
The Children's Journal

The Soapbox Issue

Fall 2004
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Anyone got a Soapbox?

One of the best parts of helping with the CCC Children's Journal is being in the midst of a talented, divergent, informed group of parents dedicated to improving the community of our children. So many ideas - both good and bad - get bantered about that it is hard to limit the scope of each issue. For this year's first issue, we decided to open all the gates and give every issue it's day in print. We call it the SoapBox issue. Inside you will find a wide variety of ideas, some intended to stir the pot, others intended to stir the pot even more. What unifies them all is that they aim to improve our community. You may not agree nor should you; in fact the CJ team disagreed so much that we even offer two points of view on the subject of Television! With the elections behind us (finally!) what better metaphor to reflect upon than that of the great American melting pot. In the case of the CCC, that pot just happens to be filled with Mac and Cheese with an organic juice box on the side.

If any of the ideas presented here spur you to do some background reading, please keep in mind that November 20 is CCC day at the Concord Bookstore. Our friends at the Bookstore have reinstated this generous tradition in which 10% of that day's sale will be donated to the CCC. So get your holiday list ready and see you there!

Finally, on behalf of the whole Editorial group, the Children's Journal would like to welcome Pat Nelson to the position of Executive Director. Pat's initial article offering for her personal "issue" was so good that we decided to base an entire future issue on the theme! Kathy Reticker's 12-year tenure will be a tough act to follow, but Pat is just the person for the job and the Children's Journal is delighted to welcome her into the fold.

Jonathan Campbell on behalf of Meighan Matthews, co-editor, and Editorial Committee members Connie Johnson, Matt Johnson, Pat Nelson, Leslie Koplou, Elise Mott, and Graphic Designer Gretchen Hollworth.



A Message from the Director

It did not surprise me that this year's first issue of the Children's Journal would be the "The Soapbox." I knew even before applying for the position as executive director that CCC is a place filled with people who are passionate about the issues that effect children. In fact it was the passion that I saw in Kathy Reticker and her staff, for the work they do, and the mission of CCC that drew me here.

Quickly, I have learned that the community of parents are equally passionate about CCC. I am also learning that this diverse group of parents care deeply about many issues and are not a bit shy about sharing their perspective, nor are they shy about volunteering to exercise their passion through participation in one or another of the committees that are essential to CCC. This is a very good thing. Active discourse on the issues of importance to the members of an organization with participants as diverse as ours, is critical to maintaining the health of the organization. This discourse does not always require agreement; however it does require civility and a willingness to work towards achieving consensus. Here at CCC, teaching children how to share what they know and how they feel about important things in their lives is central to our work as care-givers and educators. It is only to be expected that this ethos would permeate all that we do in this organization.

Having strong feelings about one thing or another is key to this culture of involvement at CCC. The role that parents and teachers play on the Board of Directors, the committees and throughout the capital campaign has been, in short, inspiring. That the CCC community upholds a value of open and inclusive discourse has been evident in the committee meetings, board meetings and staff meetings that I have attended thus far. I have seen representation from and heard the voices of new staff as well as long time staff, staff who care for our youngest infants as well as staff who teach the oldest of our

cont'd on page 2

children, new parents, as well as parents whose children have moved on, working parents as well as stay at home moms and dads.

As I settle into my role as Executive Director, I am constantly discovering what it is that I don't know about the organization and my potential to continue its tradition of excellence. It feels a bit like opening those surprise balls in which each unrolled layer would reveal a trinket or toy. My process of discovery at CCC has been notable for the presence of so many committed staff and parents, available to listen to me and share what is important to them, in order to keep us all informed about what we care deeply about and how we might achieve the goals and mission of the Concord Children's Center.

Pat Nelson
Executive Director

A Message from the Board of Directors

Dear Families and Friends,

This will be an exciting year at Concord Children's Center! We are pleased to welcome Pat Nelson as the new Executive Director of CCC. The transition has gone very smoothly and we hope that every family gets a chance to meet her. We also welcomed Laura Granahan, Lauren McClure, Bob Rainis, Wendy Rovelli and Leslie Koplow to the Board of Directors. In addition, this year we will be wrapping up the CCC Capital Campaign. We are very grateful to the parents, alumni, staff and Concord community members who have donated so generously to the campaign, and we hope that all families will join us in making the campaign a success. The culmination of the campaign will be at the CCC 30th Anniversary Gala in the fall of 2005.

