureaucratic art. I have only come to see this later in life, having left educational institutions behind. It is apparent to me from up here that school keeps you sitting at tables, keeps you opening and closing books, shuffling papers, and penning messages. Many young people have a hard time adjusting to these conditions. Some get nervous and fidgety, others grow sleepy. On the whole, I'd have to say my students, most students, are touchingly tolerant of adult notions of what humans should be knowing and doing.

Any kind of formal schooling, then, requires a specialized set of habits with which to order and manipulate in imagination the things of our world. Community remains the wider school, the educator of the broad person, the primary source of practical and social skills (while education, regarded philosophically, means being brought into the established forms of your community—if you're lucky enough to have one).

Schools are over-burdened with the task of nurturing traits in the young person that might more suitably be cultivated at home or in the company of familiars. Parents who equate schooling with education are bound to be let down. Simply stated, you can't make a rounded human being at school.

As for the household, that shelter of intimacy and nurturance, I would say the basics of reading-writing-arithmetic are best introduced and practiced there. Primary education is best handled there. At all times, developing a sense of worth and skills outside of school is to be encouraged. For this reason I tell my students they are coming to my classes to decide what is to be

done next in the progress of their work, to get help with specific problems in their studies, and hopefully for inspiration. The teacher is but the lead student, who has learned the ropes. Commonsense advice is what I give. I strongly advise my students to have a corner in the house which is their personal workspace, a desk or a table where they keep their writing gear, dictionary, thesaurus, and so on. These are the concrete correlates of good intentions, and they are most effective when respected by other members of the household.

Of course, how the teacher approaches a student is of the utmost importance. Whatever your bearing is, it will be felt. Take a snooty attitude or try to humiliate the person and you'll get defensive behaviors in return. Act like the big authority and you'll beget rebels. There is no way around this dynamic, in that human communication occurs on a kenesic as well as a conscious level. Kenesic behaviors involve body posture, facial expression, voice. In the teaching-learning dance, students will immediately sense whether the teacher is friend or foe. A playful attitude succeeds best.

Compassion is absolutely required. Teaching is after all akin to parenting. It is true that you may not always be up for the ideal—it takes energy to be positive—and one gets tired, or loses one's temper. That's just human. But in the home-schooling mode, your concern is with the whole person, that is, with the person's all-around

The teacher is but the lead student, who has learned the ropes.

situation. If someone is not learning, there are probably good reasons beyond the quality of the classroom experience. Is there arguing in the home? Did the student have breakfast? Did she have adequate sleep? The formal, institutional system hasn't the ability, time or "mandate" (fashionable word among bureaucrats) to care for the person with due attention to detail. Standards and regulations do not address important personal issues; in fact, important personal issues are ignored by standards and regulations. The tendency in public schools, whose workers are under pressure from parents and a competitive mass society, is to be kind and encouraging until a student reaches high school age, at which point attitudes change for the worse. The climate of learning then becomes threatening. Teachers start getting tough. Where in earlier stages instructors made much of your playful imagination, originality, warm feelings, now they grow serious. You are reminded of harsh Realities to be faced after graduation. Now you will feel the weight of rules. You will be tested and graded, and you can fail.

Teachers often assume these attitudes with the best of intentions. They want the student to be graduated knowing something. This is easily understood. I too would love the opportunity to pass on a world view.

But we mustn't get carried away and think that knowledge will get us to utopia, to happiness. It's not enough. Knowledge is only one thing; "information," also highly touted in present industrial civilization, is only one thing. For the sake of humane relations, we need to keep coming back to the whole person and the wider context of experience.

Interest is the true gold; it is what we seek to obtain. It can be stirred by the charm and magic of a good hour's lesson. Trouble is, that sort of thing can't be relied on. The best a teacher can do is be prepared. I take my lesson plans seriously, though for me it's equally a form of play, of make-believe. You lay out your goals, assemble relevant books, compile your spelling lists, your ideas for essays, your ordered ideas for a possible short lecture. All of this is pure pleasure. And when you're finished you feel the warmth of security because, entering the unknown, you have a plan.

V

I return to the Addition for the second hour of Class A. The boys are already seated and the atmosphere is jovial. A small revolt against studying the French Revolution, which happened last week, has given me pause. I could see it coming, feel the resistance building up. We'd been reading the passionate story of that conflagration in our school system textbook, *Patterns of Civilization*, written by a college professor in the US. The textbook gave us a political reading. Rioting in the streets, breaking open prison gates, guillotining public enemies was stimulating enough, but when it came to the scramble for power following the Revolution, the various Thermidors and so on, things got bogged down and ceased to uplift. The topic (for this round) is dropped. Thus we leap ahead to the Twentieth Century and consider the guerrilla warfare of Emeliano Zapata in revolutionary Mexico. Jody reads us a chapter out of Carleton Beale's *Great Guerrilla Warriors*. We hear about the mule-skinner and small farmer from Morelos who fought against the enclosure of arable communal lands. A great story, historic, that is, full of bloodshed, rape, pillage, betrayal, and executions. Emeliano is passed under the severely critical eye of the boys and comes out as an authentic hero.

Before quitting class, with five minutes to go, we enjoy a fast geography quiz. We turn our attention to the world map on the wall. I call out the names of mountain chains, prairies, seas, and rivers. The boys enjoy both imagining and locating these features of the land. They want to know where places are. They want to travel. I move from the map to the satellite photo of North America and ask them to point out the same features and also a few cities, Chicago, Los Angeles, Guadalajara.

After giving out homework assignments, the class breaks up. Andy hangs back and we go through our

spelling exercises. I write out his new spelling words—each word written singly in big letters with felt pen on the blank side of a bib card—and quiz him on yesterday’s dozen.

Michael’s motorcycle is already starting up and some kids are leaving. Teddy and Kenny are running up the driveway, Teddy yelling, with his black leather jacket flopping loosely around his shoulders like heavy wings on a scampering crow bird. Off to play. No, he swings around and runs back for his abandoned notebook. Linnea’s French class got out fifteen minutes ago. She’s already in the kitchen slicing bread for sandwiches; the school day has ended.

VI

I mentioned earlier that there was a Class C. Indeed there is, but it only happens on a Friday. It consists of two students, Marie and Simon, who are brother and sister. Marie is seven, Simon is six. We have two hours together. Sometimes Teddy is present, but more and more he spends these several hours with Raven writing at the dining room table in the main house.

I can easily recall what we did last Friday. Getting ready for the first period, we stood before the young kids’ bookshelf and picked out reading matter. Too

For the sake of humane relations, we need to keep coming back to the whole person and the wider context of experience.

many for the hour, a tall stack, but we carried them over to the Addition anyway. Some were the same we read the week before—*Frog and Toad are Friends*—droll buddies who wear their feelings on their sleeve; *The Secret*, about a New England homestead that reverts back to wilderness; and the untiring favorite, *A Special Trade*, about a little girl and an old man who change places during a long friendship, the girl growing up eventually and pushing his wheelchair through a familiar neighborhood as the old man had once pushed her perambulator.

We sit at the long table, Maria on one side, little Simon on the other. It is quickly decided in which order the stories are to be read, and we begin immediately. The level of enthusiasm is high, joyous, alert. Any author would be thrilled with such a reading. I bathe in my good fortune and sink into the tales as completely as my avid listeners. Seldom do we stop to talk about a picture or episode along the way, for the urge to continue on is irrepressible. And thus we pass the hour.

In the second period, I try moving on to the act of writing. I make up fun exercises. Simon is in the beginning stage of learning his letters. He is able to write his

name. He agrees to make the letter H and to decorate it with colored pencils.

I ask Maria to write five sentences on the blackboard, all containing the word “fiddle.” I’ve a hard time getting the girl to switch from a story mode to a writing mode. I can tell there is a problem because she has gone silent at my suggestion. I offer writing a sentence or two on the board in her stead, while she dictates to me, but no, that will not do. Without a word, she stands up on the chair before the board, takes the chalk from my hand and in a slow motion writes, “I pl...,” then looks over at me; and knowing what she wants, I spell out the word “p-l-a-y.” She writes the letters out nice and rounded, the way her mom taught her. We proceed in this manner, finally completing the sentence, “I play the fiddle at my birthday party,” then go on to write three more sentences until Simon gets restless. He steps up to the board and in red chalk writes, “HI,” putting his letter H to good use. The H that he has finished decorating on paper looks like two trees and a crossbar from which a kid with long rabbit ears dangles by both arms.

VII

I guess the main advantage we enjoy in this Home School is personal attention. Personal attention is naturally more effective than the impersonal, formal (that is, mechanical) relations meted out in the public system. Anyone can appreciate that the scale at which our classes function, with no more than six students, allows great flexibility, opening up options impossible at the scale of thirty students. For example, when lesson-problems arise in Class A, problems that only individual attention can remedy, a proven solution is to break down the normal schedule of two hour classes into twenty-minute tutorials, the teacher taking one student at a time and getting down to the details necessarily overlooked in the normal session. The tutorial strategy usually continues for a week or two, after which we go back to the more sociable grouping.

In order to keep my teacherly expectations within sensible bounds, I try to remember what it is like to be a kid. It’s so easy to get off on a tangent, imagining the fine things you could pass on to willing students, only to collapse into a state of depression when lessons don’t come off and interest cannot be stirred. It is tempting for adults to get over-ambitious for the accomplishments of the young. Despite such foibles, all-too-human, and amongst a thousand unnamed obstacles, I remain firm in my “ulterior motive” to give solid grounding to elementary subjects, and most especially, to establish good habits and learning practices, because only with established habits can abilities be depended upon.

Why it should be so thrilling to be a teacher of these things I am unable to explain. Around learning, I

keep descending into terms like “wonder” and “miraculous.” If anywhere in my statements above I have sounded glib, I want to assure the reader it is due to my effort to remain brief and summary and does not express jaded pedagogical feelings. My actual sentiments are more like awe and incomprehension, and I am led to believe that passing on what we know is an activity that runs deep in our cultural evolution. In a personal way, teaching feels like a great responsibility and a privilege; a privilege, I say, merely to be in the company of young people; and to be listened to, to be

heard by them, to be shaping the objects of thought and judgment, fills me with a sense of opportunity.

Oh well, the school day is done. The base-beat of Raven’s stereo floats in the air. I walk out to the garden, pick up my shovel and start turning soil in one of the deep beds, making it big and wide for growing corn. Gonna dig in bone meal, sulfur chips, sheep manure. After that, maybe there’ll be time to repair the collapsing garden gate.

Linnea is already thinning the strawberry beds when I arrive.

“Learning for the 21st Century”

Note: The following article, by Daniel Greenberg, was printed on the Opinion Page of the Metro-West Daily News. It also appeared in The Sudbury Valley School Journal, volume 29, number 6, June 2000, pp.45-48.

What will the school of the future look like?

This was the question addressed in the fourth annual international conference on “Learning for the 21st Century,” organized last week by Arthur Andersen, the world’s largest consulting firm. The conference brought together educators, government officials, businessmen and consultants from every continent, to hear and discuss what a variety of leading thinkers had to say on this crucial subject.

Arthur Andersen has been focusing on this question for over a decade, at the initiative of one of its foremost partners, Morton Egol, a partner who made his mark some twenty-five years ago when he devised the strategy for taking New York City out of bankruptcy. In the late ‘80s, Egol’s interest began to focus on education, as he came to realize the central role schools play in creating the conditions for social and economic stability. Egol made it his central mission to learn as much as he could, from thinkers in all walks of life, about the conceptual underpinnings of schooling; to know at first hand the varied practices that were being tried on the cutting edge of education; and to disseminate the ideas and experiences that seemed most likely to represent the needs of the future.

During the three day conference, an extraordinarily wide variety of speakers shared their insights with several hundred participants. Among these were thinkers like Peter Drucker, an economist who has become a legend in his own time; Russell

Ackoff, one of the pioneers of systems analysis; Nicholas Negroponte, head of MIT’s media lab; and Peter Block, an authority on the structure of successful organizations. I was also honored to be asked to address this year’s meeting. In smaller sessions, a number of highly innovative educational practices from all over were presented — ranging from a high school in Sitka, Alaska, to a K-9 school in East Dallas, Texas, to an Open University in Great Britain, to a for-profit education company serving elementary school through college in Peru. There was much to learn in this richly textured symposium.

To me, one amazing fact stood out above all others: despite the immense diversity in the ages, backgrounds, and specializations of the many presenters, there was virtually unanimous agreement on the essential features of 21st century society and the type of education that would best meet its needs. I would like to share with you some of these features:

■ First and foremost, this century will be one of constant, rapid change. To be an effective member of society, an individual will have to be able to function comfortably in a world that is always in flux, with no long-term stable platforms, no secure havens. Knowledge will continue to increase at a dizzying rate, and people will have to be life-long learners who know how to seek out and master what they need at any given time of their lives. This means that a content-based curriculum, in which a given body of information is imparted to students, is entirely inappropriate as a means of preparing children for their adult roles. There was virtu-

Daniel Greenberg has been among the prime developers of the philosophy of education based on self-initiated learning in a democratic community, embodied in the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, MA.

ally unanimous agreement that the call for “higher standards” in the form of intensive courses and standardized examinations is counter-productive and essentially harmful.

