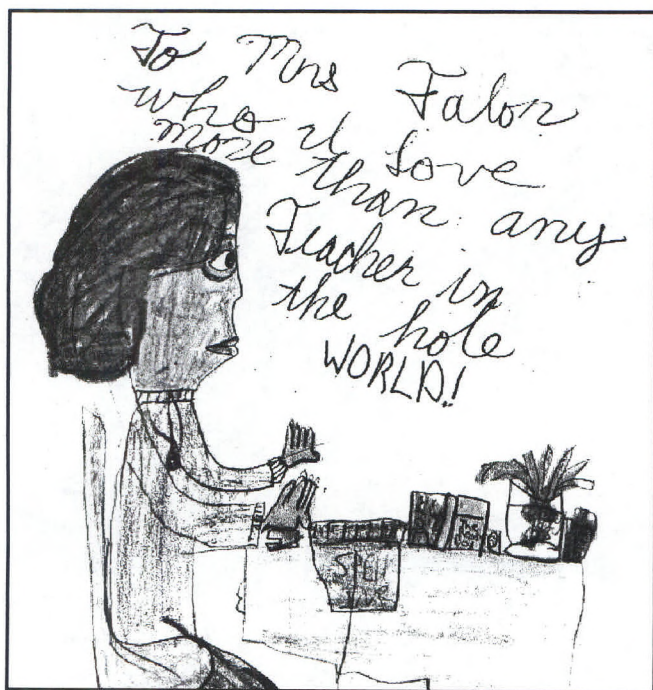


# Once Upon a Time: A Teacher's Story



by Dorothea Taylor





This book is dedicated to the faith that endures,  
to my family, my husband, my children,  
grandchildren and great-grandchildren and  
to the many children with whom I've had the  
privilege to share a life of learning.

"Once Upon A Time: A Teacher's Story"

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Taylor, 107 East Cedar Street, Poughkeepsie, New York, 12601.

## Editor's Forward

There are many experienced teachers who get results. But there are few who develop an awareness of the child, how a child relates to life, how he or she learns and that *how* you are taught can mean as much as *what* you are taught to forming your outlook in life.

Even before getting involved with Dorothea Taylor (I know her best as Nana so I hope you will forgive me if I call her by that familiar name) on this project, my brothers, sister and I had begun to see her, for lack of a more "Poughkeepsien" year 2000 term, as a sort of family guru, realizing that she'd made some passage, some journey to arrive at a wisdom that is in her bones, her words, her eyes. But it's only through working on the book and moments arising in my life that I've begun to understand how she reached this place.

Some of my recognition starts from one of my favorite passages in *Once Upon A Time*. After working with learning disabled children for over 10 years, Nana takes a position in a "normal" second grade class. Her reaction: These must be the most intelligent children in the world. She had slowed down her expectation of the natural learning process to perceive the progress in disabled children a process that confirmed in her the belief that every child can learn. She'd just forgotten how fast other minds can work.

How do we learn? How do we change our way of being and doing? How am I able to move this pen in this little ink configuration and have it mean anything to you? To get to the answers, we have to step out of our worries, agendas, ambitions and suspend the conclusions we operate on and become very basic. We have to retrace our steps, examine how our senses perceive the world and how this leads to what we are thinking and feeling and acting now.

Children are just carving these pathways we've already established no secret there. But to be able to work WITH and not just ON a child, we must cultivate a patience and attention and ways of relating to the small processes taking place that accumulate into greater ones. I don't think this is easy for anyone, especially with the pressing speed and complexity of the life we're faced with these days.

Nana's life outside the classroom has certainly not been without its substance, its dramas, worries, concerns and joys. But the classroom very early on was a refuge of sorts, its own universe apart from the world outside, a place where one thing was most important: the life of the child body and mind.

Many times in our talks, Nana mentioned that her own self-concept as a child and well into her adult life was poor; she was full of doubts and the sense that "I can't do that." This contributed (and maybe initially was the cornerstone) to her interest, love and compassion for children. The world CAN and DOES shape a child for better or for worse a simple statement often acknowledged but not often enough taken to heart, fully understood on the moment to moment level of a child learning her way in the world. Nana learned about herself, the special circumstances and effects of her own early life, through being with children. Her patience developed both out of the desire to understand and connect with the child but also out of necessity a severely learning disabled child simply cannot be reached in the ways we reach each other or the ways we teach a "normal" child. She spent years and years slowing down, patiently connecting with children at all levels in all situations. Eventually, Nana was able to walk into a classroom, encounter a situation with a child and not only identify the child's level of learning, problems and gifts, but immediately begin to relate to who they are and where they are at body and mind in that moment. At this point I think experience turns into awareness and awareness is the greater part of wisdom.

One of the last things on my tapes of our conversations is her saying, "Ahh, what I could do with these kids today."

I am blessed to have worked on this project with Nana and to have grown in my knowledge of her and her life's work. I hope you find something in it for yourself and the world around you.

Geoffrey B. Kuffner

January 2001



## A note on the making of....

Nana wrote the first draft of this book on hundreds of yellow legal pad pages in her flowing calligraphic cursive, cross-outs and long, winding arrows connecting thoughts and paragraphs. Her neighbor Karen Venuto had first shift on computer, typing up and saving sections as Nana passed them on to her. (Many thanks to Karen for her help!)

Whenever I've seen her the past three years, we've gotten right down to talking about "the book." However, beyond encouragement ("Nana, you have to WRITE it before you can PUBLISH it!"), I was not involved in the project until the first draft was done. This was a difficult moment. Writing it had been a journey of recollection and discovery and a crystallizing for her of what she had learned and experienced as a teacher but she wanted it to be finished: Her legacy there, bound and ready to be shared, and her heart at peace. I knew, though, that to be published, to be finished though these sorts of books are never finished, we had some work ahead of us. With reluctance, Nana rallied the energy to continue.

[For months, the same scene: every few weeks I'd journey up from New York to Poughkeepsie. Pop would open the back door and usher me into "Mother" who was in her study preparing her notes for our talks. Not a normal study, nestled into some corner of the house to allow for total solitude, Nana's study is at a crossroads: one doorway leads into the kitchen, another doorway leads to the front door and living room. Nana sits in her special high-backed cushioned chair in one corner facing the room's center, the gentle swing and 15 minute zong of the grandfather clock, the light in the windows, the configuration of the old swirling carpet how many family gatherings have we been too where we passed in and out of this room never stopping going from the food to the couches to the refrigerator to the piano? How many students has she received into this room to learn the basics of spelling "cat" "hat" "sat." But here it is, a quiet day and it is her study at the crossroads where she harmoniously sits with the flow of the house mixing with her thoughts and tasks.]

Section by section we reviewed the book. I prepared questions to clarify confusing passages, expand on important themes, tap into untold stories and bring more of Nana's life into her story. She was convinced that her personal history wasn't important or at least not relevant to the story of the children, teaching situations and methods she'd encountered. This was an contention of mine: that her story

was not a sidenote to the classroom but was essential to understanding her journey as a teacher. I worked with her to bring this story into the book, believing that how SHE learned, the life she d lived in the time she d lived created the context for all that follows, adding a greater depth and breadth to the classroom.

Another unusual (for this age at least) situation was that Nana avoided criticizing others, even if she felt they had been wrong in their actions, beliefs or attitudes. Whether it was her karmic sense or her desire for privacy I am not entirely sure. But I do know that, even in this personal story, she did not see much constructive value in disparaging others her goal was never a tell-all but a personal story that shared what she had seen and learned that might be useful to others.

Eventually Nana didn t have the will to write anymore and I think this had as much to do with a desire to be done as an inflamed case of arthritis in her hand. So I conducted interviews, transcribed them and integrated the text into the book. Nana s way of speaking is not far from her way of writing so most of the additions from interviews (and all of the ideas) are very close to her actual words.

At times Nana had to wait for me to get my act together as I progressed in fits and starts. But at last we have arrived at this printing. If the book finds wider publication, more work will need to be done. Unlike her husband, Nana is not known for her accuracy in dates and names and quotes and I am not a specialist in grammar. Copyeditors and fact-checkers will be needed and some sections can certainly be fine tuned. But this special small printing now, call it a galley if you know the business, holds the essentials of what may come after and is meant to ensure that Nana s story is shared with those who can preserve it and pass it from present to present.

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Cover by Laura Cooper, age 5, Regina Coeli kindergarten

1. Drawing & writings by Michael Shannon.
2. Excerpt from *Around We Go* by Dorothea Taylor, illustrated by Shirley Matthews. Published 1958 by Cross Roads Press.
3. Drawings by Billy Ghee, Regina Coeli second grade 1962-3.
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6. My Aunt Adaline Cooper's 1889 class at Highland School, Highland, New York.
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8. Drawing & writings by Richard Koziol.
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10. Dorothea Taylor Letter to the Editor , *The Poughkeepsie Journal*.
11. Drawings by Christine, 1995.



## **PREFACE**

This is a story about my life as a teacher, my experiences, and how I adapted to the many changes in the educational system over the past sixty years. This is a story of my many encounters with people and children from all walks of life, and their contribution to education. This is a story of children who are gifted, retarded, handicapped, disturbed, abused, deaf, and blind. This is a story of a belief that children can learn and succeed, regardless of their position in life, their cultural background, their ability or performance skills. Most of all, this is a story of love, hope, and courage, sometimes with unattainable goals. It is a teacher's story, striving to encourage, to motivate, to increase self-image, and to instill in each child the love of learning and the thrill of achieving the ultimate goal of success.

## **My Goals**

1. Promote health
2. Promote physical growth and motor development
3. Increase independence, the ability to meet and solve own problems.
4. Increase self-confidence, add to the feeling of being an adequate person.
5. Increase feeling of security with adults and with other children in a variety of situations.
6. Increase liking for others and understanding of their needs.
7. Increase understanding of self and acceptance of reality.
8. Increase ability to handle emotions constructively.
9. Extend and enrich avenues of self-expression, in art, music, rhythm and language.
10. Extend and enrich as much as possible an understanding of the world and all the people in it.

## Once Upon a Time

**Part I: A Penny of Sweets: Growing Up**

*A child's education should begin at least one hundred  
years before he is born.*

-Oliver Wendell Holmes



## Once Upon a Time

My childhood years were happy ones filled with simple pleasures. Life was simple in the early nineteen hundreds. Very few people had cars, only the wealthy and at that time these people were far removed from our thoughts and our problems. There were a few buses and the milkman came around with his carriage full of fresh milk but almost everyone walked or rode bicycles to their destinations.

My mother was a good women, with much concern for others and her family. She loved us and tried to help us with our needs and problems. She was at home, baked our own bread, canned vegetables and fruits and was always concerned about where we were, whom we played with and that we were never far from home. My stepfather was a carpenter and worked long hard hours when he found work to do. When unions were first started, he had trouble financially. So Mother made parts of men's ties for a local tie factory which she completed at home. I helped her fold a press, still too young for summer jobs. Even in difficult times, my stepfather, a soft-spoken, caring man, always found time to share with us. Every Saturday night he took us to a movie (first ones silent). Cost: \$.05 each and after we went to the ice cream parlor for homemade ice cream.

We had a large back yard for play and there were always children to share our games. I remember that once after learning about airplanes for the first time, I decided that I could fly also. Getting an umbrella from our house, I climbed up the roof of the barn and jumped! It wasn't too high and the ground was deep in fall leaves. The result was that all of my audience of neighborhood children thought that I was wonderful and I beamed. A few days later my brother tried the same thing and broke his arm, making me a special hero.

We put on lots of "shows" and charged admission of one cent. I always made enough money to buy a real spearmint or chocolate candy. In those days it was very special. I remember that on one occasion we had "parent's afternoon" and most of the parents in the neighborhood arrived for the performance. Afterwards, they surprised us with cookies, cake and homemade ice-cream.

Our summers were the same. There were no pools or places to swim, only lakes or ponds in the country. I had an uncle who had a car and he took our family for a picnic a few times. It was on a lake that seemed to be miles away. It was really a joy and we would look forward to going weeks ahead of time. We would get up at 5:00 am, pack a lunch and leave when my uncle picked us up at 7:00 am. Cars

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at that time did not exceed 30 m.p.h. (that was fast) and so it took two hours to reach the lake. What glorious days they were. We played ball and ran races and ate too much.

On one occasion, my uncle decided to teach me how to swim. Using the one method that he knew, and one he said that always worked, he threw me in the deep water and scared me so much that to this day I am afraid of deep water.

Our winters were cold and long. We had a small park near our home with a hill that was good for sleigh-riding. All the children in the neighborhood met and had fun gliding down the hill and throwing snowballs.

Do you remember all you can buy with a penny? On the way to school (everyone walked-there were no school buses back then) there was a corner store with a counter filled with candy. For one cent I could buy four green leaf spearmint gumdrops, a small chocolate bar, three long sticks of licorice, a package of peanuts and much more.

When you were sick, you got castor oil for your stomach, warm sulfur and molasses (heated on the stove) for colds and a mustard plaster for a chest cold. If you were truly sick and your parents or neighbors didn't have a remedy, the doctor would come to see you. In return, he would take a fresh baked apple pie or a chocolate cake for the visit. Yes, life was simple but good.

I remember my kindergarten days. I remember feeling so happy, loving my teacher and my friends, some who almost 80 years later continue to keep in touch. Many others have passed away leaving nice memories to cherish. There was one very special girl, Mary Lawrence, who lived in a little red building near the school we were attending. Her mother used to bake fresh bread every day and many times, I would stop and have a warm slice with butter and sugar sprinkled the top. It was so delicious and her parents were loving, caring people. Many days we'd sit on the porch, eat that bread I can still almost taste on my lips, then play. Mary spent some time at my house, also. I loved her but she had no other friends. At that time, I did not understand why everyone would not want to share their friendship with Mary.

One day at recess time, I was asked to give a message to a certain teacher. There were three or four teachers talking together and



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I heard my name and Mary's in the conversation: "Dorothea DuBois is playing with that girl again." One teacher said, "I think that Dottie's mother should be told about Mary's family" What could it be? When I returned home that day, I couldn't wait to tell my mother. She told me not to worry, that Mary was a wonderful friend.

Later, the 2nd grade teacher did call her in for a talk: "Do you realize that Dottie is keeping company with a black girl?" Well, mother got very angry-but not at me, at that teacher. She quietly spoke to me of Mary and her family in reassuring terms, saying, "Mary is your friend and I hope that it remains that way. Her color is different than yours. Some people see and feel the difference but we know that God loves us all regardless of the color of our skin." The year was 1918.

Mary and I remained friends all through school. Later, she move away to California, married and had a family. I heard from occasionally. She was my first friend, one I will always remember.

There was also the Canouses or Famous Canouses as we called them because they were some of the wealthier people in town. Their extended family came from Germany, bought land, built houses and ran a big meat produce place. My husband and I much later bought the land where we live from one of the Canouses. One of the young Canouses had a three wheel bicycle. She let me ride and we became friends fast after that, sharing the bicycle and practicing tricks. One time, she was in my house. We had a spiral staircase that she and I used to slide down even though that had been forbidden. What was there to fear? I slid down smoothly and jumped off. Then she followed, lost her balance, fell and broke her collarbone. What a scene! Of course, that was the end of our sliding experiments.

Another outstanding memory of my grade school years concerns the religious background of all involved. Back then being catholic or protestant was a difference that mattered to a lot of people. Life revolved around the church you belonged to, church groups, associations and youth organizations. Even though public schools were for everyone, the Catholics saw them as protestant schools and called them that. Even the protestants were divided, sometimes families who were Baptist or Lutheran didn't like their kids playing with kids whose families were Episcopal and vice versa. Then there was a large community of Italians living downtown around Mt. Carmel Catholic church. The Italian families especially didn't want the kids to circulate and to mingle with the other religions. I remember in high

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school times where Italian boys or girls would go with another religion or race and there would be chaos in the family.

Fortunately, my parents (protestants) were not too concerned with the religion of the people I knew. However, I do remember a little girl named Cody, who lived next door to my aunts. Whenever I visited my aunts, Cody and I would dress up in clothes, play house and other games. Well, my Aunt Cat was not happy with this. She came in and said to my Aunt Addy: "That girl is catholic. We shouldn't allow this." But Aunt Addy, who I now see was ahead of her time in so many ways, said, "We are going to allow it. If her mother doesn't object, she can play with her." And my mother didn't object so we continued to play together.

Even though we were divided by religion, we were also united by it. The Bible was a book we all shared. I attended public schools but each day opened with a prayer to the almighty God and a sentence from the Bible was written on the black board in front of the class. The prayer involved all races and creeds and to my knowledge, there were no objections back then. I had one teacher who I will always remember very vividly-the way she looked, the way she walked. She would enter the room very quietly and put a verse from the Bible on the blackboard, then say, "That's it for the day. Look at it, say it, write it, do it." Then we'd say in unison the Lord's Prayer. That began the day

My family was not deeply religious although my Dad read from the Bible after dinner every night and on occasion he read to us. The teaching at school, however, caught my interest. My desire was to know more about the Bible. This resulted in my attendance at a local Sunday school and joining that church. I continued and later became a Sunday school teacher and sang in the choir for over thirty years. My Sunday school learning plus the religious and morals taught daily in the classroom influenced my thinking, actions and future for the rest of my life.

Now, of course, this has been outlawed from public schools because, remember, in those days we had very few, if any, non-Christians in our schools-no children from Buddhist families, or Hindu, Moslem, any other of the worlds religions. When children from these religions joined our schools, we certainly needed to make changes. But today, I think the religious side of life is missing. Rather than becoming aware and excepting other religions and cultures in our



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classrooms as they became part of our society, all we did was eliminate religion. And with it, we eliminated a very important way to teach right from wrong and provide a moral direction for our young people. That is, we did only half of what we needed to do. We need to finish the job by finding ways to respect religious differences but to include morals in our schools.

## Search For The Unknown

I saw my birth father only once, in 1917, while a girl. Maybe I had seen him other times as a child but this is the only instance I have ever remembered. I was four years old. He came to the door of our apartment on North Clinton Street in Poughkeepsie, where we lived with my grandmother. He had a military uniform on-a very handsome man. He picked me up and kissed me and that was it. Then he went off to the war. When he came back he lived in California-I'm not even sure if my mother saw him again. She never talked about him and I never asked her. There was no contact: no letters, no messages. But they did divorce and apparently it was easy (to get this divorce) for my mother because he left her. When I was seven, she married Dad Schermerhorn and life became a happier one for all of us.

About fifteen years later I saw my birth father again (Cooper was the family line) when he came back to live in New York. I was working at the Children's Home. To me, he was a stranger looking for the unknown. We talked for a while. He had remarried and worked as a police officer out west. I met his new wife. Her people lived here in Poughkeepsie, which is why they'd come back east. They continued to live here till they died but there was no more communication. He apparently didn't want any and I felt it was a closed door. Maybe it sounds terrible now. Maybe today I would be different and would pursue some relation with him. But it wasn't important to me then. He wasn't a part of me.

My brother Stanley never saw him. He was two years old when father left. During his life, Stanley traveled all over the world but never saw him and never wanted to. He went into the service after graduation from high school at 18. He worked on planes in the army Air Corp for twenty years, married and divorced several times and

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had two children. Honolulu, Denver, Japan-whenever the Air Corps went Stanley seemed to go. Once or twice a year, he'd come home.

He was a very special brother, loving, sensitive and caring, who wanted happiness and peace. One of my oldest stories about Stanley was when he first came to kindergarten. He cried all the time. Since I was a few years older but in the same school in the second or third grade, they would bring him up to me to calm him down. Everyone made fun of him. I figured out that it was his hair and told my mother, "You got to cut his hair." He was very blonde and she had fixed it in finger curls. This, I thought, was very beautiful, but children can be very cruel to others that look differently. Mother did finally cut his hair and he finally calmed down

Throughout his life, Stanley was generous almost to a fault but he needed more than that. He was looking for what he could do to make his life better. When he wasn't here, we wrote letters to each other. Eventually, he retired to Florida and spent a lot of time in a coffee shop, sometimes doing work there or volunteering in the area. He was very clever, I really felt he could do anything. I'd given him Dad Schermerhorn's (our stepfather's) tools for all the odd jobs. But he too was still seeking the unknown. It was a destructive thing at times. He became a heavy drinker and never had any money. I was always sending him some or his uncle would. There was just something he could not figure out and I don't think he ever did.

He died in the 60s never realizing that the answer to his search was in his heart and soul. How he died has always bothered me. He wrote me a letter saying he couldn't take it any longer in Florida. He and his last wife had parted and he was thinking about coming back home. He wanted to know what I thought. I told him I couldn't make up his mind for him and this was true-as true as it is now for anyone. Shortly after, he went to the doctor for a check up on his heart condition. The doctor gave him a clear bill of health. But a few days after, they found him dead at his home-they say of a heart attack-with all possessions of value missing.

A sister in law of his former wife tried to investigate it but she couldn't find out anything and there was no other investigation. I felt so strongly that there was something very wrong at the time. I was teaching and it was very difficult for me to get off and no money to get down there. I called the number he'd given me a few times, but whoever answered didn't tell me anything or tried to get off the phone. One time I heard someone in the background saying, "Is it



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about Stanley? Don't talk about Stanley." I am sorry I didn't borrow money to go down there and pursue it.

The one thing he had asked me was to be buried here in Poughkeepsie. His first wife in California said it was ridiculous to transport him after passing but that's what I did. He came home and we buried him in Poughkeepsie. But we never saw his body. I still look at TV when something comes on about Florida and think, "Maybe he's still there . . ." It's crazy. Inside I know that was him in the coffin. By this time I would have heard if he was alive. But this is why it is so important to see the person that died. You need to know they are gone.

## Dora

I used to baby-sit when I was an older girl. My mother's brother George lived a few blocks from us. He wasn't well at all. He was injured in the first world war and never really recovered, falling into alcoholism like a number of other men who've come back from service. His wife Dora was a poor young lady who seemed to deliver a child every year with very little compassion or help. She seemed to give up at times and become very lazy just sitting around the house. Mother and I used to help her and her five children when she needed it. One day, I went with my mother only to witness the delivery of a child. Dora was lying in an unkempt dirty room with newspapers on the bed and floor to catch all the blood. The children were running around in the next room making much noise and ignoring the situation. Blood was all over.

I stayed with Dora while Mother went for help. A neighbor came back with her, full of complaints, but helped in the child's delivery until the doctor arrived. I tried to calm the other children and I remember thinking. "Why? Let me understand why." I was thirteen years old.

Another baby was born and my babysitting continued. I felt so sorry for those kids. For a couple years I had one of the younger girls stay with me at Christmas time.

## Great Aunts

I spent many of my summers out on my aunts' farm in the country. I truly loved this home with the animals and three unmarried great aunts that loved me and spoiled me. They were all in their sixties then and all lived into their nineties-Aunt Addy to 100. One, Aunt Caroline, did the cooking, serving, and washing. Aunt Hylah took care of the animals, three horses, three cows, and two pigs. Aunt Adaline was the teacher (retired by then), and she also raised the chickens.

It was a lovely old brick farm house with no electricity, an outdoor toilet and acres of land. I remember two summers that a band of gypsies opened camp on the property and there was much music and dancing and joy. My Aunt Adaline would take me to visit and it was full of enjoyment.

I had a pet chicken, cats, dogs, horses, the two cows and two pigs. The aunts sold eggs and milk to the people that lived near by. It was unpasteurized milk that was still being used at that time. We delivered the eggs and milk in a horse and buggy that we used with a sleigh in the winter. The years were 1917 through 1925, when car traffic was limited and horses were still used. It was wonderful!

My aunts had a large collie dog who helped to churn the butter making. I learned to work with him. He was on one side of the churn and we would go back and forth, one side pulling the other. You could tell when the cream in the milk was getting heavier, slowly turning to butter.

My Aunt Hylah had a beautiful black horse called "Black Beauty." One day the horse fell and broke her leg. In those days there was not help for this type of injury. She had to be shot because of the pain and because there was no way for healing. My Aunt took her up on the hill and shot her. I still remember the sound and seeing my aunt afterwards, with her face drawn and filled with tears. I shared her sorrow. A short time after this incident, she took me in a horse and buggy to see a movie. It was my first movie, "Black Beauty." A story about a beautiful black horse, and we both cried! The movie was one of the first, a silent one, held in a movie house on upper Main Street and cost five cents a person. I remember that she bought me a large stick of peppermint candy for two cents. You sucked on it until you were tired then you wrapped it up and kept until the next time.



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The aunts never saw a doctor or went to the hospital. They did everything with onions and garlic. What wonderful cooks they were! I can still remember a few dishes they made. They had a big kitchen with a wood stove. All the rest of the house was closed up at night during the winter. I used to sleep in Aunt Addy's bed. They had soap stones that they heated on the stove, wrapped up in cloth then put them on your bed. They'd then go up and change it a few times so when you got in the bed it was warm. Well, I remember thinking it was still pretty cold.

The living room was only used when somebody died. The aunts let it be used as a kind of funeral parlor before there were funeral parlors. Everything was conducted in your home or someone else's home when you died. It was very rare to have undertakers. An old organ was in the living room. They put the body on display and a big crepe on the door to let the town know someone had passed away. Crapes are a forgotten tradition, purplish, and at that time for me, scary things-they gave us all the jitters. People would see it on the door and go pay their respects. Everyone would bring in food and spend time mixing in the room.

One time my aunt Twilliger (on my mother's side) had a bad case of poison ivy. It was all over her eyes and the doctor said to keep her somewhere with no light. There was a couch in the living room so the aunts closed the blinds and she slept in there. I remember seeing her and the aunts saying "Don't go near her."

I spent some of my Christmas's at my aunts' house too. I am filled now with good memories thinking about those times. We cut the tree down from the large yard on the hill in back of the house. All the decorations were made by hand. We ate lots of popcorn and real candies on Christmas Eve and went to church across the road. I recited, "It Was The Night Before Christmas." For Christmas Day, Santa gave me an orange, the first one that I ever had. Oranges were a luxury. And I had a stocking of goodies. A doll and a monkey on a stick that went up and down when you pulled the string. It was a glorious time and I remember believing that I really saw Santa that night and heard his bells ring loud and clear.

Yes! My memories of my aunts, the three aunts, Aunt Adaline, Aunt Hylah and Aunt Caroline and their home in the country are wonderful!

## High School

In those days, at least two thirds never went on to high school. The parents felt their child knew all they needed to know at the end of Eighth Grade, and it was time to take care of the needs of the family-and they were big families then, five, six, seven kids. A lot of the kids also felt they were just ready to go to work and didn't see much in school. "Well, what else is there for us?" The girls would go into seamstress work or help out at home. The boys would go out on farms, work in their family's business or head to the factories. Some of them are mayors and lawyers and everything today. College was hardly even thought about. It was only for the wealthy. It wasn't seen as the necessity that it is today.

For me, high school was a continuation of the many things that involved my family. I did well in my studies but there were times when I was unhappy, especially when not being accepted in the social life of the school.

One class I remember is Latin. The teacher had an idea. She used Latin versions of Shakespeare's plays to teach. It worked-I remember I hated Latin but I loved those plays.

In my first year, everyone said I should try out for the dramatic club and I thought I would never make it because, who was I? They were all well to do people. But my parents and another girl's parents said try and so, with a little boost past my own poor self-image, I did. In the audition, I performed a poem where you have to cry then recite this piece where everything is wrong, everything is just awful. By gosh, I was the first freshmen to ever get in the dramatic club. We did The Cradle Song, the story of Jesus and a few others. I stayed with it for a few years, but things got harder for me. I got by but I wasn't enjoying school so much.

The proms were not for me because my family could not afford the expenditures. I solved some of my problems by working before and after school with a lady who had a stable of horses. A girl-friend, Betty, rode horses and talked about it in glowing terms. One day, I went to watch her and I felt the same way but I knew I couldn't afford it. The woman who owned the stables shared my mother's maiden name, DuBois. Our family trees probably could be traced back to the same original DuBois family of French Huguenots who settled New Paltz across the river.



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She was a character, this Mrs. DuBois. I asked her if there was something I could do to earn enough money to ride the horses. She said, simple enough, "Sure." In the morning I walked several blocks to the end of the city, the end of Innis Avenue-as far as you could possibly go it seemed to me. I cleaned the stables, watered and fed the horses. In return, in the afternoons, Mrs. DuBois taught me how to ride. After a year, I taught others. Of course, this special talent made up for a lot of things not right in high school for me. I could do the horseback riding and a lot of the other people couldn't. I loved being with horses. I loved to ride.

One year, I entered a horse in the Vassar College horse show and won second place. Now this would have been wonderful but my riding had actually won first place. The judges said my outfit (clothing) did not meet the requirements so I was penalized to second. I hadn't had the money to buy a proper horse riding outfit so I'd done my best using second hand materials. This truly soured my relationship with that world. I kept riding for a while but eventually I got a job, married and my life moved far away from the stables.

## International Regatta

A few more high school memories: Charles Lindbergh flew across the ocean solo and with a dream and a sandwich in his pocket. 1927 was the year and all of the schools closed at 10:30 after prayers for his safety. He made it....Lucky Lindy.

I also remember visiting one of the speakeasies during the "prohibition days." I was too young to take an active part but tagged along with an older friend. It was located in a house on lower Main Street. My girlfriend knocked on the door, asked for gin and they gave her gin.

Throughout my childhood, the International Regatta was held on the Hudson River just after the colleges got out in late May. It was a great day for Poughkeepsie. People came from near and far. Many colleges-Princeton, Yale, Cornell, Syracuse and many others-and countries were represented. Bleachers were put on flatbed railway cars on the west side of the Hudson in Highland. These trains were timed to go down the river with the boats tracking the race the whole way, watching the rowers in their push toward the finish line. Tickets for those seats were most expensive. When they built the rail-

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road bridge over the Hudson, connecting Poughkeepsie with Highland, that became a great place to watch too. Vendors sold concessions all day and the stores in town closed early so the shopkeepers could head down to the water. The city was filled with college boys, their families and friends. The great old radio announcers were there to let the rest of the world know who was in the lead. What a wonderful holiday! Years later, we lost the excitement of those days when the races were moved to Syracuse. Only a few people now can recall the times we had.

### NYC-finally at 24

Memories of my first trip to New York City will always remain a part of myself that wanted more. Even though I lived just 90 miles away up the Hudson, I was 24 years old when I finally made it to see the big city. A friend of mine assured me that I would "love" the train ride and to see the many hundreds of people, many shopping in the big stores. It was very breathtaking for me and our visit to the various stores could not be compared to our small stores at home. I remember the decorative windows, the merchandise so tastefully displayed and the faces of the clerks with much makeup and their high heels. But I really did not enjoy the hustle and bustle, the fast walking and the lack of personal contacts. After 2 days, I was exhausted and ready to go home.

For years after, my husband was often in the city playing saxophone in big bands and singing in choirs at many of the churches. My trips were few but memories are vivid-Broadway shows that I truly enjoyed. I stayed with my husband for three days exploring some of the town and visiting the large stores. I went to a ballet and a show with my youngest daughter which was a pleasure. And one time I sang for the King of Norway at Carnegie Hall-one of the thrilling events of my life. I was a member of the 100 Voices Community Mixed Chorus of Poughkeepsie invited to perform with the Dutchess County Philharmonic with Ole Windingstad conducting and Percy Grainger on piano. My husband Donald, who was singing at St. Luke's Chapel (Trinity Parish) in the City, assisted us. We presented "The Song of Norway" to a standing ovation from a sell-out audience. What a magical experience!

But for these moments and a few trips to visit family and friends or just get away, most of my life has centered on the place



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where I have lived and taught-a place where I have met and shared with people from around the world and where I have found every kind of child in so many incredible states of learning.

### Going to Class

There were no nursery schools when I was a girl because mothers, almost every single one, did not work outside the household. By the 1920s all grades were separate-we didn't have a little red school house with all grades in the same room. But even in high school, the students would stay in the same room while the teachers changed classrooms. I imagine this changed as materials-especially in the sciences, became more specific and elaborate.

At that time, science wasn't a big thing but geography was very stressed. Reading and writing were the cornerstone of the curriculum. There were no special education classes, no computers, no overhead projectors, televisions, cassette players or field trips. We learned with books and through what the teacher said. Students sat in chairs facing a blackboard, the teacher lecturing about a subject and asking questions. But there were innovations. I remember an English teacher I had who was great at poetry. We would recite poetry and act out poetry in high school. We put on plays of the stories we were required to read.

There was not much stress on what the higher ups in education gave the teachers to do. Teachers made their own lesson plans and taught in their own way. If they were good teachers, this allowed them to give more individual attention to students who needed it. They could see what was happening and adapt their lessons and teaching methods in different ways. Many of the methods didn't have a name or weren't even thought of as methods like they are now. They were based in practical problem solving. Teachers made their own examinations based on what they had taught the children.

There was an emphasis on morals. The teacher had power and in some ways was the most important person there was. Parents respected teachers a great deal and there was a lot of communication between teachers and parents. If there was a problem, a teacher would get on the phone and call the parents or vice versa. And as a kid, you didn't want the teacher calling home!

Today, in a vastly different society, teachers, have little con-

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trol over what they teach, how they teach, the examinations they give and how to handle behavior problems. They are generally now part of a large bureaucracy with standardized tests, lesson plans, social workers, psychologists, unions and a network of administrators. While there have been many important changes for the better, few recognize what we have lost. That is, the teacher only very rarely and often looking over their shoulder teach how they want to or have the time to go deeply into topics not included in the curriculum. Education has come very far in so many ways, but I believe we have lost a balance and have placed too many barriers between teachers and students. Teachers need freedom just as the child does. I was lucky to come at a time and find circumstances where I could reach the children in my own way and not be bogged down in paper work that took me far away from that classroom.

Perhaps this background gives some of the answer to why I was motivated to teach, to work with children, and how I approached being a teacher. I have always tried to first secure their respect, by showing respect for their needs and wishes. Every child is an individual, capable of mistakes and a child's relationship with a teacher should not be affected by these mistakes. I work to create situations which give the child the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging. Knowing that every child learns differently, to have success, I *must* use different methods to teach. Realizing that forced learning is always rejected, I try to be co-operative.

Through the years this was my approach each day. When I walked into a class filled with children, I immediately forgot all my problems. Nothing existed but the child, and how I could help enrich their lives. My life was in that classroom.