Last year, the CCC Board of Directors voted to award a small scholarship to a graduating Concord Carlisle High School (CCHS) student. The Board believes that it is in keeping with the mission of CCC to support and encourage students in our community who will be pursuing a degree in early education. At the Annual Meeting of the Corporation in June, we were thrilled to recognize Polly Sturges, who is currently a

freshman at Wheaton College in Norton, MA. Although Polly was chosen by an impartial committee from CCHS, we at CCC know her well. Polly volunteered after school and in the summer at 1300 Main Street, and her gentle and caring manner was beloved by all the children. Polly herself is a CCC alumna, and her parents, Howard and Priscilla Sturges, served on the CCC Board and are still active in the CCC community.

Many dedicated and talented parents and community members contribute to the well-being and excellence of Concord Children's Center. We are enormously grateful for their support. We urge everyone to find a way to get involved this year - by working on a committee, serving as a room parent, becoming involved in the capital campaign, or participating in the annual auction or other events. The CCC Board operates through a number of committees: Finance, Personnel, Fundraising, Communications, Development and Long Range Planning. Parents who are not on the Board are welcome to join these committees. Volunteering at CCC is a great way to get to know other families and to contribute to making CCC such a special place for children and families.

Please speak to any member of the Board if you have questions. We look forward to another great year!

Sincerely yours,
Pamela Gannon, Board Chair & Main Street Parent

Television - No Way!

By Connie Johnson, Ripley parent

I cannot live with a television in my house.

It wasn't always like this. I have, in my past and not so distant past, watched a considerable amount of television, in addition to seeing just about every movie ever released (including David Cronenberg's Videodrome in 1985 at a strip mall theater where a disheveled, middle-aged woman from the audience of 5 persons stood and applauded at the conclusion). But at some point I found watching TV didn't hold the attraction it once had. My life was growing with

new friends and activities; I started reading novels and making art, both after a long hiatus; and I found that I had no time for discretionary viewing, not even the reruns from the 60s and 70s that I adored.



And so the TV was first put in a corner, then in the basement, and finally given away to one of the nannies we had when I was still part of the executive working force.

When the kids entered into the picture, I realized that I didn't want them to watch TV, well actually, any screen. I liked the idea that kids should play as much as possible until it is time to start school, so that ruled out even Sesame Street and its brethren. I didn't understand how learning to use a mouse and keyboard at an early age helps children learn, especially since I think there is merit for right brain/left brain integration through printing, scribbling and coloring. And I am very uncomfortable with the hypnotic state my children easily enter into when they watch the screen, and their crankiness when it is turned off.

In an effort to define an appropriate boundary for my viewpoint, I started talking with other parents about their TV viewing guidelines: They limit TV to one hour a day, they limit TV to only on weekends, they limit TV to PBS, they limit TV to only certain shows, they only watch videos. Reading about the rise of obesity and distractibility among young children who sit in front of a TV, the dangerous influence of pop media and the effect of excessive violence on children who more and more can't differentiate between computer games and reality, just added fuel to my growing convictions. And as a fellow Children's Journal editor chimes in: "What about the smut factor? What about overt and covert marketing? What about the implicit consumerism?"

Concerned people have told me that banning TV isolates children socially, that my children will miss out on important peer relationships if they don't know the current social mores. Uh-oh, panic starts, "bad mother" echoes in my brain.

Then I remember that in raising my children I have choices, and mine is to remain true to what works for our small family. And for now playing works. Today my children have all the stuffed animals going on a field trip and staying in a hotel, last month they were making houses for the toads and frogs that populate our window wells, before that it was something about trains. They color, draw, read, run around, write stories, sit and think, play with their friends, visit neighbors, and almost never ever say that they don't know what to do. And if they did, I would probably roll my eyes in wonder, remembering myself at age ten saying the same thing, and then offer a few of my own favorites: make a fort, ride a bike, kick a ball, take a hike, until they walk off in a huff saying to each other "do you want to play ___?"



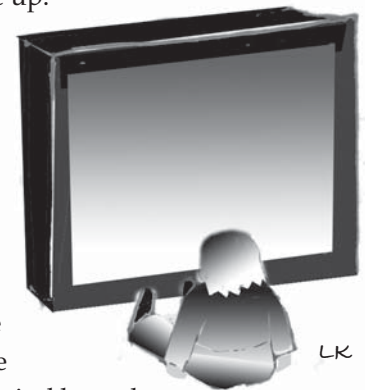
So, for now, we don't have a TV in the house.

Television - Yes Way!

By Leslie Koplou, Ripley parent and illustrator

I cannot live without a TV in my house. It's hard for me to even imagine life without TV-it is a tool that I would be loathe to give up.