■ People will be faced with ever-increasing individual responsibility to direct their own lives and determine their own futures. To this end, children must grow up in an environment that stresses self-motivation, self-initiated activity, and self-assessment, and thereby provides the skills and self-confidence to map out their own destinies. Schools that focus on external motivating factors — on teaching (as opposed to learning), on top-down management, on rewards and punishment for meeting goals set by others — are denying to children the tools they most need to survive.

■ Central to everyone’s successful functioning in the 21st century will be their ability to communicate with others, and thereby to share experiences, collaborate, and exchange information. Conversation, the ultimate means of communication, must be a central aspect of any good school. Students will have to have ample time to talk to each other and to their teachers, thus honing their skill at increasing their own insights with the help of assistance from others.

■ The world is moving rapidly toward universal recognition of individual rights within a democratic society. Specifically, this signals an increase in the empowerment of each and every person to participate as an equal partner in whatever enterprise they undertake. This implies decentralization of power—something that is occurring with greater frequency in businesses, large corporations, and governments—and the granting of full participation to every stakeholder in every institution. The implication for schools is clear: All interested parties will be given a role in running educational institutions, especially students and teachers, who are presently all but ignored and who constitute the main clientele of the educational system

■ Technological advances are proceeding at an unimaginably rapid pace, and these in turn are profoundly impacting the way all people, chil-

dren and adults, access information. Year by year, it is becoming easier and more commonplace for people to learn whatever they wish, whenever they wish, in such manner as they wish. This is becoming true even in third world countries, who are showing themselves capable of leapfrogging over the industrial era directly into the post-industrial age, and are even avoiding many of the major infrastructure expenditures incurred in developed countries by recourse to wireless technology, solar power, and other similar applications that make considerations of distance almost irrelevant.

■ New research is continually revealing that children are avid learners, that they have an immense capacity for concentration and hard work when they are passionate about what they are doing, and that the skills they acquire by pursuing any area of interest are readily transferable to any other subsequent field. Giving children more freedom to follow their own inclinations keeps their joy of learning and love of challenge alive, enhancing their satisfaction in life and their ability to contribute to society. The bottom line of all this was clear to the Conference participants: Schools of the future will be far more democratic in structure, far more respectful of each member of the community, far more tolerant of individual variation, and far more reliant on self-initiated activities than were the schools of the 20th century. To the proponents of so-called “education reform” and “the raising of standards,” these ideas seem radical. To the assembled leaders from all walks of life in the Arthur Andersen conference, these ideas were almost self-evident. The challenge presented was that of realizing these ideas in school practice.

Editor’s Note: In our next issue, we’ll be publishing an article by Don Glines, Director of the Educational Futures Projects, on educational reform. The ideas in Don’s article are grounded in the author’s vision of a future in which educational models are constructed to meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities. If you feel moved to share with others your own vision of a healthy educational future, please submit an article to us at the address listed on p. 1 of the magazine

Learning and Serving

by Chris Mercogliano

It never ceases to amaze me how in a matter of hours you can be transported into another world. In our case, we lifted off a New York City runway not long after sunrise and by noon were on a poor people's beach just outside the city limits of San Juan.

This morning I awaken in chilly darkness to the sounds of Tita preparing breakfast for her husband, whose construction job begins at seven. Judging by her noisy briskness and economy of motion, I sense that this must be a daily ritual here. Soon Tita and Davy are talking in low tones, with the scraping of the spatula on a skillet and the glukking of the coffee maker for accompaniment. My limited

Spanish allows me to pick out only a few words from the conversation, making its music all the more noticeable. Theirs is such an expressive language, so full of nuance. Tita operates on several octaves interchangeably. Davy speaks in a gravelly tenor, his larynx coated with years of cement dust, but he appears to communicate emotion with variations in cadence.

I imagine they are having the kind of exchange spouses typically have first thing in the morning, about the needs of the household, getting the kids to school, and today, how to accommodate all of the guests who have come to help them repair their storm-ravaged home.

Recently, there seems to be increased interest in a concept that has come to be known as "service learning," a hands-on approach to teaching and learning in which students engage themselves in some type of service-or-community-oriented project as part of their study. Although neither the concept nor the practice of "service learning" (a rather odd and a not altogether clear name) is new, our increasing awareness of the importance of service-oriented learning is refreshing. Indeed, the wider practice of this form of teaching and learning gives us hope that, in the face of increasingly impersonal educational paths being pursued nationwide (witness, for example, the increase in curricular standardization and conformity, as well as the concomitant increase in standardized testing), growing numbers of teachers and students are finding value in pursuing personal, human, and humane "educational" endeavors that unite us all.

In the following article, longtime alternative educator Chris Mercogliano, from the Albany Free School, in Albany, NY, gives us an indication of just how meaningful and valuable this practice can be—for the students, for the teachers, and for those who are helped (who as Chris so beautifully demonstrates, are also teachers in their own right). If you, too, have a story to tell involving service-oriented learning, we encourage you to share it with us for publication consideration. Please send your manuscript to the editor at the address located on p. 1 of the magazine.

Tita and Davy are locked in an ongoing battle with nature. Twice in little more than a decade their unusual mountain village—the story of which I will tell shortly—has borne the brunt of major hurricanes. Their first house, a ten-by-ten scrap plywood and tin shack, was no match for the fury of Hugo, in 1989. But, the young couple was undaunted. They took their federal hurricane relief check and began pursuing their dream of building a storm-proof home out of cinder block and concrete.

I can feel the pride of accomplishment in every gesture as Davy gives me a tour of the house. But, when I ask about the bright blue tarp covering the roof, a look of sadness flashes across his face. In his Bronx-accented English, he launches into the story of the last hurricane to rip through the village: George, in 1998. Apparently, this storm spawned a series of small tornadoes up here in the mountains, and Davy could only watch helplessly as one of the funnels careened toward the sturdy work-in-progress into which he and Tita had poured so much time, energy and sweat. Other nearby houses were spared, but not theirs, which took a direct hit. The last thing Davy saw before joining his wife and two small children in the concrete storm cellar was his corrugated steel roof sailing off into oblivion.

The aluminum shutter windows so typical in tropical buildings were no match for a category four hurricane either. The relentless winds smashed their way in and absconded with most of the house's contents. Only the refrigerator and chest freezer were able to stand their ground.

Six months passed before Davy and Tita had the heart to reenter their battered home to assess the

losses. Then, their grief and fear mostly behind them, they decided not only to repair the damage, but also to parlay new hurricane relief funds into making the house even bigger and stronger than before.

If determination could be measured like hurricanes and earthquakes, then Davy and Tita's would be off the scale. Somehow—I can't explain why—they seem perfectly at peace with the two steps forward, one step back nature of their quest to create for themselves a safe, spacious, comfortable home, something most of us take for granted back in my world.

The answer, Davy tells me, is to roof the new addition they have begun constructing with reinforced concrete, no small task in this remote village. The job will require days of tedious concrete making with a small gasoline-powered cement mixer.

Which is where we come in, seven seventh- and eighth-grade students and two teachers from an inner-city free school in Albany, NY—though first Tita has asked us to build a retaining wall to halt the storm erosion that is undermining the house across the road. These kids are no strangers to determination either. They raised over \$8,000 to make this two-week trip possible, holding benefit dinners, raffles, and publishing an impressive forty-page magazine for which they sold \$1,500 worth of ads to local businesses. With help from their sewing teacher, three of the girls spent several months fashioning a queen-size quilt out of six hundred small squares that they meticulously cut from beautiful scraps of material donated by a nearby textile mill. Supporters purchased over a thousand one-dollar tickets in the competition to become the quilt's future owner.



The work here is anything but glamorous. First, the mud from the slide caused by Hurricane George has to be cut back and removed. This means picking and shoveling tons of the ubiquitous red clay, always with the searing tropical sun bearing down on us. But, the kids are up to the challenge. By the time Davy returns from work at three-thirty, the site has been entirely prepared for the sixteen-foot-long by six-foot-high retaining wall. He is indeed impressed.

The following morning, we set in on building the plywood forms for the wall. Ruel Bernard, founder of the Albany, NY-based organization known as Building Community, which has been

working alongside residents of this village for the past eight years, instructs several of the kids in cutting rebar.

These are the steel reinforcing rods that will give the wall the necessary strength. The idea is to cut a little more than halfway through the rebar with a circular saw and special masonry blade, and then snap the pieces off. The rest of the kids help Tita set in place and level the form for the wall's twenty-four inch-wide footing.

Now the real fun begins. It takes all eleven of us to wheel the heavy mixer down the steep grade from a neighbor's house and into place near the wall project, where there is already a pile of crushed stone and another of masonry sand that Tita and Davy have been using to make concrete for their house. We divide up into three groups. One hurriedly fills rubber buckets with stones, while another digs into the sand. As fast as we can, we hand the full buckets to Ruel, who is wearing ear protection against the roaring rattle and clank of the machine. He heaves the sand and stone, along with bags of Portland cement, into the spinning cylinder. Water from a hose supplied by tanks on the roof of the house we are trying to save turns the mix into a lumpy, gray stew. Finished batches are turned out onto the road, to be shoveled into a wheelbarrow by the third group and then rushed down to Tita, waiting with trowel in hand. It is said that she can lay block and pour concrete with the best of them.

The process takes a sweaty, frenetic ninety minutes. We are all

bone-tired, but our sense of accomplishment is more than equal to our exhaustion. This was a real display of teamwork and coordination. Ruel is pleased with the grit of this motley mix of budding teenagers, and isn't shy about telling them so.

As soon as the tools and mixer are cleaned of cement residue, the kids return to being kids again. Dearon and Kenny, two African-American boys from the inner-city, have borrowed the plastic go-cart belonging to Tita's kids so that they can join a group of youths who are busy racing down the roughly paved hill with anything that rolls. Isaac, the third boy in the class, is still preparing lunch. He lives in the country about thirty miles outside Albany and was the first to awaken and join Ruel on the job this morning. Unfortunately, he slipped and fell hard, and his sprained wrist kept him from participating in today's pour. Instead, he and Adrena have volunteered for kitchen duty. The oldest girl in the class, Adrena suffers from chronic lower back pain, which kept her from helping with the concrete, too. Hannah, Sarah and Nicole have decided to work on their tans. They are lying out in a corner of Davy and Tita's well-kept front yard, one in the string hammock, the other two in the grass on either side. The three quickly fall asleep, and after a time I awaken them and urge them to come in out of the sun before they overdo it.

After a late mid-day meal, plus a short *siesta*, we all grab bathing suits, towels and toiletries and load into the van for the fifteen-minute ride to El Verde, part of

Puerto Rico's rain forest national park. Here, in a setting befitting a Tarzan movie, we swim and wash away the day's sweat and grime. Because water only occasionally flows from the taps in the village, this will be a functional, as well as a pleasurable, daily visit.

Several local boys have accompanied us to the river. They begin ascending the rocky ledges overlooking the waterfall-fed pool, and in turns leap from a narrow perch about ten feet above the water. Kenny is the first of our kids to follow them up. After a long moment of indecision, he pinches his nose between his thumb and forefinger and plunges downward. When his head bobs to the surface, his face is one big smile. There is applause all around. Nicole, a sturdy girl and one of the morning's best workers, is the next daredevil, followed by Hannah, who is Irish but was raised in Brunei. I suspect that the boys from the village are concealing their awe at the bravery of these young *gringas*. Next is Sandy, my co-chaperone. She is a graduate student in her mid-thirties, and is basing her Ph.D. dissertation on field research she has been doing at our school for the past year. Everyone is surprised to see her up on the ledge. A tireless worker, too, she leaps without hesitation, earning her own outburst of cheers.

We frolic in the brisk water for about an hour and then return for a sumptuous Puerto Rican meal that Tita has been preparing in our absence. Large quantities of *arroz con habichuelas y pollo* (rice with beans and chicken) and

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salad are consumed by the famished work crew. It is a fitting end to a very good day.

This morning, the line of groggy heads settled into the back of the couch on Tita's front porch reflects the lingering weariness from yesterday's heavy work. Signs of homesickness are beginning to emerge as well. Kenny is quite articulate about his sentiments: "Chris, I want to go home—now. I miss my mother and my sister. And my dog."

Ruel tells us that today will be a light day. All we have to do is construct the form for the wall itself and install it with enough bracing to withstand the pressure of the concrete we will pour in on Monday morning, after the new load of sand and stone are delivered. But, when he asks for volunteers to go to another building site in the village to scrounge 2x4s and plywood for the form, there is a collective groan. The romance of doing construction work to serve others is wearing off fast.

With a little cajoling, four kids drive off in the van with Tita to fetch the needed materials. Those who remain behind are increasingly vocal about their distaste for the idea of working again today. Dearon asks Ruel why we are doing this work in the first place. And more to the point: Why don't the neighboring boys have to help, too? *They* live here, not us. Dearon spent his first six years in Jamaica before emigrating to Albany with his mother and younger sister. He is wonderfully unguarded, rarely hiding his thoughts or feelings.

Ruel acknowledges the importance—and the complexity—of Dearon's question. He easily could have deflected him by preaching about the importance of helping others, and about the satisfaction that results from doing so, but that isn't Ruel's



photos Sandra Winn

style. He tells Dearon that in order to answer him adequately he will have to relate the story of how this village came to be. He suggests that tonight might be a good time for that.