## What is education?

*School is a building that has 4 walls, with tomorrow inside.*

-L. Wattes

One of the first things a teacher will discover is that intelligence and even motivation is not sufficient for the world of language to unfold for many children.



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### What is Education?

Everyone has an attitude toward the 3 Rs. For some, education is the means to a better way of living. For others it is the process of teaching required skills. Some know it as an unpleasant memory of their childhood. For still others-too few!!-it is an endless pleasure. What is education? It is training in basic skills, character building and vocational preparation. Education is a continuous process for every person in every social situation where the person is both a teacher and a learner.

How do we teach? Educators say, "We are making progress; this new method is wonderful; we have tried it with a group of children and they have shown good results. This method is the answer to all of our problems. Lets apply this for use in the school system."

Therefore, it is praised, published and used in the public school system. The first 2 years it appears to be working for some children. One more year and the children are failing: not 2 in a class of 25, not 5 in the class, but twelve. What is wrong? Often one method is being applied to an entire classroom with all its variety of children. In this way, educators can create as many problems as they solve.

We must continue to seek and implement new methods and to create new learning environments but without abandoning methods that have worked in the past. There is not one right way-the question is, are we reaching this child? Do we need to try something different than we've tried with others? New methods should include past performances that have resulted in the child's growth in learning. Teaching children with learning disabilities and dyslexia and recognizing emotional problems must be part of the curriculum in every college course.

One thing is certain: no machine can replace the work of the teacher. We must create the right emotional climate for learning, remembering that at times it is the teacher alone who possesses the power to make a child happy or sad while motivating them to learn. Seek first the level of the child and all learning will take place.

## **Part II.** Nursery Rhymes-The Children's Home

*Today's children are tomorrow's future, and while there  
are children, there is hope.*

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**March 4, 1933**

People were without work, without food. There were long lines of humanity waiting for bread. And there was no hope. "The country seems to brood," an observer wrote, "as though death was touching it."

Thousands of people stood in the wind and rain under a sullen March sky and listened. "This Nation asks for action and action now. We must act and act quickly." The new President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, continued to speak. "In this, a dedication of a Nation, we humbly ask the blessings of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come." Then the flourish of cavalry bugles, and F.D.R., his face grim and set, entered his car to review the marchers in front of the White House.

Throughout the country the people listened to their radios. On that day, a new President gave hope to a frightened and bewildered people.

1933-This was the year that I had hoped to go to college to become a teacher. However, my plans were defeated by our country's depression and the lack of funds. Thirteen million people were desperately seeking employment. The machinery for caring and feeding the unemployed was breaking down everywhere. It was truly a very unhappy existence for many.

After high school I found part-time work in a department store called Wallace's on Main Street in downtown Poughkeepsie working one of the counters. I wore a nurse's uniform and sold dolls-but not for long. In 1935, a bill was passed by President F.D.R. giving base salaries to all workers of \$13.00 per week. We were all delighted and I left the Wallace Co. for a better job at \$15.00 per week at Smith Brothers restaurant. I was behind the counter selling candy. I loved this work and met some interesting people. Once a week the District Attorney from New York City came for candy. He purchased certain kinds that I packed for him and he gave me a tip of \$5.00 each time. When I first went to work at Smith Bros., Arthur Smith, one of the owners suggested that I eat all the candy I liked. I did this, and after three days I didn't feel so good. I just didn't want any more candy-Mr. Smith obviously had experience in these matters.

After a year at Smith Bros. a customer of mine told me about an opening for a position at the Children's Home. She knew of my



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love and caring for children and urged me to apply for the position.

I did apply and was hired as an assistant in the nursery. The head matron, Miss Ganison, was a qualified teacher with several years of working with children. She showed me the routine, explaining my duties, the daily program and told me a story about each child. She was an ideal mentor and each day showed progress in my work and gave me deep satisfaction.

During my years at the The Children's Home, I was guided by my love for little children, especially those without homes, without loving parents to share their needs, desires, and their feelings to give as well as to receive. Each one was "special" in the need for love, compassion and understanding.

### The Children's Home

The Children's Home, founded in 1847 as "The Home For The Friendless" and later known as the Poughkeepsie Orphan Home, was a private, non-profit organization caring for children, girls and boys ages 4 to 18. It continues today to be a facility serving dependent, neglected, and emotionally disturbed children on a 25 acre campus in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Its staff is dedicated to giving these children a positive living experience and an opportunity for them to realize that a good home life is possible and desirable.

There were 62 children living at the home. At that time, there were very few children of single parents but, of those, many were in need of a home. Many of the other children were from broken homes, some were abused and some without parents. A few were up for adoption but that was rare.

In the nursery, there were 16 under five years of age-the youngest being 18 months-taken care of by two matrons. My room was across from the children's dormitory, which consisted of 16 beds, each with a chest of drawers and a rack for slippers and shoes, a rug along side each bed and eight full side windows on the east side of the building. There were 26 boys on the second floor in cubicles with beds and chests, with one matron in charge. Her day started at 5:30 a.m. and ended at 8:30 p.m. She had a part-time aide that came at 2:00 p.m.. All of the children that were of school age rode their own "Children's Home Bus" to school and returned on the same bus.

There were 20 girls with sleeping quarters on the other side of



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the building. A few older girls had their rooms on the main floor. The dining room provided an eating area for all the children with a separate room for the staff.

My working hours were from 6:00 A.M. to 8:30 or 9:00 P.M., with two hours off in the middle of the day. There were many times that I assisted the night nurse in helping with sick children. My duty as the assistant was to help in caring for the children and to keep the dormitory, play room, dining room, and bathroom clean and polished. It was a long day with very little opportunity for socializing. And, with 16 little ones, it was sometimes difficult to care for all and meet their needs. My salary was \$25 a month, plus room and board.

At that time, the Home was operated by a woman. One man did the house repairs and other carpentry work when needed. This was not unusual. Today, a man is the Director and there are men on the staff.

Margaret Race was the director for most of the time I worked at The Children's Home. She was a very dedicated lady, endowed with much compassion and understanding of both her staff and the children. Margaret lived at "The Home" and was not married. Her background in children's work was excellent and she became the mother of many. She spent days and nights supporting staff and helping care for all the problems of the children. Eventually, she did marry a local business man and retired happily after a grand wedding at the home. She has since passed away but not without leaving a wealth of good deeds and good friends.

One night, around 2:00 A.M., Margaret received a call from the Social Services, asking for help with two children, age 3, who had been abandoned. She woke me and asked if I would go with her. This was my first experience of this kind and is one that I shall never forget. The children were found in an empty apartment, crying, dirty, and lying on the floor on torn newspaper. The bodies were covered with sores. We took them to the Home that night, bathed them, (this was difficult because of the condition of their bodies), and gave them food. They slept in Miss Ganison's room that night. In the morning, the Doctor and the nurse helped with their care. Their clothes were burned, they were given new clothes, and, being in the new surroundings with people who cared, produced two happy 3 year olds.

The children were twins, the girl was the strongest of the two, and more advanced in many ways. They lived at the Home for two years, and one day a couple came and asked to adopt the girl. Miss

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Ganison refused to have the two separated. They continued to be residents for two more years until a wonderful childless couple asked to adopt both children. The legal work was accomplished and the children received new parents. They continued to find acceptance and happiness in their new home.

Experiences like this one showed me how badly life-parents and society-can treat children. And how important it is to have places and people who will provide the care and love a child needs to grow up with hope and possibilities.

There were many happy times at the Children's Home. The older children at the Home went on field trips and on rare occasions to NYC. The little ones did not travel far from the Home unless a parent, relative, or friend took them out for a day. Even this was limited by the Director, who carefully screened all persons involved. Our Christmas was wonderful; 16 children hung stockings and waited for Santa. We stuffed the stockings and each child received something special that he had asked for. After the stockings were explored, everyone dressed, had breakfast, then we all went to the "parlor." There stood a huge tree with many, many presents.

There was fun in the winter, and a hill on the grounds for sleigh riding. In the summer, there were swings and slides, and a big sandbox at the foot of the hill. The older children went to camp in the summer and to the ocean with their teacher and counselor Judy. Judy was their "house mother" also. After years of tireless devotion, she still continues to volunteer her time, helping with homework, vacation time, and other areas where she is needed. She still lives on campus-this is her home and these are still her children. In 1990, she was recognized in a special ceremony given by the Friends of Eleanor Roosevelt at Val-Kill with an award that represented her years of service, courage, and compassion for her work.

Life working with children is full of stories, funny ones, sad ones, and happy ones. Like the times that Mrs. Otis T. Rockwell would bring her two Scottie dogs to entertain the children. They enjoyed her visits and they enjoyed playing with the dogs and listening to her stories. One day when she arrived, I was on hands and knees scrubbing the floors. She said "I am not here to check on your work, I am here to play with everyone." (Mrs. Rockwell was a very formal Presbyterian women!) That is what we did, play, Mrs. Rockwell, the dogs, the children, and me.



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Dr. Edith Meade was the doctor in charge of the children and staff and was very interested in many of our accomplishments. At her suggestion, the staff decided to make a quilt and a sewing area was set up in the living room. I worked on the quilt with other members helping in their spare time. When it was finished, Dr. Meade stitched her name in the corner and it was truly beautiful and still in use.

The children were a wonderful group. The youngest, age 18 months (parents unknown) had problems learning to talk and walk. When he started to creep, he sort of "hitched" with one knee bent off the floor. His words were few, but his growth and behavior were normal for his age. He was a very lovable child and the other children helped him in many ways.

One day, when the Board of Managers were attending their regular meeting, a member called attention to this particular child. She felt that he was retarded and should be removed to make way for another child. When I was told about this, I became very unhappy about the situation and approached the Director. She gave me permission to take him home with me on my days off. This special attention, away from the others, made him feel important and needed. This broke down the barriers he had to learning and worked wonders for his self concept. In a short time, he was walking and when, soon after, he started to talk you just could not stop him. His further growth produced a very happy, intelligent child. Donald stayed at the Home until he was ten years old; then he was adopted by a wonderful couple who cared for him, and helped increase his knowledge of himself and the world around him. At this writing, he is married, with a family of his own, and is Principal of a high school in another state.

I hoped to continue my studies while at The Children's Home. In the 1930's, 40s and 50's it was not of great importance to have a certificate or degree in education if you had knowledge or experience of the given subject. Therefore my goal was to take courses all the areas that were needed in my work with the children at the Home. I asked Ms. Race and after a few months she decided that it would be advantageous to all concerned if I could continue my education. I would have to use my off-duty hours and re-arrange my schedule but there would be just enough time to do it all. She arranged for me to take courses at Vassar College in child development.

Vassar College was one of the leading women's colleges in the United States and at that time the only school to provide the

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courses that I needed at the Children's Home. It was one of my life's fortunes to be living and working just a few blocks away. Along with standard courses in child development, I took classes in music therapy and art for the young child.

## John Dewey and The Progressive Method

*Such is the capacities, the fulfillment in truth, beauty and behavior, open to these children. Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that their own activities move in this direction toward such culmination of themselves. Let the child's nature fulfill its' own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science, art and industry the world now holds as its own.*

-John Dewey.

The method of teaching and working with the young child at Vassar was, in many ways, opposite of all that I had previously learned at the Children's Home. Whereas the Home focused on a more traditional structure, rules and discipline, the courses at Vassar taught a progressive method of education. At that time, one of the most influential teachers in the country was John Dewey. In the face of a changing, industrializing world, Dewey believed we had to initiate great reforms in education. His teachings were meant to act as bridges between the academy and the transforming society around us. Though his ideas were not immediately popular with lay people and established educators, it was being taught in the universities to a new crop of students-soon to be teachers.

Dewey made philosophy go to work. He held that the full meaning of an idea was apparent only when it was applied socially. Dewey opposed authoritarian instruction, learning by rote, and the separation of the school from society.

I could understand and relate to this progressive method in many ways. I realized that it meant that teaching was a continuing process, that every person in every social situation is both the teacher and the learner. Even today, the fact that all social interaction is educable and all education occurs through social interaction is frequently overlooked. An environment provides raw material but a child acquires ideas, habits and attitudes through the many ways of interact-



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ing with other children, parents, teachers and the wider society. With the help of the nursery school teacher, Mary Dayo, who was familiar with and enthusiastic about the progressive school teaching, I applied some of the methods that I learned at Vassar at the Children's Home. However, we had to constantly take into consideration that it was not just a school but a home where the "home situation"-chores and a more structured way of living-is involved with learning and play.

When possible, we endeavored to use his methods with the child, his society, school and curriculum, including use of the daily answers to the children concerning their needs. It was their home and their wishes and hopes that were first in my thoughts. These little ones were confused at times, but I was sure of one thing, they knew that they were loved. We created situations for making choices. For instance, we let them pick out their clothing, the games that they wanted to play, even select the food that they could eat. Many other choices were made on occasions when it was possible. This may sound very normal now, but giving children a choice in what they would do or think was not a standard practice at all in those days.

Some of these approaches met with resistance-some board members and staff believed we shouldn't "fix" something that wasn't "broken" or that we were not strict enough with the children. Other methods were simply not understood. One day the head cook became quite angry because she had insisted that the children eat every bite of the food that was placed before them.

Time proved that our methods were the best and that even very young children can and do make choices that bring joy, satisfaction, and a feeling of good self-knowledge and self-esteem.

## A New Life

When I didn't have class during my off hours at the Nursery, I sometimes read school books and rested. I also did some sewing for staff members, dress alterations and made a few dresses for them. This was time consuming but I enjoyed it. Eventually a young man started coming around to see me. His name was Donald Taylor and I had known about him for quite a while but it took him some time to notice me.

I first saw Donald in high school. He played saxophone and

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clarinet in the school band for dances and games. He never paid any attention to me. One reason is that he always played the instruments with his eyes closed. The next time we met was in the Wallace Company. He worked in the Men's clothing department where he later became the buyer and then the manager of the store. The first time I saw him there he had on a tweed coat with a pleat up the back. He was tall and thin and walked with his head up in the air. I remember thinking, "Oh, he thinks he's pretty good." But we got to know each other working closely together at Wallace's. When I left for another job, we'd see each other on occasion but we didn't start going together till almost two years later. He was interested in the Home and helped me with different projects with the children, especially ones involving music. He was also very shy getting to it, but we decided to get married.

Once word got out about the wedding, everyone at the "Home" was helping me, including our night supervisor, Mrs. Pauline Haddon, who I especially remember. She was teaching me how to iron a man's shirt. Because Don was the men's clothing buyer at The Wallace Co. and all shirts were made of cotton, he would be using one or two shirts a day and I needed to know how to have them looking perfect. Pauline was a great teacher. I also had to make plans to move out of the Home and start a new married life.

1940 was a very special year for me. On February 25, 1940, I was married to Donald at Miller Chapel in Princeton University. It was a small wedding with the family and the graduating class of ministers of the college. Rev. Gordon Roberts performed the ceremony. This was his first service and it was his class in attendance. Because our country was at war, we were asked to conserve on everything (weddings included!). We spent a few days in New York City, seeing the sights and were guests of the Norman Vincent Peale at the Marble Collegiate Church.

We had our share of calamity that first day. First we'd planned to hear a big band that night where Don knew and admired the tenor sax player. Turned out that they were off that night. So we just had a dinner and came back to our hotel. Just as we got settled in our room, water exploded from everyplace. The pipes had gone bad and water stretched out over the floor into the bedroom. We tried to change rooms but the place was booked and it was too late to head to another



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hotel. We laughed a lot about our luck then moved out of there in the morning.

"Where are your inner braces?" I remember Norman Vincent Peale delivering this message. He was a great one at bringing what was happening every day into his sermons. That Sunday he spoke of not losing your self-discipline and sense of right and wrong no matter the circumstances you were in. Especially he directed his talks at the sailors coming in and out of the Manhattan ports, marrying girls they had just met. He was a dynamic person and a wonderful speaker. Marble Collegiate Church got to be known so well-a real celebrity sermon-they put chairs and speakers in a loft next door to hold the overflow of people.

It wasn't until fifty-five years later, 1995, that I met him in person. He received an Eleanor Roosevelt award at Val-Kill in Hyde Park, the next town up from Poughkeepsie. Don and I met his wife and we told him about the time we saw him. He seemed very touched by the memory. As for us, those early days in New York were truly a remarkable experience that we will always remember.

The days passed and I was busy with the children at the "home" and my new life at our home, an apartment on Garden Street in Poughkeepsie. Not too long after getting settled together, a young boy at the Home, Tommy, age 4, who had no relatives, drew our attention and love. He was a sweet little boy but rather sad because of the new situation with the other children. Tommy would watch the other children with some special friend or relative but with no one for himself. He began to give my husband Donald special attention, which Donald kindly received. We spoke to social workers and others in charge and were told that the child could not be adopted or leave the "home" at that time because he was a ward of the state. It turned out that his parents were patients at Wassauc Institute, a state home for the mentally handicapped. We were saddened by this news, but we continued to bring Tommy home with us at certain times. In May, I learned of my pregnancy and being in good health, I continued to work at the "home."

That year there was a very special event for all of us at the Home, another wedding-this one in the large living room at the "Home." Miss Martha Turner, who was the lovely, gracious lady, supervisor of the girls, was married to Mr. Paul Hasbrook, a local prominent businessman. All the children were there to hear Dr.

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Charles Gilbert Spross (see Index), a famous accompanist and composer, play the "Wedding March" and other appropriate music, accompanied by Donald singing in his lovely tenor. Donald and Charles had met playing in bands and churches in the city and Don arranged for him to come to the home. It was a beautiful service and a very unique one for the Home.

Martha and Paul were married for many years and eventually provided a secure and loving home for Donald B., a child resident of the Home. They have since passed away, but not without leaving Donald and other children a better, happier place than when they found them. They shall be remembered.

After the birth of our first daughter, Donna, over the Christmas Holiday in 1940, I continued to work part-time at The Children's Home, also at the Livingston Day Care Center. I substituted for the night supervisor at the Children's Home on various occasions, checking every hour on the children in the nursery, checking all outside entrances to be sure that they were locked. I had a clock to be punched in different departments and in the kitchen. One night, I was punching the clock in the large pantry off the kitchen and a rat, I mean a big rat, stood in the corner looking at me. I took hold of a nearby broom, he showed his teeth, I was not brave, I dropped the broom and shut the door and ran. A trap was set the next day, and they caught him! A big one!

## The Livingston Wartime Project

Some things changed at the Home during the war years but most things went on as before. There were food rations, lights out early, and some new rules and regulations. The nursery suppers were served at 4:50 P.M. and the staff would be served at 5:00 P.M.. This left the nursery staff very little time to eat and early evenings became a rush to get everything done before we had to darken the Home. Because of the rations, it was of great importance that we store enough food for the coming winter. We did a lot more canning of vegetables and jams.

Early in the war, I answered an ad for an assistant nursery position for the Livingston War Project and got the job. This was a new program and I took the position partly to earn a bit more money,



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partly to try a new environment from the Children's Home. After a year of learning a great deal, I decided to return to the Children's Home because the methods of teaching conflicted greatly with my experience, making it a difficult situation for me to succeed.

The program, essentially a nursery for children under five, was created for children of doctors from Vassar College and Vassar Hospital who were involved in the war. They gradually began to accept other children because there was such a demand. Nursery schools were practically unheard of back then, but now, with men engaged in the war, the women were working and needed a place to bring their young children.

Vassar College helped supervise the project. The girls studying child development-Vassar was still entirely female-came and did cooperative work. Because of the progressive method of Dewey that they used, where they believed in letting the child explore, touch, feel and make simple decisions for themselves, there was friction with some older personnel who disapproved. The cook (again!) was one. She used to make the children eat everything and they'd pick the food up in their little hands and throw it. There'd be great arguments between the Vassar folks and the more traditional personnel about what was acceptable behavior for the children.

Coming from the very structured environment of the Children's Home to an all out immersion in applied theory proved too great a change for me. I remember feeling, "This is too much for me," with all the noise and running around. And Donna, who was three or four at the time and joined me there, wasn't happy. It was almost a shock.

Nonetheless, I felt and still feel that many of Dewey's ideas were right. In fact, many were just common sense. But as an adult, we often never stop to think of a child as having any brains at all, as if we have to teach them everything right down to how to put one block on top of another. But the truth is, you can let them try and do it themselves and you know what you will find: they can. If you watch children play, you see them teaching themselves, discovering solutions and new perspectives. From the very beginning, many of Dewey's ideas resonated with me and I included them. For instance, at the Children's Home, we had a child pick out his own clothes to wear saying, "You can pick them out but if you pick them out, you have to wear them." Basically, over my teaching career, I used Dewey's ideas where they worked and made common sense and didn't use them

when I felt they went too far

Dewey's writings were sometimes misinterpreted, misapplied or applied to the extreme. This I realize now was what had caused me great frustration. Here's an example: When I began working as a night nurse at the Vassar Summer Project (see below), the Head Nurse trained me a little bit but she knew I had a background with children so she pretty much left me to do the job. I enjoyed it and made very good money (compared to the Children's Home). But this is what happened that stands out in my mind: the person in charge on my shift told me about a little boy who was going on three. She said he will have a BM and he likes to decorate the walls with the product of his efforts. She said, "Now you don't interfere with him. You just let him do it then you clean it off afterwards."

"Make no effort to train him, to put him on the pot?" I asked.

"Oh no," she said. "Oh no. When he's ready he will."

Well, I went through a couple nights of that and just could not take it. He was getting a glorious feeling decorating those walls with his BM, but he had no idea that it was not a healthy thing to do, nor was it a healthy thing for others. There was no discipline there. You don't have to hit a child or abuse him in any way to just show him the pot. I walked in one evening and he got all ready for bed. I took him to the pot and said, very emphatically, "This is for you. Do BM here." That was all there was to it. He did it and I got all the praises in the world. They believed for everything that the right way was to leave the child to do something when he is ready. What I didn't tell them but wanted to was, "Yes, he was ready, but I *told* him you do it there."

When a child is doing something that is dangerous the child should be disciplined-like a hot stove, "Don't touch that because it is hot and it hurts." What is more difficult to identify is when a behavior is unhealthy or just part of a stage that will soon pass; how to direct a child towards a certain behavior without damaging his sense of self or creating unnecessary guilt.

Many of Dewey's ideas fell out of favor. Others were still respected but fell out of practice because they took too much time or money to bring into practice in the classroom. It may takes weeks or months for a child to make his own discovery while it may take just minutes for a teacher to give instructions. Our society just does not have the kind of patience many of Dewey's ideas asked for. However, at a time when there were no field trips and most children learned and were taught about the world through books or the teacher telling



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them, Dewey's methods entered the classroom to stay. He believed children should learn by touching, seeing, learning about and listening to the actual things. Instead of reading about a boat, go down to the river, get on one and go through every piece. The most powerful way for the child to learn about the world is by experiencing the world first hand and this should be encouraged as much as possible.

Eventually, I left the Livingston Day Care Center when the conflicts between personnel proved to be unacceptable to me. The lack of a Director or a source of direction, the inability to organize and to work with the children instead of being a taskmaster-all of this, I considered harmful towards the growth and the necessity of the child. I returned to The Children's Home frustrated but with more knowledge of the young child, and how he reacts to other situations, places and people.

## Vassar Summer Institute

In 1945, I attended the Vassar Summer Institute, while working on premise as a night nurse with children of two to four years of age. My daughter, Donna, age four, also attended and adjusted very well with the entire program. During the day, Donna stayed in the nursery, while I took courses in music therapy for children and child development. It was both a difficult summer because of the lack of sleep and not being able to spend time at home, and a wonderful, invaluable experience. My daughter blossomed and I learned so much from the teachers involved and from working with the children. I spent a month in these surroundings and continued to have this summer position for the next two years, when my second daughter was born, making it impossible for me to continue. Then years later, in the summer of 1957, I returned as a student enjoying and learning before returning to the Little Red School House in the fall. By then, The Institute had become famous all over the world for its innovative teaching and for actively working with parents, teachers and children together and separately.

The Institute's Children's School was on campus at Cushing Hall. There were 114 children from four to ten years of age, parents, other adults, and teachers. The children lived at Cushing Hall, while the parents lived in Main Hall. The parents saw their children from 8:15 to 9:15 daily and for three hours on Sunday afternoon. The two

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groups operated independently. Headed by Miss Eveline Omwake, of the Yale Child Study Center, the school was staffed entirely by people for whom children were their primary interest.

What an individual child learns depends largely on what he is offered, including music (instrumental and singing) all kinds of nature study, science, and athletics. Miss Omwake said in one of her talks, "The teachers show children what it is to be a learner by learning with them, learning new songs or facts about turtles. The children learn that it is safe to learn and also that it is safe not to know." There was overnight camping for the older children and they built an Indian wigwam, made headdresses and bows and arrows. Later, a grand ceremony was presented to the parents.

For the children at the Institute, this was a powerful experience living and being an active, creative part of a group which transcended even while it included their only immediate family. The adult registrants took at least one of the three basic courses: Family Relationships, Education or Community Planning. There were other courses in child development, literature, art, music and religion offered on the assumption that a more broadly educated person is a better parent or teacher. Classes were conducted on a discussion basis and the guest speakers were Mrs. Roosevelt, Dr. Margaret Mead, Dr. Milton Seenn, and Henry Noble McCracken, President of Vassar at that time.

Somehow, whether the topic under discussion was Chinese-American relationships, Greek Philosophy, or integration of schools, it always seemed to pivot around the family and home. It was the people of the Institute that made parents and teachers feel the value and importance of the contribution they could make toward co-operative living in the community and through the community to the world. We were privileged to have this experience together. And I can only imagine the long term benefits to society as a whole if more families were engaged in this way. At the least, we can share the message and make what we learn a permanent part of our lives.

While at the Summer Institute in 1945, I was fortunate to meet and talk with Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Mary Langmuir Essex, (who was Mary Fisher, Director of the Institute), and Henry Noble McCracken. The teaching of Dr. Fisher was the very breath of the organization. Then there was Mr. Hans Forelicher, humorous and charming, who wrote the following poem that expressed the aims and achievements of The Institute:



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### And These Three Are One

It is indeed one,  
That man shall find and know  
The beauty of his world  
And in his search becomes  
More beautiful himself.

It is intended, two,  
That we shall grow  
Uniting, as we can  
High thinking  
And a feeling man.

It is intended, three  
That I shall be  
Friend to my neighbor,  
As he is to me.

How can I think alone of me,  
When I am more in harmony.

### My Nursery School

I continued to work at the Children's Home while our daughter grew and our lives accepted the new changes after the war. We built a new home in the Fairview district of Poughkeepsie, what was then a fairly open track of land that now is almost completely residential, and I became interested in the local school, Violet Avenue. I joined the PTA where I held different positions in the group for many years. In 1945 I was approached by the Principal to teach a second grade class. I assured him that I was not a certified teacher and could not accept that position. He said, "I know of your work with children, you may not be certified but you are qualified." I was indeed pleased and flattered with the knowledge that he considered my teaching at his school, but I refused his offer. It was not the right time to move on.

Our second daughter was born on July 25, 1948, and I



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remained at home for a few years caring for my girls although I continued taking courses of study when available. When Deborah was three years old, I returned to the Children's Home in the nursery. Our oldest daughter was a full time student in the public school and Deborah was with me. She enjoyed the group and made many friends. Deborah celebrated her third birthday with the nursery children. I remember! The candles on the large cake glowed with friendly faces smiling and they sang "Happy Birthday to You." Deborah cried! When I asked her why, she said, "I am so happy because I have so many friends." There were fifteen children singing to her, with love.

In 1951, after much soul-searching and with the support of many friends, I left the Children's Home for good and started a nursery school in my home. The physical arrangement of the house was conducive to the needs of the child-one large room, a bathroom and sink off the room, an entrance and exit out to an enclosed yard, swings, a sandbox, and other outdoor equipment was available. I obtained a state license and had a fire department inspection. The State of New York allowed the acceptance of six children, 3 to 5. Because at that time there were very few nursery schools, I had five children apply for entrance in a few days which brought in a salary of \$2 a morning. It was a delightful experience-my youngest daughter was in the group, much to her delight, and the days passed quickly by. I was free to do things my own way, to use many methods to teach the children and I learned much from them by observing their reactions in many situations.

As children's playthings are their tools, their organization is an important factor of the play. There were blocks of different sizes, small dolls, blankets, doll clothes, small tables, chairs, and a set of shelves holding drawing and modeling materials and puzzles. Each child had an individual cubby for his own box of crayons and scissors.

Play is the life of children and their enjoyment in their activities was my biggest objective. Pages could be written about the children's block building. Observation shows their play at first was chiefly the reproduction of home experiences. They made small outline houses, porches, a doll was put to bed and covered with blankets. Sometimes, a skyscraper and garage. Our outdoor sessions were always appreciated and we took trips into the environment when I could secure a parent to help. We had lunch that I had prepared ahead of time. They poured their own juice and took turns in serving food.

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After lunch, they took a rest on their cots while I played suitable music.

In nursery school, a good time must be had by all, which should result in good health and steady growth in control of body and in understanding of one's world.

I had decided that I was doing so well that I would hire somebody to help and enable an increase in students. Then another opportunity came my way and all my plans changed.

**Part III.** Once Upon A Time: The Little Red School  
House

*Let no child be demeaned nor have his words diminished because of our ignorance or inactivity. Let no child be deprived of discovery because we lack the resources to discover the problem. Let no child, ever, doubt himself or his mind because we were unsure of our commitment.*

-Allen Martin



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In April, 1940, the Welfare League for Retarded Children Inc. was chartered under the corporation laws of New York State. As a non-sectarian, non-profit group, it was dedicated to the welfare advancement for mentally retarded children. The Welfare League embarked upon a program of Recreational Rehabilitation at Letchworth Village. In 1947, in cooperation with the Administration, a program for medical research was instituted with a double objective: First, and most important to humanity was prevention; second, to promote the vital need for the improvement in the lives of the afflicted children. A well-equipped laboratory was established and 500 mothers, who were members of the Welfare League, gave samples of their blood to evaluate its possible contribution towards retardation. The results were published in the American Journal of Diseases of Children. In 1951, Governor Thomas Dewey recommended an initial appropriation for medical research and designated Letchworth Village as the research center for the Department of Mental Hygiene.

This began a movement of sorts in New York State towards questioning how retarded children were regarded and treated. Parents in particular began to come together to seek more knowledgeable care and learning environments not just places for the children to be placed outside of society.

In the late forties in a town in the Mid-Hudson Valley, my lifelong home of Poughkeepsie, there was a group of parents seeking help for their "special children." They had been told by their physicians and others that their only hope was to institutionalize their children. Allan and Harriet Raymond, who were the parents of a "special child," firmly believed that programs could be developed that would tap the potential of each child. They were committed to the learning process and the individual attention that would enable these children to live in society and not apart from it. Something better than an institution was possible.

The Raymonds did hours of research and contacted people from other states and organizations to find out what was being done in the nation and to consider the prospects for programs in our area. Encouraging news came from the North Carolina Junior Chamber of Commerce who told them of a local schooling program for the retarded that was started by the Jaycees in Raleigh, N.C. On the opposite end of the spectrum they received an article from the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Tulsa, Oklahoma that stated the prevalent view at the

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time: "The normal child receives his schooling and the "idiot" is institutionalized, but the child in between remains at home, unless the family can afford the expense of a special private school."

The Raymonds and other local parents of special children, however, believed that ALL children were entitled to an education and that the state and local governments should support the endeavor.

After more contacts and meetings with other educational personnel, the Raymonds were inspired by an article in "The Readers Digest," written in 1947 by Bernadine Schmidt, who confirmed many of their own (Raymonds) beliefs. Ms. Schmidt was an advocate, activist and thinker dedicated to educating the learning disabled and to creating schools that provide the right environment for special learning. Her methods had spread. She'd began 73 schools in the U.S., one in Toronto, Canada, and one in Bombay, India. The Raymonds met with Ms. Schmidt, who assured them that worthwhile programs could be developed that would aid the children to lead lives of greater self-fulfillment and independence. They also learned that Ms. Schmidt had definite requirements for initiating a special school. She said, "It must be sponsored by a civic group so that it will have continuity. There must be no less than 15, nor more than 20 children enrolled. No child should be excluded because of too low an IQ." Her belief was that, "The future of some of these children staggers the imagination." The Raymonds were so encouraged by this meeting that they returned home to prepare the groundwork for a school. They joined forces with other parents, among the first enlisted were the Van Kleecks, Crawshaws, Gretschniders, Williams, and Ahearns.

The next step was to find all the information needed to establish a school. From the Special Education Clinic and Teachers College of Columbus, Mississippi, they received the information they needed. It included an agreement by the sponsors to accept the financial and business responsibilities of a school including the operating costs-salary of the teachers, the cost of renting a building to hold the school, equipment, etc. The sponsoring group also set up a Steering Committee, assigned the actual task of teacher selection and employment. The Steering Committee would also act as the Board of Directors for any business problems that may arise. Thus, the Dutchess County Association For The Mentally Handicapped Children was formed. Their Charter read as follows: "To voluntarily assist the slow and mentally retarded child and to ascertain through



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study and research, the problems and causes of mental retardation and means for improving the condition of the child."

Love, compassion, and a tremendous will to help handicapped children was the root of the parents movement to establish "The Little Red School House."

The Constitution and By-Laws of the Association for the Mentally Retarded was approved and adopted at a meeting of the Association on February 25, 1952. The basic philosophy of education *for all* children recognizes the need for discovering the potentialities of each child. Their aim was to foster wholesome growths in full measure for *each* child, with regard to and for the child's abilities, his limitations, and his possible contribution to society. They recognized that the retarded child is not different than the normal, only in the degree of his learning processes, and that the need for love, security, recognition, and success is the same, except that they need more individual attention so they may be helped to adjust to life's situation.

A screening committee, under Dr. Sara Hirsdansky, retired psychiatrist of the New York City School System, prepared case histories of 24 children, and from these children, they selected their first class. On October 6, 1952, The Little Red School House opened on Mill Street with 5 children, one teacher, and volunteers from Bennett and Vassar College. The following year, the enrollment grew to 19 children. The School took extra rooms at the Congregational Church and added a teacher for the younger children. In 1954, the program was so large that they moved to Browne Hospital, which was located at the site of the present Dutchess Community College. This also later became the site of the Cerebral Palsy Clinic. Speech therapy and some educational classes were made available at this new location. The Association also changed its name to the Dutchess County Association for Retarded Children (ARC).