I admit to having a conflicted history with my relationship to tv. As a child, I watched a fair amount of TV, enough so that my parents declared at one point that we would be limited to watching one hour per day of TV. A spiral bound logbook appeared and we were expected to sign in upon watching and record what we watched. My parents carefully explained to us that too much TV was not good for our brains and that they'd prefer that we do other things with our free time. And so, for the most part, we complied. With four kids, it was hard to sneak in any extra hours, because we ratted each other out without hesitation. And we also believed my parents-that TV truly was bad, or as my



cont'd on page 4

dad would say "turned our brains to jelly". The sight of us lounging in pajamas in front of Saturday cartoons in particular drove him insane, prompting him to issue chores that demanded immediate attention. So it was hard to watch without guilt, even when on approved time.

However, there were shows that we watched as a family that I experienced completely differently. On the night that M*A*S*H was on, my dad, my older brother Paul and I and sometimes my sister would all join together for that half-hour. I watched for the companionship as much as anything else; my pleasure was in my dad's deep laugh and not the jokes and innuendo that were over my head. Later, as we entered our teens, and before the family started to disintegrate in divorce and early marriage, we would all six of us gather on my parents' king-size bed, in our pajamas and under the covers, to watch the sitcom "Soap", a witty and daring show of the late seventies. That memory is still sweet for me, as we all snuggled and laughed between my parents in quiet and rare harmony.

With my own children, TV started early, as a tool to use in desperate straits. My son's winter birth and the appalling lack of sleep I experienced in those first few months led me to purchase copies of Baby Mozart and Baby Bach to keep him "busy" as I dozed beside him on the couch in those early mornings. He would watch the same tape three, four, five times in a row without complaint or restlessness, and I woke only to rewind and launch it again. Never a morning person, those were my toughest times, and I relied upon those tapes as much as any early baby equipment. (My husband and I agreed Baby Van Gogh might be warping in some subliminal way, and I liked to claim there was a bootleg Baby Kafka that's in black and white, contained long stretches of static and no apparent end. But Baby Mozart had its own book touting the brain-boosting "Mozart effect"!)

There are times too even now, when my son is so exhausted, frustrated and wired that the only thing that seems to calm him is some time in front of the TV. And On Demand, which allows me to summon a children's show at any time of day or night is the best thing ever invented for sick kids. On those nights when one of my kids is throwing up in one hour cycles, the distraction and novelty of watching a TV show in the middle of the night is a powerful palliative.

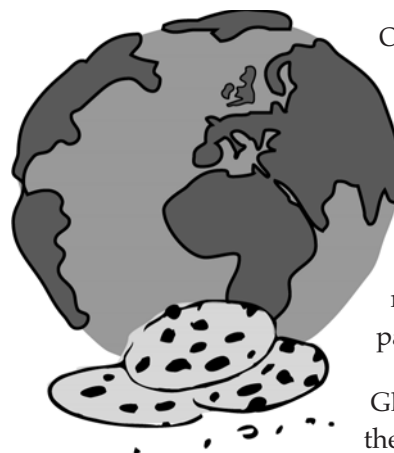
Then there's the regular everyday viewing, which we also indulge in. I get to pick the shows and I don't tend to let the kids watch unsupervised, but they do watch a few shows regularly-Cyberchase, Totally Spies, Caillou, Scooby-Doo, Jimmy Neutron, and Dora the Explorer. Blue's Clues used to be a big hit, but then the main character Steve went off to college, and his brother just doesn't cut it. No Pokemon, Yug-i-oh, SpongeBob, or any show that flashes more than 12 gazillion frames per second at my children. My husband or I sit with them while they watch, in part to monitor and explain, in part to cuddle up together and relax in close contact. I've watched far too many episodes of Scooby Doo in the past two years, but it also provides plenty of time to talk about the events in a certain adventure, how silly Shaggy and Scooby are, and what the various monsters are like.

As they get older, I'm sure we'll be continuing to refine our policies as the kids master the remote and seek out their own choices, and begin to be influenced by their peers more than their parents. Who knows-some day we may even resurrect the spiral bound logbook.

Global Warming Begins at Home!

Matt Johnson, Main Street Parent

Global warming, like overeating, is a problem that's always best dealt with tomorrow. No one will notice right away if I munch that extra cookie, even if the long-term consequences might be diabetes, obesity and a shortened lifespan. I will always work it off tomorrow.



Or maybe, just maybe, I'll wake up one day like Woody Allen did in the movie Sleeper, and discover that junk food is actually healthy. Thank goodness I ate that cookie - pass me another!