It turns out to be perfect. Thanks to the day's less physically challenging work and the revitalizing waters of the river, everyone is still feeling fresh and alert after dinner. Once the dishes are done and the leftovers put away, Sandy and I round up the kids for Ruel's talk. Only Kenny refuses to join in. Still missing home, he registers his protest by half-listening from his perch on the swing out by the gate.

Ruel takes us back to 1940, when the non-elected Puerto Rican legislature passed the Land Reform Act. A portion of land was to be taken from large property holders and given to those who had none. This attempt at economic justice had two outcomes, both of them negative: First, tens of thousands of people living in semi-feudal conditions on large sugar cane plantations were displaced and forced into the cities in search of non-existent jobs; second, the government never redistributed the land.

By 1950, more than a hundred thousand newly-urban poor were squatting in the large mangrove swamps surrounding San Juan.

Finally, in 1980, a group of several hundred families decided to take matters into their own hands by occupying one of the government parcels not far to the east. Despite official demands to vacate immediately, they pushed on, methodically subdividing the land into housing plots, laying out roads, and helping each other fashion makeshift dwellings that could hardly be called houses. A church was established, as well as a meeting space and several stores.

They agreed on a name: Villa Sin Miedo—Village Without Fear.

Here Ruel stops his narrative to stress that this bold, well-organized group was determined from the start to act as a true community. The land was to be held in common, with individuals only owning their homes. It was by working together, making decisions together, and staying together, he explained, that they were able to make so much out of nothing.

The story resumes. The government continued demanding that the residents of the Villa disband and move out. The leaders were arrested repeatedly, a reaction that only strengthened the group's resolve. Not only did they refuse to leave, but they also began pressuring the government to grant them title to their muddy, hand-built village. And they didn't stop there. They made the government's failure to follow through on the Land Reform Act a national issue, and encouraged the formation of a coalition of theirs and other such "land rescues," as the act of mass squatting came to be known.

The Governor of Puerto Rico responded with increased police harassment and threats to forcibly evict the community. Ironically, at the same time that the Legislature in San Juan was debating a bill to grant Villa Sin

Miedo its land title, an eviction order was working its way through the local courts. The courts were faster, and early one morning in May, 1982, the Governor commanded police to force their way into the Villa and destroy it.

The invasion was carefully planned. Hundreds of military-style officers, armed with M16s and incendiary grenades, and backed up by helicopters and bulldozers, moved in just after dawn. All means of escape were sealed off. It is widely believed that it was only the presence of national and international media that prevented the occurrence of atrocities.

After the police rounded up all of the residents in one location,

the community made a daring move: They began to march *en masse* down the highway to San Juan. Word of the day's events quickly spread to the capital, where labor unions dispatched trucks to ferry the marchers—who had since been joined by hundreds of supporters—into the city. The convoy proceeded to the Capitol, where, once the residents of Villa Sin Miedo had reassembled, they marched in and occupied the building. They refused to leave until the government agreed to allow them to return to the land—with title.

Three days passed. A second confrontation with police forces was averted when an Episcopalian church offered the community a year's use of a



piece of vacant rural property that it owned, about an hour from San Juan. This would buy time for further negotiations.

Vindicated, at least for now, the entire community resettled and started over. It turned out, however, to be one of the rainiest years in recent memory. The new site was located near a swamp, and the mosquitoes were unbearable. Added to the physical discomfort there was the frustration caused by the government's complete silence on the land issue. One by one, families began to drift away, tired of being cooped up in rain-soaked tents. As the end of the year-long land loan neared, only fifty families remained.

Throughout this period, the leadership of the community had been lobbying the support of religious and political organizations. The work finally paid off: A coalition of groups presented Villa Sin Miedo with a donation of \$50,000.

A search committee came across an abandoned coffee plantation that was for sale in the Luquillo Mountains, about forty miles southeast of San Juan. The price was low because the rain forest terrain would make development extremely difficult. The steep hills were blanketed with large trees and a dense tangle of undergrowth. Used to challenges that most would consider absurd, Villa Sin Miedo made an offer anyway, which was accepted.

The fifty families moved their tents onto their new land and began clearing sites for permanent houses. Roads had to be built, without the aid of heavy equipment. As they had the first time around, the residents decided that the land would be owned by the community. Everyone would receive an equal-sized plot on which to build their own homes, which, due to the lack of

cash, would again be crude dwellings made out of found materials.

Although Ruel has been talking for nearly half an hour, he hasn't lost anyone's attention. Dearon, whose question precipitated tonight's session, is the only one who worried me. His fidgeting has been increasing steadily. Until last year an unsuccessful student in schools where history is so often turned into a dry and lifeless subject, he has already been listening longer than might be expected.

“....why are we doing this work...”

Ruel continues: Once everyone in the Villa had a roof over their heads, the focus turned toward the need for a common gathering space. A local rural development agency offered to fund the construction of a community center. Plans were drawn for a building large enough to hold meetings and social events for the fledgling village's entire population, and more importantly perhaps, for it to be made out of reinforced concrete.

The reason for this last detail would soon become apparent. In the fall of 1989, civil defense authorities drove up to the Villa to warn that a killer hurricane was approaching, and to advise everyone to evacuate immediately to a Red Cross emergency shelter in the valley.

A community meeting was hastily called. After an intense discussion, the entire community elected to ride out the storm right there in the community center.

Hugo zeroed in on the mountains around Villa Sin Miedo. When the walls of the community center-turned-hurricane shelter began to tremble from the force of the wind, the inhabitants took

turns holding sheets of plywood, which had been serving as temporary partitions between families, against the walls to keep them from collapsing inward.

The walls held. When the storm had finally passed and people stuck their heads tentatively out of the building, they witnessed unfathomable devastation. Whatever trees hadn't blown over were stripped of every leaf or frond. Only scant traces remained of the shacks they had been living in for the past five years.

The Red Cross would later declare that Villa Sin Miedo's shelter was the best run on the entire island.

The final wrinkle in the story involves the Villa's application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for hurricane relief funds. FEMA initially determined that the Villa was ineligible because the residents did not hold individual titles to their property. Perhaps FEMA didn't realize with whom it was dealing. The community appointed delegates to reason with the agency, which soon reversed its decision and awarded the Villa enough money to make at least a start on hurricane-proof block and concrete houses. Hugo was literally the silver lining inside the cloud.

Which, Ruel interjects, is what brought him onto the scene: He had read about the hurricane's punishment of Puerto Rico, where he had gone on a fondly remembered hitchhiking tour a few years earlier. He was a carpenter by trade and wanted to see what he could do to help. First, he traveled to Vieques, a small offshore island that had also been wrecked. While he was there, he learned about Villa Sin Miedo, that it was in urgent need of help to rebuild its housing stock with funds that would only

cover the cost of materials. Upon hearing the Villa's incredible story, he suddenly had a vision of bringing other Americans to this community to assist with its recovery efforts.

Ruel made his way to Villa Sin Miedo, where he witnessed firsthand the residents' solidarity, a carry-over political term from the sixties that is Ruel's preferred way of describing strong unity in a group. It was there that he decided to call his organization Building Community. Its mission: To work with—not for—those in need, creating a spirit of mutual aid in the process. He also chose to make Villa Sin Miedo his base of operations.

Dearon, unable to sit still any longer, has drifted off before getting to hear an explicit answer to his question. He and Kenny are back playing in the road with the local boys.

Ruel has sensed, rightly so, I think, that Dearon's question was everyone else's as well. "The reason we are here," he explains to the remaining group, "is to help keep alive the solidarity, the strong sense of community, that built this village in the first place. Every time Building Community shows up and begins a new project, such as the one we have taken on, it provides yet another opportunity for people to work together. It also," he adds, "tends to spur Villa residents to initiate needed projects of their own."

As for Villa kids not joining in, Ruel reminds the class that the local children have to go to school during the day, and that this afternoon a few did stop by to help with the construction of the form. He finishes this point by stressing the importance of the local children witnessing the kind of hard work and cooperation that has enabled their parents and grandparents to sustain Villa Sin Miedo. The next genera-

tion of leaders will have to come from their age group, just as Tita, who was fifteen when it all began, emerged from the last. What Ruel wants my kids to understand is that it isn't just the physical labor they are doing here this week that is valuable, but also the modeling of hard work and cooperation.

**"They agreed on a name:
Villa Sin Miedo—
Village Without Fear"**

Ruel concludes by noting the absence of Dearon and Kenny, and then by saying that what they are doing right now—making connections with the Villa kids through play—is a very important step in building community. He is talking about community on a broader scale now, the bridging of different cultures. This is something that will be happening more and more as the week wears on.

The sand and stone arrive on schedule, meaning that today we can fill the heavily braced form with concrete. It's going to be a formidable task. The wall will require our mixing and hauling—this time in individual buckets—three or four times more concrete than the footing. A half dozen adults of all different ages from the Villa, plus two Americans who worked with Building Community seven years ago and arrived yesterday afternoon, have volunteered to assist with the pour.

One of the helpers is Tita's mother. Her face is that of a woman in her sixties, but her well-muscled body is that of someone much younger. It announces that she has mixed and moved more than her share of concrete in this life.

Kenny and Dearon ask if they can start the motor on the mixer this time. Ruel shows them how

to wrap the rope around the pulley. After a dozen or so increasingly effective tries, the motor gives a few hopeful chugs. The next yank yields half a dozen. Finally it catches, and Ruel adjusts the idle.

We divide ourselves into three groups again. The presence of the others enables us to form a semi-bucket brigade to pass the heavy pailfuls of concrete down to the waiting form. Young, sore muscles strain against the weight. As soon as one batch has been scooped up and tossed down into the form, another is ready to be turned out onto the road. The form is about two-thirds filled by lunchtime. We jointly agree to push on and try to finish before we stop to eat. But then misfortune strikes. The downward pressure of the concrete begins forcing the form up off of the footing. About half of the concrete from the downhill section of the wall rushes out from under before we are able to add more bracing and staunch the flow.

Vellon, a neighbor who is running the mixer this time, shouts to Ruel that to be safe we should take a break and allow the concrete in the form to set up. Otherwise, he warns, the problem may recur and more concrete will be lost. Two steps forward, one step back, I mutter to myself. I was hoping that lunch would signal the end of this backbreaking job.

After the meal, we take advantage of the time off and get out the tents that Ruel has offered to lend us for the next leg of our trip, following the week in Villa Sin Miedo. We plan to spend a couple of days beach camping on the offshore island of Vieques, so that the kids can have a taste of the Caribbean, and so that we can find out more about the recent controversy over the

United States Navy's use of two-thirds of the small island municipality for munitions storage and bombing practice. We have been following the issue in the news for the past few months and want to see what Vieques natives have to say about it.

Everyone regathers at three to complete the pour. It's a real act of will to get going again. Thankfully, this time there are no mishaps. We are all done by five, and while the rest of us are cleaning tools and buckets, the kids are happily scratching their names into the top of the wall they have just helped to build.

After dinner the kids go off to build more community. A group of Villa boys has invited our seven to play kickball with them on the lighted basketball court, which Villa residents built a number of years ago. It's been interesting how, the longer we stay, the more the two groups are merging together. It's like watching a deck of cards being shuffled

very slowly. I am impressed at the way everyone is coping with the language barrier. The Free School kids' little bit of Spanish and the Villa kids' modicum of English are going a long way.

This time it is Sarah and Nicole who put a dent in the *machismo* of the local boys. Both very athletic, the girls consistently pound the ball over the wall at one end of the court for home runs, something the slender Puerto Rican boys are able to do only occasionally. The girls carry their superiority graciously, but the older boys begin to boil over with frustration anyway, loudly blaming each other for the lopsided score. Before things get out of hand, someone wisely suggests mixing up the teams.

The next morning at breakfast we discuss the gender-related cultural difference that we've observed, in which we've noticed that only the boys come around the house, except for a couple of nearby six-year-old girls who

play with Tita's daughter. Ruel explains that in Latino culture, especially in the countryside, girls are kept close to home where they are expected to help their mothers with household affairs. Only the boys are allowed to roam free.

What else are these seventh- and eighth-graders learning by serving others in this very different world, sixteen hundred miles from home? Starting with the obvious, they are indeed discovering how good it feels inside to help those in need, to work alongside them to improve the condition of their lives. Included in the bargain is an unforgettable lesson in the power of cooperation. Though it was by no means easy, the job of pouring the wall went much faster than the kids had ever expected, thanks to the presence of so many helping hands.

Additionally, by living under third world conditions, the kids are enjoying a vacation from



technology and an encounter with nature instead. Without things like televisions and Play Stations to occupy them, they are spending the majority of their time out of doors. When they aren't playing games, they are exploring the forest and encountering all sorts of unusual birds and creepy crawlies, as well as beautiful flora, fauna and wild fruit.

And they now know beyond a doubt—after carrying bucket after bucket for flushing toilets from an outside storage barrel—that water weighs approximately eight pounds per gallon. The conservation of resources has suddenly taken on a whole new meaning for them.

