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Sophia's Hearth Family Center Web Site

We invite you to sign up for our email and postal mailing list, to receive updates about coming events and articles of interest.

Summer 2009 June 29–July 17 Professional Development Offerings

Mark your calendar! Planning for summer 2009 is underway, and will include a new cycle of our 13-month part-time training course, "The Child and Family in the First Three Years," for early childhood teachers, parent-infant and parent-toddler group leaders, childcare providers. In addition, we will add several all-new five day courses.

June 29–July 3 Meeting the Needs of Children With Sensory Challenges in the Early Childhood Years; Jane Swain and Marjorie Rehbach

June 29–July 3 Creating an outdoor environment for the young child; Carol Nasr Griset and Marjorie Rehbach

July 6–10 and 13–17 Nurturing the Young Child from Birth to Three; Susan Weber and Jane Swain

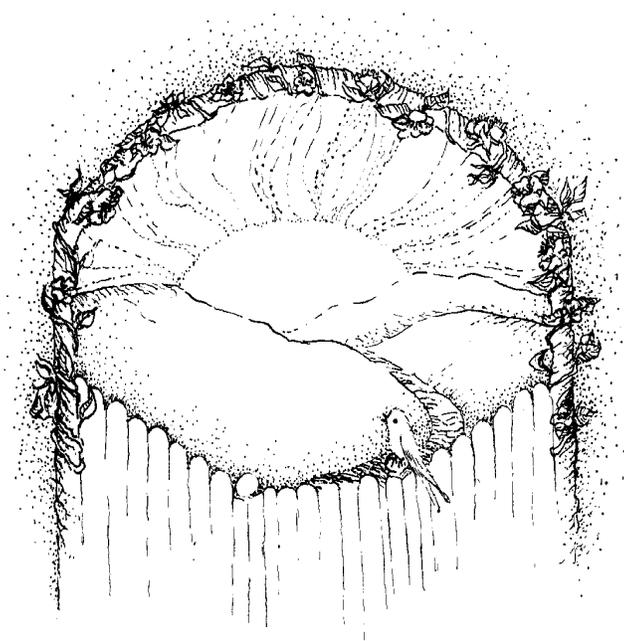
July 6–10 Working Well with Parents; Carol Nasr Griset and Marjorie Rehbach

July 13–17 Cooking for the Love of Children; Anne-Marie Freyer Wiboltt

**Full descriptions of all courses and biographies of faculty will be posted on our website shortly.
A complete print brochure will be available in early 2009.**



Join us in beautiful southern New Hampshire, land of lakes and mountains, as part of a joyous learning community that will inspire and transform your work! More details on our website, or call us to register at 603-357-3755.



the *Garden Gate*

FALL 2008

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1

the journal of Sophia's Hearth Family Center

Sophia's Hearth Family Center educates and nurtures families and professionals in their care of the young child, out of the resources of Waldorf education. Our vision is that every family be supported to create healthy family life so children develop and flourish with joy, strength, and confidence.

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

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Professional Development Offerings



A letter from Susan Weber

November 2008

Dear Friends,

The Garden Gate.... As we prepare this issue for publication, I picture each of you as our readers on one side of the gate, and we as your neighbors across the fence, telling stories and sharing news. The themes are both timeless and timely, and as I listen to the voices of parents and students, I am heartened by all the candles they are lighting in the world. We hope that this 2008 issue will illuminate the world around you, as well. We are also grateful to share that the hard work of our extended process to become full members of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America has been successfully completed, and we may now acknowledge our status as a full member organization.

An update – 700 Court Street and our new facility ~

A festive and glorious August day marked the groundbreaking celebration for our new facility at 700 Court Street. We had long awaited this moment—months of envisioning this new center, carefully planning its many details, and at last determining ourselves ready to take this tremendous step to begin the actual construction. Over 100 friends of Sophia's Hearth Family Center joined our staff, architects and builders. A reunion of past board members and families brought a special note to the day. Standing tall in the hay field is now a pentagram defined by tall poles, festooned with goldenrod-yellow banners, each carrying a message of good will and hope for the new building and its work.