This was a period of growth-by the children and staff. It was a testing time, a time that involved changing locations of the school, the selection of teachers, and learning of the children's abilities and placement. There was a constant influx of new teaching methods. It was a time that the parents asked for a stronger academic program and a good physical program. Some teachers had been handicapped with clerical work. Others disagreed with the programs that were used.

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It was apparent that the staff needed more contacts with other schools and more direction from others involved with the teaching of the mentally retarded child. After many meetings and discussions, the ARC contacted Katherine Lynch, who was director of several hundred classes for children of retarded mental development in the New York City school system. She knew the whole range of teaching and training retarded children from beginners through obtaining jobs for the graduates. She inspired the association with the thought that their children could become citizens, whether in the world, the community, or the home. The ARC also contacted Miss Mae Carden, whose method teaching had proved successful in over 100 schools, including Wassaic School, Buckley Schools For Boys in New York City, and at the Emma Willard Day School. Arrangements were made for the teachers to take a course of instruction in the Carden method. The teachers also visited Wassaic to observe the success of the methods used there. Mrs. Carden visited on several occasions to share her methods and spend time helping the teachers improve their techniques.

Other progress was made. A recommendation from the Board of Directors resulted in the hiring of an executive secretary to help take over duties so the teachers could concentrate on the training and education of the children. A schedule of volunteer workers at school was started under the supervision of Mrs. Vivian Erdrich. Mr. Stephen Puff, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation in five counties, including Dutchess, and the Senior Counselor in the New York State Education Department, was asked to work on the Curriculum Committee. He obtained state aid for some vocational training for the older children. The Poughkeepsie School Superintendent also gave permission for his art supervisor to guide the teachers in suitable art work for the children.

These programs and methods of teaching were not the total answer for learning, but this was the beginning of progress. The school continued to grow in size and knowledge.

## Everyone Can Learn: My First Class

*We must have a place where children can have a whole group of adults they can trust.*



In 1952, I was still involved with the nursery school program in my home. It was a very successful endeavor and I was looking forward to securing an assistant and enlarging my group. Then, I was approached by Mrs. Raymond in regard to joining the staff of The Little Red Schoolhouse. Mrs. Raymond and I had known each other since our childhood and Donald was a boyhood friend of her husband. She was aware of my work over the past decade. I, however, had little training in the field of "retardation" and felt that I was not qualified. She assured me that my efforts at The Children's Home, the courses at Vassar College, and my success with the nursery school was a necessary background for the teaching at The Little Red Schoolhouse.

She asked me to come to the school for a week and then to give her my answer. I agreed and in one week my whole life changed. That was what I wanted to do and the help needed for these children was so vital, so necessary. I disbanded my nursery school, helping to find other places for the children and joined the staff of The Little Red Schoolhouse. I also made arrangements to turn my educational pursuits in the direction of this special field. I was able to take courses at Columbia and New York Universities by going to Newburgh, N.Y. and Orange Community College after school and evenings.

My teaching involved children with brain damage, others who were deaf, autistic or had Downs Syndrome. It was a challenge, difficult at times but extremely rewarding. This was the beginning of many changes in the system and it was the first time in our history that these children were recognized as having a potential for learning. I was the aide to the teacher in charge, a lovely, compassionate lady, Mrs. Bessie Payne, whom I learned to care for and understand. However, we did differ in our approaches to the children, their needs and ability to comprehend and follow through with the daily tasks.

Each child is different, therefore a different approach should be used to obtain results in all areas of his (her) development. At that time, it was assumed that these children were incapable of learning any subject matter. Society only wanted for them to learn to sit still and listen, to learn the right way to reply to an adult's inquiry, the right way to do problems, and the right way to keep in line during a fire drill. My thoughts were different. I believed then and still do now



that each child has potentialities for growth in all areas and that the education of children and their teachers is society's greatest tool for improving itself.

The basic needs of all children are the same. Children of all ages need an atmosphere of warmth in which to thrive. They need the warmth of close, honest human contacts, and the feeling that adults-teachers and parents, especially-like them, are interested and enjoy them. The handicapped child needs all of this, even more than the normal child, as experience has shown us that many of these children have been over-protected or neglected and not given the opportunity to learn to care for themselves in even the simplest ways.

It was our role to help these children develop self-control so they could begin their path towards becoming socially accepted, happy children. It was important that we teach functional activities that will develop self-help. These children remain in the manipulative stage longer and become frustrated more easily. They have short attention spans and have less creative ability than other children of similar chronological age. Their degree of reasoning, problem solving, following directions, and communication are their problem. In language, the variations in their ability range from those who use sounds and gestures to those who speak in complete, clear sentences. Observation of emotional development shows that a few children have acceptable control in some group activities, while a larger number are either hyperactive and/or aggressive, withdrawn, and passive. We do not know what role color plays in the lives of these children, but we do know that they learn colors very slowly.

All equipment should be of sturdy construction and should enable the children to experience success-not overly complicated, technical or fragile.

My first class was composed of six children, chronological age of 4 1/2 to 8 years, with mental ages of 3 to 5. Two children were brain-damaged at birth, one was autistic, one deaf, and two were Down's Syndrome. Two of the group were extremely hyperactive, and two had little or no speech.

Our daily schedule was very similar to most nursery schools: Opening conversations, salute the flag, day and month of the year, season, weather, and special days, handiwork, art and music.

I disagreed with some of the procedure. I felt that we needed more play and music. Much of play therapy has been denied the hand-

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icapped child since the first time that they were diagnosed as a child with problems. In place of play, they were taught how to dress properly, eat properly, and speak only when spoken to. All of this was done so that the child would appear to be normal and look like other children. They were seldom, if ever, given the opportunity to experience the joy of learning through play.

Play is experience in life for a child. They learn through all their senses and all their muscles. Small children will smell the world with their noses and take in the world with their fingers, touching, their body balance, even their tongues. Watch a child at play. Doesn't he remember an engine through sound and music images? Doesn't he ring his bell, blow off steam, and go puffing around the room? Doesn't this mean that he took his engine through his senses and muscles? In his play, he recalls his experiences. Without it, an important part of learning is stopped. Play is more than exercise, it becomes educational and is another time of growth to observe.

Drawings are a kind of play with crayons and paints. We should let the child see and hear through their own eyes and ears without always interpreting, explaining, and pointing out our observations. Provide them with a suitable setting for learning and let them learn.

It was not an easy role trying to teach children that are not supposed to be able to learn but neither was it an impossible role. Children in general are not easy-they require patience, love and forethought. I enjoyed the role because I enjoyed working with these "special children."

I did try to express my feelings regarding the learning methods and structure of the day, and had some cooperation from the Director, Mrs. Helen Wolpert, who was a most sympathetic person. She agreed on my theories of more play and music for the children. She provided books for the teachers to read so they could be helped in the feeling of child development. The Art Instructor from the public school also would come to work with the children and share ideas and give instruction to the teachers.

Miss Lynch, who continued to play an active role, along with Miss Carden, suggested that in teaching Math, to use peg boards and crayons to help them gain concepts of numbers. She said they should do something different every day but learn the same lesson. She spoke about teaching material and suggested more "hands-on" experience. She was critical when speaking to the head nursery teacher concern-



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ing the method used in "telling time." One should have the children prepare clocks of construction paper so each child had his own and could move the hands. She said, "The teachers should use all the possible senses of the child." In this case it would be touch as well as sight.

She told the teachers to review, review and review, and added that she (the teacher) was teaching a beautiful lesson, but she was not teaching the children. This was one of the theories that I had been working on, but I had not been successful. I was pleased by the approval of Miss Lynch, who was a well-known educator. There was a question concerning out-door play for the children. Miss Lynch said that it was very necessary. Although some teachers and parents could not see the reason for this, I felt that it should be included in the entire program. Although at that time we had to follow their wishes, I continued to hope that they could be educated in the importance of out-door exercise and the benefit of the social contact with the other children in the school.

In this entirely new word of learning that we were creating, time flew by and the children showed progress very slowly but positively. They played with blocks, small cars and engines, and they drew-some drew just lines, occasional circles, although some who were more advanced created pictures of people and houses.

A "special" story about a "special" boy, a Downs Syndrome eight-year old, mental age of four: He had little speech but he was happy and cooperative. His problem was that he was not toilet trained. His case was an exception to the rule as we decided to accept him into the group on a trial basis. Somehow I thought that I could teach him how to use the facilities. He was very interested in cowboys and Indians (a big promotion at that time). He would imitate Indians and say "Bang Bang." Sometimes there would be tears when he had to go to the bathroom. One day, following two days of changing diapers and sensing that he had to relieve himself, we both dashed into the bathroom, removed his diapers, put his fingers in the air and said "Bang Bang - do it now." And he did. That was the beginning of the end of diapers, and a big step in his growth.

Finally, they were allowed to go out-of-doors for play. A joyous day! They took walks, they played in the sand box, on swings and slides. We introduced three-wheel bicycles and carts.

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Transportation was an important issue that both parents and teachers had discussed. Because the school-age child had been refused admission to public school, transportation had also been denied. In June, 1954, a group of teachers and parents decided to go to the capitol, Albany, to present their problems and request for aid in transportation. Arrangements were made and the trip took place. It was a short session. The members of the State Legislature that were involved in transportation gave us little satisfaction, saying, and I quote one leader, "We are sorry, but this is impossible and I question if there ever will be public transportation for the retarded child." A group of unhappy parents and teachers left the session with heavy hearts and feelings of rejection. I questioned the entire procedure and felt that although this was one step backward, we were going ahead in so many other ways.

### **Richard's Little Red Boots**

Many stories have come from the Little Red Schoolhouse, but the story of Richard's little red boots is a special one. It is about Bessie Payne, the head Nursery School teacher, who didn't arrive at school one morning in February, 1955. I had finished my work at 2:00 PM and went home shortly afterward. Soon, I received a call from a parent asking me if it would be possible for me to pick up Richard's red boots. He had left them at school and he couldn't go outdoors without them. I lived a short distance from the school and also the parent. On arrival at school, the director, Mrs. Wolpert, said that she was very concerned about Bessie, as she had never missed school and always called in an emergency. She could not reach her and she had no car, so she asked if I could take her to Bessie's house. To Bessie's we went.

She lived on the second floor apartment. As soon as we opened the door, a strong odor of gasoline greeted us. We dashed up the stairs, opened all the windows, and turned off the burner on the gas stove. Apparently, the water in the kettle had boiled over, putting out the gas fire, but the burner was left to do the damage. Bessie was in bed but unconscious. I could not reach the police or the hospital-so much red tape! But I did get the Fire Department. Dr. Rogers, who was involved with The Little Red School House, came and took her



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directly to the hospital. Bessie apparently had been boiling water for tea, returned to bed while waiting for the hot water and fell asleep. When the kettle boiled over, the water put the flame out leaving the gas to fill her home. There was some brain damage, due to lack of oxygen for such a length of time, but she was alive and would hopefully recover in time. I always believed that Richard's little red boots saved her life.

This accident changed my position. At school in March, 1955, Mrs. Mimi Stambrook and I were teachers of a new class. Mrs. Payne did return later with a smaller class and a volunteer to help. She was physically better but still coping with the after-effects of the damage. She needed time and reassurance that she would fully recover, which the future proved to be true. She was able to cope with the smaller class. Also, she started a choral group with the older children that was most helpful for both her and them. Time was the healer and her faith would see her through.

The new class was wonderful. It was composed of ten children, a trainable group. Mimi was very musical and played the piano at different times for the children. Our opening exercises were happy ones, filled with song and sometimes dance. Music, a gift from Heaven. It calms the restless heart-the best therapy for the soul. Music knows no race, color, or creed.

There was a child, David, age 7, who had been with us for a short time. He had a vision problem and paralysis in his right side. His work proved to be acceptable for his age, but there was something that I sensed was missing. He usually arrived later in the morning, after we had finished our opening exercises. One particular morning, he arrived earlier. I sat down with the other children and waited for Mimi to start playing the piano. A few minutes later he stood up and then he laid down, put his ear on the wooden floor and started to tap time with the music. I reached for two blocks that were on a rack behind me, stood behind him and loudly clapped the wooden blocks. He didn't move a muscle-the boy was deaf! For some reason this child was not diagnosed as deaf but further examinations showed that there was very little hearing in one ear, none in the other. When this was confirmed, a different approach was used and David progressed in all areas. Soon, he was promoted to the next educable class.

And then there was Jill, age 8, diagnosed as brain damaged at birth. A pretty child, who talked to herself much of the time, Jill held

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her head looking up in the air, seldom answered your questions but did follow directions, like stand, sit, and eat. She enjoyed music sessions and at times she would sing her own songs pertaining to something that we were doing. One day she came to the piano, sat down, and proceeded to play the aria "Every Valley Shall Be Exalted" from Handel's "Messiah." She did not look at the keys; her head was looking at the ceiling. When she finished, she sat down and was very quiet for a long time. When her mother arrived, I explained what had happened. She said that the previous night they had gone to hear parts of "The Messiah" sung at a local church and Jill came home singing parts of it, using her own words, but the tone was the same. What could the future be for this child? She only sang and played the piano when she felt motivated. She had many characteristics of an Autistic child, but at that time our knowledge concerning the handicapped was not like it is today. There was a sadness in my heart for her. She was in a different world that I could not reach.

There was a girl Diane who I remember being very artistic, able to draw just about any cartoon you could imagine. She was very gifted but very sickly, with lots of colds and coughs-all the symptoms of Down's. My younger daughter Debbie would visit me sometimes at the Little Red School House and play with the children. Diane took a liking to her and started calling us at home. She called almost every night for the longest time and Debbie would talk to her-listen to her would be more accurate-very politely. Diane told all her problems which were very little, mostly medical, this little pain or that. Debbie was impatient but was very good at not showing it for a 10 year old. Finally, she would say she was not feeling so well and this made sense to Diane, who'd kindly reply: "Now if you have a sore throat, you take an aspirin and you go to bed." And Debbie would say, "Yes, that's what I'll have to do and go to bed right now." That's how Debbie would get off the phone with her.

Diane's mother and father took her to places all around the Northeast to see if she liked them and wanted to live there. After a fair bit of touring, Diane loved it in South Hampton and they told her she would go there one day. They made all the arrangements, all the payments and, years later, when they died, Diane went to live in a community in South Hampton, spending her days where she liked it best.



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One day, the director of the Little Red School House called me in to the office to tell me about a complaint from a parent. She was all smiles as she informed me that Billy talked about me constantly and told his mother how much he loved me. His mother became quite frustrated over his constant referral to me and asked him, "Why do you love Mrs. Taylor?"

"Because she makes music when she walks," he replied. At that time, I wore a taffeta slip under a skirt and it did make a noise when I walked. The mother felt much better after this explanation and I stopped wearing the skirt.

Then there was Louis, age ten years and no speech, just grunts and hand signals. His parents said that he spoke a few words at age two, but stopped abruptly shortly afterward. There was a question of a traumatic experience, but what was it? Nothing could be confirmed. He was not autistic as he was quite aware of all his surroundings and participated in all activities. We had just set up a sandbox on legs and filled it with water. The children had their cans and pans-it was fun. Louis came over to the water box, stood and looked at it for a while. Suddenly, he picked up two pans, dipped one in water and filled the other one. He held the pan above and let the water fall down, saying, "water, water, water."

This was the beginning of speech for Louis. Why? Why water? Such mysteries, but we built on what happened. For a while, Louis only talked while playing in the water, but as time passed, he began to relate to other things, children and their names.

These were the years when "cowboys and Indians" were the topics of most children, so we decided to use this as a counting promotion for learning. We had a large sandbox and we built an "Out West" village. We had Indians, cowboys, all things that were countable. It was successful and the children learned counting-5 horses, 10 houses, 1 church, 8 Indians, and so-and they invented stories surrounding the village. Some of this was transferred to paper through drawings. Again, the children learned by playing.

## Teaching The Severely Retarded

In June, 1955, Director Wolpert and I attended a workshop on educating the severely retarded given by the School of Education-

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Exceptional Children at Syracuse University. The need for this course became evident when "an act to mend the education law, in relation to training of certain children with severely retarded mental development and the appointment of state aid therefore" became a law April 28, 1955, with the approval of the Governor, Chapter 795. There were children not covered by the special classes already in operation - i.e. children with IQs under 50 but with M.A. (mental age) of at least three years. In other words, this act provided school opportunity for children who were not educable but who are trainable to social acceptance.

It was an excellent opportunity for teachers from all over the United States to compare schools and problems as well as sharing ideas. At this workshop, a demonstration class with a teacher of severely handicapped children was shown. It was interesting to note that the new law specified ten students to one teacher, but in actual practice it was found that two of these children had to be excluded because one was seriously disturbed emotionally and the other was a behavioral problem. One teacher could not do justice to teaching the other eight children when the two problems were present. The class concluded that the low IQ children would have to be carefully screened, if one teacher had to be alone with them. It also became evident that 2 1/2 to 3 hours of school was all these children could take.

A research study of severely retarded children was given by Dr. G. Orville Johnson of the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, who stated "that from the beginning, no one knows all the answers for this is a new field. From research and observation it is clear, however, that the retarded have the same emotional needs as other children, so the school environment must be a calm, consistent one where the individual and his growth is of prime importance." The course gave 3 graduate hours for 2 weeks work. It was hard work but it was well worth it for the understanding and ideas which would help us train the severely retarded to become pleasant, helpful, happy children.

## Help From All Corners: Senators, Eleanor & Pennies Down the Chimney

The history of the Little Red School House is not only about the children though they are whom we were putting our efforts to



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help. It is also a history of the people and the community who rallied together to make a new vision of learning and the future possible. There were many fundraisers, special publicity drives, meetings, letters, radio addresses and just person to person chats to keep us going, moving forward and getting support from wider and wider circles. Any parent might have a "special" child and this brought together people from all walks of life, religions and profession.

In 1952, we started a fund drive. An organization dinner was given by Nick Beni, chairman of the school's special events committee, at his "Anchor Inn." It was attended by more than 100 people and the proceeds, at \$10.00 per plate, were given to the school's treasurer. The Reverend Earl F. Spencer, Rabbi Zimmet, and Father Caldwell, were the speakers. That week, sermons in the churches and in the Temple of Dutchess County told of the cases of mental retardation and the need for education for the mentally handicapped. The following week, a running trailer about the LRSH appeared on the screens of movie houses and drive-in theaters and miniature "Little Red School Houses" were placed in lobbies to collect coins dropped down the chimneys. Our own Eleanor Roosevelt spoke concerning the children and their needs on local radio station WEOK. Angela Patri, well-known columnist and educator, spoke at a rally at the Friends Meeting House when we introduced our first teacher, Mrs. Mary Desole. Mayor Stevens published a proclamation setting aside a day for mentally handicapped children, where high school girls tagged shoppers on Main Street and collected \$650 in coin "Little Red School Houses." A group of seven to eleven-year olds caught the spirit, and with no help from adults, staged a variety show in Corlies Manor for the benefit of the drive for their handicapped friends. All of this was good publicity and attracted people to us. The radio stations, newspapers, and printers backed the programs enthusiastically and without cost to us.

A few years later, in April, 1956, Senator Estes Kefauver visited the Little Red School House. A gifted man of stature and much understanding of the problems of the handicapped, he was the United States Senator from Tennessee who sought the Democratic nomination for President that year. His investigation into organized crime in 1950-1951 was nationally televised and created great public interest. He was a lawyer who sat in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1939 to 1949. In 1948, despite his support for civil rights for blacks, an unusual position for a southern politician in that era, he was elect-

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ed to the Senate where he remained until his death in 1963. Senator Kefauver spoke before over 500 people at the I.B.M. Country Club-IBM being one of the most important growing businesses in the area-on behalf of the parents, children, and teachers of the retarded and the handicapped. It was a wonderful presentation by this truly remarkable man that many have remembered. Later, he spoke individually to parents, teachers, and children with sincerity and compassion. His encouragement for all who lived, worked, and were friends of the handicapped was inspiring. It was also a sign that our work and others like us around the country were being recognized in political circles. There was a growing hope of wider political and public acceptance for our mission.

In 1957, with community support very strong, I.B.M. included the Little Red School House in their Welfare Fund, providing a boost in our financing to add programs and students. That same year the Poughkeepsie School System finally provided financial backing for four special education classes, which brought the mentally handicapped into the local public system for the first time.

By 1958, circumstances forced the Little Red School House to leave our school at the former Browne Hospital. It was to become the new home of the Dutchess Community College. Mrs. Wolpert, our Director, left to work in the public school system and Mrs. Bessie Payne, fully recovered, became our new Principal. Our official move was to a temporary residence in Poughkeepsie's Jewish Center, which we were very grateful for. However, it was not an ideal situation. The classes for the older children and the Principal's office were on the third floor and the nursery and trainable children were in the basement. It was cold, damp, without proper lighting and no windows. The people in the rest of the building were gracious and tried to be of assistance but we knew we had to make other arrangements for the future.

Eventually, we were rewarded for our work and our patience. Mrs. Charles Michel of the Rubican Foundation in New York City purchased a building for us at 26 Forbus Street in Poughkeepsie. A former private residence in excellent condition, it was a wonderful new home with plenty of rooms for all and a yard large enough for outdoor equipment. The younger group had two rooms on the first floor, with the upper grades on the second floor. A large entrance hall and another large front room provided space for our Principal and for conferences.



## New Schoolhouse

We made progress in our new schoolhouse and suffered disappointments. The two rooms provided for classes gave us the opportunity to separate the children at different times and, of course, the bathroom facilities were very helpful. This was a period of growth and understanding of the many problems involving the children. As I write today, I realize now that some of these children were wrongly diagnosed. Today, after much research, we would find learning disabled, attention deficit disorders and Dyslexia

The children in this class needed to be motivated and I started working with them in that direction using a very simple method. I created large cards with words of various objects that were in the classroom printed on the cards-such as chair, table, floor, door, pencil, etc.-and placed these cards on the object to help make connections between words and what the eyes see. The next step was to have the student print the name of the object. Some even learned to spell the object used. It was successful and fun. Much learning was taking place.

However, after a few weeks, it was disapproved by the school Director and the School Board and I was asked to discontinue using the methods. They said that it was not orthodox (that is, not being used by others) and the child would soon forget what I was trying to teach. I was extremely unhappy about this, mainly because it had produced good results that even parents had recognized. The material was put in the back of the closet, but not forgotten; even the children asked for the cards. A few weeks later, I took the material out of the closet and used it at times that we were not being observed. I realized that I was going against orders, but it was helping the children and that was always my first consideration..

### Gregg "How are you today?"

Two Autistic children proved especially challenging. At that time, research in Autism was still in its early stages. Even at the writing of this story, it is the most misunderstood disability, the children

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depicted as hopeless, fully unable to communicate and locked in a world of self-abuse. Those brilliant at some tasks, Autistic Savant, have been of greatest interest and mystery to the public but are only a few of the many with autism. We worked with each child to the best of our knowledge. There was tremendous pressure facing families of these children and we tried to relieve some of this pressure by finding different ways to cope and help them to face reality. I sought what knowledge exists regarding the condition and to identify even the questions for what has not been discovered.

One handsome lad named Gregg-ten years of age, mental age unknown because of autism-became one of my "special" friends. He did not relate to anyone or anything-there was no eye contact-all of this being a part of the pattern of an autistic child. Whatever you said, he would repeat. If you said "How are you today, Gregg?," he would answer "How are you today, Gregg?." This pattern continued for several months. One day at lunch time (we ate with the children as part of the learning and training) he opened his sandwich and, without advanced notice, he threw it at me. I picked up the sandwich saying, "Oh! Cream cheese and olive, this is my favorite," took half the sandwich and devoured it. This was a contact and I used this whenever the occasion presented itself. He followed me around as I was involved in different stages of work and play with the other children. He started to build blocks and to make puzzles and simple drawings. If I said, "I want to make a puzzle," he would say "I want to make a puzzle," and he would do it. Later, when the school closed, Gregg was accepted in the Rehabilitation Program. When he was older, his parents placed him in a private school for this autism. He retained some of his previous disabilities but as he matured there was some improvement in different areas. His favorite hobby is horse-back riding, in which he is quite accomplished.

Over time and allowing learning to happen throughout a life, the comparatively slow progress of the learning disabled can add up to wonderful success. Michael, age six on his acceptance to our school, had multiple disabilities since birth which affected his speech, vision, and hearing. In some areas he appeared to be advanced in comparison to the other children. He had good social contact, attention span, memory, and following directions. He related well to his parents. His father was a very dedicated man to our cause and was one of our most conscientious workers. Michael was responding to

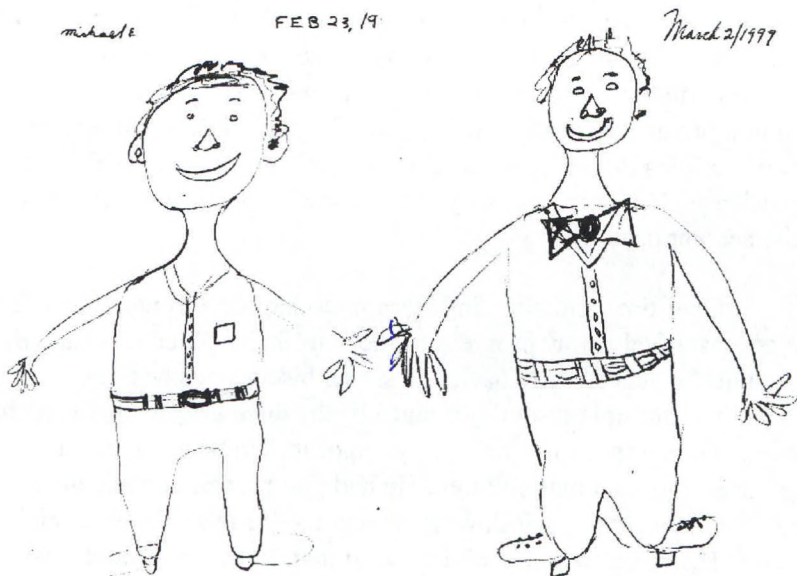


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our methods and appeared to be very happy in the classroom.

When the school closed, he continued his schooling at Rehabilitation Center, a vocational training center for the mentally handicapped, and later went to Arlington High School, a local public school. There were no special classes at that time, but the teachers worked with him giving the extra help that he needed. At 21 years of age, he attended B.O.C.E.S. (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) and later returned to Rehabilitation Center to learn some adult skills. Today, he is a mail clerk on Rehab's mail team. He volunteers at a Sunday School class, raises money for charity, is a fourth degree Knight of the Pleasant Valley Knights of Columbus. He earns a paycheck from work that helps him be self-sufficient and productive. But most important to Michael is that he is now learning to read.

After all these years, Michael, at age 46, returned to ask me for help in 1997. He has started to learn where he left off at the Little Red School House. Over the years, he has learned many social skills and his knowledge concerning other people and places is excellent, but his academic knowledge was never required. He has poor vision, only one eye, and uses hearing aids in both ears. Because of a mouth deformity, he is unable to make the proper use of sounds. It has not been easy for Michael, but he tries and the results are good. We started with the alphabet then moved on to reading and writing. Reading



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[1] Michael Shannon, a learning disabled young man who I first taught at the Little Red School House, was in his forties when he drew this picture and wrote this short essay. He wears hearing aids in both ears and has speech problems because of his mouth formation. After many years in different school situations, Michael is now starting to read and write. It can be done!

Michael E Shannon Oct 4, 1991

I started collecting STAMPS  
When I WAS young, I bought  
Some from my teacher. My  
friends gave me some from  
U.S. and from other  
countries in the world. I  
keep my STAMPS in  
albums. I have old STAMPS  
and New STAMPS. I enjoy  
collecting them.

to him  
helped a great deal and now he is reading to me-from a Third grade  
reader and his writing continues to improve.

Remember Richard and the Little Red Boots? He was a handsome boy of seven years when he arrived at the Little Red School House, eager to learn to read and write and interested in all things. The curriculum did not call for this at that time, but I did work with his alphabet, sound, reading and writing. The rest of his story should have been different as he was ready to learn and denied that privilege because of the lack of proper diagnosis and teaching. When the school closed, he went to Rehab group on Hooker Avenue and learned to set a table, wash and dry dishes, and mop floors. An incident occurred one day: Richard spilled a pail of water while mopping and had to continue his work over and over. What happened to his self-image?

He later attended public school in second and third grade classes in a newly organized "special" class. He did well, the results were good, but Richard continued to be immature and needed more



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time. He then joined a group at Rehabilitation Center where he learned to do maintenance work. Later, he went to an ARC workshop that he found extremely boring and asked to be moved from the shop.

At the present time, over 40 years later, he is working with me and progressing daily. He is reading fourth-grade material and his writing is excellent. He plays drums and organ by ear-he taught himself-and he has a very nice singing voice. I have taken him on occasion to an all-boys adult home where he has performed much to the delight of the listeners. His musical ability is outstanding and he has started to write musical scores and I have been using this as a crutch for learning. He works part-time in the kitchen at Marist College, does chair caning and many chores for his family. Once diagnosed as a brain damaged retarded child, I find him to be a most unusual individual. What would he have accomplished if we had not stopped working together years ago?

## The Educators from Iran

One very rainy morning, a group of five gentlemen, all educators, arrived from the country of Iran. This friendly group wanted to observe our work in the classroom situation, the methods used, and the diagnosis given. They sat quietly, took notes and did not ask questions or interfere with our teaching. They spent over an hour with my class and left to observe the other classes. We scheduled an afternoon meeting following dismissal of school to discuss the day's activities and to give the group and teachers the opportunity to answer questions and exchange ideas.

One gentleman told of a "chat" with a 12 year old from the educable class. He asked him if he was a "Negro.." Of course, the man being on the defensive, said quickly, "No." He explained some of his racial background to the child. This gave the teacher a lead-in to further discussions and explanations regarding different colors and races.

The big question from the men was, "What yardstick do you measure the true potential of each child by? In our country some of the children that you classify as retarded would be slower to learn but be able to accomplish many things." They felt that we expected too much of each child and blamed much of our problems on the parents and the home situation. I did learn from this experience as I have

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learned from many others. I also knew that they would return to their country with some knowledge that we had given and shared with them.

The school continued to expand its services growing to 45 children, 5 full-time teachers, 3 part-time teachers and volunteers. The classes consisted of a day-care group, play group, young trainable, two intermediate trainable groups and an older trainable group. The ARC formed a special committee to visit various workshops in order to gather information about creating a shelter workshop. We also formed a "get together" group of teenagers, much to the delight of the older children. They met once a week to talk and plan for future programs and recreational activities.

### 1960 Closure on Forbus Street

In 1960, the Little Red School House closed on Forbus Street and some of the children, those deemed "educable" (i.e. able to advance in academic subjects) were absorbed into the Public school system. However, the children that were diagnosed as "trainable" were not accepted. The Association for Retarded Children and the Dutchess County Cerebral Palsy Association organized a task force to ensure that there would be a program for the multi-handicapped individual. This would include a comprehensive program including a work training course for these children. In April, 1962, Rehabilitation Programs Inc. was established as the organization which would operate services for the trainable and the multi-handicapped.

The school had been a success for all concerned-students, teachers and parents. The challenge of meeting the expenses was also a great factor but not the deciding one. The growing acceptance of special students into the public school system was for the parents a landmark success that warranted the closing of the private LRSH. I felt that this was an accomplishment as well but many of the teachers had hoped to continue our learning and teaching in that special environment. Public schools at the time were simply not adequately equipped nor did most teachers in the system have the proper training and course background to properly address the child in need of special learning methods and environments. The schools have made great strides in the last forty years, catching up to where we were and, in



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many cases, surpassing our ability to diagnosis and match methods with individual students. But it has not been a fast or efficient process.

I left the school a few weeks before the actual closing and was given a wonderful farewell party by the parents, board members, and children. I cherish the kindness that was given to me during those eight years, the joy received, the love given that was returned over and over again and the tears of sadness of so many,

### The Exceptional Child

In the 1950s, there was little material written especially for the learning disabled. We were inspired to create our own. And, because much of what we were attempting was new, there was a great deal of experimentation in trying to understand the problems these children faced-to understand how their brains worked and how their senses took in information. Some things I have done some people have accepted and others have looked at me like I have two heads. Other things I discovered by accident and never found a satisfying explanation for but used it because it worked. For instance, when I went to have new glasses made a few years ago I told the optometrist that I've found that children with learning disabilities, and dyslexia in particular, often read much better up and down than side to side. I suggested to him that when they do the eye charts, he should have them read from top to bottom. Instead of "HAPPY," try

H  
A  
P  
P  
Y

I would often take a story, usually some classic, reduce it to what they would understand and produce a simple booklet: "Farmer Jones had a farm and on the farm there'd be a cow, a pig, etc." And we'd go through making the sounds. There was nothing like that. Or, at least, at that time I felt safe to assume it didn't exist and decided to make it for myself specifically for the students I had.

I felt strongly that these children could succeed even with academic school work if constant repetition was made and if my

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methods were concrete and direct. Before I started teaching these children there was a tendency to eliminate academic instruction. Now, I was sure that they could achieve an ability to read children's' stories at first, second, third and even fourth and fifth grade level. Also, I knew that simple fundamental operations of arithmetic, history, and geography, rewritten in simple story form, could be taught. Therefore, I decided to write this material for different ages and performances. With the help of the children, I produced the stories in simple form and covered many areas that they could relate to.

In 1958, a group of Vassar students doing volunteer work at the Little Red School House suggested that I write my material into a book form for the "Exceptional Child." They were using some of my material and felt the positive responses from the children. Dr. Sara Horsdansky, a psychiatrist from New York City, observed my teaching over a four-hour period and wrote the following to a colleague, Dr. Ignacy Goldberg, Directory of Mental Retardation Project, Teachers' College at Columbia University: "The stimulating effect of the songs, games, and stories under Mrs. Taylor's tactful and sympathetic guidance has had a most therapeutic value in the successful training of these children. It is indeed regrettable that this kind of service is not more generally available for the approximately 4,000,000 children in the United States because of the lack of understanding of the need for this type of service. It should be a 'First Step' in the psychiatric approval of the social training of mentally retarded children." Dr. Ignacy Goldberg wrote, "I feel that there is a definite need for material written by Mrs. Taylor, especially for the retarded child."