On a more subtle level, the kids are being appreciated and honored for making a valuable contribution to the world around them, something American children are often deprived of in a modern, high-tech society in which so much is done for them, and in which there is so little opportunity for them to participate in the real life of the town or city where they live. To this end, Tita has been showing her gratitude in many ways, ones that don't require a common language: braiding and beading Kenny's long hair, weaving a string and bead necklace for Dearon, washing the girls' filthy work clothes, teaching Sandy how to cook Puerto Rican-style, preparing meal after delicious meal.

Also, by being away from home for two weeks in such an unfamiliar environment, the kids are finding out that they have inner resources they can tap into in order to maintain their sense of equilibrium. And that they also have each other for support. I have traveled with kids this age many times over the years, and I am always profoundly moved by

how bonded the groups become as a result of our sharing these kinds of experiences.

I am reminded of the adolescent rites of passage of pre-literate peoples around the world that are receiving so much attention these days. Separation from home and all that is familiar, some sort of perceived danger and the accompanying fear, and hardship or challenge are common elements of all such rituals, regardless of the culture. All three ingredients will present themselves during our two weeks abroad. For some of the kids, flying constitutes the danger; for others, the darkness of the nights or being so far from home. The distance, with an ocean in between, combines with the length of our visit to the island to generate a profound sense of separation. And thanks to the hard work and Spartan living conditions, the inner-city kids from our school are experiencing more hardship and challenge than they have ever known in their relatively pampered American lives.

“And they now know beyond a doubt—after carrying bucket after bucket for flushing toilets from an outside storage barrel—that water weighs approximately eight pounds per gallon. The conservation of resources has suddenly taken on a whole new meaning for them.”

None of us can believe how quickly the week has flown by. Unfortunately, the construction of the wall has taken longer than Ruel had anticipated, and the only work we have been able to do on Tita and Davy's house is to form up one of the concrete beams that will support the new roof. The kids have fallen so in love with Tita, who has become

everyone's surrogate mother, that I think they wanted to make more of a contribution right here.

Tita throws us a farewell party on our last night in Villa Sin Miedo—yet another display of gratitude. She grills up a massive pile of *pinchos*, or chicken shish kabobs, and lays out a spread of chips and soda to go with them. We all eat to the point of bursting. The sadness of parting lingers in the air.

The celebration winding down, Ruel floats the question whether we would like to return next week to paint the wall. He will have the forms off by then and the concrete will be sufficiently cured. The answer, not surprisingly, is a unanimous yes. We decide that we will return to Puerto Rico after we visit Vieques for four or five days of touring, and that we will seek out Adrena's grandmother and grandfather on the far western end of the island. Her father, who died when she was a little girl, was Puerto Rican, and she hasn't seen his parents for years. Then we will head back to Villa Sin Miedo for the final twenty-four hours of our trip.

The wall is first to greet us on our return to the Villa, shining white in the afternoon sun. While we were gone, Ruel not only removed the forms, but he also invited the best mason in the village to stucco over the concrete with a special mortar coating. Willie is such an expert that he has managed to erase entirely the bulge caused by the leak. Ruel and the other two American visitors then primed it with a base coat.

Now, our kids can apply the finishing touches. They had a mural-planning discussion during the van ride up into the mountains and agreed on a design: a large Puerto Rican flag

in the center of the wall, with Villa Sin Miedo written on one side and Albany Free School on the other. In larger letters will be the word *solidaridad*—in solidarity. Space will be left under our school's name for other Building Community groups to sign in before they leave.

“The reason we are here... is to help keep alive the solidarity, the strong sense of community, that built this village in the first place.”

Tita locates a small flag to serve as a template, and Ruel helps the young artists to project an

enlarged outline onto the wall. They are just about done when I get back from the hardware store with the proper color paints and enough brushes for everyone. The job goes quickly, propelled by a prideful sense of completion. While the kids fill in the stripes and single star on the flag, Sandy, an expert calligrapher, does the lettering.

Tita joins us just as we're stepping back to take in the magnificence of the mural. She sums up her approval in one word:

Buenissimo!

Ruel is especially pleased by the way the wall project turned out to be such a joint effort.

There is talk now of turning the house we have just helped to save, which has been mostly unoccupied for several years, into a computer learning center for the children of Villa Sin Miedo. In any event, the wall/mural is a permanent symbol of cooperation. Sitting prominently at a “T” intersection in the road to this section of the Villa, it will serve as a vivid reminder of the time we spent here, learning and serving.

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Resources on Learning Through Service and Travel

Compiled by Robin Martin

Service Learning Resources

Building Community - the Free School's connection for service projects in Puerto Rico. For ten years, Building Community has been organizing community service, service learning and solidarity projects in Puerto Rico, Guatemala, and the United States. Contact: Ruel Bernard, phone: (518) 872-9601, e-mail: ruel43@aol.com

CommunityService.com - as per their web site, this organization is "designed to facilitate partnerships between volunteers and non-profit organizations. It provides a forum for matching volunteers' interests and capabilities with the needs of non-profit organizations to enhance community service in areas including education, health and human services, and culture and the arts." You can search the web site by zip code for volunteer opportunities in your area, and will likely find many national opportunities posted by VolunteerMatch.com and ServeNet.org, such as work with Habitat for Humanity and much more.
<http://www.CommunityService.com>

Idealist - can help with brainstorming other types of community service activities. It searches the postings and listings of 20,000 non-profit organizations in 150 countries. When I searched organizations using the keywords "student community service," for example, it found 157 records — most of which look quite interesting. In addition, you can use its specialized volunteer search (listed as "Volunteer Opportunities" under "Take Action") to seek particular types of opportunities in particular parts of the world.
<http://www.idealist.org/>

The John Dewey Project on Progressive Education is conducting extensive case study research into the effectiveness of nine service learning programs in the state of Vermont. It is called the Democracy and Education: Schools and Communities Research Project and is grounded in the belief that education is for the purpose of preparing students for living in a democratic society. <http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/>

UCLA Service Learning Clearinghouse - lists many articles and other publications, especially for teachers, about building effective SL programs. This clearinghouse lists many (mainstream) organizations that could be especially helpful to teachers who must develop an academic or curricular focus. In reviewing this type of literature, be wary of the school-to-work rhetoric. It may sound promising, but often the motivations are more economics-focused than student-centered.
<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/slc/k16.html>

Programs for Students Traveling Abroad

Center for Interim Programs - offers individualized services for older high school students and adults to "pursue structured alternatives to formal education or work by matching clients' interests with over 3,000 internships, apprenticeships, volunteer positions, and cultural study programs worldwide."
<http://www.interimprograms.com/>

Cultural Homestay International - "A non-profit organization founded in 1980 to promote international understanding, friendship, and goodwill through cultural homestays." (Homestays are when students visit other countries and arrange to stay with host families for a set amount of time, often from a week to a year in duration.) Contact: 104 Butterfield Road, San Anselmo, California, 94960, United States; Phone: (415) 459-5397; e-mail chimain@msn.com. <http://www.chinet.org>

Global Works, Inc. - offers summer service projects for students ages 14 to 18. Includes community service trips to Puerto Rico and many other parts of the world. Mailing address: RD2 Box 356B, Huntingdon, PA 16652 USA, Phone: (814) 667-2411.
<http://www.globalworksinc.com/>

Living Classrooms Foundation - works with schools and community organizations to provide experience-based educational programs emphasizing the applied learning of math, science, language arts, history, economics, and ecology. Location: 802

South Caroline Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21231, United States; Contact Person: Jennifer Heatwole; Phone: 410-685-0295. <http://www.livingclassrooms.org/>

Servas International - "an international network of hosts and travelers building peace by providing opportunities for personal contact between people of diverse cultures and backgrounds." Operating for over 50 years, Servas has an established track record. For an annual fee of \$65, you can travel to and among their over 14,000 home stay connections in 135 countries. Visit their Travel with a Purpose: International Traveler Information web page for more details. In the U.S., contact United States Servas, Inc, 11 John Street, Suite 407, New York, NY 10038-4009. Phone: 212-267-0252. For contacts outside the U.S., visit the Servas web site or e-mail: servas-info@servas.org.
<http://www.servas.org>

Resources for Designing Your Own Travel Abroad Programs

In addition to the often-used Lonely Planet travel guides and other materials that you will find in the travel section of your local library or bookstore, here are some online resources that may be worth investigating:

About International Education - describes an array of study abroad programs, reviewed by Lucile Vea, an expert in international learning experiences. In particular, there is a study abroad section, where you can browse programs by regions of the world or by subject. Includes a special section for high school programs, as well as a financial aid section. Also nice sections on Tools for Teachers and Tools for Students, which include links to a 3D Atlas, environmental news networks, "dangerous places," and more. <http://internationalead.about.com/>

Budget Travel - for budget-type travelers, includes long lists of economy travel agencies from around the globe. Features information for domestic and world travel needs.
<http://www.budgettravel.com/>

Council Travel - works especially with students and teachers, via airlines such as TWA, to offers discounts for educational programs when students or teachers travel in groups. Local offices around the country: just look them up in your yellow pages to find the one nearest you. <http://www.counciltravel.com>.

Hostels.com, <http://www.hostels.com>, and Hostelling International, <http://www.hiayh.org/> - if you don't find a good home stay program for you or your group, the next most economical and often fruitful learning experience comes by way of youth hostels. This web site tells what international hosting is, along with information about U.S. and international hostels. See also: <http://www.iyhf.org/>

Travel with Kids: How to Find Discount Airfares on the Web, <http://travelwithkids.about.com/travel/travelwithkids/library/misc/blfindairfares.htm> - an article that discusses five strategies for finding the best airfares. Includes links to many different fare-finder tools.

Priceline.com - name your price (within reason) for an airline ticket, and you can choose what airlines, airports, and how many transfers you are willing to make. The more you limit the options, the less likely your bid will be accepted. I often get tickets at half price by using Priceline. The catch is that once they accept your bid, you are stuck with the price and with tickets that are non-refundable and non-transferable. (You can also make bids for small groups traveling together.)

For More Information...

For answers to other questions about service learning and student travel resources, or to find additional information about Puerto Rico or The Free School, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides, at <http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm>, where you can easily link to the referenced web sites as well. Or, for a printed version of this Online Action Guide, call 1-800-639-4122.

And the Skylark Sings with Me

By David Albert

Reviewed By Charlie Miles

David Albert's *And the Skylark Sings with Me* deserves to be considered among those truly inspirational books that have emerged from within the homeschooling community, books that show us what can be done by dedicated and loving families. These books, unlike "how-to" books that offer tips on teaching various subjects or manifesto-type books that open our eyes to the problems with compulsory education, serve to renew our vision of what homeschooling is about and touch us by speaking to the totality of our parenting. Reading them, we are reminded that living, loving, and learning are one.

My introduction to homeschooling, for example, came first from Nancy Wallace's articles, published by *Mothering* magazine, and later from her books, especially *Child's Work: Taking Children's Choices Seriously*. After reading about the musical genius of her children, and her philosophy of respect for them, I wished that Nancy would adopt me. My own children were young at the time, and we hadn't officially begun our homeschooling adventure, but I knew that my life was forever changed by the possibility of my being an incredible mother, as I imagined Nancy to be. Later, after reading the Colfaxes' books (for example, *Homeschooling for Excellence*), I had a vision of what could be accomplished when kids are allowed to pursue their love of learning to its fullest. David Guterson's *Family Matters* helped me formulate answers for all the nagging questions that friends and neighbors posed and reminded me that the strength of homeschooling emerges from the heart and in our ability to open ourselves fully to our children and to life as it is, here and now.

And the Skylark Sings with Me follows in this tradition of books meant to inspire and celebrate family life and learning. Many of these books feature exceptional children, as does this one. David and Ellen Albert's children are musically and intellectually gifted; the first part of the book is devoted to an explanation of how the Alberts became aware of this predisposition for music, surprising since neither parent initially had strong musical tendencies. But what becomes quickly apparent is that the Alberts recognized and encouraged the girls' love of music, as well as their musical talents, not just by providing them with music teachers, but also by actively pursuing these interests along with their children. Instead of seeing these interests as ancillary to "real learning," the family pursued an interest in music together, using the resources available in the community for support.

It is this model of learning that has worked so well for the Alberts and that they offer to us. Involving themselves fully in their children's lives, the Alberts take their children seriously, recognizing them as beings worthy of respect, time, and energy. These beliefs perhaps emerge from the family's

Quaker belief that "there is that of God in every person which can be recognized and celebrated regardless of its social and cultural manifestations."

This is a book that is lovely in almost every way. Although we are told not to judge a book by its cover, in this case the cover points to the joyful spirit that lies within. Threaded throughout the chapters are poems by William Blake, one of which inspired the book's title. David Albert carefully weaves together stories of his family's learning experiences with thoughts about parenting, the importance of community, and the current state of public education. The Alberts have found their learning in their local community—Olympia, Washington, a town that is large enough to offer a variety of cultural and educational experiences, yet small enough that the children can be recognized and greeted by name by most community members. However, their sense of community expands beyond the local to encompass the world beyond [see sidebar], an expanded community rich with learning experiences. The Alberts actively acknowledge and celebrate the interconnected web of which they are a part.