Today we find ourselves in a new situation that dictates that our beautiful building must wait a bit longer. The loan that would have financed construction expenses has not been fulfilled as anticipated. That means we have more fundraising to do. The excellent news is that we are within \$100,000 of meeting the full goal of \$1,000,000 which will release the final increment of our \$500,000 challenge gift. We are seeking committed partners whose gifts will enable us to complete the fundraising for the final 20% of our project needs. We invite you to help us in finding these new donor-partners, or to consider what further support you may be able to contribute to this important work. Once all necessary financing is in place, we will begin construction.

We are disappointed but not discouraged and we are deeply grateful to our builder, MacMillin Company, for its patience. We are confident that time will bring us the resources to move ahead.

Susan Weber, Director



I Love Recipes

We begin with that most treasured relationship, a new mother and her child. Amy Fredland lives in Keene, NH with her husband Nils and their new baby boy August. She was an elementary school teacher at Monadnock Waldorf School before August's birth this summer. We are honored that she was willing to share with us a glimpse into her new life as a mother.

I love recipes. One of my favorite things to do is to sit down with one of my many cookbooks and a bowl of cereal or turkey sandwich and simply read recipes. It's best if there is a photograph that shows the finished product so that I can see what the end result is supposed to look like. After years of doing this I'm now quite good at concocting many recipes in my head and imagining the finished dish. I'm quite sure that I have only made one small fraction of the thousands of recipes I've collected, but I've read most of them at least once.

You see, I love to cook and to eat and a recipe shows me what I need to do in order to achieve my goal. If I want to bring a basket of warm blueberry muffins to a friend's house for brunch the recipe is what will get me there. A good recipe is clear, concise and orderly, and gives exact measurements and proportions. With a good recipe, a few ingredients and some simple kitchen tools I can be an artist—a creator.

As of August 12 of this year, in addition to being a foodie, I am now a new mother. My son, August Jeffrey, was born 2 weeks beyond a predicted due date by cesarean birth. He weighed 11 pounds 15 ounces and was 21 inches long.

Since August was born I've had time to reflect upon my pregnancy, his birth and his first few weeks of life. I find myself slightly worried. Why? Not because I rarely find the time to read a recipe let alone try to make one, but because there doesn't seem *be* to a recipe for mothering! I find that I question myself countless times during the day and night:

“Should I let him sleep on my chest or try to transfer him to his crib, risking him waking up?”

“How often do I really need to wash him?”

“Is it ok to put him in a swing so that I can take a shower?”

“Should I wake him up to change his diaper that I know is wet, or just let him keep sleeping?”

“How many layers does he really need to have today?”

For the first few weeks of August's life, I was incredibly overwhelmed with this new responsibility of parenting. My reaction to those feelings was to read; searching for advice, guidelines, ingredients one could say, to the recipe of mothering. I read books on how to wash a baby, how to hold a baby just so when he's breastfeeding, how long I should wait until taking

visitors. I read mainstream books, books from yogic traditions, books from 1970's hippie folks and countless articles from the Internet. I read until I was confused and tentative; always wondering, “Is *this* the right thing to do?”

Then I started to talk to people. I talked to other moms, to teachers, to caregivers, to dads, to friends and to strangers. I asked about sleeping patterns and eating habits, about how old their child was when they could ride in a stroller, about what kind of stroller is best for a newborn... the list was endless. And so were the answers that people gave me.

But where was the recipe? You know, the one that tells you exactly how long to rock a baby before he falls asleep, what brand of soap is best for his skin and what temperature the water in his bath should be.

What does one, who is so used to following directions from someone else, so used to working off of somebody's else's trial and error and experimentation, do when she finds out that there really is no recipe? There's no recipe for ensuring that her baby will go to sleep every night at the same time, no recipe for making sure that a diaper will not leak, no recipe for knowing whether to vaccinate or not. Believe me, I've looked and it doesn't exist.

This is the question that I'm living with these days. Where can I find the exact combination of cuddling, singing, playing, washing, feeding and crying? How do I fold those ingredients together? And which tools will I use—cradle, blanket, breast, stroller, woolens? I ask again, “Where is my recipe?”

Recently my answer has begun to bubble up inside of me. It's usually when the only sound I hear is the sweet suckling from August nursing, or when he opens his little mouth for a deep yawn. Or perhaps while I cradle him in the wee hours of the morning as he struggles to find sleep again. This is when I allow myself to remember that my son came to me *because* I have these questions, *because* of the decisions I make, *because* of the searching I do, *because* of who I am.