Reviewing my material and encouraged by the teachers and friends, I decided to continue writing and looking for a publisher.

The result of these labors were disappointing-I had to learn a tough lesson for my naivete. A large firm showed interest and I was able to contact the president, who graciously gave me time to explain my material to him. At the end of our conversation, he said, "This material looks extremely interesting, and in reviewing all the contents, I want to tell you that I believe that you are twenty years ahead of your time." He did, nonetheless, refer me to an assistant in New York City who wrote children's' books for the firm. During that summer of 1958, I made several trips to the City to share my work with this writer. He and another editor approved of my work (with some minor changes) to be used for the very young child. I



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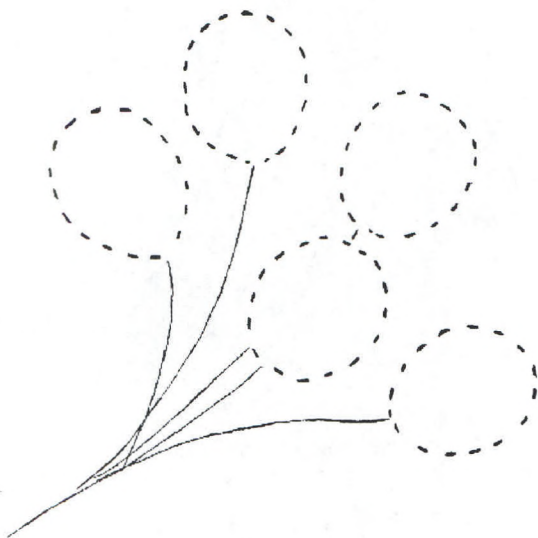
picked out all illustrations, color and printing fonts. They were pleased and appeared to be positive about my selections. I was delighted, believing that I was really beginning to accomplish something. Money involved was not discussed but, once our work together was done, they thanked me and said I would hear from them in the near future. After several weeks, I contacted them but our conversation was extremely negative, as if the book would not see the light of day. Unfortunately, I did not have a copyright.

As it turned out, I trusted and I learned.

Later that year, my 12 year-old daughter and I spent a day browsing shops in the city. At one point, we were in a bookstore and what did we see? "Mother, look at this book," my daughter said, "This is yours!" Would you believe, it was a copy of my book with very few changes, including my color scheme & selected illustrations. There it was with the name of the publisher that I had worked with in New York City. I was struck with both pride and disbelief that it had been published. The sad part was that my efforts were to help the Little Red School House. Of course, it was a learning experience, but a very unhappy one. I am left to wonder how many others have experienced similar disappointments and how many wonderful works have not made it to those who would benefit from them.

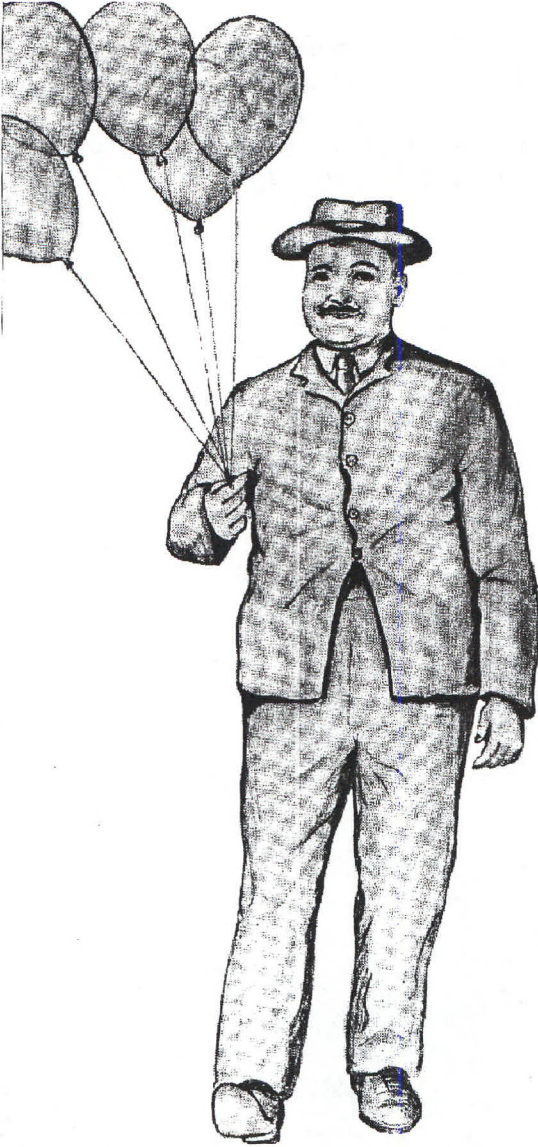
The following year, I met a gentleman from Hyde Park who ran a small press company called Cross Road Press. He offered to print some of my other materials for a very small fee. Illustrations in the material were created by Mrs. Shirley Matthews, who was the mother of a young handicapped boy attending classes at the Little Red School House. The art work was excellent-its beauty and simplicity appealed to the young child. The work, *Around We Go*, was completed that year and copies were sent to various groups and schools in the United States.

**THE BALLOON MAN IS A BIG MAN. HE WALKS UP AND DOWN THE STREET WHEN THE PARADE GOES BY. IN HIS HANDS, HE CARRIES MANY BALLOONS. RED BALLOONS, GREEN, YELLOW, BLUE AND ORANGE BALLOONS.**



*[2] The Following images are excerpts from Around We Go. This is for the very young child or the learning disabled. When we involve many senses-seeing, touching, hearing-in a simple story, a child has many ways to take in the information and make progress.*





# Once Upon a Time

**THE BALLOONS STAY UP IN THE AIR  
THEY ARE FILLED WITH GAS.**

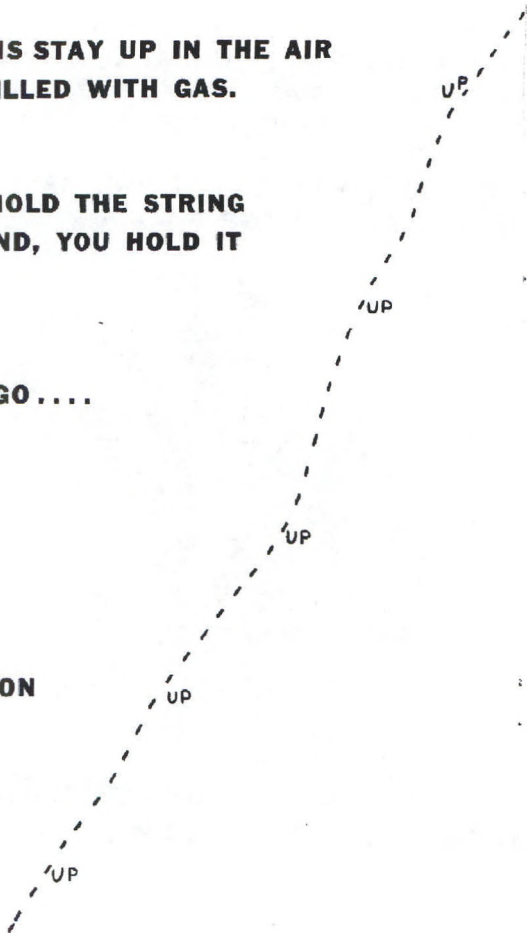
**WHEN YOU HOLD THE STRING  
IN YOUR HAND, YOU HOLD IT  
TIGHTLY,**

**IF YOU LET GO . . . .**

**IN THE SKY**

**YOUR BALLOON**

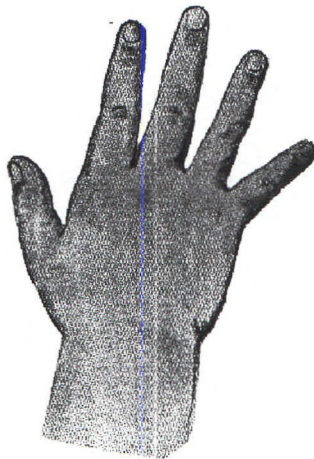
**WOULD FLY**





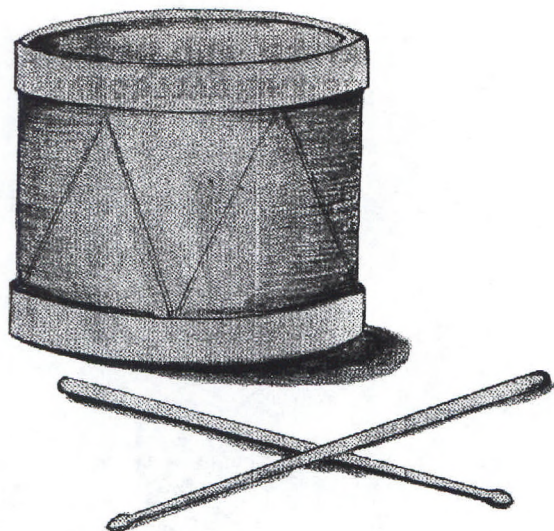
**ONE DAY, A BOY NAMED DAVID AND HIS FATHER WENT TO A PARADE. DAVID SAW THE BALLOON MAN. HE ASKED HIS FATHER IF HE COULD HAVE A RED BALLOON.**

**"YES", SAID FATHER, AND HE GAVE THE MAN MONEY FOR THE BALLOON.**



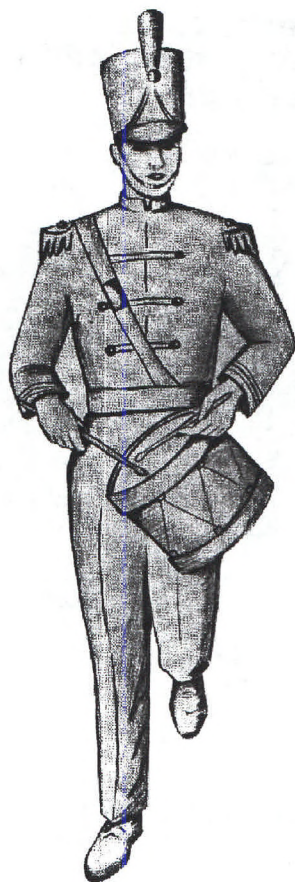
**THE BALLOON MAN TIED THE STRING OF THE BALLOON ON DAVID'S FINGER.**

**UP THE STREET CAME THE PARADE WITH  
THE SOLDIERS. THEIR DRUMS WERE GOING  
BOOM - BOOM - BOOM**



BOOM BOOM BOOM





# Once Upon a Time

**DAVID WAS SO HAPPY WATCHING THE  
PARADE THAT HE FORGOT ALL ABOUT HIS  
RED BALLOON, AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT?**

**THE STRING SLIPPED A LITTLE...  
AND A LITTLE MORE...  
AND...  
OFF HIS FINGER**

**WHEE... WHEE...**

**WHEE...**

**IN THE AIR,  
SAILED THE  
RED BALLOON.  
HIGHER AND HIGHER  
IT WENT.**

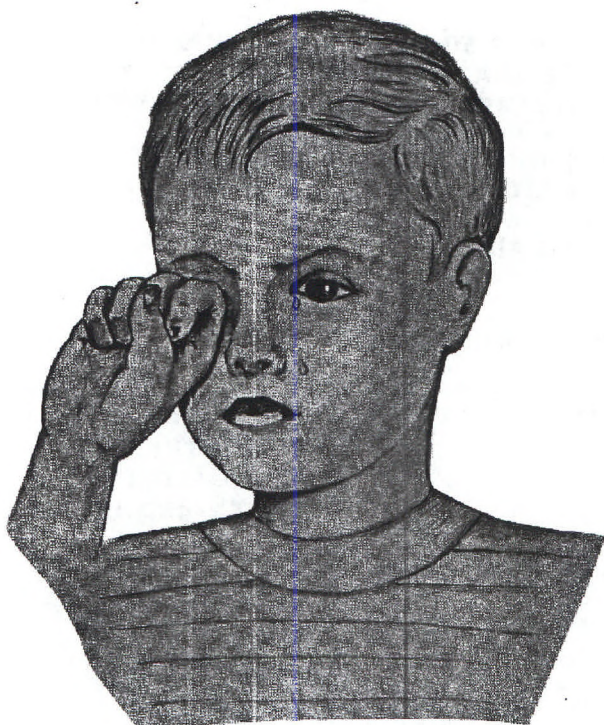
**AND...**

**WHAT ABOUT DAVID?**

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU  
LOST YOUR BALLOON? WELL...**

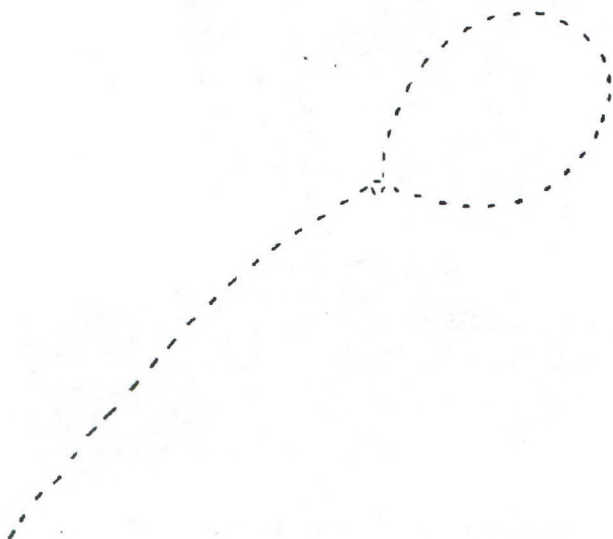
**THAT IS WHAT DAVID DID... HE CRIED...**





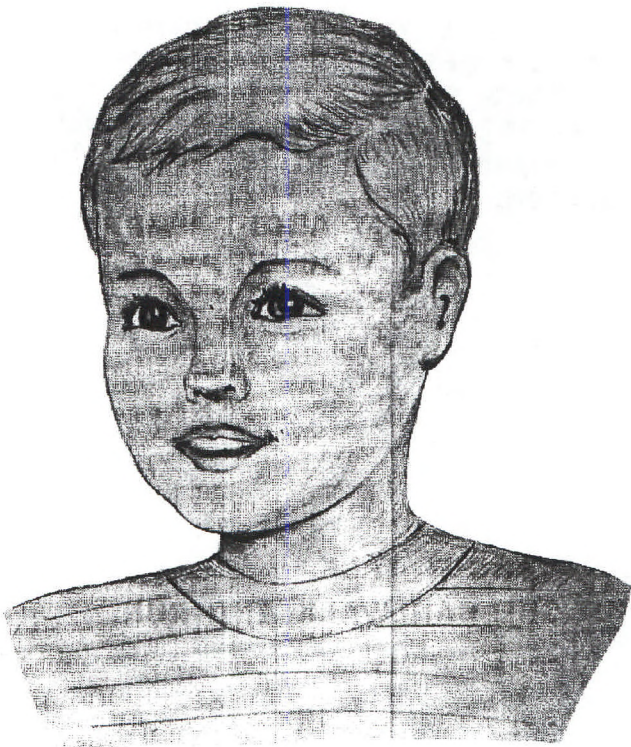
**HE WAS VERY UNHAPPY**

**FATHER KNEW THAT LITTLE BOYS CAN BE UNHAPPY WHEN THEY LOSE THEIR BALLOONS, BECAUSE HE WAS A LITTLE BOY ONCE. THEY FOUND THE BALLOON MAN AND DAVID PICKED OUT ANOTHER RED BALLOON.**



**THIS TIME, HE HELD IT VERY TIGHTLY. IT STAYED WITH HIM FOR A LONG, LONG**





**DAVID WAS VERY HAPPY**

## Once Upon a Time

When requests for more came it, we were delighted but Cross Road Press was no longer able to provide its press. The man in charge had left to take a position in California and had closed down his business. This left me with little help for future printings and no money to continue. I talked with Mrs. Roosevelt, who was aware of all the work I had accomplished in the field of Mental Retardation and had used some of my material with success. She suggested I contact President John F. Kennedy and offered to speak with him. I sent the material to the President, who referred it to Dr. Leonard U. Mayo, Chairman of the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. Dr. Mayo wrote to me, saying the President asked him to thank me for the material that I so graciously sent him: "We will utilize your material and booklet to demonstrate what tools are available for educational purposes."

The Panel distributed my material and it was used in various states, but as I stated before, I was not in a financial situation to continue the work that I had planned.

## What Have I Learned From My Experiences at the Little Red?

I do not know the total answer and, in many instances, it took many years to appreciate the impact of our efforts. And yet, the stories concerning the teaching of these children and the compassion needed, has never changed. In many cases, they were not given the opportunity to learn to read and write. They were taught to be courteous, to learn the proper greeting when meeting others, to be orderly, to dress properly, and to use the proper tools for eating. All of this is necessary, but this is a small part of learning. These children benefited so much from experiencing more freedom than society had allowed them in the past. Free to interact with each other and closely with teachers, they discovered things about themselves, about other people and the world.

What about those little black marks known as letters, arranged in endless combinations, known as words? The little black marks can make a child laugh or cry, be angry, or love. Reading is not just a skill or a habit. It is truly a wonderful experience. It has been said "that the spoken word rushes by and is gone, but the written word remains forever." Most importantly, I learned-we proved!-that every child can learn even if it takes years to see clear progress. That means that the



## Dorothea Taylor

teachers of these children must have a different set of expectations and a patience that is aware of the importance of the smallest things.

### Church of Saint Nicholas

In 1954, a group of 'White Russians' (those who had supported the Tsar during the Communist Revolution) raised funds to purchase a parcel of land in Poughkeepsie with the purpose of building a church for their people. At that time, I was doing part-time work for the late Dr. A.A. Leonidoff, a local physician, and also tutoring two children and one adult who were members of the Russian congregation. Dr. Leonidoff was in charge of the group's affairs and his contributions and loans were instrumental in their success. After talking with Dr. L., I enlisted the help of my step-father, the late Charles Schermerhorn, to help find a proper home for this endeavor.

He suggested that they purchase a barn on Livingston Street, which was the original part of property belonging to the Adriance family. He said, "This barn is built better and will survive time against the elements longer than the homes that are built today." So for a reasonable price, a barn with a manger became the church for people that had escaped their homes and came to a place where they could be free. Interesting people, as all people are, they had a great desire to build this church because though they were very religious, worship had been denied them in Russia. They'd held services in Russia but at great personal risk. In America, like other immigrants and refugees, they took factory work, did sewing, farm work anything they could get as they learned the language and got started. It was a special struggle for their congregation, partly because many people in the community believed that all Russians were communists.

I had the opportunity to speak with Mrs. Roosevelt who became interested in their plight and volunteered to help them. She wrote articles in her column 'My Day' that included personal letters of her friends and others that were interested in the cause of the Russian community.

In 1958, the church gave a concert at the Poughkeepsie High School. The performers were Russians, all professionals-dancers and singers-who had escaped communist Russia and gave of their talents to aid the church. Mrs. Roosevelt called me and asked for twelve tickets. Later, she increased the number to twenty tickets of which she

## Once Upon a Time

insisted on paying for the entire group. It was a wonderful concert. The auditorium was packed, perhaps the first step in bringing people together, recognizing and accepting other people and their culture. Later, Mrs. Roosevelt met the performers, introducing herself and her friends. In return, she was thanked for her help in making the building of the church a reality.

My two Russian pupils who were learning English had accomplished much and were teaching their parents and others what they had learned. The congregation numbered a total of sixty-five persons including adults and children. All were dedicated to the service of God and country. There were many who helped, among them St. Paul's Church, The Poughkeepsie Journal, Christ Church, Jack Dougherty and the late Harold D. Spences of Western Printing Co. There was participation from the Dutchess County Council of Churches, Dr. S. Alfred Adams, Mrs. Clarence E. Baston and Mrs. Helen Walker as well as others.

A plaque on one of the church's doors gives thanks to many individuals that were involved in the success of this endeavor. Among the names are Dorothea A. Taylor and Anne Eleanor Roosevelt. I felt very proud!

The formal dedication of St. Nicholas church took place on August 30, 1959. It is very beautiful church, still serving the religious needs of the Russian people.

A few weeks after the concert, Helen Walker, a former teacher of Russian at Vassar College, contacted me with an offer of a grant to study Russian at the college. I was happy to receive this offer but unfortunately could not accept due to my full-time job and the responsibility of caring for my family and my sick parents. I did continue my contacts with some Russian people and to share in their hopes and dreams.

I have a vivid memory of my first funeral at the Russian Church. Everyone lit a candle and walked around the body that is raised up. We sang a cappella as we circled around and around, then everyone blew their candles out together. The circling, I was told, was to light the way to heaven, while the candle being blown out means the person who has passed is on their way.



**Dr. Leonidoff**

How did I come to be involved with these wonderful people? My oldest daughter's asthma. Donna had a terrible time with asthma as a young girl. We had tried various remedies without much success. Then a neighbor suggested we visit a Dr. Leonidoff who had a practice not too far from us.

He was a general practitioner (GP)-which is what we had back then, very few specialists for every possible ailment like there are today-with an office in one part of his house. And he was very helpful with Donna and eventually became the doctor for all of us. At the time, we didn't have much money to pay him for his care. But he needed some help around the office, filing, typing (though I wasn't such a good typist-in fact, I've written this book in long-hand, getting help from various neighbors and grandsons to turn it into type) and tracking appointments, whatever came up. I started working with him in 1954 and kept helping him for the next twenty years, for about three days a week, mostly during the evening.

What began as a sort of barter system turned into a life friendship. Dr. L. became an important father figure to me, a fascinating man, who had a certain, call it "old world psychology," a kind of understanding of people and integrity that you do not find too often in this day. He gave me inspiration to pursue my passions and to get through difficult moments. He helped me believe I could do anything I wanted to do if I put my mind to it. And when he would bring up all the things he'd been through, nothing would bother me. I talked to him a lot about children. He helped me to continue my work, to persevere through those periods when a teacher feels there is no progress or the barriers are greater than the rewards.

Many of the details about Doctor are still a mystery. There were just some things he would not talk about no matter the circumstances. Was it because of some hardship he had endured that he just could not express or some other situation I could not imagine-some sensitive information? I am not sure. We often wondered about possible connections to the czars family but all the research done by his daughter Ira and others has not led to any conclusive answers. What I do know is that he was born in Russia, the youngest in his family. His father was a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church. Although he grew up wanting to join the Russian Navy, he failed the test, which I imag-

## Once Upon a Time

ine was very severe at the time. He changed course and began to study to be a doctor.

The war between the Red Russians and White Russians broke out. The Czar and his family were killed and Lenin came to power. As a White Russian, Dr. L. escaped, was captured and escaped again, eventually fleeing to Bulgaria. He married there and had a daughter Ira but his wife passed away when she was two. Life was very difficult for him then. He finally made it to this country in 1921.

At one point, before I met him, he ran Baltimore Hospital for Tuberculosis, which was formerly Brown Hospital. This was forced to close for financial reasons. Ironically, the Little Red School House rented the hospital years later for \$2 from the government until they turned it into Dutchess Community College. It is up on a hill, where you can see for miles. For the TB and for the LRSH children, it was a wonderful place. When it was closed, Doctor L. went into private practice.

He had a wonderful philosophy of life. He didn't dislike anyone, but had something good to say about everybody. In practice, he used a lot of psychology but in a rough, practical way. I can hear him say, "You know there's nothing wrong with you. Take an aspirin." Then he'd say, "Have yourself two good scotches then go to bed and forget it." But when someone was really sick, he got down to business. He knew his patients very well-something that is often not the case today-and understood their health in terms of their lifestyles, special concerns and habits. Donna and Debbie knew him well and liked him very much.

A funny story, maybe it had to do with the language: One day one of his secretaries, Helen, hadn't been feeling well in the stomach. "Doctor, I have to talk to you," she said very seriously. (I was within ear shot-and I could hear better than I do now) "You know what is wrong with you?" he said.

"No, doctor."

"You are full of shit," he announced. "You need to go home and take a good physic." I hid my laughter and carried on with the filing as Helen walked out, got her things together and left to go home to take care of herself.

When Mrs. Roosevelt got involved in the church, he was grateful but reserved. He was a Republican. He liked her but he didn't like everything she stood for. The truth is, however, she stood for the



same things he did but it was difficult to see between the Democratic and Republican ways of expressing things. So, when they had the concert he thanked her warmly. Afterwards, he had a party at his house—one of many Russian parties he hosted and, indeed, vodka seemed to be little more than water, it didn't seem to effect anyone—and I asked him if he had invited Eleanor. "Oh I thanked her. I thanked her," he said. But he hadn't invited her. I said, "You missed it. She would have enjoyed it." And she would have, everyone celebrating a new community home.

One year he traveled to Europe and returned with a new idea for the Brown Hospital property. "I'd like to see the senior citizens take it over on one side and children on the other. We could train the older ones to teach and care for the younger." I thought it was a wonderful idea with so much to offer both groups, but he couldn't convince anybody. He was ahead of his time.

When Dr. L retired, instead of working in the office, I did some shopping for him. Then, towards the end of his life, he got sick and I assisted the nurses who cared for him. His mind was still very keen but physically he was failing. There was a Russian man caring for his home, with his family living in another part of the house. Dr. L. was always making these sorts of arrangements, helping people out who needed it or could not pay, in return for the simple things they could offer.

During his life, he was a generous donator to Marist College, which later named their football field after him. He was a humble, compassionate person who donated his life to helping and caring for others. I shall always be grateful for his help and the courage he gave me to continue my work with the children.

One day a lovely young dusty gray cat followed me into doctor's house. She came in. I put her out and she followed me back in. She was about six months old we figured. Dr. L. liked animals, cats and dogs, but he never had the time for them. He made an exception for her, deciding that if she didn't go back to her own home she could stay with him. And that's what she did. He gave her the name Mourishka which means "Little Mary." After a while, she developed her own entranceway into the house. She would climb the tree in the front yard with branches that stretched to the second floor window where Dr. L. sat. He'd open the window and she'd come in.

Two years later, when Dr. L passed away, we couldn't find

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Mourishka. We called, we looked but there was no sign. I said to Ira, Doctor L.'s daughter, "You know animals do strange things when people die that they cared about."

Eventually, I went to do some laundry and she was up on the top shelf in behind the curtains. All I could see was her little face sticking out. I gently lifted her down while she cried and cried. I believe that was her way of getting away from it all. She'd never hidden like that before.

So after Dr. L. died, what were we going to do with Mourishka? I volunteered to take care of her. First I took her to the vet. He said don't let her run freely, take her out on a leash first and get her used to the place. After a couple days, everything was fine. She never left my home and yard. It was easier because I was not a stranger. But I certainly started a new friendship with her. She was a very gentle, lovable cat. She lived to be about fifteen, a nice life for a cat. She died when I went to the hospital for the first time with a critical heart condition and they didn't think I'd make it. A few days before, she hadn't been feeling good and the vet diagnosed her with kidney trouble. He helped her have a little more comfort but it was time for her to go. We were both suffering at the same time. I just had modern medicine. Don and my son-in-law buried her in our backyard underneath the maple trees.

## **Hudson River State Hospital: Locked Doors & Secret Millionaires**

In 1955, while still at the Little Red School House, and after several hours of orientation, I became involved with the first volunteer program in New York state for mentally and emotionally disturbed patients. The Reverend Earl F. Spencer, former pastor of the First Baptist church of Poughkeepsie organized a group of five women, myself being one of them, to help with writing letters, playing games, listening to music and eventually starting a dance program at the Hudson River State Hospital, now the Hudson River Psychiatric Hospital.

At that time, all doors were locked, and an attendant let you in and out. There were few drugs available and used by the patients. Without medication, many were difficult to work with because of their frustrations, mental conditions and anxieties. I was assigned to a ward of twenty men. My duties were to talk with them, read stories,



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answer questions, play games such as chess, dominoes and checkers. One patient insisted that I 'shoot pool' with him, which I did on a few occasions (he taught me), but I finally turned this task over to another when I learned that he was a former state champion.

One evening, I left the ward, forgetting to lock the door. The attendant was busy with an unruly patient so another patient decided to go with me. The elevator being close by, he followed me into the elevator before I realized that he had happily joined me. I turned to him, while we were riding down to the first floor, saying "Bill, I forgot some of my books, let's go back and get them." We returned to his ward and I assured him that we would ride on the elevator sometime in the future. We actually did go up and down a few times on the elevator but under the supervision of an attendant.

There was a certain elderly gentleman that was one of my assignments. He was a charming individual, well educated, very well dressed and appeared to only have a few problems. He enjoyed having me read to him, play chess and he told me some stories that were really strange. One night he told me about his penthouse in New York City, and suggested that when and if I was in New York, I should stay there and he would see that all my wishes were provided for. He wrote three very friendly letters to me with the same message. I continued to work with him, playing chess, reading, discussing the material and listening to his tales. I did speak to the nurse in charge, who said, "This is a patient who suffers from hallucinations, but he is harmless, just needs attention." Time passed and the gentleman became ill and passed away. A few months later, I learned that he did have a penthouse and a butler. He had no known relatives so the state received a huge amount of money that he had left behind. In one of his letters to me, he had offered to give me several thousand dollars, just because I listened to him.

After a few months, we received permission to introduce dancing to a group of men and women. We bought records that they requested and had an evening filled with music, refreshments and fun. After a year of these successful programs, other churches in the area became interested and joined our group.

One summer at the HRPC, I worked with fourteen to sixteen year old disturbed youths, teaching reading, writing and math. It was very interesting but not easy. I realized that the methods that were

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familiar to me at the Little Red School House could not be applied to these children because the cooperation needed was so difficult to obtain. No medication was as yet being used to calm and focus these children. I felt rather frustrated and unhappy, in search of some secret to reach these adolescents. I had a group the following year who were under medication, which did help to produce learning of all subjects to varying degrees. By the third summer, with more experience, I worked with eight boys that were under some type of medication. They all responded to some methods of teaching. Five boys out of eight successfully finished courses with averages in the 80th to 90th percentile. They returned home at the end of the summer and entered the next grade of their school year. A letter of thanks from one of the school's principals was gratefully received.

In the summer of 1957, I worked with lobotomy patients at the Hudson River State Hospital. A lobotomy is a surgical procedure that involves cutting out or across the lobe of the brain, in order to modify or eliminate some function associated with a mental disorder, often severe depression and pain. After surgery, the patient usually returns to a very young mental age, but can progress, sometimes daily, to the normal age. Success in this procedure was minimal and was only used occasionally. My work was to help the patients who had returned to a very young age of five, six or seven, and teach them the basics in reading, writing and math. Some patients developed daily in these skills, others were slower. The long term results I never really knew as I returned to school that fall and the surgery was stopped the following year.

I enjoyed my work with the patients and witnessed as the next few years brought about many changes. "Miracle drugs" (one especially important being chlorpromazine hydrochloride, known commonly as Thorazine) were introduced that produced a quieter more cooperative person and, in some cases, made learning possible, while providing more support to the nurse and attendant in charge. Eventually these drugs transformed institutions.

The wards remained open with the exception of the severely handicapped or suicidal patient. Patients no longer needed to be strapped down. They could be talked to and therapy could be done. Mental disorders were beginning to be recognized as physical conditions that could be treated. Care changed to be more goal oriented because behaviors were more controlled. These weren't "crazy people;" they were people with problems requiring care. Many were able



to return to their homes. Some were placed in adult homes and progress continued.

Though I left this area of work myself in the late 50s, I did return years later to teach patients located in adult homes. The year was 1985, and I worked with groups and in some cases, one on one, doing reading, writing and arithmetic.

### **Story of Robert & \$324,000**

In 1960, I was asked to work with a severely retarded man of 45 years. Robert had never been exposed to any type of schooling. He had been kept in seclusion at home, protected from all interference from others. He was loved deeply by both parents. His father was a prominent lawyer who was also a musician, and he instilled in Robert the love and understanding of music.

Robert was also physically handicapped with limited speech and was hand-fed because of his disability. His days were filled with listening to recordings of the Masters-Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and others. He enjoyed the musical programs on television. He knew and could tell you the name of every opera, the composer, and many of the singers involved in the different performances. I worked with him but progress was very limited because of his extreme handicaps. He enjoyed my visits and I learned about classical music from him.

On one visit, his mother spoke to me concerning his future. I assured her that I would help (in case of her death) in any way that I could. As life would have it, his father passed away and shortly after was joined by Robert. His mother then entered a nursing home: there were no relatives and her health was poor. She asked me where to leave her money so that children could be helped. I suggested the Children's Home. She died a year later in 1975 and left \$324,000 to the Home. It was to be in the name of Robert, her son, but somehow this was not communicated. I have often placed the blame on myself because I did not speak out and tell the Board members about Robert and his parents, but I really did not know about the results of their non-recognition until a much later date. In 1994, I finally set things right. After speaking with a staff member of the Home and telling the story about Robert, a plaque was placed on the walls of the Children's Home in memory of him.

**Part IV.** Inside an Expanding Universe-Regina Coeli

*Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny, revealed to  
you in whatever of science, art and industry, the world  
now holds as its own.*

-John Dewey



## Wappingers Parochial School: The Most Gifted Children in the World

Even before the Little Red School House closed, I had decided that it was time for me to move to new teaching opportunities. I was so amazed while observing my grandson, Michael, watch television, play and talk when he was just six months old. He was learning things at six months that the children at the Little Red School House were learning at five years. I realized that I had begun to see the world of children only from the point of view of the mentally and physically challenged. I felt I needed to take in a new place and children at different stages with different brains. I'd never give up on the wonderful children I had known-I continue tutoring the learning disabled even today, but when I was offered a position in a "normal" school, I decided to take it and start over again.

In late August of 1960, I received a call from the Sister Principal of a Catholic school in Wappingers -a town just south of Poughkeepsie-asking me if I would be interested in teaching a second grade class in her school. She knew about my work at the Little Red School House and had read some of my material. She believed that these methods were right for a normal classroom as well as the learning disabled.

At that time, I was discouraged because of the results involving my materials and was pleased to know they were being reviewed by others. Her offer would allow me to experience the other side of the educational picture, and, as she suggested, put these methods to work in new settings.