Global warming brings on the same cycle of denial and desperate fantasy. Subconsciously, I cling to the

hope that our society's feverish appetite for fossil fuels will somehow prevent a future ice age. I picture the headline: *America saves the world, again!*

Of course, I'm still doing my part to prevent global warming, and teaching my kids by example. At least that's my story. I chose to purchase a minivan since it gets 20 mpg. I pat myself on the back for pushing my Honda mower around the lawn 25 times a year, since it's less polluting than an old Briggs & Stratton would be. We recycle religiously, but still haul out two full garbage cans to the curb each week - around two tons of trash a year.

When I add it up, I have to admit that my family's "green" habits are a matter of degree, not kind. We're still gluttons consuming half the earth's resources. And we're probably headed for the environmental equivalent of gastric bypass surgery.

Parents and grandparents should be passionate about global warming. We're raising our kids carefully, sending them to great places like CCC. Don't we worry about whether the world will be inhabitable when they grow up? The issue isn't on the radar screen. One presidential candidate is an oil executive; the other says gas is - get this - too expensive! Meanwhile hurricanes batter Florida, and glaciers fall into the ocean in Antarctica.

Most people who feel my sort of guilt and despair reach for a cookie, or maybe a stiff drink. (I'll spare that analogy.) How am I going to make a difference of kind, not just degree?

When I carpool to work, my 20 mpg minivan suddenly gets 40 mpg. When I ride the train, it's many times more. And when I ride my bike, I put the train to shame, and work off the cookie as well.

In Concord, we have stores we can walk to, two commuter rail stations and neighbors who make good carpool mates. We can get our electricity (once the dam's fixed) from the Assabet River, thanks to Acton Hydro. The town offers us compost bins for next to nothing.

Is this the whole answer? No. But it is important to think globally and act locally where global warming is

concerned. We all want our kids and their kids to have a healthy planet to live on, and to impart the wisdom of doing everything we can to protect it. And we need to act now. Anybody need a lift to Waltham?

And what do you do?

Meighan Matthews, Ripley parent

Deep breath. Size up my questioner. What will my excuse be today?

"I'm a stay-at-home mom, but I'd like to go back to work."

OR

"I spent 10 years working in the environmental field and I'm taking time off to be with my kids."

OR

"I'm home with the kids and so grateful that I can make this choice."

Etcetera.

Our generation was told we could be anything we wanted to be. As a young woman I watched my mother relish her liberation when she went to work at a local college. I knew I would never be a housewife. And yet here I am.



It just so happened that I wanted to leave the organization I worked for when I had my first child. It felt like a natural choice to stay home, even though I had never planned to. And the longer I was away from my professional life, the more I realized I was ready for a career change anyway.

Being a full-time mom is certainly a career, but it doesn't have the rewards we have been taught from a young age to expect from our work lives: a decent income, prestige, or an opportunity to "make a difference." It is by far the hardest job physically that I've ever had. And being "on" 24 hours a day is like nothing I could have previously imagined.

cont'd on page 6

Besides trying to determine what combination of affection, discipline and activity will allow my children's best selves to blossom, there isn't much in the way of an intellectual challenge. I can't stand housework.

But I am grateful. I know there are many who can't afford to make this choice. I love being with my children so many hours a day. I am actually watching them grow. I am a part of their little daily lives. I love holding them in my arms.

I am also conflicted. I think what I am doing is good for my family, but is it, really? Is watching Mommy pay the bills and riding around in the shopping cart really better for my four-year-old than being in his beloved CCC classroom? From what I can see, children in full-day care seem to be beautifully well adjusted if not more independent and outgoing than my children.

I regularly experience feelings of powerlessness and even selflessness because I am spending hours and hours of my day doing work that isn't recognized or valued in our society. On top of this, I don't have much time to myself.

So, what is my issue, other than one of personal confusion?

My mother drops little hints about my house not being as clean as she thinks it should be. It occurred to me one day that when she was a young mother, having a clean house was something to be proud of. You were a successful woman if your house was in perfect order. The definition of a successful woman is vastly different today. I open my college alumni magazine and read about the professional achievements of my classmates and drool. I am embarrassed to answer the "And what do you do?" question. As much as feminism has done to liberate women, one thing it has taken away is society's valuing the work of stay-at-home parents.

My issue is that I think feminism has a new job to do. In addition to continuing to break through the glass ceiling and finesse the delicate subject of gender equality in the home, perhaps feminism also needs to start relegitimizing the role of the stay-at-home

parent. A few things to consider from some quick on-line searches: The stay-at-home parent role is not considered "work" in the US census. Salary.com estimates a fair wage for the typical stay-at-home mom to be \$88,276. In 1995, the UN calculated the "non-monetized, 'invisible' contribution of women" worldwide, if treated as market transactions, to be worth \$11 trillion. (The Human Development Report prepared by the UN Development Programme and published by Oxford University Press, 1995.)