Although *And the Skylark Sings with Me* is rich with warm and fuzzy feelings, it is a thoughtful and intelligent book. I was particularly struck by Albert's discussion of the fallacies and assumptions behind the "correct" answers on the 5th Edition of the California Achievement Test. In addition, although he repeatedly critiques public education, Albert does not allow his understanding to act as a springboard for anger or dissension. Instead, he points out, "Schoolteachers, like so many of us who love and honor children ... witness daily the uniqueness and wisdom of individual children struggling to break free, and those who are aware understand how this uniqueness is crushed under the pressing burdens of 'education.' Left to their own devices," he continues, "many, like John Holt, would subvert the dominant paradigm. And in their own little ways, in the ways which make some of them gifted teachers, they do just that." Instead of turning their backs on public schools, as some homeschoolers have done, the Alberts use them as yet another resource for their family's learning and demonstrate, again, their sense of interconnectedness and commitment to community.

Some veteran homeschoolers may tire of seeing yet another homeschooling book about exceptional children, and wonder if the homeschooling community is willing to talk about average children and their experiences. Perhaps anticipating such criticism, David Albert ends his book at the point of his older daughter's tenth year, so as not to have the family's homeschooling experience judged by the children's accomplishments per se. As he himself writes, "One of the reasons I

Charlie Miles is the Editorial Assistant for Paths of Learning.

have chosen to end work on this narrative at the turn of Ali's tenth birthday is to prevent our kids' future success (assuming they are 'successful,' whatever that might mean) from being the lens through which their education is perceived." And later: "Our efforts as parents/teachers are not primarily directed at the mastery of science, mathematics, Latin, music, or Shakespeare. They are about the nurturing of citizens of the planet who, in abundant recompense, allow us to 'borrow from eternity,' for children provide us a glimpse of a future which, at least within the boundaries of our limited physical selves, we can never know." Nevertheless, clearly, the Albert children's gifts far surpass those of the normal child, homeschooled or otherwise.

However, *And the Skylark Sings with Me* still has many blessings for any reader. It would make a lovely gift for a family with young children that is considering homeschooling. Those who have already begun their homeschooling journey or those who cling to schoolish structure will find sustenance in the many examples of concrete, child-led learning that Albert shares. Families unable to homeschool have much to gain by reading *Skylark* because the Albert model of sharing learning as a family can be adapted by anyone.

Yet, one of his greatest gifts, to his children and to us as readers, is his ability to be present to the fullness of life. Albert's heart is big, and his life philosophy beautiful, and maybe his willingness to share these with us is his best teaching of all.

Supplement to Book Review of *And the Skylark Sings with Me*

For anyone who knows us well, the commitment my partner Ellen and I have made to homeschool our children might seem somewhat surprising. We are strong supporters of public and, especially, community institutions. It is a marvel of American democracy to observe citizens tax themselves to support safe and adequate water supplies, build adequate roads and sidewalks, construct adequate sewage disposal facilities, and maintain adequate public health infrastructure.

But education, we are persuaded, needs to be viewed differently. While the public school mission of an adequate education for all children in a democracy is a noble one, especially when we recognize how far we are as a society from achieving even this, from my perspective as a parent, the goal of an "adequate" education for my children is by definition "inadequate." Children are not the same as sidewalks; entrusted with the total development of human beings—each with their own personalities, gifts, capacities, and ever-changing learning needs—responsible adults could not but come, I believe, to the conclusion that "adequate" simply isn't good enough.

Starting from that premise, it soon becomes evident that what we have come to question about public education is not so much its actual practice, which varies quite widely from place to place and school to school, but its virtually universally accepted mission. This has little or nothing to do with "good" versus "bad" teachers (I've known plenty of good ones, in the conventional sense of the term, and, on balance, there are

probably more who are well-intentioned than the other kind); educational "enrichment" (why would any parents suffer their children to undergo the "unenriched" variety?); curriculum reform (when hasn't there been curriculum reform?); or funding for schools, computers, or teacher salaries (show me well-funded schools and I'll show you kids whose parents at the very least feed them in the morning more often than not). If pressed, I'll indicate support for better teachers and better schools, educational enrichment, and curriculum reform. Certainly I support school breakfast programs, my only reservation being that it would be terrific if we could ensure kids got a decent breakfast at home! The funding question is a bit trickier, as it reveals our society's mindless, inexorable, and ultimately destructive tendency to conflate "more" with "better," the quantitative with the qualitative. But on the whole, from our perspective, these considerations are beside the point. In challenging public education's mission, at least for our children, we implicitly call into question the entire administrative structure of school buildings, scheduled school days and hours and vacations, age-bound grade bands, classrooms with prescribed numbers of children assigned, predetermined curricula, and arbitrary though strictly defined schedules for testing and evaluation. Taken together, these serve as the bureaucratic engine by which adequate educations are more or less efficiently produced; our experience indicates they have next to nothing to do with how children, how humans, optimally learn. Since "adequate" rather than "optimal"

education is the public school mission, even given occasional protestations to the contrary, this shouldn't seem particularly surprising.

Our questioning also has little to do with the educational theory behind public schooling. In fact, I'd respectfully suggest there is precious little learning theory to be found in the operation of public schools, only administrative directive in disguise. This is disheartening. Collectively, we've discovered a lot in the twentieth century about how kids learn, as often from the cultural anthropologists beginning with Margaret Mead as from the education specialists. Most of it, however, as most any public school teacher with a long career can attest, simply becomes grist for the mill once it hits the educational combine.

The great anthropologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson once asked an educational behavioral psychologist who performed learning experiments on rats whether he ever did them at night, since rats are nocturnal. "No," said the psychologist, "They'd bite." "Oh," remarked Bateson, "so what you've been researching are the learning patterns of sleepy rats." Now one can raise the attainment levels of sleepy rats with the proper (I might have said "enriched") inputs, but they remain fundamentally rats, fundamentally sleepy and too docile to bite, and, most fundamentally of all, *caged*. For children in schools, the application of the rich discoveries regarding how humans learn is at once overgeneralized and then limited to what can be allowed to work within the narrow confines of the classroom and curriculum. It could hardly be oth-

erwise within current cultural assumptions and administrative constraints. And those who show any real signs of being awake are just as likely to be punished as rewarded.

Perhaps a better metaphor would be to liken children in school to hares forced to bear the weight of the administrative machinery of public education on their backs as if they were tortoises. Some, the athletes of the public school world, bear it more gracefully than others, and get used to the weight. Some become so weighed down they forget they are hares. Others chafe and rebel under the shell. Our family is part of a loose-knit non-sectarian homeschooling network—the Learning Web—and within it and elsewhere we have witnessed children, once unencumbered of the shells, experience an end to depression, discover a renewed vibrancy of spirit, and a freedom to learn. Some, as if by magic, are cured of chronic conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which formerly had been treated by the legal dispensing of mind-altering substances by secretaries in our “Zero Tolerance Drug-Free Schools.” As many homeschooling families have experienced when taking their children out of public schools, the process of adjustment may take time, as the hares must relearn to stand up and straighten their backs before they can run again.

This book provides a narrative account of how our children have learned and, perhaps more critically, how, with our assistance, they have discovered ways to take charge of their own learning. I am sensitive to the weakness of this narrative approach. It is unscientific. It is impossible for us to know to what degree what some would consider the manifest precociousness of each of our daughters is due to our efforts, their genetic makeup (substantially different in the case of each of our children, as Meera is adopted), or other factors. We can’t clone them to find out how they might have fared in a different environment, school or otherwise. I do not want to give the impression that my children’s particular gifts, preoccupations, or foibles as detailed in this narrative are necessarily typical of the homeschooled child. If there is a

single underlying critique of public education that runs throughout this book, it is that there is no such thing as the typical child, homeschooled or otherwise, and the working assumption that there is one is the single greatest cause of damage inflicted upon children in public schools. I would strongly suggest, however, that a prime lesson we have learned from our children is that there are no overachievers, only underestimators waiting to be proven wrong. I hope this account of my children’s learning will be considered one slim volume in the library of human potential.

One of the reasons I have chosen to end work on this narrative at the turn of Ali’s tenth birthday is to prevent our kids’ future success (assuming they are “successful,” whatever that might mean) from being the lens through which their education is perceived. I find there is something disempowering in the formulaic “My Homeschooled Kid Got into Yale ... And Yours Can Too!” genre, as it suggests that the learning experiences our children acquire today are intrinsically less valuable than those they might receive in the future at an institution more venerable than our backyard. We consider it important to resist the temptation to narrowly conceive of education as “preparation for life.” Children are living, breathing, learning beings in the present moment, and satisfying their need to learn is critical to their current quality of life, which has its own inherent value, whatever tomorrow may bring. If there is anything typical of my kids, it is as of all children—unless or until it is ground out of them—their delight in discovery.

What should be of some universal relevance is the intertwined record of what our children have taught us about helping them learn, utilizing the resources of our medium-size community of Olympia, Washington. I can say truthfully that we began our homeschooling adventures with little in the way of preconceived designs—certainly no master plan—and more often than not, what few plans we had turned out to be wrong-headed. Our children have taught us humility, and they’ve taught us respect. Experience has per-

sueded us that the bedrock of parental love and the foundation of any education worthy the name are one and the same, and that is learning to listen. Our education as parents/teachers is embedded in the episodic narrative, not because our children’s education is necessarily so, but because these episodes have provided the openings for Ellen and me to revisit our own schooling and learning experiences and to reimagine them in the light of what our children have taught us.

Behind this anecdotal and highly personalized account of our children’s teaching are the more general lessons which they have presented to us. From them, we have learned that:

- A. Children understand and, given the opportunity, can articulate what they need to know at any particular point within the limits and natural round of their own individual and unique development;
- B. The primary job of the teacher (parent or otherwise) is not to teach but to provide the opportunities whereby these needs can be met;
- C. These needs don’t wait to be satisfied: if they aren’t addressed adequately and in a timely manner, children become frustrated, and will take out that frustration in aggressiveness, recalcitrance, or worst of all, passivity; and
- D. No single individual can be expected to meet all of a child’s learning needs at any particular point in time. It takes a community, with or without a school, to raise a child.

As our children have gotten older, their interests have deepened, and their studies have become more specialized. This is as it should be, and I have organized this book into rough subject areas to plot the development of their understandings. I am aware, however, that these subject divisions more closely parallel the way Ellen and I (and most adults) have been taught to think about education than our children’s actual experience. A characteristic of Ali and Meera’s intellectual development has been the fluid, interpenetrating nature of insights gained. A quick scan of the

text finds our kids making connections between evolutionary biology and opera and finance; astronomy and eighteenth century colonial history; music, religion, and mathematics; optics and trigonometry; sociobiology and ethics; and arithmetic, nutrition, and geography. Yet, to focus on the subject matter even in this manner is to miss the point. Our efforts as parents/teachers are not primarily directed at the mastery of science, mathematics, Latin, music, or Shakespeare. They are about the nurturing of citizens of the planet who, in abundant recompense, allow us to “borrow from eternity,” for children provide us a glimpse of a future which, at least within the boundaries of our limited physical selves, we can never know.

The end I envision for my children’s education is not the mastery of subject matter. It is perhaps here where, more than anywhere else, we part company with the practice of public education. For the end we envision lies not in the amassing of facts or concepts which, in itself, has little more intrinsic value than the accumulation of shoes, baseball cards, or sports cars, but in the responsible exercise of freedom—the freedom to learn, to create, to grow, *to be*—unfettered by prejudice, their own or that of others, unhampered to the highest degree possible by others’

expectations and their own preconceptions, fears, and self-doubts, uninhibited by dependencies not freely chosen. These are high-sounding words, and would not signify much if they did not inform our actual practice, as our learning adventures should illustrate.

The responsible exercise of freedom must start early if it is to flower. As learning is the primary means by which individuals and communities adapt, cultivating the freedom to learn is in my judgment among the best mechanisms to ensure both personal satisfaction and community and species survival. The joy and power of learning, freely exercised, is one of very few real alternatives to an ecologically devastating cult of consumerism—a fundamental belief that happiness or understanding can be purchased like a 4X4, whereby, as the television commercial promises, one is “free” to go where one pleases regardless of environmental consequences—and to equally destructive power relationships among individuals or among nations. The spontaneous desire to learn is given to us, I am absolutely convinced, by a Higher Power—whether God, Nature, or Reason—and failure to cultivate its free exercise cannot but result in the diminishment of the human spirit and the human heart.

The title of this book “And the

Skylark Sings with Me” is taken from the poem “The School Boy”, one of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. At once poet, illustrator, and visionary, Blake contemplated the processes of education as paralleling the dehumanization and destruction of community that marked the dawning of the industrial age. As the literary critic Alfred Kazin has stated, Blake would have seen in society’s pedagogic carefulness the effort of caution to do the work of the imagination. “Under a cruel eye outworn,” the child is driven from “learning’s bower,/Worn thro’ with the dreary shower.” In Blake’s vision, the tragedy of childhood is that we inflict our civilization’s lovelessness upon it. “How can the bird that is born for joy/Sit in a cage and sing?” Blake, as Kazin notes, considered the treatment afforded to and experience of children as the nucleus of the entire human story. In that spirit, we offer our family’s educational enterprise as an expression of an alternative story and a new song.