In September, 1960, I became the new teacher of 49 second graders, a vast class compared to what I had worked with in the past. There were several "Sister" teachers in the school to work with. It was a structured environment with the Sisters using their gracious instruction at various intervals. The children were wonderful and partly because of their discipline of the previous years, they continued to act accordingly. All the Head Sister had to do was appear in the doorway and there would be peace. Meanwhile, I had to change in so many ways, in the way I presented the different subjects, listened to the children and how I understood their reactions to me and my teaching.

It was a good year and as I taught, I learned. My first reaction to the class was a feeling of acceptance of their wonderful knowledge of subjects. This must be the brightest and most knowledgeable class

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in all schools. After years of working with the handicapped and their problems, this was a complete change of thinking and teaching. In a short time, I recognized the children with special needs, but the class was so large and I was not employed to work with them alone. Instead, I experimented with applying some of the individual methods I'd developed with the entire class. The response was excellent and I learned which methods were most effective and how best to adapt them to all the children at the same time. What I knew without a doubt, was that all could learn.

There were also methods that I would have liked to use, but I was not in the position to do so. This was my first class in a normal situation and I was asked to follow the curriculum that the school had established.

Late summer of that year, I received a call from the Sister Principal of the Hyde Park Parochial school at Regina Coeli, asking if I would consider making a change in my position. She spoke of the many advantages, including a shorter distance to travel. I would have a much smaller classroom and a greater ability to teach as I liked rather than follow a strict curriculum. Her philosophy was "Teach how you chose but get results." After thinking and weighing the pros and cons, I decided to make the change.

The fall of 1960 welcomed me to Regina Coeli School in Hyde Park. This gave me many years of working with and teaching children, grandchildren of mine, and others.

## 17 Years In Second Grade

*A school should not be a preparation for life-a school should be life.*

-Elbert Hubbard

I remember my first day at Regina Coeli. I remember the day, the hour and the first child who was so anxious to be there that he arrived before I did. He was a 'walker', a smiling, happy boy.

"Good Morning," he said. "I walked to school and I wanted to be early so I could get a seat up front."

His name was Richard, and with him, my new life began. Wonderful years!

I had a second grade class of thirty-two children, full of life



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and ready to explore the universe. The atmosphere at the school was much less structured than St. Mary's, my former school. I felt more relaxed from the first day that I arrived. The Sister Principal was a wonderful, compassionate person, happy and accepting. There was discipline, but with truth and understanding, and always a certain amount of respect that could not be denied.

There were no 'specials' at that time, no music, art or gym. Each teacher taught each subject and we put on some very good musicals and plays. We had few special lunch periods, one or two a week. At least three days we ate with the children. In those years-just 40 years ago!-one must remember that life was different; we lived at a much slower pace. All of society was different. We were without many of the social problems of today. Mothers were able to stay at home, financial pressures were much less and there were fewer divorces or split families.

I taught all subjects including art, music, gym, science and Spanish. I had a store where they bought and sold articles, food and candy. One day a week, we did all of our work on gray slates with chalk. We sang every day, we ate together, played together and grew in knowledge of the Lord and of other people, their beliefs and their cultures.

[A note here regarding science, which was an entirely new subject to me: One day during my early days at Coeli, my daughter had a group of teenagers at our house. They were five or six bubbling, excited girls talking of many things-their friends, experiences and schools. Although I was not participating with the group, I did interrupt at one point to share my recent interest in "science"-"Did you know that man will some day land on the moon?" The response was negative and I stopped talking after the LOOK that I received from my young daughter. After they all left, she approached me giving me her disapproval of my words. "Mother," she said, "You know that is not true and now my friends will think that I have a crazy mother." I abided by her wishes and didn't bring the subject up again ... But we both remember.]

As time passed we as teachers and the children saw many changes in society and the school and lived through different programs. Some were good, some were disastrous. I remember the 'new Math'; how can I forget! The teachers had to take a course in how to teach this new Math. We went to another school after school for several weeks. We did receive credit, but what a crazy course! So we

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started on our new Math.

In my second grade class, I had a young boy, Bill, who was a good student and excelled in Math. A short time after receiving our new Math book and starting our new program, Bill's marks appeared to produce a sudden change. After two weekly tests (I did not call them tests) he received marks of 42 and 35 percentile. I called his attention to this and asked him "What happened? Please explain this to me." His answer was "Mrs. Taylor, I don't know whether the birds are flying this way or that way and the ducks are swimming upstream or down." Some other children were failing also and I began to check my own method in using this program. I realized that I also had difficulty and would occasionally make a mistake. In conclusion, I decided to use both methods, the new Math and the old Math. The children that liked the new Math and did well continued. The others used the visual reading of numbers and symbols. Bill returned to his high grades and the others using new Math never quite made the higher marks. After two years this whole program was disregarded and we moved on.

There was a diabetic child in this class who really became disturbed at our birthday parties and special occasions. I decided to have 'special' candy or sweets for him and this solved our problem. At that time, there were little or no special sweets for the diabetic, so I learned to make some myself and continued to do this for a few years.

We had a wonderful priest, Father Galleger, who visited the school every day. He would come to second grade with his saxophone and play for the children. He taught them the song "When the Saints Come Marching In" and we did the song with the saxophone at our Spring concert. Our Parish Priest, Monsignor Tom McMahon, also came to school almost every day, and every month sent the teachers notes of congratulations and Thank Yous for all their work. The day before St. Patrick's Day, he greeted the class and gave me an envelope, saying "Here's a bit of the Green, and you can take St. Patrick's Day off, because you are all such wonderful teachers." The bit of Green was a ten dollar bill and this was repeated the next few years.

When treated so royally, one could almost work for free. Once a month we all went out to dinner that was paid for by our Priest. It was a happy, fun time for all, including the eight Sisters who taught at the school.



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There are many stories from Regina Coeli. There is the one about the boy who one day insisted that there was a rabbit sitting on the book shelf in the room. He actually cried because no one would believe him. We later learned that he had fallen the day before at home and hit his head. He had a concussion and he recovered after a few days.

Then there is an untold story that I shall tell in this book. This boy sat in the back of the room (he was one of the tallest). It happened during recess and quiet time. I noticed that several students were standing around his desk. He was sitting and the rest were laughing. I quietly proceeded to approach his desk and stood amazed at what I saw. He was displaying his (you know what) and charging five cents apiece for anyone that wanted a peek. As I was the witness, the group silently left his desk and went back to their own desks, many with hands over their mouths. Some were giggling and others looking rather horrified.

One morning, the eighth grade teacher ran past my door, saying "Just wait until I tell Sister about the boys in the eighth grade." It was a hot day in June and the boys asked if they could remove their ties. Teacher said no. One desperate boy, being very warm and perspiring, took a pair of scissors and cut his tie off just below the knot. Of course, it failed to relieve his symptoms, but it did get some results. Eight other boys proceeded to do the same thing. The head Sister passed my room a little later, really laughing, saying "of course they must be disciplined." They were told that they must buy new ties and wear the new ones to school the next day. Case closed!

There was a sister, Sister Barbara, who raised white dogs and she would bring one of them to school with her on occasion. She would visit the nursery and we would say our morning prayers with this little white dog standing in the corner with his hands folded reverently-an inspiration to us all.

We did have children who found reading very difficult. There were no special reading teachers, but we were allowed to work with each child using any method that produced good results. Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Dyslexia (see Index) were unknown. Dyslexia was called "mirror reading." Because of my background in working with retarded children, I was able to help.

One boy, John, had a problem in reading. He appeared to be well-adjusted emotionally, did well in Math, but reading was a disas-

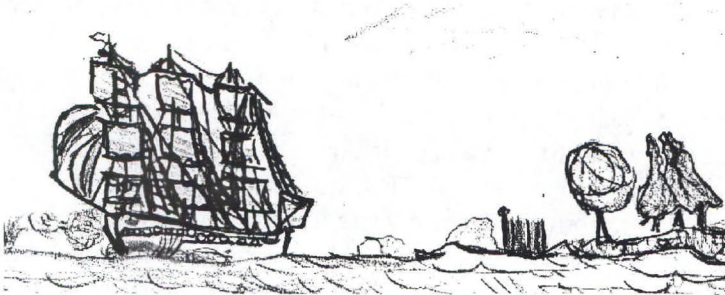
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ter. I was reviewing the problems one day and John was struggling to read. In desperation, I took him by the hand and went to the boys' bathroom. I held his open book up to the mirror and he read it perfectly, even upside down.

I worked with another student, Keith, after school for many months. He was an extremely talented child and scored high on intelligence tests, but he needed special training in reading, writing and spelling. He progressed slowly by learning to compensate for his disabilities.

It is not easy to be a Dyslexic, but in addition to the support and understanding from parents and educators, the key to success is compensation. Use techniques to cover up inadequacies. If you cannot spell, use a dictionary. Proofread everything that you have written several times. If you cannot remember things, take notes and put them in a certain place. Robert Louis Stevenson said:

"To be what we are,  
And to become what we  
Are capable of becoming  
Is the only end of life.



*[3] Billy Ghee was a seven year old boy in my Regina Coeli second grade class of 1962-3 who had a wonderful artistic gift. It is especially rare to see all the fine detail he includes here.*





### Art, Language, Music & Social Studies

As society changed, Regina Coeli changed. Methods in teaching changed, some were better. During my later years, more lay teachers were hired and a few Sisters left the community. Sister Barbara became Principal and she had a strong emphasis on the "Arts." We started a school band and singing and choral groups. Individual instrumental teaching took place and the school was filled with music. My class learned special music for special days and would go from class to class with Sister Barbara and sing for everyone. Sister Barbara also made contact with Marist College and acquired members of the Drama Club to come to Coeli and direct and produce several plays. They were excellent for both the school and the children.

All of this enhanced the reputation of Regina Coeli and attendance grew each year. As the need for special teachers continued to grow, I was asked to start a class in Art, Music, Science and Social Studies in grades one and two. This was a productive venture and a very busy one. For the next two years, I worked with the children, teaching music for concerts, for First Communion and special occasions. We had Art once a week separately in both classes and also basic Science and Social Studies.

The Social Studies motivated the children to learn about other cultures and other people. As part of this program, I secured different people from all walks of life and many different occupations to come and speak to the children. There was a dentist, doctor, owner of a restaurant, head waiter and cook. Also an artist, nurse, fireman, plumber, electrician, teacher, lawyer and Director of a college. This

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took many days, questions asked, answers given and stories to write about. It was a wonderful program and the children learned much about the everyday world around them from this experience.

After two years, the school, parents and Board of Education decided that because of the growth of the school and to meet the needs of the children, they would provide private teachers for Music, Art and Science for the entire school.

### **Kindergarten & Marie Montessori**

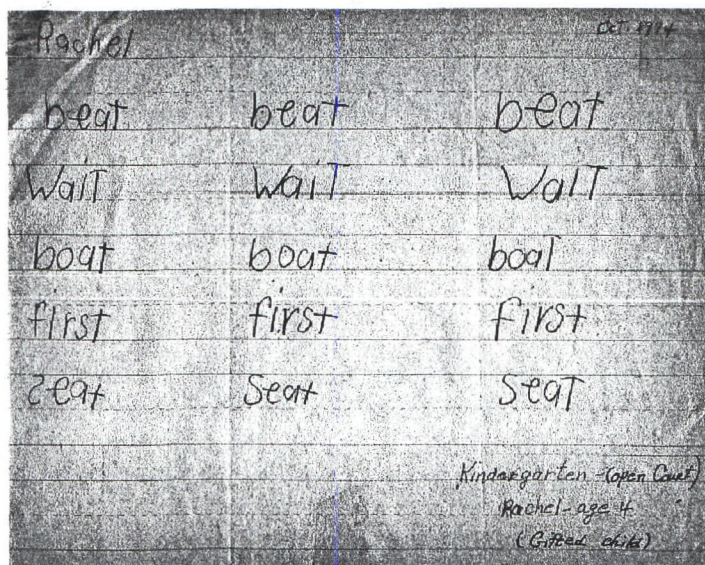
*A teacher's motto should be 'Watching while observing.'*

-Marie Montessori

While wondering what my next job would consist of, Sister Barbara came to me, asking if I would consider starting a Kindergarten class at Regina Coeli. At that time, the Parish of Regina Coeli had a pre-school program based on the teachings of Maria Montessori at the former Eymard Seminary for future priests. Under this program, taught by Regina Coeli's Sister Marie Celeste, the children progressed rapidly. Most could read and write and were ready for kindergarten by five years of age. As a result, a kindergarten at Regina Coeli was urgently needed.

I decided to accept. I had some courses of training in Marie Montessori methods and the "Open Court" program at Regina Coeli incorporated many of her ideas. I worked with a teacher who came to Regina Coeli from New York City that summer, who had help institute this program. "Open Court" was a great success for the kindergarten-loosely structured, with a background in music, art, some languages, reading, writing, math and spelling. Eventually, this program was used with positive results up through fifth grade and helped to further increase our enrollment. We were providing a kind of education that other schools were not.





[4] How many mothers and fathers have trunks full of old assignments by their daughters and sons-ones that might not seem important now but were magical accomplishments when they occurred? Here is an assignment in writing words from the Open Court Program by a gifted four year old girl named Rachel (1974). Notice how she keeps the lines evenly spaced but not according to the lines on the page and how her first "s" turned out backwards but she fixed it the rest of the way. Writing letters is no easy task and here we are now in a world full of words!

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After the Montessori school closed due to lack of funds, Sister Marie Celeste came back to Coeli to teach second grade. This was a great asset to my work as she brought some of the equipment with her for me to use with the kindergarten children. I now had a set of hand-bells to be used with their music books, many types of puzzles, numeral guides and boxes of "smells."

In many ways, these years teaching kindergarten were my very best years. The children were wonderful, their brains like sponges, soaking up every bit of knowledge. The entire program was a revelation concerning how children learn and the end results were incredible. I had thirty-seven children, eighteen in the morning and nineteen in the afternoon. We had no "specials" at that time. The entire three hours were spent on learning and creating.

At the end of the term, with the exception of three or four children, they were all reading, writing and doing Math, and the music that they learned was fantastic. They learned to sing in German, French, Spanish and Hebrew, and we gave a concert singing these songs.

One year, I was asked to take a young boy who was diagnosed with Prader-Willi syndrome. At that time there was little known of this disability, but research had been started at the Jervis Clinic on Staten Island (see index on Prader-Willi). This disability involved a hormonal growth causing motor delays and mild to moderate retardation. Scot was an affectionate child of six years, hyper-active and very verbal. He demanded attention constantly, seeking interaction with the other children to the point of annoyance. If they refused to listen, he would hit them.

Sister Principal had suggested that I give him a trial. He had been rejected by another Parochial school and the public school. Sister felt that my past experiences would be helpful. We explained to the other children that Scot was "special" and needed our help. We all began to assist in coping with this most difficult child.

It was a testing time for me and the children. The first few days were not good. He was unruly, uncooperative and interrupted our schedule by screaming. On the fourth day he said prayers, saluted the flag, sat still for ten minutes and did some work in his letter book. One week later, he started to take responsibility for his actions. I gave him errands to do, going to the office with attendance and to the kitchen with the juice and milk count. Scot had good days and poor



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ones, but he was adjusting. He was good at Math and was slowly learning sounds and words, enjoyed music and participated in art work.

One day, he took his sweater off, ran to the bathroom and flushed the sweater down the toilet. His excuse: "I hot, I don't need sweater." Another time, he disappeared. We could not find him. I stayed with my class while Sister John Catherine and others from the staff went looking for him, calling his name. After several minutes, he was found in a utility closet. The door was locked and he refused to come out. The janitor had to break the door open. Scot said, "I sorry."

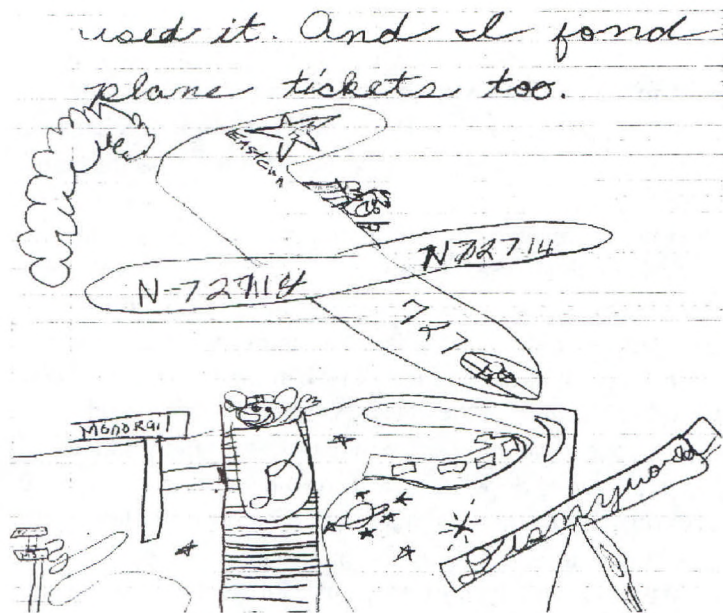
Even though we had to deal with these difficult situations, Scot did show improvement in many areas. His speech was better, he was making complete sentences and his behavior showed improvement. His attention span was short, but in math and doing puzzles, he showed progress. It was quite a year for Scot and myself, but one I will always remember as a challenge.

*Grade 2 - age 7 years  
Dorothea Taylor, CT*

Joseph Eagles  
thanksgiving  
Not a long time before  
thanksgiving a  
birthday takes place.  
November 12  
is that birthday.  
my birthday is that  
day. I had a super  
gift given to me.  
A trip to Disneyworld  
was that gift. And I

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[5] Joseph Earls, age 7 years, a child diagnosed with borderline cerebral palsy, was in my second grade class in 1977. He had some problems adjusting to being in a "normal" classroom but, by being patient and finding ways to bring him into the learning process, we discovered that he was a gifted child. He wrote this letter about his trip to Disneyland.



There was one child who puzzled me. He was not producing, appeared to be unhappy and did not relate to the other children although there was no clear reason why. I suggested that his parents take him to St. Francis Hospital for a full evaluation, starting with the physical diagnosis. After completion, it was found that he was diabetic and needed immediate medical treatment. After a week, the child showed improvement in all areas, including his relationship with others.

Another child, Joseph, was paralyzed on one side from birth but expressed himself (verbally) and his needs very well. His coordination was extremely poor. He had a short attention span and did not relate well to others. Diagnosed as a borderline Cerebral Palsy, no school would take him as they didn't have any special education classes. We decided to take him in and I soon discovered that his reading, Math and comprehension were excellent. By the end of the year, he was reading first grade material and his writing had improved to the point that at vacation time he wrote a letter to me that was very



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advanced. He continued to improve as time passed. Joseph is a great example of a child being ready in his own time. His early years were very difficult but by six he had reached another stage-one where learning became more than possible, it happened! He was a gifted child adjusting to his situation.

I had two children that were extremely hyper-active, with other problems in reading and writing. Today, they probably would be classified as being ADD or ADHD. These children, if the teacher is not skilled at working with them, can disrupt an entire class throughout the year.

Often the first reaction to a child disturbing others or interrupting a lesson is to discipline. However, many times, the child has some learning disability that is *disrupting him*-interfering with his ability to pay attention and learn. Rather than think in terms of discipline, I think in terms of strategy. First, how can I prevent the adverse effects on the other children in the class? As a teacher, you might know who needs special help but there may not be enough time to provide it. So you have to do what is best for the whole class. Second, how can I help this child overcome his own problems or, at least, get something out of classroom? Ideally, he should be in a separate class with children with the same type of problem. But, as a rule, these children (often ADD and ADHD), even if they do have difficulty learning, they are also bored. They are usually quite bright and the lessons bother them because they can't do it. But they *have* to do something. My solution when I am in a classroom situation, has been to give them something constructive to do when they are acting up, even if it has nothing to do with that moment's lesson-coloring, painting, building, anything that will occupy their time yet they want to do it. Always divert one thought to another. This may take more time than punishment but it will result in a happier, healthier child.

In one class at Coeli, I had one little boy who was really awful, certainly diagnosable today as severe ADD. In the classroom, there was a big closet. I had the door taken out and fixed it up for him as a private study for the times when we needed the classroom to be calm. He would sit in there and he enjoyed it, being alone, because he could do anything he wanted to do. I didn't care what he did as long as he didn't bother anybody else, but he was separated. Was this the best thing for him? No. A special class, specialized care would have been the best thing. But with a whole class to manage, this was the

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best solution.

Looking back on those years, wonderful years, and seeing the growth and the results in each child, I search for the answers: Why did these children progress? Every child could read, every child could write. The answer lies in many things. The "Open Court" method was structured but gave each child the opportunity to produce in his own way and in his own time. But one doesn't really need any given method to produce these results. The reason doesn't lie in the hands of solely the teachers either though there were many good teachers-just as there are now.

I believe that much of the beauty of those years in the classroom was the time we were in. The world was going through many changes but the effects on children were not as striking as today. There were hardships in families in the 1960s and 70s but the family remained intact with the exception of a few who found it was necessary to separate. Especially since the 1980s, mothers have been going back to work. Many are forced to earn more money as the cost of living was increasing. Others seek success in careers. But when I started teaching Kindergarten there was one divorced family in the entire school. I remember when that one boy came to school and told us about the divorce. He was 7 years old and the news went through the school. How awful! everyone thought. And all the sisters started praying for him.

Now there are several children with divorced parents or single parents from each class. Children no longer have the security of the family. Many children even become confused concerning who their parents are. The stories children tell: the girl says her father leaves in the morning and Jerry comes in the back door. They have two and three and four grandmothers. Some students go to get the bus (sister always required a notice if you were going somewhere besides your "normal" home) and they stop and cry, saying, "I don't know where to go-if I'm going to grandma so and so or aunt so and so." Children are emotionally involved; they see and hear what happens around them. But relationships get complex before they are capable of understanding. They are not ready to absorb all the differences.

I don't want to sound like I want to go back in time. When talking about adults, I am for divorce when circumstances cannot be overcome-when the relationship turns abusive, for instance. But when I see the consequences of divorce in the behavior of children, I wish that more couples found ways to work through their problems or were



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more committed to each other from the very beginning.

Also today, children are exposed to so much more stimulus, through television, movies, computers, even toys are more complex. Children are distracted; schools sometimes feel like they are in a competition with the outside world to hold the attention of a child, focus it on learning even the basics. This is a long subject and many have written whole books about it. What I can say, is that life is going fast, sometimes too fast. And children's brains, all their senses, are often not prepared, are not ready physically or emotionally, to absorb all the information that is put before them at such a bewildering speed. How do we slow things down? What are the long term consequences of going so fast?

As for me, time did pass in its own way and I was ready for retirement. I did not have any plans for the future, I just needed to rest. In 1977, at age 65, I decided to say "farewell." I promised to help when needed and to be available for substituting whenever possible. There was a party, gifts, tears and laughter, but deep inside, I knew that I would return.

Many parents and teachers spoke to me and asked that I would reconsider my decision and continue my teaching. There was a wonderful letter from Dr. John Connelly, President of Dutchess Community College, who called me and wrote to me saying "You are important to the future of our children and are needed by them, the school and the parents." I appreciated all the sincere feelings and they will always be remembered.

### My Great Aunt Adaline

I had a wonderful great-aunt who taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the Town of Lloyd, Ulster County, in 1889. My Aunt Adaline was one of three aunts that lived on a lovely old farm in the country. One, Aunt Caroline, did the cooking, serving, and washing; one, Aunt Hylah, took care of the animals, three horses, three cows, and two pigs. Aunt Adaline was the teacher, and she also raised the chickens. They sold eggs and delivered milk to their neighbors, using the horse and wagon in the summer and the horse and sleigh in the winter. The years were 1917 through 1925, when car traffic was limited and horses were still used. I spent four summers on the farm with

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my great-aunts and many Christmas holidays. Those days were very happy ones that I shall always remember and hold dear.

My great-aunt Adaline was 16 years old when she started to teach and she had just completed her studies in a private girl's school in Poughkeepsie. She passed away in her sleep on her 100th birthday. She taught me so many things, some of which I have used in teaching my children. She instilled in me the joys and love of working with children and the results that were positive and rewarding. I was 13 years old when she died, but my memories of her vitality and positive methods in teaching are alive and productive.

While I was still young, five years old, my aunt would play store with me. We had a small cash register to make change, and a scale to weigh coffee, beans, tea, etc. (we weighed merchandise at that time). It was "play" and I was learning. Years later, in my second grade classroom, I had a store in one corner of my room. Once a week, the store was open "for business." A full day's work was built around our store. We learned math, reading, writing and science. It was fun and we learned. In my aunt's teaching, the children used slates for writing, English, and math. I used slates and chalk for the same subjects. That also was fun and the children learned. Several days a week, the entire class read orally, but in unison. This is a method that I have used for many years and the results are amazing. The slower child listens and learns. There were many ideas that my aunt shared with me, never realizing that they would be used many years later.

In education today, some of these methods have long been forgotten. They are the basics and could be used in the early training of the young child. The methods are simple and understandable. They do not frustrate the child because they are mostly a "hands-on" method, fun in teaching and learning.

Today, I find that many teachers are unhappy and frustrated with the curriculum that they must follow, but they have little choice. For many years, much of the curriculum used in the classroom is created by different individuals from the State Department of Education. Some of them have never taught a child or visited a classroom. They are usually extremely well educated with an excellent background in theory, but lacking in the basic needs of the small child. The need is great for individuals who have worked and taught children for many years, people who have seen and used different methods and are knowledgeable in the results that are produced. Sometimes, we have



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to go back in time before we can go forward.

The Teacher  
by Tim Bette\*

Thirty years ago, she began teaching  
young children in their threes and fours.  
She didn't know much about children at first,  
but over time learned more and more.

She gave them hugs and wiped their tears,  
and never left them alone.  
She guided them through the small things,  
which often turned out to be milestones.

Her first students are all gone now,  
and she waves to them when they pass.  
There's a banker, a writer, a lawyer an artist,  
and parents with children in her class.

To those who ask if she plays all day,  
she says with a gleam in her eye,  
that she teaches bankers to add and subtract,  
and artists the color of the sky.

She teaches the alphabet to writers,  
and lawyers what it means to be fair.  
She teaches politicians to take their turn,  
and executives to share.

She knows that what's learned in the sandbox,  
will influence them for years to come.  
It's the little things that shape them,  
so impressionable are the young.

If you too work with children,  
and dance and sing and play,  
don't forget that you shape the future  
by whom you teach today!



*[6] My Aunt Adaline Cooper's 1889 class at Highland School, Highland, New York. A true "little red school house" with ages four through 12 in a part of New York State that the French Huguenots settled long ago.*



**Part V. Two Week Retirement-New Journeys**

*A teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his  
influence stops.*

-Henry Brooks Adams

*I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I  
understand.*

-Chinese Proverb

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[7] Seven year old Jacob Zadlo was a boy I tutored who came from Poland and was just learning to read, write and spell when he drew this picture for me in 1996. A wonderful artist, I hope he is encouraged to paint and use his talents throughout his life.

It wasn't long before my 'retirement' produced a rather restless and bored individual. I couldn't imagine not doing what it is that gives me joy and meaning myself-this wasn't work. After the first two weeks of sleeping, resting and catching up on odd jobs, I was eager to start on some new paths I was unable to travel while committed to full time, regular employment. Over the next twenty years, I continued to tutor students in need while I explored to varying depths a wealth of different education environments in my area-some were almost shocking in how different they were from what I had known before. Forty years into my career, I not only found fresh opportunities to share my knowledge and methods with many people and institutions, but renewed my own hands on learning process. I have some-



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times not been as able to do everything as I could in the past. But life has kept placing me in situations rich with possibilities and the joys of learning and watching others come to know the world and how to express themselves. I still constantly marvel at what a world of individuals we live in! There are still many problems with education as it exists today on the whole. Many of these will be solved and others will rise. There is so much good work being done by talented teachers and quality institutions and programs to reach those in need. We must continue searching and sharing and struggling to find ways to enrich life for all children wherever they are.

### Poughkeepsie Public Schools

After those two weeks, I decided to volunteer part-time in the public school system. I was accepted at a city-run pre-school program for under-privileged children located on Lincoln Avenue in Poughkeepsie.

The program consisted of 30 three, four and five year olds. The head teacher was keenly aware of all the problems of her group, having decades of work experience in the city school system. She had a motherly kindness about her and a lot of compassion for the children and yet she taught, incorporating Montessori and her own methods. She was older than I and I observed her style and feelings, taking in how she used singing and storytelling to teach.

The children were from poor families, some drug and alcohol addiction related, neglected and sometimes hungry. They were given breakfast and lunch that were nutritionally prepared. This was the time when drugs were starting to have a serious impact on city-life. And there was a different kind of poverty than I known. As a child, my family and others I knew during the depression had been working poor, many families just getting by on farms or small shops in town. There was little or no welfare apparatus in the country. Many of these children, however, came from split families or families living on government support, and living in more densely populated urban areas where jobs had dried up. The children were growing up in a much different and I think more dangerous world. What this program sought to do was provide a safe, healthy environment for children to learn and play-to begin.

Some days the bus driver would find parents asleep and com-

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pletely unaware of the time or their children. He would wash and dress the child and bring him or her to school where a nutritious breakfast was waiting for them. Some of the parents accepted this as their given right, others were angry and asked the people involved to mind their own business. Social services stepped in and tried to solve some of the problems.

Vassar College supplied the school with excellent equipment. They had so many things that were conducive to learning and made the working with the children more appreciative. In fact, I remember my first impression when I walked into that classroom and saw all the material they had: "Ahhhh," I thought, "all of Coeli never had such wonderful tools." They had so much to do inside and outside, a child could not help but be captivated. Blocks, dolls, puppets (the head teacher put on puppet shows from time to time) and all kinds of build-ings. It was wonderful, but I also couldn't help but wonder what it was like for a child to go from this universe where there seemed to be everything, back to having so little in the "outside" world. What happens when they leave when this is what they become used to?

Unlike at Coeli, the children here were predominantly black with a few white students, Chinese and Mexicans. As far as the children were concerned, however, there was no difference and I saw no race conflicts at that age. I don't even think they even recognized a difference. They played very well together. Of course, they had squabbles like any class but they were kept busy and seemed to enjoy the days as they progressed in their knowledge of themselves, each other and the world.

Among many other interesting chores, I was asked to help with testing. I'd go out in the hall with a child and do very basic testing of skills and IQ to get an idea of their strengths and weaknesses and what sort of special attention they might require. A few stories from those days:

There was a child named Sandra, age four, who appeared to be a happy, well adjusted child. She enjoyed the program and had a good rapport with the teachers and the other children. One day she suddenly became very withdrawn, lethargic and unhappy. This continued for several days until the head teacher told the school director about the situation. A social worker was contacted and the family was interviewed. After several days of investigating the problem, it was



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discovered that members of the family and friends would meet nightly and smoke marijuana together. Sandra was inhaling the smoke which caused the reaction that she was having and it carried over into her work at school. The child was removed from the home situation and went to live with a relative. In a short time, Sandra was herself again-enjoying her work, play and classmates.

Anita loved our music program and joined in singing, especially a song called 'Mary Had a Baby.' It was a negro-spiritual from the musical program 'Open Court.' A simple song, the children would rock their dolls as they sang it. One day, a parent came to me after school all in a tiff saying that she did not want her child singing that song because it was not her religion. We went over the words but she still insisted that we must not sing it. So, it was dropped from the program but the interesting part of the story is that we found the children singing it by themselves for a long time after this incident was closed.

I stayed with the group for a year but also continued to teach in other schools and in different situations. It was a special time for me. I made new friends, learned new methods used in teaching and shall always have special memories of the little ones that taught me many lessons.

## St. George's School

St. George's school was partly supported by the Episcopal Church. It was a well-run school based on Christian principals involving over 100 grade school children. I spent several months, a few hours a week, with the nursery group and other classes. The teacher in charge of the nursery-Mike O'Brien-had previously taught kindergarten at Regina Coeli. It was a pleasure to work with him because of his knowledge of the young child and their needs.

I substituted in the pre-K class with three and four year olds. The children in this group excelled in their cooking and would make recipes of their own. The first grade students printed their recipes that were later given to their parents. The pre-K did the work and cooked their own food. Here are some thoughts from that lovely class:

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### Pancakes

We used milk and flour. (Laura)

We used eggs too. (Jeff)

We stirred it. (Beth)

We poured it in a cooking pan and it turned brown. (Matthew)

We ate them. (Jason)

We put syrup on them. (Nile)

They were good. (Laura)

We cut them. (Lauren)

We ate them with a fork. (Jeff)

Pancakes are made from grain. (Nina)

When pre-K got their pancakes, they cut them with a fork. (Matthew)

We passed the syrup. (Damena)

### Pizza

"You need to roll the pizza with the cutter for just a little long. Then you put the pizza in the toaster for maybe about 18 minutes. Sometimes under the pizza it gets burned. Then you just eat the top part of it. It's got really good cheese. It's kinda like bubbly cheese."

-Lauren

I also substituted in the kindergarten class and worked with children with learning differences. The administrators somehow got an eye on my writing and asked that I teach penmanship to the second and third graders. (I wrote quite a bit better back then.) I agreed and spent some hours working on cursive lettering and how the letters flow together into words.

I enjoyed my teaching at St. George's and remember the dedicated director who displayed a sincere interest in the children, parents and teachers. How important it is to have compassion and leadership at the head of the school!

A few years later, circumstances--mostly financial shortfalls--closed the door of St. George's school, leaving many unhappy. The children were absorbed into the Poughkeepsie Day School and other private and public schools.



## St. Augustine's

St. Augustine's is a small parochial school in Highland, New York. The principal of the school, Sister Barbara, was the former principal of Regina Coeli in Hyde Park. She asked if I would substitute in the second grade and help in other classes with learning differences. Sister and I had worked together at Regina Coeli in organizing the new "Open Court" kindergarten. She continued to use this method of teaching in several classes and with excellent results. "Open Court" is still being used in some schools, written by Montessori teachers to integrate Montessori methods while covering the state curriculum.