It's a fair bet that I would be an even better mother to my children - and other stay-at-home parents happier and more productive in their lives - if I and they felt our role was truly valued and appreciated in society.

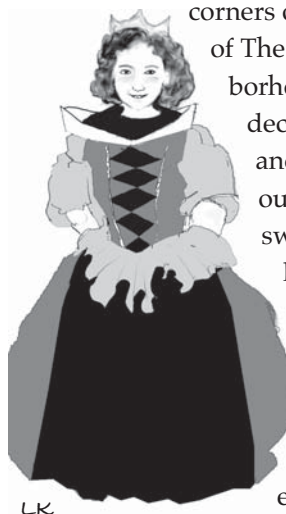
What do I do?

"Today I'm Chair of the Building Committee, Budget Manager, and Facilitator for Tree House Picnics. And I love my job."

Goblins, Ghosts, & Gender

Jonathan Campbell, Main Street parent

With another Halloween under our belts, I am reminded of the fun I had as a kid stomping around the neighborhood, showing off costumes, and counting and recounting the hoard of sugar products acquired throughout the night. I also remember the days afterward when we would all get together in the corners of school and compare stories



of The Weird House. Every neighborhood had one; a house overly decorated with things ghoulish, and a costumed old guy giving out candy amidst a dry ice fog swirling around the porch. As kids, we agreed that any adult that was having that much fun was not to be trusted. We could never figure out who that guy was the rest of the year, and no kid would ever confess to having him as a parent.

Part of Halloween's appeal to me is the parade of ages that arrives at your door. I love the raw fun in the eyes of the preschoolers, the middle-schoolers who have not yet decided to give up such innocence, and the bravado of the surely teens who show up in the lamest of costumes after all the porch lights have been turned off. While some bring life to pre-packaged costumes, it is the ones who make their own that make the holiday memorable. We have had a Minotaur, a full Deck of Cards, a young Picasso, and a hanged-man complete with his own gallows.

Two years ago my son wanted to be a lion. I was informed that I could be a piece of celery. The next year I was given the option of being a spicy pepper, while he went as Batman. This year was deemed the Year of the Pirate, and I was told to man the candy. To help stir the creative juices, I went online to see what a pirate costume is supposed to look like. After quickly learning that "pirate booty" as a search string will get you more than you ever bargained for, I found what I thought was a great selection at Oriental Trader. And yet the more I looked, the less I liked what I saw. Of the 17 costumes, 9 were only for girls and 8 only for boys. (There are no gender-neutral



options.) For girls, all options had hats, most were based on traditional fairy tales, and a surprising number were available in adult sizes. I am still not sure what kind of party features both 7 and 37 year old woodland nymphs. For boys, the costumes were pretty much limited to various fighters; crime fighters, fire fighters, soldiers, ninja, and pirates. Non-combative options were limited to a physician and a construction worker (who may have in fact been a Village Person.) What most distressed me was the fact that all options but Superman and the Village Person entailed face-covering masks. Even the physician had one of those mirrored eye reflectors that were obsolete even in the time of Markus Welby. What is it about our sons that we are trying to cover up? What about them do we try to enshroud in plastic? Is this the 'mask' in masculinity? Or, is my

wife correct when she states that I have retained too much 'anal' in this analysis? Either way, it seems our kids are being given a pretty short thrift by those who market costumes; and, by extension, a pretty short thrift by those of us who buy them.

I never did figure out how to dress up as a piece of celery. And I relished how easy it was to buy some Batman PJ's and to fashion a makeshift cape. But as my son turns 5, I can see a thunderhead of logos, product placements, and society-sponsored masks looming on the horizon. How long until he too feels society's pressure to put on a mask? Which one will he choose? How long will he wait to become that wacky guy with the dry ice fog swirling around his porch?

If you have a son and are interested in the emotional masks that society will try place on him, I suggest reading *Raising Cain, Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Dan Kindlon & Michael Thompson. It offers great insight into a preschool boy's abilities and the emotional demands made on him. I am not sure it has any answers, but it certainly caused me to look at Halloween just a little bit differently. If a literal mask is what you seek, try the Birthday Express catalog or Oriental Trader. Just back off on the dry ice fog if you know what is good for you.



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CCC Day at the Concord Bookstore
is Saturday, November 20th
10% of the entire days book sales
will be given to the CCC!