Excerpted from pp. 18–24 of *And the Skylark Sings with Me*, New Society Publishers/Holt Associates, 1999. [David H. Albert apparently holds the copyright.] David can be reached through www.skylarksings.com.

In the light of the expanded sense of community that David Albert's book so eloquently articulates, Albert is donating the proceeds from his book to help build homes in India. The following message that David wrote in another venue is pertinent to this endeavor and expands upon this concept of extended community.

Dear Friends,

Please forgive this form letter, but I wanted to communicate with you as quickly as possible. Some of the families on this list (and others of you as well) have contributed to a small fund I formed with the proceeds from my homeschooling book *And the Skylark Sings with Me* (www.skylarksings.com) to help build 10,000 cyclone-proof houses in the coastal areas of southeast India. The funds were to be used to purchase two cinder block-making machines. These houses—which people in the villages are being trained to build themselves—are replacing homes made of mud and straw, with thatched roofs that rot easily, which are wet inside (with children sleeping on the floor) during the entire monsoon season, and which are often destroyed in seasonal flooding.

I am pleased to report that the machines were purchased in February and building is now well underway. Each house requires 600 blocks and contains 352 square feet of living space (this can be a little more than double an average poor family's current living space, if you can believe it!), plus a veranda, with space for a kitchen garden and cattle shed at the back. These villages are made up of 11,000 families whose ancestors had been landless laborers for up to 700 years, but now have regained land peacefully through the efforts of my Indian mother's organization, "Land for the Tillers Freedom" (LAFTI). As a result of her work in land reform, she has now been formally nominated for the "International Right Livelihood Award," which is the alternative Nobel Prize awarded by the Swedish Parliament and given to individuals or groups who are making a lasting difference in the lives of communities through dedication to human rights, social justice, community development, and environmental restoration.

I now have pictures of the blocks being made through a joint effort of men, women, and children, and the pride in the faces of the people is impossible to describe. I will try to find a way to post the pictures on the web sometime soon. My mother takes special pleasure in reporting that in her previous house-building efforts, trees (which are very scarce in coastal South India) had to be cut down to fuel the firing of bricks. Cinder blocks, which provide excellent insulation against the heat, can be made from all locally available materials and require only sun and water (both of which they have aplenty) for curing.

Meanwhile, my father's struggle against multinational-based prawn companies that continue to cut down mangroves and salinate the soil in violation of Indian law continues apace. In one village, when people went out to protest the destruction of their livelihood (the rice fields), the corporation hired goon squads to set fire to all 35 homes. I am grateful to announce that the people have now completely rebuilt their village—in cinder block—with your help (and that of a small Italian aid agency.)

For those of you who are homeschooling children who might be able to appreciate all of this (and how we homeschooling families have managed to make a difference in such a far off place), I invite you to have them write to me with any questions they might have—about India, about life in a village, or about how we can all make difference in working to make the world a better place for all of us. I promise to answer all questions as best I can.

David Albert

P.S. For those of you who would still like to contribute—we can still use funds (and it's tax-deductible!), make a check out to the Gandhian Foundation, and send it to me at:

**Skylark Sings
1717 18th Court NE
Olympia, WA 98506**

Another way you can contribute is to purchase a copy of *Skylark* directly from me: \$16.95 (free shipping, and I'll even sign it for you!). Address as above. Thanks!

A Manifesto for Healing the World *Spirit Matters*

by Michael Lerner

Reviewed by Ron Miller

Most of us involved in alternative forms of education were drawn to them because something vital is missing from the modern system of public schooling. This system does not treat people as full human beings, but as functional parts of a vast, impersonal economic machine. Modern schooling does not provide a caring community to nourish our children's inner lives, but, on the contrary, it establishes a high pressure, coldly competitive mechanism for certifying who shall be the managers and professionals, and who shall do more ordinary, less richly rewarded work. Objective qualifications matter, while the feelings and intuitive wisdom of individuals do not. In response, despite their philosophical and pedagogical differences, most of those who have chosen homeschooling, and most of the educators and families who have joined "free" or "folk" or "democratic" schools, progressive, Waldorf, Montessori, Friends or various other types of independent and charter schools, are deliberately looking for communities in which people genuinely care about each other and their children, and respect each person's feelings, struggles, and aspirations. Alternative education is not merely a quaint, romantic pedagogy; it is part of a growing social movement seeking to escape and possibly someday overthrow the competitive, materialistic society that has turned education into an industrial process.

Michael Lerner's new book *Spirit Matters* gives voice to this movement with compelling clarity and a truly prophetic vision. His analysis of our cultural predicament plunges directly to the heart of our spiritual and ethical impoverishment. Although only one chapter of *Spirit Matters* is specifically about education (providing a fine summary of key ideas for transforming schools), Lerner's critique gives voice to the spiritual longing that I believe lies at the heart of all varieties of alternative education—the search for a sense of community that nurtures the fullest and best aspects of our humanity. Lerner argues that we are "fundamentally connected to the wonder, marvel, and grandeur of the universe" from our earliest childhood, but are trained by society and schooling to repress our intuitive knowledge of this connectedness. Modern education, he says, alienates us from our innate sense of wholeness, separating our inner knowledge of who we really are from the counterfeit outer self that is recognized and rewarded by a blindly materialistic society.

Lerner's goal is simple yet profound: He wants to replace the "bottom line" of industrial society—the maximization of material wealth for the benefit of those who succeed in economic competition—with a set of guiding values rooted in love, caring, compassion, and healing. These are *spiritual* values, he insists, meaning that they represent a living Force in

the universe that transcends our divisiveness, our egoistic striving, and our violence because it is "the ultimate substance" or "ultimate consciousness" of the universe as a whole; Spirit is the evolutionary unfolding of awareness, "the voice of the future beckoning to the present." Moreover, this unfolding works by way of cooperation, not competition and conflict. The important point is that *Spirit matters*; it is *essential* to enjoying a fulfilling life, and our technological/consumerist culture has taken a dreadfully wrong path by subjugating spiritual to economic values. "The deprivation of meaning and Spirit causes pain that even the greatest material rewards cannot adequately offset."

Lerner, a psychologist, philosopher and rabbi, addresses the spiritual hunger of modern people across conventional boundaries. *Spirit Matters* offers a meeting ground where all who experience the pain of spiritual deprivation—whether they be progressives or fundamentalists, intellectuals or union members—can find sources of meaning outside the narrow boundaries of capitalist materialism. Lerner describes spirituality in a holistic fashion that embraces and honors traditional religious paths while assuring secular readers that neither religious dogma nor New Age idealism contain its essential meaning. He speaks of an Emancipatory Spirituality: Giving expression to Spirit both liberates the individual psychologically and inspires social movements for justice and reconciliation. To be effective and authentic, personal growth and social change must be pursued in tandem.

"Much of what we call 'pathology' in our society," writes Lerner, is a response to "a quite real desperation people feel in their lives, rooted in a desire to overcome the terrible feeling that their own lives are meaningless and empty. . ." He calls for "a social movement committed to spiritual transformation that can publicly champion a new bottom line of love and caring," and throughout the book he proposes radical ideas that integrate personal transformation with social and political activism—a new consciousness rooted in spiritual

Ron Miller has been an author, editor, and publisher in alternative education since 1988, when he founded the journal, *Holistic Education Review*. Originally trained as a Montessori teacher, he is completing doctoral work on the cultural history of American education and is presently writing about the free school movement of the 1960s. He is the president of the board of the Bellwether School near Burlington, Vermont, and is founder and president of the Foundation for Educational Renewal, the publisher of *Paths of Learning*.

values that finds concrete expression in dramatic political steps, such as a Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, requiring large corporations to renew their charters every twenty years by demonstrating their commitment to values of fairness, justice and sustainability. He seeks a society that fundamentally operates on the principle of interdependence and connectedness rather than separation and high stakes competition.

Contrary to the prevailing ethic of our time, an Emancipatory Spirituality insists that “the world and other people are not here to be used and manipulated by us for our own narrow purposes, but to be responded to with awe and wonder and radical amazement.” In an earlier book, *The Politics of Meaning*, Lerner developed his argument that positive and substantive political change could only come about when the existential epidemic of modern times—the loss of meaning—was addressed directly. The triumph of the marketplace cannot be countered solely on economic or political grounds, for it is the loss of meaning, the loss of a sense of the sacred, that is ultimately the most destructive aspect of unfettered global capitalism. Only when we truly see each other, and all life on the planet, as embodiments of Spirit rather than opportunities for maximizing wealth, will we be able to sustain social, economic, and political institutions that facilitate love, caring, and compassion.

In education, the contrast between a commodifying, utilitarian consciousness and a sense of reverence for the intrinsic value of life and growth is played out in the quality of the learning environment we provide young people. Lerner recognizes that “schools reflect and teach the larger competitive ethos of the society. Students learn that they must ‘succeed’ by some set of objective criteria or else they will be discarded by this society. Ideas are valued to the extent that they are ‘useful’ to achieve some purpose. . . . To be a human being in touch with Spirit or capable of loving and caring for others may be very nice, but it has nothing to do with what ‘counts’ in this world: To ‘make it’ in the competitive marketplace.” In his chapter “The Spiritual Transformation of Education,” Lerner suggests that a school based upon a sense of the sacredness of life would look and feel entirely different.

First, there would no longer be “odious forms of testing” that are essentially competitive and reduce knowledge to a mechanical processing of information. Lerner proposes “an expanded sense of the goals of knowledge,” that would honor subjective, intuitive, artistic, and other non-instrumental ways of knowing. (In another chapter he makes a concise critique of *scientism*—rationality devoid of ethical wisdom.) In a spiritually transformed school, students would not be bound to textbooks and packaged lessons, but would spend a substantial amount of time in natural settings, participating in the arts, and having numerous opportunities to “experiment with a wide variety of different activities to see what grabs them and speaks to their souls.” They would also be encouraged to work cooperatively, with older students mentoring younger ones, an ethic of helping replacing one of competition. Young people’s moral and spiritual questions, and the ethical traditions of human cultures, would be discussed openly, and students would have time to engage in stillness and meditation to

develop awareness and mindfulness. Yet no one spiritual path would be advocated; educators would teach the value of diversity, and deliberately enable students to communicate freely with those in their own community and elsewhere who reflect religious, cultural and other differences.

Such an education is not simply “learner-centered” but, like Dewey’s understanding of progressive education, has distinctly social aims. While modern schooling “all too often puts the mind to sleep,” a spiritual education “wakes it up and teaches us to recognize that every aspect of reality can be fundamentally healed and transformed, and that each of us is an agent of that transformation.” Teaching “must be directed at engaging the student in asking critical questions and learning to see the possibilities in every actuality. Even the deepest spiritual truths are of little value if taught as a new catechism.” Lerner wants education to empower each person to participate actively and directly in the healing of society and the building of a caring community. No longer is schooling to be solely concerned with giving students skills to compete in the job market.

Again like Dewey, Lerner warns us not to react mindlessly against all traditional education. He emphasizes throughout the book that spirituality is about balance—about responding with judicious care rather than dogmatic fervor. Consequently he discusses the need to help young people “learn some of the accumulated knowledge of the human race.” Yet even here, his approach is holistic rather than mechanistic. Unlike E.D. Hirsch’s authoritative lists of factoids that every child “needs” to know (i.e., memorize) at each grade level, Lerner outlines what he calls “core streams” of knowledge—integrated bodies of inquiry that seek to integrate “knowledge and wisdom, matter and spirit, detached thinking and intuition, and emotional understanding of reality.” These streams might include the world of work, the miracle of body, the meaning of life, cooperation and community, and birth and death; or, they could include other inter-disciplinary studies that a community of learners finds meaningful.

Finally, Lerner envisions a society that encourages life-long learning and supports people in taking major sabbaticals every seventh year of their lives in order to step back from their career routines and renew their inner lives. Education would not be synonymous with schooling, but would be an esteemed goal of the entire culture. Education would not be preparation for the job market, but a continual enrichment of meaning, self-awareness, and one’s ability to be an agent of social transformation.

Now, truth be told, there is nothing especially original in Lerner’s educational vision. Many people in alternative schools, homeschooling situations and community based learning centers are already doing some or all of the things he recommends, yet he makes no reference to this reality, lamenting that the educational system is unlikely to reflect these practices for the next thirty years. Various writers and theorists have been articulating many of these ideas, even as far back as two and a half centuries ago. Yet, except for fleeting references to a couple of contemporary theorists, Lerner neglects this literature as well. *Spirit Matters* should not be read as the latest word on alternative educational ideas or practices.

But it would be unrealistic to approach the book with this expectation. The author is deeply immersed in other academic fields and makes no claim to be an educational theorist. Indeed, similar chapters in the book offer a vision of transformed legal and medical professions; he is looking at the culture as a whole and does not have a specialist's grasp of any of these professions. What makes this book so valuable and inspiring is that it provides an encompassing moral vision within which a genuine renewal of education needs to be situated. Michael Lerner has given an immensely valuable gift to all of us working on the growing tip of a new society—a sustaining vision grounded in prophetic insight, a manifesto for healing the persistent human failings of greed, injustice and oppression. *Spirit Matters* reminds us that we on the margins of the dominant society are not just a bunch of odd romantics, but faithful servants of the vital creative energy of the universe that works through us to nourish our children's capacities for wisdom, goodness and love.