St. Augustine's was under excellent leadership and I enjoyed my teaching and the many contacts that were made. I was there for a few months helping when needed when I received a call from Mt. Carmel school in Poughkeepsie. The eighth grade teacher was ill and I was asked to teach her class. The need was urgent, at that time, and all was working well at St. Augustine's. Sister Principal agreed with my decision as I reluctantly said "farewell."

## Mount Carmel School

I was eager to experience many types of teaching in different situations and this was different and rewarding. Although I had agreed to do this, my expectations were quite negative. It involved teaching eighteen eighth grade students while their teacher was ill then recovering from surgery. My previous experience with this age group was only working with one child or person. I expected to have great difficulties, especially considering this time when children are moving quickly into all the transformations of adolescence. I expected all sorts of awful things to happen. I was totally surprised at the results. The cooperation that I received from this group of teenagers was fantastic. I talked to them like to another individual my own age and for the most part, they did what I asked of them. There was good behavior and self discipline. There was a caring and sharing attitude that surprised me and in a short time, I found myself looking forward to each day.

When I spoke of my reaction to these children, I was told by Sister Principal that the good behavior was due partly because I was a grandmother and many of the children-most were Italian or of Italian

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background-had a great love and respect for their grandparents. You have to remember I was used to working with children who barely stood above my knees and here were these great big boys, some with moustaches. I thought at times I was talking to men not boys but they were only 12, 13 or 14 in the eighth grade. During the year, I learned about their heritage as I taught them. As for materials and syllabus, I must admit I winged it, reading up on each subject as I taught it and following the lead of the teacher who had left. At that age, teaching requires more structure. They have already been through those early stages of play and learning, now they are looking for and require more specific knowledge of the world.

Interestingly enough, this Catholic school originally wanted me to teach sex and marriage but I decided not to as my ideas were quite different than theirs. So the priest ended up teaching it.

I also worked with a few children with "learning differences" in first and second grades, and with remedial students in other classes. Sister Principal made me feel very welcome and she continued to keep in touch with me for a long time. I still have fond memories of Sister, her caring and encouragement to the children, the parents and the teachers that I met.

Especially, I will always remember the eighth grade class.

## Teaching Religion

I started teaching Sunday school when my oldest daughter was three years old. It was in 1943, a year of war, turmoil and sadness. I was at the First Baptist church in Poughkeepsie and I had a group of fifteen children-six, seven and eight year olds. It was a lively group that enjoyed the stories from the Bible, simple prayers and songs. They were taught to read from the Bible and to learn the 'Ten Commandments.'

At that time, life revolved around the teaching of the 'Commandments' and the church was a very important part of their lives. Music was also a part of their religious training and many sang in the children's choir. As they grew older they became members of the senior choir, that numbered forty members or more. I continued as a teacher and sang in the choir for over twenty years.

When I started teaching a Regina Coeli in the 1960's, there was a great need for music and to involve the younger members in



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learning so they could participate in the church services. The church was trying to include all of the congregation in the singing of hymns and participating in the musical part of the service. I started using some of the songs that I had taught before and most were accepted by the Sister Principal and the other sister teachers in the school. We went through a vital change in their musical background and the first and third grade sister teachers would constantly ask me for the words and music of an individual song. My oldest daughter, who was married with children of her own, later started the first 'folk singing' group at Regina Coeli church. It was very successful and helped to increase the church membership.

Also while at Coeli, I was asked to work with children with learning problems involving religious practices or teachings. This was a very new project in the CCD program. There was a boy, Jim, age ten, who did well in learning some prayers and in remembering his duties involving the church's requirements, but he was so frightened when it came to 'confession.' He would shake and cry whenever we would discuss it. One day, I spoke to the parish Father explaining his problems. The Father said, "No confession for Jim, just let him come and talk to me." Jim was overjoyed and the rest was progress.

The tests for these children were made simple, taken from the Bible and in language that could be understood by all. I made tests that they could relate to and it was accepted by the Father of the Parish. I worked with other children of various ages and stages. Most received their First Communion and their Confirmation. It was a wonderful part of my life and many of these children still keep in touch with me.

When I returned later in the 1980's to work with reading problems, I was also asked to help teach religion with the handicapped. I had two severely handicapped children that showed some progress and four children that received their First Communion and were confirmed later. Every occasion was a joyful one for parents, children and especially me!

Religion in schools has become a complicated issue over the years. When I started to teach at Saint Mary's and then Coeli after the Little Red School House it was such a drastic change. At the LRSH there was no religion directly taught because the students were from four or five different faiths. At St. Mary's religion was integrated into the day with morning prayers and a curriculum that included religious

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lessons. At Coeli, Sister said "I don't care what you do as long as you produce." What is the right amount of religion? What I found to be best for kindergartners through second grade was very simple things. I taught them how to write simple words, "God" and "Jesus" and others. And told Bible stories. Much can be gotten especially for the little child from listening to these stories because they all have an idea of right or wrong. They will absorb it and talk about it and draw pictures they are great at drawing pictures.

Because I was teaching to all Catholic kids I didn't run into the conflicts that exist today, especially in the public schools. Teaching religion was a sideline issue. But I do believe that when the public schools took God and religion out of the schools they made a terrible mistake. It was necessary that the schools respect and accept other faiths as the student body and America in general changes. But removing religion entirely is not the answer. Teaching religion is a way of teaching right and wrong and on many levels world religions are in agreement. The real challenge is for schools to provide some moral focus for students and sharing what religion can bring to a life without disrespecting or placing one faith over another. How can we do this? Through sharing stories from many faiths and taking valuable lessons from each one in turn. Or, if we must not use religion, we must have stories that do ask, what is right about this, what is wrong, even without reference to God. Many children are fortunate enough to have parents who do teach and discuss right and wrong but so many do not. Many are never taught anything about how to make decisions and how to behave. They often don't even know when they are doing something hurtful to somebody else. It may not be a school's responsibility to teach this but it is a school's opportunity.

## Van Kirk House

Van Kirk House is a group home run by New York State for ten to twelve young men who have developmental disabilities. They all work in sheltered workshops where they receive some remedial instructions. I felt that more could be done for them to help increase communication and knowledge in other areas. Because they worked every day and had their shopping and other chores to finish, there was little time for any educational or social activities. There was only Sunday.



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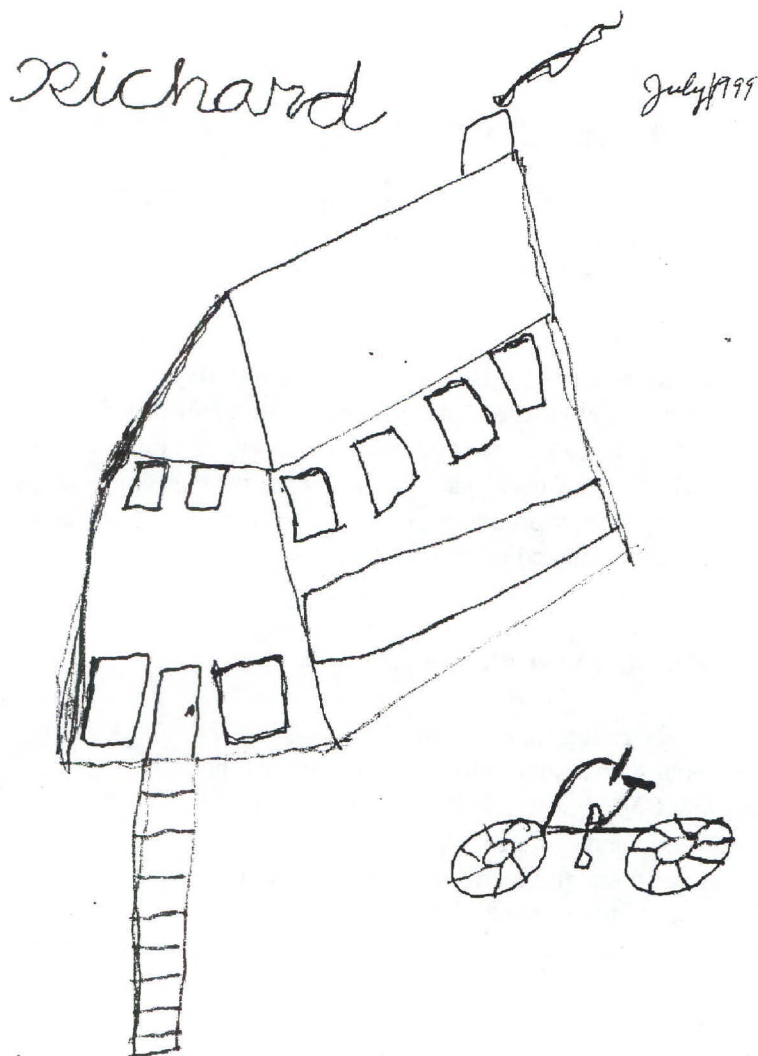
Once I expressed interest in this, a board member asked if I would be interested in providing a Sunday school class for these boys. It was an non-denominational project, using only basic forms of religious programs. The boys were Jewish, Protestant and Catholics. Only a few had any contact with a formal approach to religion. I told them stories from the Bible, Old and New Testament, and we learned some simple songs. After we finished, they drew pictures and art work that were related to the stories that we had discussed earlier.

There was a handsome young man of twenty-three years, David, who was of the Jewish faith and he remembered passages and many parts of the Bible. He was a savant in regards to his memory of dates and of incidents that happened many years ago. He could tell the day and years of happenings in this country and many dates in the Bible. It was almost unbelievable to hear him quote "King Solomon died in 931 BC." He was handicapped in many other areas and was classified as a borderline schizophrenic. His parents did take him home on occasion and take him to Temple. One day, in our class, we talked about the presence of God, acknowledging that "God was everywhere," caring for and loving everyone. The following week he went home to New York City for a visit with his parents. His parents were planning on a Saturday night service at the Temple, which was located several blocks from their home. They were late in leaving, and soon realized that they could not do as they planned. There was a Catholic church nearby and David said "This is St. Mark's church and Mrs. Taylor said that God is everywhere, so let's go here." The parents wished to make him happy so they attended St. Marks and he had a delightful story to tell the group on the following Sunday about his attendance at Catholic Mass. He assured everyone that God was there in spirit.

Another day, one of the boys suggested that we dance and that was the start of dancing in our Sunday school class, although we did separate the two. At this time, I was tutoring Richard (little red boots), who was a former student of mine from the Little Red School House. Richard's hobby was playing the drums and singing. He had a good voice and was very creative musically. He played organ by ear, and did drums, rhythm and voice all very well. He was continuing his learning to read and write. He was very creative musically and asked if he could go to Van Kirk House and play and sing for the boys. Well, of course, one Sunday I brought Richard, drums and all. After our Sunday school class, Richard displayed his talents with great

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response from the others. We ended up going again and again, whenever we were able, and each performance was better than the last.



[8] Some of Richard's Koziol's story is in this book. He was about fifty when he did this drawing and writing. He started to read and write about four years ago. Diagnosed as brain-damaged at birth, he continues to show progress in all areas.



my hobby is music.  
I play drums, that  
include snare, bass,  
tom-tom and cymbal.  
I sing along when I  
play the drums. "

While at Van Kirk House, there were birthdays, holidays, and outdoor picnic celebrations. After a year, some personal health problems forced me to reduce my activities. I was sad and unhappy to leave the Van Kirk House. I had grown to care for these boys and to relate to some of their problems. They had grown in the knowledge of a "Creator that embraced them with love."

### **Community Methodist Church**

While giving time to Van Kirk House in Hyde Park, I was asked to help with a small group of children that attended the Community Church in Hyde Park. I had these children on Sunday mornings and went to Van Kirk House on Sunday afternoons. There were four children with learning differences and one was severely handicapped with no speech. I worked with these children during the church service and some Sundays I taught religion in other classes if needed. The children learned basic differences between good and evil. We read simple stories from the Bible followed by art work that involved the story. It was difficult working with the four children with their problems because they needed a one-on-one approach. I was unable to do this because of the severity of their handicaps. Example: One child would attempt to run out of the building and I could not leave the others to reach him. I did secure a teenager for help who was incidentally a child with learning problems. I was able to show her how to relate to them and to actually teach. It was amazing how

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she worked with these children. The rapport was excellent and she appeared to reach the very core of their problems. Her future became alive with the prospect that she was able to give help to others.

This church accomplished much by giving aid to many people. They reached out to both children and adults that needed help to survive. Unfortunately, after a few years they were forced to close their doors due to a lack of funds and not being able to enlarge their congregation. I missed working with the children and adults. I was unhappy over the results-but time changes so many things and I had to move on.

## The Christian School

Many times over my career I have had to struggle past the prejudices and conflicting beliefs of co-workers and institutions in order to keep the child's interests primary to anything else. After the Community Methodist Church, I spent a year teaching children at Upton Lake Christian Academy, a private Christian school affiliated with a local church in Clinton Corners. This Fundamentalist school was structured and very disciplined. Sometimes I felt like I had traveled to a school 100 years in the past. The children seemed stiff and formal and I came to realize that's how the school expected them. On their desks, each child had a little American flag. When they got the answer, they'd put up the flag instead of raising their hands. There were moments where I was tempted to say, "Everyone, jump up and down. Yell, scream, dance!!!" They were also very strict in their religious teaching, believing that how they taught it was the right and only way. On one occasion, the superintendent told me about a special student begging to come to the school but he was Catholic and "We don't want the Pope around here" was the Super's response. That strict atmosphere and the emphasis on teaching by rote ran contrary to my beliefs and theories. Nonetheless, the school did attract a strong student body and got results. The child received very good meals and enjoyed daily outdoor exercise and activities. The upper classes were in a large room with individual desks with enclosed sides giving each child privacy and help in concentration, also making it impossible for a child to copy from another child.

I worked with two wonderful children both with learning differences whose problems were not understood by others in charge. I



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was not in agreement with the disciplinary methods used by the Principal of the school as it interfered with learning and caused many problems with the child's self-concept. There was a fourteen year old girl with some learning differences that the superintendent refused to recognize. She was a lovely girl who had emotional problems following the death of her father who was killed in a train accident. She was disciplined at different times when "the punishment did not fit the crime." One day she had to sit alone with nothing to do all day because she wore lipstick to class. (I object to this on many levels but, at least, if a child is removed from class, give him something to do-engage his or her mind in constructive ways rather than create a more unhappy, brooding and alienated soul.)

When she was ready for high school, the people in charge suggested to her mother that she be sent to a school in Massachusetts for children with problems. I suggested that she transfer her to a local high school where she could obtain special help in some areas that were needed. At my suggestion, the mother had her tested and evaluated by a local psychologist. There was truly nothing wrong with this child; she was just passing through a confusing time that required patience and special attention. She did well in the testing and entered a local high school followed by some teaching in a special field. She graduated from high school and Dutchess Community College then secured a position working with handicapped children. She later married a fine young man and continues her work.

In all, they were a good group of children, many showed growth in all areas in spite of the restrictions that were used. I understand that the superintendent was replaced and that many conditions have changed since my involvement in the school. The beliefs of a "leader" or a "teacher" can impair their ability to understand a child and give them what they truly need.

## The Mental Health Players

In the summer of 1985, I was asked to participate in a program sponsored by the Hudson River Psychiatric Center. The Mental Health Players were a group made up of volunteer "actors" from the education community formed by the late Joseph V. Towers, the Artistic Director in charge of public relations at HRPC. He planned recreation for the patients at the hospital. Joe was a dedicated person,

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with much compassion and a wonderful sense of humor. At one of his lectures to the Players, he said, "Remember when you work with these people or are involved with them in any way, you are serving the poorest of the poor. Many are mentally ill with physical disabilities. They have no money, no friends, no hope and no dreams."

The program attempted to dispel stereotypes associated with health and mental illness through skits about attitudes toward mental health illness, grief, alcoholism and teenage pregnancy. By inviting the audience to interact with the Players during a question and answer period, the Players could reveal public misconceptions of the illness and treatment. The programs were loosely structured. There were no scripts, only topics. There were however, certain objectives that they wanted to reach and certain attitudes they wanted to explore. The skits allowed for audience participation, with each Player keeping his or her role. Joe chose the roles but we adlibbed our own words.

The group had more than fifty members and did about 125 programs a year, appearing before more than 10,000 people. About two thirds of the members of the staff and others were volunteers. I performed about once every two weeks.

My first assignment was with a very organized group. Many had much experience and I had butterflies in my stomach. The play was given at the IBM Country Club for an audience of over 300 retirees and other people. I played "Ellie," who has been in an institution. She's all cured and is now at home, taking visitors. Other "actors" play the visitors. They ask Ellie questions that are at time offensive and awful. She finally out of self-respect asks them to leave. It did go well and Joe told me that I did a 'great job.' After that initial portrayal, my misgivings were gone and I became a member of the group. I did that role maybe four or five times, performing at different schools including Dutchess Community College and Marist College. Each time we did it, it changed depending on the questions the visitors asked and the way the audience responded to our interactions. I learned a lot about people through the audience's reaction, the things they'd say to different situations. And I learned more about Ellie's predicament myself simply by imagining her. At the colleges, they'd ask me questions as if I'd really been in the hospital-how long did I stay in the hospital? What was my problem? When I was Ellie, I stayed in character the entire visit to the school. It gave me a chance to act, a love since I was young. A good teacher is a good actor and I thoroughly enjoyed it.



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The learning that I acquired from my work with the Players will also be one of deep gratitude for all the people involved. I could not have learned the many lessons or the knowledge of the "poor and the poorest." When Joseph Towers died, there were many changes in the hospital and the status of the Mental Health Players.

### Handicapped Adults in Rhinebeck

Rhinebeck Continuing Services, a project I was involved in for ten years starting in 1984. It involved teaching reading, math and writing to a group of people, ages 18 and up, from some of the adult homes in Dutchess County. Each day, a bus would pick the adults up from the various group homes and bring them to our Rhinebeck school for instruction, socializing and arts and crafts.

I met with different adults on a one-on-one basis in the subject that was needed once or twice a week. I worked with clients (they used that word instead of "students") that had very little schooling, that came from poor environments, who were neglected and abused. We all knew each other by first names, so instead of the little ones calling me Mrs. Taylor, I was Dot. Many clients were helped, some to realize a dream.

There was Tom, age thirty-nine. He could not read or write. In a short time, he had accomplished reading to a second grade level. Then he was transferred to another home outside of the district and I lost communication. There was a girl so pretty she stood out in every setting. Eighteen at the time, she had started Yale when she was 16 but was diagnosed with schizophrenia and needed a different setting to continue her learning. There were also clients of a second language that produced good results and went on to the next stage.

They had a very nice and good teacher to teach sculpture and they made a lot of lovely things. One summer, I made arrangements for a large group that was involved in art, sewing and ceramics, to go to Eleanor Roosevelt's ValKill to display their work and have an instructor explain to other people just what the clients at the group homes were doing. They were able to sell their wares, thus providing them with a good self-concept that they desperately needed. I also arranged for an 'art exhibit' for the work of members of the Rehabilitation Center. The art exhibit was excellent and involved the work of many ages in Rehabilitation. As for the clients from the

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Rhinebeck Services, they returned to their center filled with pride and importance, knowing they could and did something valuable for others.

As a whole, however, I was disappointed in the continuity of the clients. There were constant changes. I would start with one person and a few weeks later they would be sent to another adult home, often leaving this area. Nevertheless, there was usually a noticeable progression in their knowledge. One lady, Mary, had just moved from the adult home to an apartment of her own. She had to learn how to write checks and do her own shopping. It was difficult for her because she had never been in a position to take these responsibilities. She had to increase her reading and math skills, but she was motivated to do this because she truly desired a home of her own. Another client, John, was a young boy of twenty years, diagnosed as a schizophrenic. He was very artistic and showed talent in writing stories. He would start to write a story, accompanied by his own drawings. Both were good, but he would stop after a few pages and refuse to continue. I tried to increase his productions but he was sent to another residence and I lost track of him. There were so many that I worked with, it would take another book!

I was introduced to a lady from Cuba who had refused to learn English and my knowledge of Spanish was the answer to the problem. She was an emotionally disturbed adult who was living in her own apartment but had great difficulty in communication. She did respond to me and in a short time she was learning English, writing checks and doing her own shopping. She would write notes to me in Spanish and I would answer her in English. Later, she wrote to me in English and I would answer in Spanish. She was a devout Catholic and I brought her copies of the 'Catholic New York.' In this paper there were many articles that were written in Spanish on one side of the paper and English on the other. This created much conversation for us both and was a great aid in her progress. In fact, I had her teaching me. And I got to like her very much. When I would meet her she would say, very slowly and loudly "HOW ARE YOU"-here she would pause then descend on the final word-"TODAY?"

"Very good," I'd answer back.

At this time, the director of the Continuing Services decided to change the one-on-one approach to try having a class of ten or twelve. The Director was a woman of intelligence and keenly aware of the needs of the clients. She realized that only a few people could



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be reached in the time allowed. A class was started and a full-time teacher was hired who was well-trained to work within the group. I assisted her for a few hours each week and helped provide necessary book material. It was a successful venture and much progress was made.

I was also a board member for many years. Much of this was mundane and half of the deliberations dealing with town, state and federal regulations were difficult to follow and seemed to require a different sort of brain than my own. I did learn, however, a great deal about the clients when we reviewed their cases to decide about changing living situations. This gave me insight into teaching strategies. One important change came about too when I realized-sometimes the most obvious things are missed-we had no clients on the board! Why not? These were the folks we were trying to help and who better to direct us and make sure the clients' needs and desires were being met. Well, the board agreed after a little debate and selected a client to join us.

She didn't talk very much but she was at every meeting and told us what the clients' needed-more tissues, more of this and that, more potatoes to eat, and, especially, better transportation in the city of Poughkeepsie was a big and constant concern. This helped us not lose sight of the basic human needs while discussing more administrative or teaching issues.

In 1994, my work at Regina Coeli increased and I realized that I had to curtail some of my teachings. I left Rhinebeck Continuing Services rather reluctantly and said farewell to the many clients and friends.

## Literacy Volunteers

In 1982, I joined the Literacy Volunteers of Dutchess County, then located on Davis Avenue in Poughkeepsie. Now they are at the old Poughkeepsie High School which was also the old Lourdes Catholic High School.

This was a new program-part of a national program-that involved teaching reading to non-readers. The students were all ages, many were studying English as a second language and some were learning disabled. It was operated on a total volunteer system, including the Director, secretary and teachers. We were required to take

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lessons from qualified teachers and to attend workshops on approaches to learning. Most of the people who took the courses were retired teachers or on one level or another involved in teaching. There were also a number of retired IBM employees. The courses of study were interesting and although much was repetition for most of us, we still learned about the different approaches that would help us to succeed. When finished, we were assigned a person or persons to work with and to report to the director about our progress at the end of the month.

Some times the students would come to my house, other times I'd meet them at the school or go to their house. I really enjoyed this work and was able to apply the teaching in the hours after my school work was finished. Working one on one meant a chance to intimately understand where a child was at in his understanding and to find a way to help him along. One young man I remember vividly is Danny. He had a learning disability and just didn't seem interested in reading I think because of it. So many people are turned off to learning because it can be so difficult to even make little steps. Well, in his case, I found out what he likes the most. He was a volunteer fireman in his twenties. I got all the material I could on fire and fire fighters and focused his learning process on something he loved. He went to work drawing pictures of fire engines and writing simple sentences about fire fighting. He had probably always been gifted in certain ways but had so many disabilities that nothing was ever done-teachers and parents were all intimidated perhaps. Unfortunately, his mother stopped him from coming after a while because she felt he had done all he could and didn't want him to reach beyond his abilities. This is too often the mentality of parents! We shouldn't give up on expectations, we just need to adjust them to meet the real potential of every person.

Over three years, Literacy Volunteers grew and its volunteer character changed. A paid Director was hired as well as others to assist her. Following this, tutors were soon required to complete extensive student evaluation forms. I found these to be overly detailed and time consuming for volunteers. I did not have the time or energy to do all of this extra paper work and also to complete my teaching at school. And were these extra papers necessary or conducive to helping others learn how to read? My students had made good progress and I was pleased with the results. I decided that, after ten years of volunteering, the circumstances involving this project gave me the



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opportunity to spend my time on other things. Two students, however, continued to work with me outside the program. They are Richard and Michael, men now in their 40s who I originally worked with at the Little Red School House. Literacy Volunteers reunited us and we picked up where we left off after all those years.

Literacy Volunteers continues to aid people of all ages to read and are doing excellent work.

## Violet Avenue School

Violet Avenue School and I have a long history. It was built in 1939-1940 as part of The New Deal, constructed of field stone that was found in the area. Franklin Roosevelt was the speaker at the official opening and he was pleased with the results-a beautiful school and one that I was always proud of. This school, just a few minutes from my home on foot and part of the Hyde Park Central School District, is the elementary public school where my daughters graduated from and where my son-in-law has taught fifth grade for over 25 years. I was active in the PTA and spent many hours helping to assist in matters pertaining to educating the children-and, a long time ago, I almost joined the staff.

While I was still working at the Children's Home In late 1940s, Hank Worley, Violet Avenue's principle, gave a call and asked to see me. I went to his office wondering what was on his mind. After some pleasantries, he said "I would like to offer you a position." My mouth fell open--a position, teaching?! This is what I wanted. But I said, "I'm not qualified for that."

He said, "What do you mean not qualified? What you mean is you are not certified but you ARE qualified because I have heard of your work and we need teachers desperately."

"How do you get by that Mr. Worley?" I said, wondering how he'd tell the state I wasn't certified.

"I put it under the blotter," he said.

I thought for a moment about that but finally said, "No, I can't."

I had a very poor self image to begin with, which is maybe one of the reasons too that I have been able to identify with children with disabilities. "Well," I thought, "how can I walk in there? What do I have? The Children's Home and that's all." I thought less of myself

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for not having a college degree. So I didn't take the job and am left to wonder what would have happened if I had. It is not so much a regret as a wonder at how a choice here or there can entirely change the course of a life.

Well, in 1982, almost forty years later, I was back at Violet Avenue helping to teach in a "special education" class, a class for children with disabilities. It was a new class well supervised by the teacher in charge. Students from kindergarten through sixth grade came to the class on a regular schedule throughout the day and week. Some of the material used was similar to mine but I did learn about other methods in practice.

The teacher had to follow the New York State Department of Education's curriculum so she wasn't able to use some puzzles, for instance, that I had often used with good results. I assisted her in all aspects of the class full time every day then three days a week as the class got off the ground. After several month of volunteering there, I left to return to Regina Coeli and continue my work as a remedial reading teacher. I will always appreciate my time spent with the teachers and children at the Violet Avenue school.

## Joy of Learning

The 'Joy of Learning' was a joy for me to spend some hours with the children at Michael O'Brien's nursery school in Hyde Park. Michael, who taught at Regina Coeli and St. George's School, opened his own school after he left St. George's. This endeavor was the result of his dreams and an answer for the great increase in families with two working parents. I was grateful to have the privilege of working with these children in reading, writing and testing on occasion. In my previous work with Michael, I knew of his expectations and of his ability to produce good results. His school was much larger than the one I started out of my home in the 50s but it was very similar in content and style.

Michael used music effectively, sometimes with stories and his entire program was conducive to learning. I remember one special day when I replaced Michael for a day. He attended a conference and asked me to substitute. At that time, he had two computers that the children could use at certain times. One young boy of four years asked me if he could go to the book and music section. He did not



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want to work at the computers. We stood a few feet away, leaving about eight or ten children at the computers. He gave me a book to read and after a few sentences, he said "Will you tell it from your mouth?" I agreed, and started saying, "Once upon a time ..." In less than three minutes, every child at the computer left and joined us as I continued to tell them "from my mouth" a story that kept them happy and interested for quite a while. It did not stop at this time. A week later, when I returned to spend two hours to work with some special children, several came up to me saying, "Mrs. Taylor, please read to us, please?"

This entire country tends to veer towards extremes of perspective, going all this way or all that. People are ready to discard many wonderful ways of learning for the potential of the new. When the new way of teaching Math came it was out with the old way. But for some, the old way worked best! Since computers first arrived, so many parents make having their children learn them the absolute primary thing as if it were a status symbol. As if the computer and not learning about the world, being ALIVE and growing up healthy and with a strong self-concept were the most important thing to be gotten from a school. Budgets for basic classroom improvements and playthings, even teachers, are cut to make way for computers.

Now I've seen children do wonderful things using computers. It can be a powerful learning tool. But I am skeptical when I see computer time replacing other forms of learning through play, using the five senses and really interacting with others. Computer time begins to replace the time a teacher might read to them till they are not read to at all. A certain beauty, a certain kind of contact is lost.

As with the consequences of television replacing other forms of play (attention deficit disorder, less motor development, etc.), I think in the coming years we'll see that where the computer replaces the teacher and other ways of learning, the young children will not go through the same stages of development. We have to monitor the effects on children. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the technology is going ahead so fast now that there is no way to slow it down, let alone stop it, to understand its impact. For all the innovations, a lot of damage is being done that we'll only know about later.

I believe the best way to use the computer is to recognize as a tool and introduce and incorporate it where it is the best tool. But for the young child especially to grow up healthy and go through the

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stages of healthy development, daily contact, playing with the hands and using the five senses, hearing stories read aloud, avoiding over-stimulus and the physical nature of a book cannot be replaced and must remain at the core of our classrooms and homes.

### Return to Regina Coeli

At the request of the new Sister Principal of Regina Coeli, I returned in 1982 to teach part time as an aide in the kindergarten class. The teacher in charge and I worked well together in the religious and reading programs. I used some of my own methods in teaching religion that followed the church curriculum but in a simple understandable format. The stories and music I'd used in years past with great success were again well received by the children.

The reading program gave me the opportunity to introduce some methods that I had used in the past: making letters in the air, tracing letters of the alphabet on the spinal cord of each child's back, sometimes invoking the entire class in this operation. They learned quickly and were reading and writing before they entered the first grade.

In 1983, I started a remedial program using the structure of the program in public school district. As I continued, I realized that much more was needed to provide these children with the help they required. Some children had "learning differences," attention deficit disorders and dyslexia. Although little was actually being done at the time, it was slowly being recognized how these disorders interfered with the processing of language.

These children all had one thing that was alike-their poor self-concept. All believed that they could not produce good work and felt that no one cared or was interested. My first lesson was to convince them that they could do anything. Improvement and progress were made. I used different approaches and methods. All children are different and they learn in a different way so it is important to experiment in order to find what works best. I used some of Orton-Gillingham (see Index for more information)-color overlays, color glasses, learning to spell using vertical methods in spelling and reading. California has successfully been using color over-lays for reading. There was a teacher who used a blue color over-layer in giving a



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second grade boy a test. Previously, his highest mark was 45%. The new test given with the over-lay procedure produced 92%.

I acted on my strong belief that reading, writing and spelling should be taught in one unit rather than separated into different assignments and categories.

I eliminated all florescent lighting as I found that this lighting was interfering with learning for the "learning differences" child. One day, a ten-year old girl came to my room saying "It's so good to be in this room, I can see to read." I later discovered that other children felt the same way. How important lighting and color is to the learning process involving these children! The lesson to all: the physical environment for learning can be as important as the teaching methods and the social environment.

I continued to learn more about the right and left brain hemisphere capabilities. Both are needed for learning to take place. Most schools today use mostly left brain methods which results in handicapping those with right brain holistic strengths. It is important for a teacher to seek out right brain approaches to truly access & free a child's abilities. Another very important issue is the time given to complete their work or testing. They should be given extra time to produce the answer as their thinking is slower but the results can be the same as the other children. Give them time!

Some of the methods I used were called 'unconventional'. But if we remember that it is not always the child who cannot learn but the methods used that keep him from producing, we will be more willing to explore some effective unorthodox approaches. In addition, as a child's self-concept improves, you will almost inevitably find improvement in their work. These children progressed in all areas in part because they enjoyed the many ways that were used to increase the thought process and to teach reading, writing and spelling.

## Regina Coeli Nursery School

For a long time I had a dream of beginning a full care nursery school at Regina Coeli. I finally got my chance when the right forces seemed to come together in 1987. The school had continued to grow and parents were calling for a nursery school. The former convent located on the school property had been vacated and I suggested that it would make a wonderful day care center and school for many chil-

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dren. My plan involved a nursery full-time for babies aged from 3 months to 2 years and a pre-K program for 3 to 4 year olds with a special class, or classes, for learning disabled preschoolers.

This program would also include summer and after school sessions. That summer a friend of mine and I spent many hours working on the plan. We had carpenters and electricians volunteer to do the necessary work and a fireman to give approval for the safety of the children. The town building inspector gave his approval after inspection of the condition of the building. I secured the aid of several people who would volunteer their help. Some were retired professionals in the field of art, music, dance, and nursing. They were senior citizens who wanted to continue work in their specialized fields. I became very excited about my dream for a "center" that could help parents, teachers, and children. I attended a special meeting of the Board of Directors and presented my plan and asked to have it approved. There were many who thought the plan was "wonderful" and wanted to start the Center right away. It was presented to the Archdiocese in New York and, sadly, that was as far as it got. They refused it because of its large insurance factor. No further discussion.

Lack of vision and fear causes negative reaction to new ideas and this created a lack of progress that was truly needed. The timing was poor and the results were painful for me and many others. I had to remember that this too is "As it should be."

## SUNY New Paltz & After-School Programs

In 1987, I spent two weeks observing classes of children with learning disabilities at New Paltz (SUNY). The clinic was conducted by the special education department of the college and consisted of children ages 7-12 years. This program continued to be used with the children into the fall of the year. This was a very interesting and productive program and many methods were similar to methods that I used with the children at Regina Coeli. My role was for observation only, therefore my contacts with the children involved was minimal. I did speak with the teachers and was included in their discussions-a most enlightening and productive time.

Later that year, while still teaching "special class" at Regina Coeli, I became interested in the after school program. The young teacher who was involved in this work left to raise a family of her own. The day would be longer for me-the hours were from 3 p.m. to 6



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p.m.. I finished my teaching at 3 p.m., in time to take on a new challenge. My assistant, who worked with the previous teacher, was a happy, caring individual who helped me in many ways. We had twelve to fifteen children, ages 6 to 10 years old. They were a varied group with many different interests.