Above all, *Spirit Matters* is a call to action. Lerner encour-

ages us to take on meditative practices to cultivate mindful awareness in our own lives. He invites readers to join a Spirit Matters network (www.spiritmatters.net) as a nucleus for building a transformational social movement. He suggests further readings (including *Tikkun*—a Hebrew word meaning “repair” or “healing” of the world—which is the provocative magazine he edits). Finally, he points out that although Spirit is a powerful transcendent force, it can only be made manifest in human affairs through our deliberate effort. “The central truth is this: We are embodiments of the Spirit of the universe and have the freedom and consciousness to make significant choices. The pace of change will depend in large part on the choices you and I and others make in the coming years. . . . The more we trust each other and the universe, the more we fully embrace Who We Really Are, the more we will make the world safe for Spirit.” I like to think that making the world safe for Spirit is exactly what holistically inclined educators have been trying to do for two hundred years. Michael Lerner encourages our struggle.

Dear Paths/Dear Readers

We continue to receive wonderful feedback from you, our readers. On the whole, the responses that we receive are quite positive, as are the following comments sent to us:

"I so enjoy reading your comments in *Paths of Learning* and love the direction it's going. Keep up the excellent work. I think it fills an important role of helping families step out of the box."

Jeanne Biggerstaff
Oregon Home Education Network

Another reader writes:

"Your magazine is wonderful. I appreciate your mission and your style of delivering your message. The networking you facilitate through your website and Directory of Resources is an inspiration to me. As I continue work on the website I am designing I hope we can be mutually supportive."

Emma Bragdon, PhD.
Woodstock, VT
www.spruceharbor.com/practicaltraining

Occasionally, we receive feedback from readers who take issue with something we've published. Such is the case with the reader whose comments we offer below. This reader finds quite problematic some of Herbert Kohl's statements on homeschooling, which Kohl made in the interview that we published with him for our Summer 2000 issue (Issue Number 5). In an e-mail exchange with the editor, the reader offered further comments for Mr. Kohl's consideration. In his response to the reader, which we also offer below, Kohl seems to be addressing his comments primarily to the original feedback sent by the reader; however, the reader's additional questions and concerns seem important, and towards the end of his response Kohl does perhaps take at least some of these questions into consideration, and so we offer both of the reader's responses along with Kohl's reply.

Although we always reserve the right to omit material from responses that we might nevertheless wish to publish, we feel that the depth of the problems at stake here warrant our publishing this exchange in its entirety. As always, we invite you, dear reader, to join this discussion by sending us your own views of the matters under consideration here.

Original response

Are Home Educators 'Opting Out'?

I noticed with much interest the interview with Herbert Kohl in the most recent issue of *Paths Of Learning*, since I have found his books to be both inspiring and intellectually rigorous. He made some statements in the interview which made my blood boil, so I put his assertions to the UK Home Education List (e-mail list service) of which I am a member, and have put together an answer to his accusation.

Herbert Kohl stated that "If you have no responsibility for other people's children, then you have no regard for democracy." In the first place I believe that the home education movement here in the UK is a completely different creature from in the US, on the whole people are home educating for different reasons, the 'Christian' element is nowhere near as

dominant as it is over there. People are a little more radical and are often actually rejecting the school system as flawed rather than just 'not good enough' for their children. The general feeling was that schools are NOT good places for children to be, for any children to be, and that our job (which most people actually do with gusto) is to get the message out there that school is not compulsory. They stick up posters, they write letters to newspapers, they bombard web-sites with mails when they give out false or misleading information, they go on the television (my family have been in two regional magazine programmes), they talk to people they meet and are generally very visible and work to raise the profile of home education and also support people who are new to it or wavering on the sidelines.

We wish as a movement that the schools would take more notice of what we do, we have a lot to offer them in terms of new ideas and alternative ways of working, but our government department and local education authorities on the whole prefer to pretend we are not here, even to deny our existence to families in desperate need. How can he make such an accusation against people who are actually creating one of the real alternatives to school, when the vast majority of the parents whose children are in the schools do absolutely nothing to change them? In fact I certainly get the impression that parents in this country actually totally buy in to the National Curriculum, standardised testing, literacy hours and everything else that the government is inflicting on their children. Since market forces have come into play in education we are the only real force for change. To quote Lenin, we are 'voting with our feet', and in the end that can be the only real pressure on the government to change what is going on in schools. Home birth advocates did not change hospital births by having babies in hospitals, but by having them at home, thereby proving that a lot of the claims of paediatrics and obstetrics experts were bogus. Breastfeeding advocates didn't take down the bottle-feeding establishment's claims by bottle-feeding radically or responsibly, but by not bottle-feeding at all. One might just as well argue that vegans have a public duty to save meat eaters from the health risks from BSE etc. in meat by contributing to ways in which meat might be better produced!

In the years of attempted school reform I'm afraid I have to conclude that schools have become worse places for children not better, they have become more rigid in approach and less child-centred. Children are 'schooled' earlier and earlier and for longer and longer. There are more and more centralised controls on the content and process of education. I say again, the only people doing anything to change this are the people who are creating alternatives and making efforts to spread knowledge about them. I would politely suggest to Herbert Kohl that he gets himself a copy of John Taylor Gatto's new book, *The Underground History of American Education*, and see for himself why there is no point struggling to change a system that is pathologically bad for children and structurally designed to undermine their ability to learn. You would have to remove compulsion com-

pletely, and schools would have to become something else entirely as a result, offering what their clients wanted, not what others decide they should have. Would it be even meaningful to refer to them any longer as 'schools', and if so would they have been reformed or scrapped, some of the buildings and resources having been recycled in the process no doubt? But if this happened, the whole economic, political and social base would change, so either [Kohl is] asking us to change the world for him, or merely tinker with it despite many disbelieving [that] any good could come of such collusion with irredeemable rottenness. Home educators are some of the few people acting with real integrity and are, maybe even in spite of what some of them intend, a force for social and educational change in both our societies. So I am changing what I can in my children's lives, and hopefully setting an example to others of what can be done, that there is a real and viable alternative to the stultifying imprisonment that is modern schools.

Martine Archer (full-time long-term home educating parent of four children, 12, 10, 10 and 6 and webmaster at www.silencingthebell.btinternet.co.uk) with the thoughtful assistance of members of the UK Home Education List. (postal address: 3, Brookfield, Hampsthwaite, Harrogate, Great Britain HG3 2EF) For more information on home education in the UK visit www.education-otherwise.org (or call 0870 7300074) www.home-education.org.uk www.choiceineducation.co.uk

Ms. Archer's follow-up response

On another tack slightly I would be interested to know what Kohl thinks of the mass exportation of the western school model of education to the developing world, replacing former community based learning, and what if anything we can do to influence this process. (I am thinking, for example, of a campaign last year by Blue Peter, a BBC children's magazine programme, to bring large centralised classrooms, with walls and roofs and desks and blackboards and globes, to areas of Mozambique where they had formerly built their own simple buildings for village based literacy work. Also a current campaign by Oxfam to bring literacy to the so many million illiterate children worldwide by getting them into schools.) I personally think this issue is bigger than simply our own communities, it is global. I do have a sense of responsibility, and feel very depressed that many people don't see the breadth of the problem beyond their own children's difficulties or their own school's shortcomings. I don't know how to have more impact as an individual other than raising consciousness at a local and personal level. What does Kohl suggest?

Herbert Kohl responds:

In response to Martine Archer's letter I have a few comments:

1. There has been a long and effective tradition of state supported (public in the US) education in Great Britain. From the Plowden report [through] the work of the infant school movement and James Britton's work at the ILEA (Inter London Education Authority), effective schools that responded to all children, regardless of class, were developed. My children attended one of them.

Margaret Thatcher managed to disassemble most of these programs but that is no reason to abandon the ideas of democratic publicly supported excellent schools for all children. The home schooling movement, as [Ms. Archer] describes it, seems to have gone belly-up to Thatcher and given up the fight. But there have been and continue to be excellent state schools in the UK as well as in the public school systems in the United States. It may just be a question of where you choose to fight your educational battles. The teachers I work with and the children they serve are in public schools and are struggling on the side of their students. The parents of these children work and do not even have the privilege of staying home to teach their children. Many of the parents have either not been to school or have done badly in school and want their children to be educated in excellent free public schools. To be able to home school is a matter of economics, prior education experience, and social commitment. You have to be able to afford to stay at home and (*pace* the children of migrant workers many of my students work with) have a home to stay at. By the way, my three children all went to public schools and, though some of the schools were good and some were not, they survived and as adults are thriving.

2. John Taylor Gatto's writing about the origins of public education are idiosyncratic, mean spirited, and historically distorted. I would like to remind people that Froebel, Pestolozzi and other people who created the kindergarten movement were involved in the democratic political and social movements of the early nineteenth century; that the creation of public education in the United States in the late 18th century was in direct contradiction to authoritarian church related education; that John Dewey, who was an explicit socialist whose educational ideas had a major positive affect on public education, was not the kind of authoritarian Gatto is obsessed with; and that African Americans in the United States were abandoned to home education without resources for years and that public schools, no matter how unevenly, have sometimes been a source of citizenship and success for their community. The struggle to desegregate the schools in the United States was not a struggle for home-schooling. I also haven't noticed many home schoolers reaching out to people less privileged than they are or helping their children on an everyday basis.

I wonder if Martine would advocate home schooling for poor people throughout the world, especially those living under conditions of oppression, with no resources, and with great hopes of obtaining power under difficult circumstances. And what happens to community and solidarity, and social struggle if you keep your kids at home? What happens to community literacy campaigns? And what happens to the equitable distribution of resources and information? Just because things are difficult doesn't mean they are not worth fighting for.

I believe that if people want to home school and can afford to do it, that is their choice. But one has to take a larger view of the opportunities available to all people and of the social and moral responsibilities we all have to other people's children as well as to our own children.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education (ALLPIE)

P.O. Box 59
East Chatham, NY 12060-0059
(518) 392-6900
allpie@taconic.net

The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education is a parent-to-parent organization which assists people who wish to be involved in their children's education—public, private and home schooling. Services include a catalog of resources, workshops and conferences, a mail-order lending library, phone consultations, and ALLPIE mailings.

Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)

417 Roslyn Rd.
Roslyn Heights, NY 11577
(800) 769-4171
<http://www.edrev.org>

The major clearinghouse for information, contacts, and consulting on alternative schools of diverse types, community learning centers, home education, and international alternatives. Produces a nationally distributed radio talk show, *The Education Revolution*, an informative newsletter, numerous videos, and the most comprehensive directory (over 300 pages) of alternative schools and learning resources.

Antioch New England Graduate School

40 Avon St.
Keene, NH 03431
(603) 357-3122
<http://www.antiochne.edu>

Graduate programs in education include specialties in environmental education; Waldorf education; and the Integrated Day, a progressive approach that makes connections between the life of the child and the life of the classroom.

Association of Waldorf Schools of North America

3911 Bannister Rd.
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 961-0927
<http://www.waldorfeducation.org>

The major organization linking Waldorf (Steiner) schools, teacher education programs, publications, and other resources. Publishes *Renewal: A Journal for Waldorf Education*.

Association for Experiential Education

2305 Canyon Blvd., Suite 100
Boulder, CO 80302
(303) 440-8844
<http://www.aee.org>

Promotes experiential learning in numerous settings, especially through outdoor adventure programs. Publishes books, directories and the *Journal for Experiential Education*. Sponsors conferences.

Autodidactic Press

P.O. Box 872749
Wasilla, AK 99687
(907) 376-2932
<http://www.autodidactic.com>

A small press and website advocate for self-education and life-long learning. Dedicated to the proposition that lifelong learning is the lifeblood of democracy and a key to living life to its fullest, and to the autodidactic philosophy that an education should be thought of not as something you get but as something you take.

Center for Education Reform

1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 204
Washington, D.C. 20036
(800) 521-2118
<http://edreform.com>

A nonprofit advocacy group supporting fundamental reforms in schools, with an emphasis on high academic standards, more parental choice, and greater local control. Provides numerous resources on charter schools, including research, state-by-state reports, and materials for planning new programs. Offers a comprehensive database on educational reform and several publications, including *The Education Forum*.

The Center for Inspired Learning

<http://www.inspiredinside.com/learning>

A website created to help people connect with other people and ideas related to more holistic and community-based forms of learning. Contains links to pages describing different types of schools, a library of reflective articles, and more.

Designs for Learning

1745 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 649-5400, ext. 3009

Coordinated by Wayne Jennings, director of five charter schools and the originator of the St. Paul Open School, this contact has research on principles of learning and charter school designs, relevant to creating alternatives in both the private and public sectors.

Down to Earth Books

P.O. Box 163
Goshen, MA 01032
<http://www.spinninglobe.net>

Publisher and online bookstore specializing in education, psychology, spirituality, poetry and other topics. Titles include back issues of *SKOLE* (the journal of alternative education that preceded *Paths of Learning*) and the three volume *Challenging the Giant: The Best of SKOLE*, along with *Making it Up as We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School*, and *Real Education: Varieties of Freedom*, a book from Great Britain not readily available in the U.S. Website also features reviews and articles.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Educational Futures Projects

P.O. Box 2977
Sacramento, CA 95812
(916) 393-8701

Coordinated by Don Glines, creator of the well-known Wilson and Lincoln public alternative schools, this clearinghouse has information on the original philosophy of alternatives for everyone, the history of the movement, and publications on how to create alternative programs.