We started our program with a short rest period, relaxing with books and quiet conversation, followed by juice and snacks. After this, we formed groups for school homework. Next, some had art and Spanish instructions. Then there was a cooking class and play indoors and out. I had a young high school girl, Christine, who taught dancing to some of the girls. A young boy, Aaron, also from high school, taught basketball to both girls and boys. We had a good group, a few behavior problems, but all seemed to enjoy our work and play. The parents especially liked the homework finished and the special help that each child was given. It was a productive program that continued for two years. At the end of the second season, I became ill and needed surgery and I was unable to continue my work for the summer months. The program was discontinued because at that time they were unable to find a replacement.

Many schools have opened their doors to this type of program and it has proved to be not only sorely needed but most productive.

In the fall of 1989, I returned to Regina Coeli and continued my work with remedial reading classes and helping with the "learning differences."

### Children of Jamaica

In 1987, my husband and I decided to take a cruise to the Caribbean Islands. It was a large undertaking for us, but with our children's help we embarked on this wonderful trip. The ship docked at Ocho Rios and we went for a walk in the town. As we approached a large run-down school building, we heard voices of many children. In front of the building was a playground with just automobile tires hanging from a few trees surrounded by dust and dirt. Curiosity forced me to explore further so we both entered the school. We were welcomed by the head teacher who appeared to be tired and not too happy. There were only three teachers, all were rather stern and each had a whistle and a leather strap hanging from their waist. There was one large room with approximately 225 children from one corner to

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the other. Each table had eight to ten children aged five to nine or ten years old. There was little or no equipment, a few pencils, crayons and paper that were shared by all. Books and other materials were locked in the closet, to be used only at the discretion of the teacher.

The head teacher introduced us and I joined a group of children where I received letters from the alphabet and numbers. The children were a wonderful group, so eager to learn, cooperative and happy. I read a short story and went to another table continuing with the same work. It was interesting to hear the children singing while they worked on their papers. The teachers did not stop them, therefore I assumed that this was acceptable. I started to sing the simple spiritual song 'Amen.' The children followed and in a short time, every child in that building was singing and clapping to 'Amen." The results were wonderful, the rafters rang with the voices of the many children and the heavens were filled with 'Amen.' We had to leave because the ship would be leaving. I left with a sadness for these children and filled with the need that was there. I wish it had lasted and lasted. I felt "ah I could do something here" because they were so ready and eager to learn.

The memory of those few hours in Ocho Rios will always be part of my thoughts and the great need for furthering education for all children throughout the world.

When we returned, I spoke to the children at Regina Coeli and they immediately brought paper, crayons, pencils and puzzles to school to be sent to all the children of Ocho Rios in the Caribbean.

## Brookside Day Care Center

In 1992, I became a member of the Board of Directors at Brookside Day Care Center. I was asked to join by a woman on the board, the head nurse and supervisor at Hudson River Psychiatric Hospital, who's children I'd had at Regina Coeli. Brookside is a day care center for children, located on the grounds of the Hospital. Meetings were held once a month and mainly focused on equipment needs, a review of teacher performance and student needs.

Brookside is a private, not for profit corporation established with the goal of providing quality, affordable day care services for children of Dutchess County and SUNY employees represented by the sponsoring unions. If they are unable to fill a slot at the center after



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the employees' children are considered, they accept children from the general public. The purpose of the center is to provide a safe and stimulating environment for infants and young children, nurture self-esteem, social development, encourage self discipline, promote language development and work in cooperation with parents of the community.

At the time I was there, Brookside was composed of sixty-two children, aged from around six months to four years and was under the direction of a very capable woman with much experience in this field.

I visited the school on several occasions and offered additional help beyond board duties when it was needed. In 1993, I was asked to make plans for a kindergarten class that was wanted and needed for the following year. We had several meetings and plans were made, using some of the methods of teaching that I had used in the past. I was really excited about the project when I learned that the Director of the school was leaving and the many projects that were planned were put on 'hold' for the time. In the end, the state didn't offer any funds for the new program and there was not other backing.

I had been a member of the Board for two years and saw many improvements in the school and their hopes for the future. Not too long after that, I did retire as a board member due to sickness after two years of service. I saw many improvements in the school and have continued to offer my support as they realize their hopes for the future.

### **Reading to Children, 1994-1995**

While still teaching part time at Regina Coeli, I had the opportunity to spend a year reading to children in grades K-2 in the library of Ralph R. Smith, a Hyde Park district elementary school. It was a delightful change, just reading to children. The results were very rewarding. Although I have been reading to children for many years, this was more structured involving two hours of telling and listening. We would start the session with several children picking out a book for me to read. I would pick out one or two of them that were clear and simple with a limited amount of characters, perhaps a story that I would like to tell. After the story, there would be questions and answers followed by all going to tables where paper and crayons were

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provided for them to draw pictures about the previous stories.

Story telling to children is perhaps the most effective teaching tool that is ever used. Stories will work when lectures fail. The world's great religions use stories and parables to transmit these beliefs. Jesus of Nazareth spoke in parables to his people when trying to explain why! Parents make excellent story tellers because they know their listeners.

In fact, reading to children is an art that can be acquired by doing it. I suggest that the reader will read slowly, look at and discuss the pictures but do not lose the contents of the story. For the young child, keep the story simple and without a lot of detail. Omit "scary" feelings and substitute changes when necessary. There are enough scary things in the world already. For example, a child age four repeatedly requested "Red Riding Hood" and I read it to her many times. One day, I changed the ending: "The men took the wolf to a new home, the zoo, and he was very happy." The child never asked me to tell it again. I realized in this instance she had been attracted to the story because there was something disturbing and uncomfortable about it. Her mind wasn't ready or able to accept or understand the wolf chewing somebody up. Once it ended on a good note she could go onto something else. A child should go through all these nice things when little to build a foundation of emotional satisfaction.

One of my favorite books is "Goodnight Moon" by Margaret Wise Brown. Children love to hear it. There is a poem "Wynker, Blynchen and Nod" by Eugene Field that always brings questions and answers of "read more." More recently, there is a book, "The Kissing Hand," by Audrey Penn. Well received by the Pre-K children, it tells us how love works and gives us strength in a sometimes frightening world.

Children also still (and always!) love to hear you tell it "from your mouth." Do not use a book, but tell a story with much expression and feeling. The past few years have produced a simpler type of book for the young child that has proved to be more acceptable to teacher, parents and the young child. Hearing stories also helps children TELL stories and therefore understand their own lives, make sense out of the things that happen to them.

Storytelling can be a healing activity. When a child is crying and perhaps hurt, putting your arms around him and telling him a story has the power to heal.

I remember when we had electric storms, thunder and light-



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ning, and my mother would take me out on the front porch and sit me on her lap. When we heard the terrible noise, she'd tell me it was the little men in the mountains, the Catskills, playing bowling. Every time the ball hit, it made that rumbling crashing noise. Because of that story, I grew up never being afraid of storms though I had friends who would crawl under beds. Now, of course, I know the storm is not those men (how can I be sure?) but that isn't important. My fear was taken away. We'd laugh with every rumble and that's one of my memories of my mother on the porch listening to the men in the mountains. She had a lot of wisdom even though she didn't have the psychological studies we have now.

Class reading together is an almost forgotten method of teaching reading. However, it is extremely effective and it can give support to the poorest readers and can give a good self-image to all.

I attended a one room school house when I was a child of 10 years. It included grades 1-8 with one row for each grade. I remember reading together with the whole class and learning from the experience. It made the older children feel very important and made me feel important also. Since then I have used this method with my classes. Instead of always placing children in groups for reading, we read together. A most valuable tool!

I could have stayed longer at the "library" but had to spend more time at Regina Coeli, because my duties were necessary and I must return to the children in need of help. But reading has traveled with me everywhere I go.

### Special Education Class, Public School

In 1995, while still teaching part-time at Regina Coeli, I volunteered for several weeks at a public school in the Hyde Park district as an aide for special education children. The first day with the class brought back memories of the "Little Red School House." The teacher and her assistant were very organized and showed much compassion and understanding for each child especially in the calm and patient way they talked to them. The material used was excellent and the way that it was presented was understood and accepted by the children. Each subject was short and each child was given time to fin-

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ish his work. Every child was motivated to feel important and needed. Although the degree of learning disability was different, each child was progressing at his own pace and the results were great! It was wonderful to finally realize that what once was considered impossible, actually had become a reality. The hopes and dreams of many parents became real.

Other teachers could learn much from observing the teachers of "Special Ed." This has been in England for many years. Every person studying for a teacher's degree must have six months or more work in the field of special education and the results are very positive. Many methods that are used with learning problems can and have been used successfully in the contained classroom.

In talking with the teachers there and elsewhere, it is clear that they are dealing with stresses that I was fortunate to not have. The enormous amount of paperwork and heavy public school bureaucracy drains these teachers of much energy and time they would use to help the children. And the same set of rules and curriculum that has helped establish and define special education in the public schools also limits and frustrates the teachers when they want to experiment with an "unorthodox" or unsanctioned approach-that is, when they need freedom to reach certain special students.

I was most successful and most happy as a teacher when I could create the classroom I wanted, free to deviate and add to the curriculum given to me. There were times when I considered returning to school to earn a higher degree that would allow me to teach in the public schools and, especially, to earn a better wage for my work. But I was happy and had no desire to go to school, taking time away from my calling with these children.

There is also a need for more teachers in general. How do we get the people who are natural teachers to become teachers? I have met many people who I think would make wonderful teachers but who are not technically qualified or, like myself, are deterred by the education requirements and the financial burden. I've also met teachers who are brilliant in every subject but they are inept teachers. They have no feeling, no compassion, no understanding of children but are ready to say "you do it or else" at every turn. We don't need that, especially in this society. To meet the needs of this next century, we have to find a way to lead teachers into being teachers, not deter those who might do it best.

As for Special Education teachers in particular, they are need-



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ed now more than ever as our rapidly changing society (from technology to family situations to drug & alcohol use) will most likely bring us complex learning disabilities to address, such as attention deficit disorders and emotional problems.

My work at this public school was most encouraging. It helped to fulfill my dreams of finding a place where our "special children" with their "special teachers" could grow in all areas of their development.

## Conclusion

I believe, first, that all children need good pre-school experiences followed by pre-kindergarten screening of all students. The child who is not ready for academics should receive developmental experiences or repeat pre-k, depending on his/her maturity. I believe in smaller classes in kindergarten through third grade. Only by helping children succeed in reaching their full potential can they restore vitality to our nation.

I am presently working at Regina Coeli part-time with children with learning differences and also with a pre-k group. I am enjoying every minute of exploring, learning, laughing and singing with the children and the teacher in charge. She has brought me back to my beginnings in child development of many years ago in my work at the Children's Home, The Little Red School House, and the many experiences with the children. I am constantly feeling the wonderful, beautiful blessing that is given to us for such a short time, to help, to listen to, to enjoy and to love.

Gandhi once said "If we care to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with children."

Once upon a time, I was given the privilege to teach children: to bring into their lives knowledge of the world and begin the many lessons that they must learn to succeed in society; to help them grow in that knowledge, to become strong and beautiful, to develop their strengths, to overcome their weaknesses and most important, to believe in themselves. Knowing that each child is the gift of the Creator, I strove to enjoy, encourage and teach to the very best of my ability.

Tomorrow is a place where tolerance, acceptance and love for all exists. Tomorrow is a place of peace.

Once upon a time will always be once, now, tomorrow and always!



## Part VI. Index



Nicole

I have included this Index to provide a little more insight and background-personal and historic-on some terms, special disabilities, teaching methods and people that appear in the body of the book. From there, I'll leave the reader to discover the wealth of other sources that go into greater detail and analysis.

*[9] Five year old Nicole (1991) with a very special, happy picture of herself for us.*

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## **I. Disabilities & Gifts**

### **ADD/ ADHD**

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are disorders of the central nervous system that interfere with one or more of the basic learning functions. ADD is a chronic disorder starting as early as infancy and is characterized by lack of control of impulses, short attention spans, hyperactivity, sometimes difficulty in judging depth, distance and size, and in remembering sequences or sounds. The brain may inhibit the speech muscles effecting their ability to reproduce sounds accurately. Sometimes words and letters are confused and may be seen backwards. This may make expressing what the ADD or ADHD student knows using speech or writing a daunting task. Without special help, severe disabilities may overlap and make school work impossible.

The teacher should have all information about the diagnosis and any medication that the child may have to use, as well as an understanding of the child's own learning style so strengths can make up for weakness. Quiet play is recommended, including play in small groups. At home, the child should have his own room (if possible) with simple colors and few distractions, keeping toys out of sight. Follow a good routine, use short direct interaction and stick to a consistent daily schedule for play, homework, meals and TV. Remember that these children cannot work under time pressure. Allow them time to work at their own pace. Self-image is the most important element in their lives. He or she must be constantly assured of his progress and his worth as a student and as a person. He is subtly rejected by his peers, you must make an effort for him to belong.

I have worked with and taught children with ADD/ ADHD and I have used many of the methods that have been written in this book. It has not always been easy but when you see the results and the glow of self-assurance in the eyes of a child, it is worth more than any words that can be used to express my feelings of success.

### **Autism**

One of the most misunderstood disabilities is autism. The

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autistic child does not respond to his environment, lacks communication skills and is perhaps the most difficult of all handicapped children to reach. This is a disability that is often diagnosed as hopeless, sometimes shown as an autistic savant who is brilliant in some area for tasks but fails in simple learning skills. Many times there is no speech, many repeat what is said. Much special training is required in the teaching of an autistic child. In my work with autism, which was many years ago, I was saddened by the situation partly because of my lack of knowledge. I was not able to relate satisfactorily to them or this problem.

Since that time, much research has been done in this field and progress continues. Research has shown that high doses of vitamins showed a remarkable improvement in the behavior of these children. Under the use of vitamins C, B6, plus 200 mg of pantothenic acid the response was amazing. Improvement showed in reduced tantrums, increased alertness, improved speech, better sleep habits and greater sociability. This is remarkable, because for decades "autism" has not responded to many attempted treatments. It gives us hope that further vital information concerning behavior and communication characteristics of this disorder will be learned. These children are capable of learning. The question, with an answer perhaps more complicated and difficult to discover than others, is: how do we reach them?

## Down's Syndrome

Children born with Down's Syndrome have 47 chromosomes instead of 46 in each of cell. The risk of having a child with Down's Syndrome increases in older mothers and may also increase in fathers over 50 years of age. Although many of these children have heart and gastrointestinal tract defects, most can be corrected by surgery. Early intervention programs such as teaching self-help skills, feeding, dressing, and toilet training are of great help to these children. This enables them to become more independent which, in turn, helps the family and others involved. Like all handicapped children, they benefit from good homes, good medical care, special education and love.

My first experience with the "Down's Syndrome" child was at the "Little Red School House." They are very special children and many are endowed with some similar characteristics. They are usually friendly, happy and very affectionate. There are different degrees of



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intelligence in each child. Some children continue their education in many areas, others do not. It is possible that the progress shown is due to parent and/ or school involvement.

Society has not always been kind to these children or adults, mostly because society does not understand that Down's Syndrome individuals have much to offer and should be accepted as a person that deserves to be treated with dignity. Statistics show that approximately 4,000 children with Down's Syndrome are born each year in the United States. It is not related to race, nationality, or religion.

I always considered it a special part of my teaching to work with these children and I have seen some who have grown in knowledge and promise. Recently, at a graduation party for a former student, I was rendered speechless at meeting the student involved and two others who approached me. One girl standing a few feet away, whom I worked with at The Little Red School House, a Down's syndrome, said, "Mrs. Taylor," and turning to her mother continued, "There's Mrs. Taylor, and I love her." Her mother asked (not remembering!), "How do you know Mrs. Taylor?" She answered "The Little Red School House - she taught me lots of things." The year with Mary was 1952.

Down's Syndrome children are educable and will go far if given the opportunity. All things are possible.

## Stop the excuses

I read with much sadness the news concerning the plight of the people in the group homes for the retarded. It is very difficult for me to believe that there are still people so misinformed, so fearful and ignorant in their beliefs concerning the retarded.

This is due of course to lack of knowledge and education on the subject of retardation. The excuses that are given for not wanting these people in their neighborhood are ridiculous and are just that — excuses — all because of fear and lack of knowledge.

For over 50 years, I have been working with and teaching the retarded, the disturbed, the autistic, the handicapped, retarded adults and the normal child. My greatest joy has been in my work with the retarded. They are so accepting of everything and everybody. They are so full of love and do not see or hear the violence and hate that is all around them. They trust and believe in the goodness of their fellowman.

What a wonderful opportunity, you as parents and neighbors have to teach your child the most important lessons in life. By accepting these people as neighbors — you can teach your children how to accept others, to share in their lives, to show kindness and to care. If you cannot show compassion and understanding as parents — how can you expect your child to show these qualities?

Remember, you are the model. Your reaction to this situation will influence your child's thinking and actions. What you do and your decision will have far reaching affects on the future of your children. Stop making excuses — try to see the handicapped, the retarded as they really are — human beings, fellow men, children of God. Let them come to you, to your neighborhood and you will be blessed.

DOROTHEA A. TAYLOR  
Poughkeepsie

*[10] I wrote this Letter to the Editor of The Poughkeepsie Journal in response to the resistance communities in the area were giving to creating more group homes for the disabled.*



## Dyslexia

There have been many attempts to cope with the dyslexic child in a regular classroom, but they have been unsuccessful partly because of the lack of teacher preparation. Thomas Edison attended school for five days. His father said that he was lazy and stupid. His teacher said that he was sick. His mother took him out of school, hugged him, told him that she loved him and taught him herself saying, "You can do it."

Dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence and for years has been misunderstood and misdiagnosed. It affects many children and adults, some who are extremely talented. Among dyslexics are: Albert Einstein, Hans Christian Anderson, Tom Cruise, Cher and her daughters, and the late Nelson Rockefeller. Dyslexia is the result of a flaw in the brain's ability to process language. In the past, these children were placed in classes for the retarded and emotionally disturbed. This changed in 1975 with the federal passage of the "Education for all Handicapped Children Act" which gave dyslexics better access to normal classes. Sometimes called the "invisible handicapped," there are all types of dyslexics and varying degrees of dyslexia. They are generally of average or above average intelligence but have difficulty with reading and writing. They might see things in reverse, upside down, or even moving around on a page and often will see or write a word as a mirror image.

Teaching dyslexia has improved over the years, but problems remain. There have been many attempts to cope with the dyslexic child in a regular classroom (now inclusion) over the past 30 years but it has been unsuccessful partly because of lack of changes in teacher preparation. School districts operate under state and federal mandates for identifying needs and most states have not designated dyslexia as a special category. All regular education teachers in the school system around the state are still not required to take courses in special education. If dyslexic children do not have teachers who can understand their problems and intervene, then the child is lost.

There are some excellent private schools in New York State and in other states that have good reputations in this field and are producing good results. Unfortunately, the cost to attend these schools is a financial burden for the average family.

## The Gifted Child

There are no standard definitions for the bright and gifted child. The school system has adopted the results found in IQ testing. You can find the lower limit stated as low as 100 and as high as 150. But the use of IQ does not make allowances for the character and the motivation of the child. The main problem with the brighter child is to see that they are not held back and to be sure that you are using methods which help them capitalize on whatever capabilities they have.

My experience in the past with the bright and gifted child is that there *is* a difference in how they learn. I think of a bright child as one who profits from a college education and will do well in any career which they may choose. When we speak of the gifted, we mean children whose potentials are greater than bright, who exceed expectations, but we do not separate the bright from the gifted. If they are given proper care at home, skilled teaching attention and support that all children need, they will become well adjusted and happy, realizing their own potential even if it is abnormally beyond others. Remember that all children lack knowledge, judgment, and experience. Sometimes, I have found them to be physically and socially immature-obtaining full development is a long process for even the most gifted child.

As a good teacher you wish to help all the children in your class. Knowing the IQ can help the teacher adjust the curriculum to a child's ability. You do not expect the slower child to go as far or as fast as the brighter child. The trick, if you can call it that, to teaching an entire class when abilities differ to a great degree, is to keep the gifted and bright ones occupied, giving them constructive things to do while the others have time to finish the basics. And to not work the two groups together in a way that the gifted ones outshine and intimidate the others. Allow the gifted children to help the other students though they never know why, they just feel they are big shots while the "normal" or slower students benefit from the extra help.

My second grade class of '64 was an unusual class because there were several bright children and two gifted individuals that proved to keep me extremely busy. Although we had a library, I also had one in my classroom. When a gifted child had finished his assignment, he was free to read and to help others, especially the slower child. Different students were chosen to take charge of our library and



others took charge of our store when it was open.

A young boy, Michael, who was truly a gifted child, came to my class at 6 years of age. He loved reading books and became easily bored by waiting for other children to finish their reading and spelling. There were times at spelling periods when the class, including Michael, would prepare for a ten word test. Michael would number his words on paper and continue to read his story book. When I would finish dictation, Michael would spell all the words and pass in his paper with the rest of the class. Results would be every word correct and in the proper order. He tested IQ of 145. But he was immature in his relations to others and always appeared to be happiest in his relationship with an older child. His socialization improved as he grew older. In third grade, he played a twelve string guitar (taught himself) and played with the local church's folk group. He also excelled in sports. He did not skip any classes and was fortunate enough to have teachers that recognized the situation and provided many opportunities for him to continue in the learning process. He graduated from high school at 16, continued college and became a lawyer at age 22.

I had a girl, age 7, in my second grade class who was also advanced in many areas. All of her work in all subjects was completed ahead of the time during the class, causing frustration. She did excellent work in art and music, so I decided that when her class work was done, she would take her paints in the hallway and make a mural on the walls. This procedure took many weeks for completion, but the results for her intelligence and self-esteem were wonderful. She continued to excel in art, music and sports, and was involved in school plays and colleges. She lives a most productive life with her children and grandchildren.

There are still not enough teachers who identify our most talented children with the aim of challenging and educating them to their capacity. The future of civilization depends on educating all children and educating the brightest to become leaders.

## **The Learning Disabled Gifted Child**

Working with the learning disabled gifted child is especially a challenge but can be equally rewarding. They can be most unusual, producing much joy, surprise and concern for the teacher involved.

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This teacher must be able to motivate and challenge this child without creating paralyzing frustration. The child needs to experience success but not without constructive criticism. Determine their strengths and weaknesses. Use methods that will encourage the strengths of the children while teaching them to compensate for their weakness. For example, other than writing, use tapes, recordings, drawings, art media, role playing, drama, and typing. Remember, because they are learning disabled gifted, they will not be able to perform like other gifted children.

Motor skills and emotional behavior have a great effect on a child's performance. Their weaknesses are in the following areas: attention and motivation, self concept, handwriting, memory, sticking with a task, and auditory, motor and visual perception. They will attempt to hide or mask their "differences" because these differences can create a high level of frustration. Their strengths are in several languages, problem solving, leadership, original thoughts or ideas in art and music, creative ability, quick recall and they usually have avid interests.

Some of the answers that have helped the gifted disabled are: 1) Always identify the child's strengths as well as weaknesses; 2) Nurture the areas of strengths and provide training in the areas of weakness; 3; Tell stories about historical and contemporary gifted disabled achievers such as Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill, Cher, Bruce Jenner, Albert Einstein and Nelson Rockefeller; 4) Remember that there is more to life than school. Try to acquire the skills taught in school but keep your talents alive.

They can and will learn if given the time and patience. Some disabilities just seem to disappear once a child discovers and learns how to compensate or, through persistent work, to overcome. If the child is included in the regular class and does not present any behavior problems they should be requested to work with a slower child or spend some time with the Special Ed child. I did this several times with different children and the results were excellent. The child who was tutored showed self-respect, self-confidence and pride in their program. The tutors increased their self-respect and belief in their own ability. Once you identify the gift that your child has work WITH it not around it. Example: If it is with animals, give him work involving animals. If it is art, let him paint. If it is music, use this to help keep him interested and happy in the learning process.



## Learning Disability (Differences)

In 1963, Dr. Samuel Kirk, a psychologist in Chicago, was the first one to use the term "learning disabilities." Before this time, the terms used were brain damaged, minimal brain dysfunction, perceptual handicaps and communication disorders-all carrying a heavy medical or neurological stigma. Dr. Kirk sought to make these problems and people with these problems more accessible and better understood by teachers, parents and the public.

Learning disability does not mean that a child cannot learn or that there is no hope for change or that the child is not intelligent. Nor does it mean that a child will have problems in all areas. It does not mean that we should not have the right to expect the child to develop to his or her full academic potential.

A learning disability is simply a condition that interferes with a person's learning skills and overall functioning in life.

To address these conditions, we must have a special program for learning differences. A program dedicated to the philosophy that each child must be educated to the extent of his or her ability, no matter how extensive or limited it may be. The curriculum must be built for the individual and for their different needs. The program should involve teaching the child skills that are adequate to their intelligence and social needs, whatever the level. It should be built on their strengths, not their weakness. They should work at their pace and time. They should be allowed extra time to complete their work in all areas. In my experiences, I have found that their responses and comprehension do not differ from other children when required to perform the task involved. Give them time, give them space, and let them know "they can do it."

We must try to create a learning environment so the children can achieve mastery in some area. Henry Thoreau once wrote "Birds never sing in caves, and neither do we." In order to learn, the child must be free to experiment, to try, and to be free to make mistakes. That is the way to learn.

One of the most important elements in teaching is the self-image of the child. Adults in any child's world can strengthen his self-image by the words they use and the feelings that they convey. A child who is told that he is bad or stupid will behave in these ways.

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He will see himself as incapable of learning and he will hold this concept into his future. Although he may appear to be free to learn, he cannot because of his poor self-image. He is not free, he is restricted by the picture that he has of himself. The magic words are "I can." Let him learn these words and say them many times, "I can, I can, I can!." He will accomplish much!

In my years, I was always trying to make kids feel better. I remember one boy in my second grade Coeli class who had a learning disability but we didn't know too much about it. He never got a passing mark in anything and was really down in the dumps because of it. Compared to him, everyone seemed to be getting awards. What could I give him? I sent away for a special looking certificate, filled it out with his name and gave it to him. What for? He was the only one who had been to class every single day of the year. I told him, "You go to the head of the class. You are the only one who came here every single day and it is so important." He told everybody and they couldn't say no it's not true because it was true.

There are times when a teacher can, with one word, destroy the hopes and future of a child. Therefore, it is of great importance that all who come in contact with the L.D. child help them develop their self-image and give positive reinforcement and support in all areas of their development. It is important to help him believe in himself. Let them know their way of thinking is not just different but "special." Let the child pick out his own books to read; let them find their creative skill for writing stories and poems without criticizing the spelling. We must look at research in terms of telling us how children do learn, rather than why they cannot learn.

Results from formal testing that are used at the present time are not a full evaluation of the L.D. child's performance and should not be used to determine his achievement.

For testing, the teacher first observes the child and writes what she sees. Then take real samples of students work and study it. Next, consider the whole child-age, environment, particular strengths and weaknesses. Then the teacher will give an ability test, showing what the child is capable of doing. Scores must indicate a discrepancy between ability and achievement in order to be disabled. I was indeed fortunate to have worked with children when I did because I was able to use the material that I wanted as long as it produced results. There were parts of the testings that I used, some I ignored. The following is a list of tests I have used: Standard-Benet, Ann Arbor Learning Inventory,



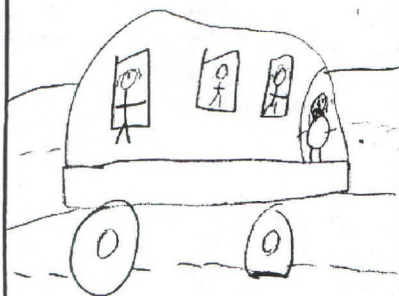
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Slingerland Screening Tests for identifying children with specific language disability (discrepancy between ability and achievement), Laubach Way to Reading-Laubach Literacy International, Syracuse, NY, parts from Gates-MaGinitie, Readiness Skills, and from Open Court (kindergarten and first grade) Language Arts program.

Finally, these words of Allen Martin, who wrote "Friends of Children with Learning Disabilities" should be our guide: "Let no child be demeaned nor have his words diminished because of our ignorance or inactivity. Let no child be deprived of discovery because we lack the resources to discover the problem. Let no child, ever, doubt himself or his mind because we were unsure of our commit-

Name christine

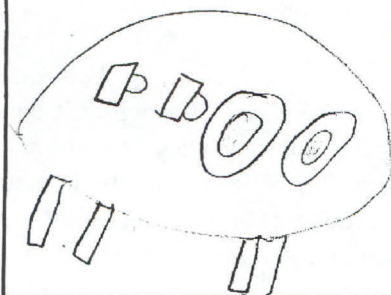
The car has a flat tire.



My book fell on the floor.



I set two plates and two cups on the tray.



She had picked a bunch of flowers.



## 2-5 TURNING WORDS INTO MENTAL IMAGES

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[11] An excellent assignment: "Turning Words Into Mental Images." It touches a child's imagination, gives them freedom to draw and to connect all these little abstract letters with situations in the world. Christine, whose work this is, has some learning disabilities but has overcome many by hard work and perseverance.



ment.

## **Learning Disabilities & the Right-brain & Left-brain Approach to Learning**

Everyone has a right and left hemisphere of the brain that must work together for true learning to take place. Much of today's education is dominated by left-brain curriculum that results in handicapping those with right-brain strengths. To put it simply, the left brain structures and organizes information and the right brain creates ideas.

### **Right Brain**

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music  
art  
singing  
creativity  
feelings and emotions  
shapes and patterns  
visualization  
learning by experience

### **Left Brain**

-----  
hand-writing  
language  
reading  
phonics  
locating details and facts  
following directions  
listening  
talking and reciting  
using symbols

"Left-brain children" deal in symbols, think in symbols and can function with symbols. "Right-brain children" deal with the concrete. They learn by doing, touching and moving. They often have problems dealing with written activity sheets. Left-brain children are very verbal, usually having good vocabularies and having no difficulty expressing themselves. Right-brain children are non-verbal and often have difficulty expressing themselves in words. They can use an object, touch it, point to it, but if you ask them to identify it, they have problems labeling it. Left-brain children have a sense of time. Right-brain children have very little sense of time.

Many right-brain children have difficulty with phonics. Phonics requires the ability to discriminate and associate sounds to make a word. These skills are basically located in the left hemisphere and are a part-to-whole activity. To help change this process, teach the children sight words containing the same pattern such as "rat," "fat," and "cat." The children must discover how the words are alike. Then

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have them change the words and make the substitutions, replacing them with ones that they think of themselves.

Right-brain children have trouble taking pieces and putting them together. If asked to sound out the word "map," they may respond with "cat." You have to give them the whole word to learn. Let them use color chalk (their favorite) to write each letter in a different color. Spell the word with eyes closed, then write the word five times with their eyes closed. Work with sequence, using body movements like hands on head, touch the shoulders, bend over, etc. Ask the children what you did first, second and third. Whole letter writing is when the child forms the whole letter without lifting his pencil from the page. Using music is another way to reach this child. Sing while you are teaching (clapping hands). Teach arithmetic by singing addition or times tables using clicking of the fingers to each number.

This whole-word approach to learning is almost never adopted. So what happens to the child who cannot learn phonics—who can only learn the whole word? He continues in phonics until the third grade, still unable to read, and is started on a career of failure. His learning "disability" in this case is due to an inappropriate method NOT to his capacity.

Most children are not all left-brain or all right-brain. Brain patterns are as individual as fingerprints. There are many combinations, all of which are normal. It is the teachers task—the entire education's system task—to evaluate the student and find the methods that enable learning, growth, self-understanding, self-esteem and productivity. In too many cases, the system forces the child to conform to it rather than the system having the ability to adapt to the needs and nature of its students. It's not that they can't learn. It's how they're being taught.

*The future will continue to show us how the two hemispheres work together and how to adapt this knowledge to education. Further techniques will be devised to strengthen both hemispheres. This will help create the balance that will give us a deeper understanding of learning.*

## Prader-Willi Syndrome

Prader-Willi Syndrome is a developmental disability associated with extreme obesity and uncontrollable appetite. The physical



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signs and behavioral symptoms are highly complex. Motor delays and mild to moderate retardation are among the signs.

In 1991, the George Jervis Clinic on Staten Island offered diagnostic treatment and research on Prader-Willi Syndrome. Services were being provided through a new unit in which all laboratory services and diagnostic procedures were available. New forms of treatments are being investigated and used, including human growth hormone therapy.

About 400 to 500 affected children are born in the United States each year. The results of the Jervis Clinic findings are available from: Prevention Education Resource Center, Institute for Basic Research (OMRDD), 1050 Forest Hill Road, Staten Island, NY 10314-6330. The telephone number is 718-494-0600.

## II. People

### John Dewey

John Dewey was the founder of the Philosophical School of Pragmatism and the outstanding thinker of the so-called progressive movement in American education in the first half of the 20th century. He was born in Burlington, Vermont in 1859. In 1882 he entered John Hopkins University in Baltimore for advanced study in philosophy. He received his Ph.D. at John Hopkins in 1884 and went to the University of Michigan, where he was appointed an instructor in Philosophy and Psychology. His interest in education began at Michigan University, where he observed that schools were going along lines set by early traditions and failed to adjust to the needs of a changing democratic social order. Dewey left Michigan in 1894 to become professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Chicago, where his achievement brought him national fame.

Dewey's philosophy of education was that the process must begin with and build upon the interests of the child, that it must provide opportunity for thinking and doing in the classroom experience, and that the teacher should be a guide and co-worker with the children, rather than a taskmaster assigning a fixed set of lessons. He believed that the goal of education is the growth of the child in all aspects of its being. In 1904 he accepted a professorship of philosophy at Columbia University in New York City, where he stayed for 47

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years. He became one of the most widely known and influential teachers in America.

However, in the last decades of his life, his philosophy on education was under attack. His progressive ideas were blamed for failures to train children adequately in essential core subjects and in manners and discipline. He stayed intellectually busy and continued his work until his death in 1952 at age 93.

I believe much of this reaction to his work was due to time and interpretation. When interpreted in the extreme, Dewey's ideas seemed to go too far in allowing children to do whatever they wanted-to learn in their own way and at their own speed. Also, as new generations grew up and both parents were working, society truly sped up: There was not time to allow a child to discover things on their own, to make all their own decisions. Nonetheless, though his philosophy was rejected in many cases for its impracticalities, a great deal of his influence remained, adapted to a more structured classroom and curriculum.