Education Now and Education Heretics Press

113 Arundel Drive
Bramcote Hills
Nottingham, England UK NG93FQ
www.gn.apc.org/edheretics
www.gn.apc.org/educationnow

Education Now is a quarterly newsletter on alternative schools, homeschooling, visionary learning systems, and person-centered education. The Education Heretics Press catalog features original books and monographs on diverse paths of learning. Though published in England, the philosophy and most of the issues are relevant to American concerns.

Endicott College and The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES)

(877) 276-5200
<http://www.tmn.com/ties>

Graduate program in Integrative Learning. Colloquium-based, low residency and innovative online learning community. By addressing human and ecological issues through a systemic approach, these studies emphasize the need for congruency between what we know and how we act. Students develop practical strategies for designing learning environments that meet the needs of a culture in rapid transition.

EnCompass

11011 Tyler Foote Rd.
Nevada City, CA 95960
(530) 292-1000

A nonprofit, holistic learning center dedicated to the psychological and emotional health of children and families. EnCompass teaches and models the NLR (Natural Learning Rhythms) approach developed by Ba and Josette Luvmour through an integrated program of workshops, classes, internships, retreats, Family Camps, Outdoor Education, special programs, conferences and publications.

Genius Tribe

P.O. Box 1014
Eugene, OR 97440-1014
(541) 686-2315

A mail order library for unschoolers, homeschoolers, and other people committed to education in the fullest, freest, most joyful sense of the word. Book and resource reviews by Grace Llewellyn, author of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*.

Goddard College

Plainfield, VT 05667
(802) 454-8311
<http://www.goddard.edu>

Graduate program in teacher education emphasizes alternative, progressive, and holistic approaches. All graduate as well as undergraduate programs regard each student as a unique individual in charge of his or her own learning.

Great Ideas in Education/Holistic Education Press

P.O. Box 328
Brandon, VT 05733-0328
(800) 639-4122
<http://www.great-ideas.org>

Publisher and distributor of books in the areas of holistic and progressive education and the journal *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. A partner with the Foundation for Educational Renewal (publisher of *Paths of Learning*).

Growing Without Schooling

Holt Associates
2380 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 104
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 864-3100
<http://www.holtgws.com>

GWS is a bimonthly newsletter linking homeschooling families, filled with resources, information, and personal stories. Holt Associates offers consultations; sponsors an annual conference; and publishes the catalog John Holt's Bookstore, containing tools and ideas for independent learning.

Haven

<http://www.haven.net>
<http://www.haven.net/edge/matrix.htm>

Haven is a web-based global learning center with personal inquiry, dialogue, collaboration and service as guiding processes. Focus is on 21st century "edge-ucation," right livelihood and sustainable business, deep ecology, and the interconnections between them in our daily lives. Offers online salons, mentoring, and apprenticeships for teens and adults.

Heinemann

361 Hanover St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
(800) 793-2154
<http://www.heinemann.com>

Publisher of numerous titles on whole language approaches to literacy and other student-centered methods of teaching, including several excellent books on alternative education. Titles include *Making it Up as We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School* by Chris Mercogliano, *One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards* by Susan Ohanian, and *Round Peg, Square Hole* by John Gust.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Home Education Magazine

P.O. Box 1083
Tonasket, WA 98855
(800) 236-3278
<http://www.home-ed-magazine.com>

Published since 1983 by a second-generation homeschooling family, this is an in-depth and well balanced general interest homeschool magazine. Ten columnists and over a dozen feature articles in every 68-page issue. *H.E.M.* website offers an extensive online library of articles; a database; discussion forums; and more, including the American Homeschool Association, a nonprofit networking and service organization with a newsletter, writers' clearinghouse, and information on home education laws in all 50 states. See <http://www.home-ed-magazine.com/AHA/aha.html>.

John Dewey Project on Progressive Education

411 Waterman Building
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405
(802) 656-1355
www.uvm.edu/~dewey/

A policy research institute promoting ideas such as justice, equity, human development, creativity, care, ethics and community in public discussion of educational issues. Publishes studies and position papers, sponsors conferences and forums.

Jola Publications

2933 N. 2nd St.
Minneapolis, MN 55411
(612) 529-5001

Publishes the periodical *Public School Montessorian* and an annual *Montessori Community Directory*, a comprehensive listing of hundreds of schools across the U.S., as well as organizations, teacher education centers, publications, materials suppliers, and other resources for Montessori education.

Alfie Kohn

<http://www.AlfieKohn.org>

A useful website featuring articles, books, videos, and lectures on teaching and parenting by Alfie Kohn, one of today's most astute observers of schooling. (His best-selling titles include *No Contest* and *Punished by Rewards*.) Also lists national and state-by-state resources and contact people to build a campaign against the educational standards movement.

Living Routes - Ecovillage Education Consortium

72 Baker Rd. Shutesbury, MA 01072
(413) 259-0025
(888) 515-7333 (toll free)

<http://www.LivingRoutes.org>
info@LivingRoutes.org

Living Routes is a growing consortium of sustainable communities (known as "ecovillages") and universities working together to

offer accredited experiential programs that empower participants to help build a sustainable future. Semester programs are currently offered at the Findhorn Foundation in northern Scotland and Auroville in southern India. A North American Summer Institute and a January term program at Crystal Waters, a permaculture community in Australia, are also available.

National Association for Core Curriculum

1640 Franklin Ave., Suite 104
Kent, OH 44240
(330) 677-5008

Promotes integrative, interdisciplinary studies, team teaching, block scheduling, and other learning-centered approaches. A network of innovative educators influenced by the principles of progressive education. Newsletter lists conferences, resources, and research support for these methods.

National Association for Year-Round Education

P.O. Box 711386
San Diego, CA 92171
(619) 276-5296
<http://www.NAYRE.org>

Year-round education represents an alternative way of thinking about the school's relationship to the community as a whole, encouraging experimental programs and lifelong learning. NAYRE publishes books, articles and monographs, and sponsors an annual conference.

National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools

1266 Rosewood, #1
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(888) 771-9171
www.ncacs.org

NCACS is a nonprofit network of schools, groups and individuals committed to participant control, whereby students, parents, and staff create and implement their own learning programs. NCACS sponsors a directory and other publications, conferences, exchanges, accreditation, and alternative teacher education.

National Coalition of Education Activists

P.O. Box 679
Rhinebeck, NY 12572
ncea@aol.com

NCEA is a multi-racial network of parents, school staff, and others involved in public school issues. Its purpose is to promote a progressive and equitable vision of public education and to help local activists acquire the information, skills, and support they need to make this vision a reality.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

National Community Education Association

3929 Old Lee Highway, #91A
Fairfax, VA 22042
(703) 359-8973 <http://www.ncea.com>

Supports schools (primarily public schools) and community leaders working to provide expanded learning opportunities in response to individual and community needs. After school and extended day programs, social services, alternative schools, and lifelong learning approaches are among the models promoted. Based on principles of local control and self-determination. Publishes books and other materials.

National Home Education Network info@nhen.org <http://www.nhen.org>

Encourages and facilitates the vital grassroots work of state and local homeschooling groups and individuals by providing information, fostering networking, and promoting public relations on a national level.

New Horizons for Learning

P.O. Box 15329
Seattle, WA 98115
(206) 547-7936 <http://www.newhorizons.org>

An online resource for educators concerned with the fullest development of human capabilities. Explores ideas not yet in mainstream educational practice. Online journal, books and other materials, networking for people and organizations.

Northeast Foundation for Children

71 Montague City Rd.
Greenfield, MA 01301
(800) 360-6332 <http://responsiveclassroom.org>

A nonprofit organization providing workshops, consulting, publications, and other resources dedicated to the improvement of K-8 teaching. Strong emphasis on the social context of learning and understanding of children's development. "Responsive Classroom" approach has been used successfully in hundreds of schools.

Partnership Education Consultants **Center for Partnership Studies**

P. O. Box 30538
Tucson, AZ 85751
(502) 547-0176 www.partnershipway.org

A network of professional development/school reform consultants who help schools implement the principles of Partnership Education presented in Riane Eisler's book *Tomorrow's Children*. Partnership Education is a comprehensive approach to the content (curriculum), structure, and process of teaching, emphasizing values of caring, community, inclusiveness, and cooperation. Advanced studies in Partnership Education are being offered through Prescott College and California State University at Monterey Bay.

Pathfinder Center

P.O. Box 804, Amherst, MA 01004
256 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 253-9412
plc@valinet.com <http://www.pathfindercenter.org>

Supports teenaged unschoolers and their families. Offers strategic consultations for families considering teen unschooling or interested in improving their unschooling. Publisher of *Liberated Learners*, in which two teen homeschoolers tell their story each issue. Locally PC provides a wide range of activities for unschoolers to learn and play.

Prescott College, Admissions Office 220 Grove Ave.

Prescott, AZ 86301
(800) 628-63642
admissions@prescott.edu www.prescott.edu

A private liberal arts institution offering BA and MA degrees. Emphasis is on self-directed, interdisciplinary, and experiential education in the fields of Adventure Education, Environmental Studies, Education, Humanities, Integrative Studies, and Arts and Letters. Offers undergraduate program bases in Prescott as well as externat undergraduate and graduate programs.

Rethinking Schools

1001 E. Keefe Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(800) 669-4192 <http://www.rethinkingschools.org>

An activist publication for teachers, parents, and students concerned with urban education. Views classrooms as "places of hope" and empowerment. Also publishes books and resources on particular topics.

Youth on Board

58 Day Street, P.O. Box 440322
Somerville, MA 02144
(617) 623-9900 x1242
<http://www.youthonboard.org> youthonboard@aol.com

Youth on Board is a nonprofit organization that helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change their communities. They offer highly interactive training programs for young people and adults and a wide array of publications on youth involvement issues, including the book *14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making*.

Zephyr Press

P.O. Box 66006
Tucson, AZ 85728-6006
(800) 232-2187 <http://www.zephyrpress.com>

Publishes books exploring "new ways of teaching for all ways of learning," including multiple intelligences, brain-based learning and integrated curriculum. Sponsors workshops and an annual conference.



ENCOUNTER

Education for Meaning and Social Justice
An Educational Journal With An Attitude

ENCOUNTER, published quarterly since 1988, is a professional journal characterized by a strong belief that the fundamental purpose of education is to help a child grow as an individual and compassionate member of society.

Expanding the discourse on educational renewal by focusing on the implications of the holistic perspective within the classroom, ENCOUNTER encourages a wider, more unified view of reality and, in doing so, returns the human spirit to the core of the curriculum. It insists that students and *their* needs be the center of the educational process—not the demands of the economy, technology, or bureaucracies.

ENCOUNTER believes that education must focus on the development of personal growth and meaning for both students and teachers in an environment that creates and insures social equality and justice.

ENCOUNTER is indeed a journal with an attitude. It belongs in *your* library and on *your* reading table.

ENCOUNTER is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Personal subscriptions cost \$39.95 for the year; \$85 for libraries and other multi-user environments. Add \$9 for non-US delivery. For more information, phone 1-800-639-4122 or write to Encounter, PO Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328, or visit us online at <<http://www.great-ideas.org>>.

PathsofLearning Resource Center

→ www.PathsOfLearning.net ←

Are you a parent faced with tough decisions about finding creative and learner-centered options for meeting your child's unique needs?

Are you a teacher wanting to create space for more creativity and individuality while fostering a dynamic classroom community?

Are you a school board member or administrator seeking solid evidence for how to implement new programs or restructure schools in ways that better fit how students learn while maintaining students' natural curiosity and love of life?

Visit the new Paths of Learning Resource Center, www.PathsOfLearning.net

In collaboration with the magazine, we now offer an online search tool that brings together educational research and stories about effective learning options—in public schools, charters, private schools, homeschooling, and more.

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For anyone without easy access to the Internet or who prefers print materials, please call us at 1-800-639-4122 for an offline request form.

To contribute stories or research about more holistic learning options, write to: robin@PathsOfLearning.net

A sampling of features in the next issue of

PathsofLearning

Options for Families&Communities

In Our Next Issue of *Paths*:

- ▣▣▣▣▶ An interview with Cecile Andrews, author of *The Circle of Simplicity*
- ▣▣▣▣▶ Articles by Mary Leue, Emanuel Pariser, and others on relational education
- ▣▣▣▣▶ Don Glines, veteran alternative educator and Director of Educational Futures Projects, writes on educational reform
- ▣▣▣▣▶ Continued coverage of the problems with high-stakes testing
- ▣▣▣▣▶ Writings by young persons; book reviews; and a whole lot more!

In Upcoming Issues:

- ▣▣▣▣▶ Articles focusing on Native Americans and education
- ▣▣▣▣▶ An interview with Helen and Mark Hegener, publishers of *Home Education Magazine*
- ▣▣▣▣▶ An Israeli-American student's personal narrative about her childhood experiences during the Gulf War
- ▣▣▣▣▶ Articles on adult learners, special needs students, and other non-traditional students