John Dewey wrote: "There is a disposition to pass on to those who are under the immediate jurisdiction of the teacher, namely, the children, the pattern of strict subordination, which they themselves have to follow. It may be a guess, but I think it is a safe guess, that the dictatorial autocratic attitude adopted by some teachers in the classroom is, in some considerable measure, a reflection of what they feel they suffer from. It offers a partial compensation for their own subjection. If these teachers had an opportunity to take some active part in the formation of general policies, they might well be moved to be less autocratic in their own domain.

## Eleanor Roosevelt and the Children

*Praise a child in a loud voice and scold in a whisper.*

-Catherine the Great

I met Eleanor Roosevelt for the second time when she returned from Russia in 1957. She spoke at the Vassar College summer program that involved parents and teachers in a Child Development course for both parent and child. She spoke about her trip to the Soviet Union. While there, she visited homes for children and day care centers. She was very impressed by what she saw. She



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also commented on the kindness and acceptance of the elderly people. Many cared for the children and played very important roles within the family.

After her lecture, I was given the opportunity to speak with her personally. She was most gracious and I was deeply moved by her love, caring for children, and acceptance of other races and religious beliefs. She had a high pitched voice that would rise even higher when talking about subjects that she cared about but she was learning to control it and bring it down. She was excited by the things happening in Russia and what we could learn from them. In this as in so many other things, she was ahead of her time. When I questioned her about the plight of the retarded or handicapped child, she replied, "In Russia, I was told that they have no 'retarded,' that every child has their 'niche' and whatever their potential is, they are given the opportunity to obtain it."

After talking with her, I was more than convinced that my future would continue to be in the teaching of the handicapped child. The need was great, and it continued to be a challenge and a reward. There were many occasions in the future that I would contact Eleanor for advice and help. She always listened and answered me. Our communication always involved children or some aspect of religion. As the years passed, she became part of my strength and my friend.

## Eleanor Roosevelt's Val-Kill

Val-kill is the Dutch name for Fallkill Creek, which runs generally south and west through Hyde Park to Poughkeepsie, where it empties into the Hudson River. It is also the name given to the piece of Roosevelt family property which became Mrs. Roosevelt's home. Both Franklin and Eleanor were "river people," members of the old Dutch and English landed gentry, implanted from Europe in the late 17th century.

Franklin Roosevelt offered to build a cottage for her beside the Fallkill, just east of his Hyde Park home. The cottage was designed by Franklin and Henry Loombs. It was completed by the end of 1925. Lifetime interest in the property was given by Franklin to Eleanor and her friends Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook. They acted on an idea to establish a factory. It provided extra income for people in rural areas who reproduced Early American furniture. This

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was expanded to include weaving and jewelry making. The three women were equal partners in the undertaking and they shared the cottage with Eleanor for more than 20 years. When the Val-Kill Industries was dissolved in 1936, they converted the factory into a residence for their own use. In 1947, Nancy Cook and Marion Dickinson moved to Connecticut. Eleanor acquired title to all buildings and 825 acres of land.

On June 9, 1939, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England visited Val-Kill where at a picnic lunch there were served hot dogs, potato salad, smoked turkey, baked ham, baked beans and strawberries. Mrs. Roosevelt thought that they should try to give the King and Queen something that they would not have at home and it should be interesting. We tried to give them American food while they were with us.

After Franklin passed away, Eleanor lived at Val-Kill for much of every year and was a part of the community of Hyde Park, walking to stores and going to church at St. James. My husband remembers her buying Christmas gifts at the Wallace Company where he was the buyer of men's clothing. She also wrote a special weekly column called "My Day" published in *The Poughkeepsie Journal* and other papers. She wrote about the differences between people, where they came from and how this influenced things today.

After her death in 1962, effort was made, unsuccessfully to convince the federal government to save her home at Val-Kill for the American people. Val-Kill was more or less dormant for a number of years. Then, in 1975 local efforts were renewed to save the site until, in 1977, Eleanor Roosevelt National Site became the first site in the nation to honor a president's wife. The National Park Service had developed specific management objectives, among which is: "To commemorate the life and work of Eleanor Roosevelt, focusing on her personal philosophy and issues that were of concern for her."

In May of 1979, the Legislature authorizing Eleanor Roosevelt Nation Historic Site was passed by Congress. They indicated a threefold purpose for the park: a) To commemorate for the education, inspiration and benefit of present and future generations the life's "work of an outstanding woman in American History, Eleanor Roosevelt;" b) To provide a site for continuing studies, lectures, seminars, and other endeavors relating to the issues to which she denoted her considerable intellect and humanitarianism concerns; c) To concern for public use and enjoyment in a manner compatible with the



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foregoing purpose an area of natural open space in an expanding urbanized environment.

Val-Kill Inc. is now a non-profit organization chartered for the above purposes and it has continued an interest in the planning and operation of programs at the site since the park's establishment in 1976.

## ERVK

The friends of Valkill (ERVK) have devoted many hours to the humanitarian causes that Eleanor believed in. They present lectures and speakers' programs securing people who knew Eleanor personally and/ or had some connection with her at some period of her life. I am one of the older members of the group and one of the few left who knew Eleanor. We have had some wonderful gatherings.

The human rights emphasis was inaugurated during a lovely, moving candle-lighting ceremony that was organized by The Friends Committee of ERVK. This ceremony honors unsung heroes who have followed Mrs. Roosevelt's work in the human rights area. It also gives an award to one special individual who has been recognized as carrying forward the work and spirit of Mrs. Roosevelt.

In 1979, The Friend's Committee of Eleanor Roosevelt presented Jean Stapleton, actress and founding member of ERVK in "Soul of Iron." Her performance dramatized ER's importance to the American people and drew attention to the need to preserve and further her work. Ms. Stapleton continues to reprise this role on occasion in theaters around the country.

At one of our special lunches, we had Harry Belafonte, who spoke about race relations and told how the local schools were helping by having children teaching children in programs called "Racial Harmony" and "Youth Against Racism." Later, members of ERVK met and spoke to him. However, mine was a special greeting. He worked towards me, hand out-stretched, saying, "O lovely lady, how are you?" And he kissed me. My grandson, standing close by, gave me a big smile.

A girls leadership program is conducted in June of each year. It consists of leadership development sessions, history of the women's movement and visits to the E. Roosevelt U.S. monument, the United Nations in New York City and New York's State capitol in Albany.

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They also work on community service projects, civic participation training and environmental appreciation of Val-Kill and human rights.

One year, I helped organize a day with a group from an adult home in Rhinebeck. They displayed and sold articles that they had made at the center-afghans, socks and lovely ceramics. They explained their work and were admired by the members and guests. Eleanor was a friend of the handicapped and she would have been very pleased.

There have been other memorable days:

I remember a great talk given by Speaker Judge Albert Rosenblatt on the 4th of July one year celebrating our freedom and introducing several families from other countries who received American flags that they proudly waved and waved. Another meeting of ERVK involved dancers from the Scotch Society. It was a delightful performance, bringing a bit of Scotland to us.

And Eleanor's birthday is always a big day, drawing many people and attended by some of the Roosevelt family, well-known speakers and local artists. This celebration has grown in recent years. It started with a luncheon at a local hotel attended by some friends, Board members and members of ERVK and speeches given by friends, mostly pertaining to the Roosevelts. At the present time, the birthday party includes many people that are involved in some area of human rights with speakers from all over the world.

Among the founders of ERVK that continue to be active with the group are Joyce Ghee (founder), Joan Spence, Helen Marchese and Margaret Amierowski.

## F.D.R.

Memories of F.D.R. are not as vivid or personal as of Eleanor but I do remember things that he did and changed while he was in the White House. It has been said that none of the Presidents ever matched him as a communicator. He loved his town, his church and the people of Hyde Park. While still the Governor he attended meetings at the Poughkeepsie Masonic Lodge. My husband's father was also a member and on this special night had F.D.R. sitting at his right side. He whispered in Grandpa Taylor's ear, "Will you please lend me 25 cents? I need it to pay for parking my car." Grandpa Taylor was very happy to comply. A few days later, he received 25 cents from



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F.D.R. thanking him for his kindness. We still have the quarter and a note of appreciation from F.D.R..

As an employee of the Wallace Company when I was twenty years old my salary was \$7.50 a week. One of the first things President Roosevelt did was to raise the minimum salary and my weekly check was \$13. It was a day to celebrate.

Roosevelt was greatly admired in Russia during the war years. When the war began, the military in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow doubted that the Russians could survive the German onslaught. After F.D.R. sent Harry Hopkins over to check on the capability to survive, he (Hopkins) said, "They will survive and we should help them." F.D.R. began to "Lend Lease" to Russia and he was considered a good friend by all the Russians.

F.D.R. recognized that old public buildings were built when people understood that they reflected a community character and its respect for government and laws. He made sure that post offices and schools that were built during his tenure reflected his native county of Dutchess by using Dutch Colonial architecture of fieldstone and slate from the Hudson Valley. The President personally campaigned *The Poughkeepsie Journal's* publishers to build using a local historical style and materials. We have their wonderful building with its clock tower and weather vane of Henry Hudson's ship the Half Moon to thank him for. Violet Avenue School, the Hyde Park Post Office, Haviland High School-these are several examples of his vision.

I remember that F.D.R. was the first president of the U.S. to talk directly to the people over the air. He closed the banks to bring order out of a chaotic situation. He tried to remember the individual citizen in Hyde Park-the girl behind the counter, the carpenter on the new building and the farmer in the fields. These were the overwhelming majority, all of whom had their small savings in some kind of a bank. And it was these people who he knew he had to reach. The result: the radio talk about the bank action.

He initiated the "New Deal" when the country was in the midst of the worst crisis in history. The best of the "New Deal" was the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935. F.D.R. was a man with great vision.

On the day before he died, he said, "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow, will be our doubts of today."

### Maria Montessori

Dr. Maria Montessori came to this country in 1913. She was the originator of a method that revolutionized the teaching of little children. Based on her belief (at the time, this could even be called a discovery) that children *want* to learn, her method gave them an entirely new freedom in the classroom.

Born in Italy in 1870, Maria Montessori wanted a career that would involve her in personal service to humanity so she decided to become a doctor. By gaining admittance to the University of Rome, she became the first female medical student in Italian history. Her fellow students were hostile and she became quite depressed. One night, after working late and alone, she left the school, discouraged and unhappy. On a park bench, she noticed a poor beggar woman with a child playing with a streamer of red paper. The child was happy and absorbed. Maria thought, was it possible that so simple a thing could keep a child happy? She became fascinated with children, how they learn and what brings joy. She decided that she would continue her studies, become a doctor, and pursue work with children. She graduated in 1894 and was appointed assistant director of the Universities Psychiatric Clinic. Her work took her into contact with the retarded children who were housed with men and women in the general asylums. She was greatly disturbed by the circumstances and the lack of anything for the children to do—no toys to play with, no dolls to cuddle. She began to study and do research work in retardation.

In 1899, at a teachers' conference in Turin, she announced that retarded children could benefit from education if given proper attention. Dr. Montessori visited schools in London, Paris, and other European cities to study their teaching methods. As a result, a state school for the retarded was founded in Italy. She continued her work using methods and materials never tried before, breaking down the traditional rigid structure of the classroom and authoritarian student-teacher relation.

She believed that children must be given freedom of movement and that the process of learning must be happy and exciting. The children were allowed to move about in the classroom and always choose what they wanted to do, provided that they did not overstep the borders of harmony and good manners. There were color boxes,



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counting wooden blocks, boards to distinguish between rough and smooth, and frames for buttoning and lacing on flannel. Also, she used sandpaper letters and introduction objects in every kind of geometrical form. She said, "To develop intelligence, the child falls into two groups: 1. The motor skills to walk and coordinate his movements. 2. The sensory functions through which he lays the foundation of his intelligence, by observing, comparing, and making judgment."

These new methods were so successful that Dr. Montessori eventually sent a group of so-called "idiots" to take the regular examinations taken by the public school children. They actually did better than the normal pupils. Now, she was convinced that similar methods applied to normal children would also set free their personalities in a surprising way.

By the end of 1907, she opened and became Director of the first Children's House. Other houses were set up and a Montessori Society was started in Rome and other European cities. During World War I, her work was halted as, back in Italy, her methods met with political resistance. Benito Mussolini did not allow freedom in education and her schools were closed. But the public protested so badly that Mussolini finally gave permission to reopen the schools.

As for her methods of reaching children, she said, "The teacher must know how to observe." She linked the role of the teacher to what she called "the organization of work in which a teacher vowed to respect every child."

Her teaching provides conditions of freedom for the child, but sets limits. She sought to guide the child without letting him know while always being ready to provide needed help. She said, "The organization of work would be in vain without freedom of all those energies which come from the satisfaction of the child's highest activities. Freedom without work would be useless. The child left free without means of work would go to waste—just as a new-born baby, if left without nourishment, would die of starvation."

Dr. Marie Montessori died in 1952, leaving a lasting monument found in thousands of happy classrooms in every part of the world. The end of the learning process for Marie Montessori was more "growth."

I first encountered Montessori methods while working at the Little Red School House. It turns out that without knowing it, many of my methods developed on the job were similar to hers.

One especially important concept was to allow a child to be

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free but to set limits. This sounded strange to other teachers, particularly those used to a more authoritative, disciplinary approach. Here is an example of what I mean. If a child is working on a puzzle, I never stopped them from doing it even if the rest of the class was headed out for recess. This allows them to continue in their thought and body process and to fully explore the moment they are in. For other teachers, they'd say, "The time is up. It's time to stop." In other words, the clock is more important than what you are doing, what you are feeling, what you are learning.

One teacher I worked with at Coeli used to say, "I'll give you five minutes." Even though, she was giving them time to stop what they were doing and get ready for something else, it still wasn't right. A five year old doesn't know what five minutes is and can't conform their experience in that way. The learning process and the time it takes shouldn't be rigid. It should be free and flexible. There is enough time pressure in society already. Allow a child to take some idea or experience to some closure for them at that moment.

At Regina Coeli, the Open Court curriculum incorporated many Montessori ideas. In the classroom, we had a music corner with bells and drums and recorders. Especially unique and nice were smells. We had a box and in it were little round scented corks that the child smelled and could learn to identify. Montessori suggested doing a lot of work with animals. Since, we couldn't have them in the class, we talked about them a great deal and made the different animals sounds. One of the sisters from Coeli did start a pre-Kindergarten Montessori school in Hyde Park with the idea that she would start them in the Montessori then send them to me in the Kindergarten. She had rabbits and guinea pigs that the children would take care of and play with. When she closed due to lack of funds, she offered her materials to my classroom.

Montessori was great on music and art that brought out so much that nothing else did. We did a lot of music those years, all kinds, and dancing. We used a book with Yiddish, Spanish, Italian and German songs. I'd sing it (sometimes just sounding it out the best I could myself) and they'd sing it back. The children loved it, especially the German. Every time we did German someone would say, "Can we do it again?" They must have liked that guttural sound. We made a band and walked around the school playing small instruments-bells and drums. Everyone would gather around the doorways to hear our band pass by. One year Sister Barbara asked if I wanted an organ.



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Someone had given her a wonderful three tier organ. I, of course, said SURE and for one year we had an organ that added to our music and provided enjoyment for the class-and for me.

I also had four easels in the room and the ones that wanted to could paint everyday though no one had to. Usually-this being one of those moments when the teacher has to step in to "set a limit"-I'd have to arbitrate as they fought over who could go next. We had building blocks and a doll corner with all the dolls to dress and undress. Many of these things they do have these days in a regular kindergarten though music unfortunately does not seem to be used as often as we did.

## Norman Vincent Peale

Norman Vincent Peale was known over the world as a great optimist, an inspirational Christian preacher and author who celebrated his theory of "The Power of Positive Thinking" in a book of that title that sold nearly 20 million copies in 44 languages. This book, he said, he originally wrote in order to confront and overcome his own inferiority complex.

"You are looking at a person who in his youth, was the worst negative thinker in the world." After college he became a reporter for the *Detroit Journal*. During a fire in Detroit, Peale talked a frightened child off a dangerous ledge causing different people to tell him that he should be a preacher. His vocation soon changed. Later that year, he enrolled at the Boston University School of Theology. At age 24, he began preaching at Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan where he stayed until the early 1980's.

It was in February, 1940 that my husband and I attended his church and met the man who helped change many lives with "positive thinking."

He started a clinic for Christian psychotherapy and began to publish a magazine called *Guideposts* in 1945. For 54 years, he had a radio broadcast. Publication of his sessions grew into the worldwide Peale Center for Christian Living. His inspirational messages, found in his 46 books, transcended religious boundaries as business groups focused on his can-do method of facing problems squarely by positive thinking.

With a deep understanding of human behavior, Dr. Peale

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helped originate a philosophy of happiness. He helped millions find a new meaning in their lives. Dr. Peale was presented the "Presidential Medal of Freedom" in 1984. He died in his sleep on Christmas Eve, 1993 at his home in Pawling, New York, a small town not too far east of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County.

### Charles Gilbert Spross

Through his songs, choral works, piano and organ compositions, he has given to the world, gems of his creative art, a permanent value and a high standard of musicianship. As a young boy, he pumped the organ in the church where his sister was the organist. After his sister's practice period, he found the opportunity to practice on the organ manuals. He studied with many harmony and organ teachers locally and took piano work, theory and composition in New York City with well known professional musicians. As a young man, he decided to specialize in accompanying and this art gained for him a reputation on the concert stage which was doubtful if any could ever surpass or even equal. He accompanied Melba, Nordica, Freonstad, Shumann-Heink, Marion Falley, Alma Gluck, Mary Garden, Ruffo, Enrico Caruso and many others. He was also the soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and wrote over 200 songs, piano pieces, cantatas and anthems.

### III. Teaching

#### Braille

One of the joys of teaching is that you are constantly learning new things. And, in turn, discovering new ways of sharing life and learning with students-of bringing unexpected stories, ideas and tools into the classroom. In 1982, I took a course in Braille that was given at a local high school by a blind teacher and proved to be most helpful in my teaching.

The first two weeks were spent on "getting to know you," the class and the teacher. First, she asked the class to be very quiet while she asked each student, one at a time, to walk up to her desk, speak to her, giving our name, row, and desk number. Then we would walk



back to our desk and the next person would walk up to her desk. She would speak to each row, one at a time, until she had finished speaking and listening to fifteen students. This was time consuming, but an amazing result occurred. She started the teaching process by calling out names, saying "Mary Smith, 2nd row, 3rd seat, will you please answer my first question?" There were few mistakes and at the end of the week, there were none. We were required to use the same desk at each session, and we did. Unfortunately, after several weeks of exploring the Braille system, the teacher became ill and the course had to be canceled. She left many disappointed students, especially myself, but I began to introduce her teachings to my students.

At that time, I was working with a young boy with partial vision whose visual future was undetermined. Also, I was using the Braille method with an eight year old girl whose grandfather was blind. It was most rewarding to all of us. Many times in the years after, I used my Braille board as a motivating method in teaching the learning disabled child to help their self-image. It exposes the children to an entire other way of the world, one without sight. This stimulates their compassion and imagination and truly "opens their eyes." I have told many of my children the story of Helen Keller and it has been a favorite. There was Daniel who had many visual problems, who said "If she can, I can."

## **Inclusion**

The question involves integrating into normal classrooms students with disabilities. In the 1960's, there was hope that some day children with learning disabilities would be served by teachers trained and prepared for this task. As the 1990's approached, many teachers who working with these children were still not trained in the field of special education. The public, in general, assumes that the regular class teachers are equipped with teaching strategies, material and the time to educate these children with disabilities. Though most regular teachers are empathetic toward them, many are not able to quickly identify what a child's problem is with any depth and most do not have the expertise or time to help. A teacher trained in these learning disabilities can walk into a classroom and just by watching and interacting for a few hours or a few days, identify the children with disabilities and begin to incorporate individual and classroom strategies

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to help.

Yet, too often, even if the teacher possesses the knowledge, they are more concerned with conformity-accomplishing the curriculum they must get through. The nature of the disabilities, such as ADD, ADHD, or dyslexia, and the need for related services are often disregarded. Some children can be educated within an "inclusion" model, others can not. Many school districts are moving toward full inclusion despite the lack of support, research, and information on the subject. This is in part to save funds as special programs are expensive to maintain, in part because parents don't want their children separated from being "normal," and in part because of traditional educational beliefs that children should be taught together in the class.

In this story, what happened when the "Little Red School House" closed and the children were transferred to the public school system? Some children, those deemed "educable" were accepted. Of these, some succeeded and were able to integrate and grow, others suffered, did not get the special help they needed and failed to grow to their potential. Some of these joined the children deemed "trainable" who were sent to the Rehabilitation Center for the handicapped. The program there involved teachers and personnel who were specially trained to meet the needs of the learning disabled child, but the focus was on acquiring skills for tasks and self-sufficiency, not in academic subjects such as reading and writing that give greater power to express.

There are many children, depending on the type and degree of disability differences, who cannot function in a large group of children with various levels of learning. They will become extremely frustrated, unhappy and insecure. Their self-image (which is already poor) will diminish.

The answer I believe is to provide more special education teachers and some training in this field for all teachers working with children. Some courses involving children with disabilities should be a "must" at all teacher-training colleges. There should be changes made in the methods used to evaluate the students. Screening and testing should move towards a more holistic understanding of each child rather than quantifiable testing results.

Inclusion-will it be a process of school reform as well as a vision for the 21st century? Or will it be another program that will fail because it lacks the total understanding of the child and his needs AND the needs and abilities of teachers?



## Think Mathematics

Mathematics is a familiar tool of real life. Transactions of daily life should be reviewed in story problems. Remember that math is the one subject that never changes. All other subjects change-history, social studies, and language, but  $2 + 2 = 4$  is now and will always remain. (My grandson tells me about the peculiarities of quantum physics. Well, I'll go out on a limb here and say that  $2+2=4$  will stay the same for most of us!) Children who have problems mastering a particular skill usually need a different approach to the skill. This applies to Math as well.

The teaching of Math has made many changes in the past 60 years. Research and study continues. Today's program is different than yesterday's and tomorrow's will be different from today's.

In Math-not one of MY strong subjects when I was in school!-I benefited as a teacher from some of John Dewey's ideas and from those of my great aunt. Dewey believed that the subject matter selected for the Math program should have a plain relation to some real need or situation in life. He believed in active learning-"Get the children doing something"-where all studies grow out of relationships with the world. In Math lessons, don't just use numbers and counting. Create situations with problems that require the skills of math to solve. Meanwhile, a little Math can be woven into a history lesson or art or music class. Now, of course, this gets more complicate as the math gets more complex. But for the child just learning his way in the world, I believe it is the best focus-keeping math related to life and not falling into it as an abstract subject separate from the world around us.

When I suggested the old idea of my Aunt Addy, the second grade class jumped at the chance and decided to have a store, selling candy, cookies, pencils and crayons. They would use real money, making change when necessary. So, a real store we had in the back of the classroom. It was equipped with cash register, money for making change, paper bags and a counter. The merchandise was labeled 5 cents, 7 cents, 9 cents, 10 cents, 20 cents, etc. The store was open 2 days a week. On those days, it took the place of a formal Math lesson and the results were most productive. By seeing and doing they were accomplishing more than a teacher or instructor from a manual could

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produce.

(I provided coins from my piggy bank to run the store. If the use of money is an objection in a particular school, other systems can be used. Substitute colored chips or student handmade bank notes. There are many variations and many other situations that can be used to teach Math. It starts with imagining.)

One day a week was "slate" day. Each child had their own chalk and slate. I chose a leader who put his problem on his slate. The others gave the answer. Other times they chose the leaders and I was only the guide. Only slates were used on that day. Results were good and the children looked forward to this "active learning."

## Music

Music has produced phenomenal results for many children in the process of learning. Many schools have relegated music to being a "special" instead of using it as a tool for learning ANY subject. Music creates harmony and relaxation which is the first step to constructive thinking. Did you know that it is most difficult for a child to learn if there is anything or anyone that he or she is afraid of? Did you know that fear in the classroom diminishes the ability to learn? The atmosphere must be free of fear and should be replaced by harmony and love. Music promotes this and will increase the memory span and aid in concentration.

Have you ever questioned why a child can sing melodies that consist of difficult words like "Supercalifragilistic" and actually learn to spell the word correctly? They relax with music, they concentrate on the tune and the words. It is joyful, and they are in control. The late Grace Fernald, U.C.L.A., endorsed a program called "happifying method" using some of these ideas that I found successful. I have used music in teaching the alphabet, encouraging the child to write the letters as he sings. A class that is filled with song while working is a joyful one and with it comes learning in many areas.



## Play

*The training of children is a profession where we must know how to waste time in order to save it.*

-Jean Rousseau

The young child must be given the opportunity to experience the joy of learning through "play." Play is an experience in life for a child. They learn through all their senses and all their muscles. Small children will smell the world with their noses and take in the world with their fingers, touching their body balance, even their tongues. Watch a child at play. Doesn't he remember an engine through sound and muscle images? Doesn't he ring his bell, blow off steam, and go puffing around the room? Doesn't this mean that he took his engine in through his senses and muscles? In his play, he recalls his experiences. Play is more than exercises-it becomes educational and is another time of growth to observe.

Drawings are a kind of play with crayons and paints. We should let the child see and hear through their own eyes and ears without always interpreting, exploring, and pointing out our observation. Provide them with a suitable setting for learning and let them learn. Sensation, wonder and thinking-the child's experience is a rich composite of all of these. For his or her fullest development as a person, we must wisely secure his world of new experience, giving him strength through being loved and understood.

In the nursery group, he will grow and need gradually, but steadily, to free himself from the infantile gratification of dependency and protection. He will need the strength of being able to do, to create, to solve and to understand. He needs experience in the nursery years suitable to his powers that will heighten his sensitivity and support his curiosity. This will lessen his frustration and give him pleasure through the growth of skills and interest. Ages and stages! This play, this experience should not be postponed until he is older if it is planned imaginatively by the nursery school teachers who have observed what children observed, what they wonder about, what they enjoy doing, seeing and hearing, making and understanding.

This is the goal for education in the nursery years: How to

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create a situation which will offer the child opportunity to develop a deep sense of belonging in the world of people.

Remember, a little child's day should be filled with first-hand experience. There should be materials to manipulate. We sometimes forget that children have to learn form, size, texture through touching, looking, and comparing. They have to learn all kinds of sounds. Their senses are not dulled but are sharp and keenly perceptive. As teachers we should be challenged to stimulate and preserve this by providing rich and varied opportunities for learning by direct and vital experiences.

As teachers, we must provide for expression in play and language that is vivid and shining as the clear eyes of childhood. Only through play are these things possible.

## Teaching Languages to Young Children

The very young child enjoys learning about other cultures and languages. Their brains can be compared to a sponge that soaks up knowledge and adults can forget this process. I was never very formal or systematic but took the little time I could allot to introducing a language through talking about the culture, singing songs and teaching simple sayings. Even a word or two can begin to open a culture. "Buenes noches" or "Adios" and a child's interest is sparked.

In the 1960s, I started teaching conversational Spanish with my kindergarten class and the response was delightful. They learned songs and, on occasion, they would use some words and sentences among themselves. When they reached the second grade, they still remembered. In second grade, I reserved fifteen or twenty minutes a day to teach and speak in Spanish. I had a contained class room with no "specials" which allowed me to create other subjects and Spanish was one I chose.

One year, I had a student who was going to South America for a month. The class enjoyed working with him and all were learning the most important words, phrases and sentences that he would use in that country. That was the same year that I introduced Braille to the students. We had a student with a blind grandfather who had come to live with her and the family. The entire class worked on this with joy.

Later, when I returned to Regina Coeli as a remedial reading



teacher, I continued to work with teaching other languages as a tool to motivate the child in the process of learning. This was in the 90's and a few children were interested in Japanese, so we learned about the culture and some of the basics of speaking in the tongue of the people.

When I directed the "after-school" program at Regina Coeli, I had a group of children that were interested in Spanish, ages 8 to 10. In the process, they learned much about the culture, religion and the different Spanish speaking countries.

There is a private school in this area that teaches Spanish, Italian and French in the early years. Recently, on a Sunday, the first grade sang the "Lord's Prayer" in Italian at the church service. The congregation was overjoyed and asked for more.

Teaching languages is a tool for learning our own language and it has been overlooked and neglected by educators for many years. Most students, if at all, do not have the opportunity to start learning a language till 9th grade, 7th at the earliest. This is nothing but a mistake to wait so long! Serious study may come later, but an introduction to other languages and brief regular lessons in one are a joy and should not be missed for the young student. What is needed? Teachers who have some understanding of a language or someone in the school who can share their language with others. Then we need schools who are willing to seize the opportunity of young minds growing up in this time where people from all nations live together, communicate with each other and are truly building another kind of world.

## Methods & Sources

Many years ago, a "professor" told me, "Teaching is a science and an art." My time as a teacher has proven this to be true to me. It is an art in its many ways of giving expression, power, seeing, hearing and understanding. It is a science in its experimentation, use of methods and observations always searching for answers: How can I help this child grow? How can I motivate him to learn? His dream of tomorrow is my task of today.

Over the years, I have been asked to specify the particular methods and materials I've used. They have come from many sources and application, again, greatly depends on the individual concerned. I

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have developed many of my own-some trial by error. What I can do here is list a few of the most valuable.

I have used suggestions from John Dewey. He said, "A child's world is a world of people with their personal interests rather than a world of facts and laws. Not truth in the sense of conformity to extreme facts but affection and sympathy is its keynote." Continuing, he said, "Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science, art and industry, the world now holds as its own." (see Index, John Dewey)

Marie Montessori said, "There is no behavior problems where there is interest. Freedom is an essential element. A child is only limited when he shows acts of destruction or against another child. Otherwise the children are free to move about the classroom and to choose their own activities. To be actively disciplined, the teacher must set firm limits against destructive or asocial actions-thus assuring the different between good and evil." She believed that children must be given not only freedom of movement, but the process of learning must be happy and exciting. There were coloring boxes, frames for buttoning, small tables and chairs, blackboards low enough for the child to reach easily, blocks and puzzles. "The child must be given activities that encourage independence and he must not be served by others in acts he must learn to perform for himself. (see Index, Marie Montessori)

In Kindergarten, I used the "Open Court" Series. Some of the writers of this material were Montessori teachers. We must recognize that most young children do not learn everything in school, so the school program must be considered in the light of what adds to the enormous and valuable experience of home and neighborhood. "Open Court" is a program that supplements the natural expression of children by contributing the special kinds of learning that the teachers can supply. The children learn counting and measuring, thinking skills, human understanding through literature and an excellent music program.

I found that the late Nina Traub's book *Recipe for Reading* was excellent in my teaching children with specific learning disabilities. Indeed, all children could benefit from this approach and could learn to read, write and spell better and at an earlier age. Traub's book on mathematics is also a valuable resource, *Recipe for Math*. Nina Traub said of working with learning disabled children, "Love is essential but it must be coupled with knowledge."



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From Orton-Gillingham, I learned more on teaching multisensory phonics through using "Presenting Academic Failure Program." The Orton Dyslexic Society gave me more support in its educational program. They work toward the day when every child and adult will have the opportunity to master language to the extent required for full participation in our culture.

A *Specific Skills* series of books by Richard A. Boning, reading specialist, was most helpful in teaching the slow-learner or those learning a second language.

The Merrill Linguistic reading program based on the philosophy of Charles C. Fries helped with writing words and sentences and stressing phrases and sentence comprehension.

The Laubach Way to Reading series is excellent-starting with the known, the spoken word, and moving to the unknown, the written word. The emphasis is on learning by association rather than rote memory. This series is also most helpful for second language students and gives teachers and students a consistent pattern to follow.

Many teaching problems will be solved in the next few decades. There will be new environments and new methods of instructions. But one function will always remain: the teacher alone has the ability to create the emotional climate for learning. No machine, sophisticated as it may be, can fulfill the role of the teacher.

## Teachers & Parents

Much can be learned about a child by both teacher and parent if they come together regularly and openly. In the early years (Nursery, Kindergarten & 1st Grade) it is good for a school to organize a group of parents and teachers in these grades that can meet and discuss the children's needs and interests. This meeting should be focused on a common goal-the children instead of each other. Parents too need to know that they are not alone in facing difficulties of raising their own children. These meetings should be held once a month and should revolve around sharing information through discussion. Many parents will be concerned by the problem of discipline. Children should be treated sympathetically and not be pushed around. Those who are interested in their work and play are well-behaved; those who are disrupted or disinterested should not be scolded-we must look deeper to find the source of their behavior and develop

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strategies to motivate them and learn cooperatively.

As adults and teachers we should recognize that childhood is not a preparation for life-childhood is life. A child is an active, participating and contributing member of society from the time he is born. No child will miss the joy of living unless it is denied him by adults who are convinced that childhood is a period of preparation.

The classroom and the home and neighborhood sometimes exist in a child's life as if they were on different planets. It is important that the learning process in the classroom extends into the home and neighborhood and that the latter has a presence in the environment where student and teacher come together.



Dorothea Taylor

## Once Upon a Time About The Author

Born in 1913, lifelong Poughkeepsie, NY resident Dorothea Taylor has traveled many paths and used many methods of teaching. A mother of two, grandmother of eight, and great-grandmother of five, she continues to work with and teach children and adults in both public and private schools. She finished Child Development at Vassar College, attended Columbia and New York Universities and SUNY at New Paltz, where she completed courses of study in Psychology, Special Education, Reading, Hearing, and Speech. She taught in public and private schools for over 60 years, worked with handicapped children, learning disabled, dyslexic, deaf, blind, autistic, and Downs Syndrome. She taught in one of the first schools for the retarded in New York State and spent many years in a contained classroom. In 1960, she received recognition for material written on "The Exceptional Child," which was accepted and utilized by the late President John F. Kennedy's Panel on Mental Retardation. Her work was also recognized by the late first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, listed in Who's Who in Community Leaders of America in 1972 and the Dictionary of International Biography in 1974. Presently, she works daily as a part-time volunteer with Pre-K children, and children with reading problems, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, and dyslexics. "There is no greater service to this country than the education of our children."