This is a humbling feeling that reminds me that there really is no recipe. How can there be? There can be suggestions, stories, sharing and research and philosophy from which one can consult. But as each child and every parent is an individual, and each day is new it seems that all parents will need to create his or her own recipe in every moment.

I suppose this is an opportunity for me to become not just a creator, but to become creative. This is a chance to part the waves of questioning in my mind in order to make space for listening to and observing my child; to find that much sought after bottle of Organic Instinct. From there I feel I can begin to understand the “right” thing to do or say. In doing so I am writing my own recipe for helping my son to feel safe, loved and cared for. 🍄

Mother and Child

Mother and Child *A verse written by a student during
the first summer's session of the training program,
"The Child and Family in the First Three Years"*

From the Brightness...
Down, down, down
To the darkness of the earth
To the possibilities of earth
Sheaths, cover, wraps, warmth
Hands
Who are you?

I am eternal.

Where have you come from?

From the spiritual realm.

How is it that we have come together?

I have come to say yes to life...

To meet you...

To be in human relationship...

And to grow in new capacities.

I am here on my own initiative.

Can you see me?

I am restricted by this body,

By this skin, muscle, bone.

But my inner knowledge can break free,

Shed the layers like a snake.

Mother Earth will hold me, support me

Ground me.

Will you be here?

Can you truly be here?

I see you, child.
I will be here.
I can be here with you.
Come to me, relate to me,
Go away and then return...
My gate will never close completely.
Rise...rise in the way your body already knows.
Greet the earth that will support your movements.
Feel with your senses:
Up, down, heavy
Balanced
Emerge from the water and become grounded.
Your base of support is wide.
You shall expand and develop
Go forth with my love. 🌱



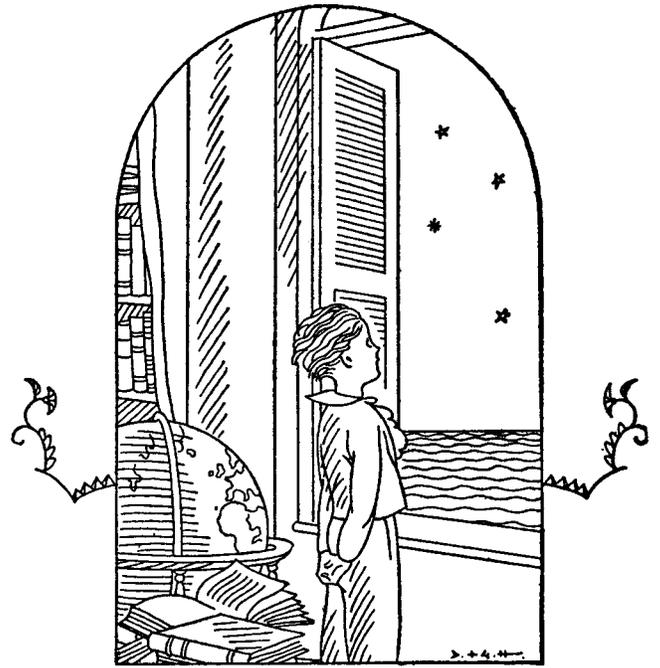
Dad's Corner

Let us continue exploring the fundamental relationships with the child... this time from the dad's perspective. Noah Elbers is a baker of exquisite bread and small business owner of Orchard Hill Breadworks. Noah lives in Alstead, NH with his wife Dove. They have two children; eight year old Greta, and one year old Asher. We are grateful to Noah for sharing his thoughts and questioning nature with us.

An unexpected favorite parenting experience of mine is putting children to bed. Who would argue what an exquisite feeling it is to have a relaxed little body nestling up next to you, steady light breath indicating he has slipped off to sleep. Of course this is not how bedtime always goes in mine or anyone's house. It can be a dreadful struggle. About a month ago my one year old and I had a bedtime that for me demonstrates not only the challenge of putting children to bed, but with a liberal use of metaphor, encapsulates one of the central challenges of parenting.

It was one of the rare nights on which I take Asher up to bed. Since I work most nights he is used to the gentle voice and calming routines of my wife Dove, but on this night she asked if I could step in so she could read to our older daughter. I was happy to try.

It was a bit awkward for Asher and me at first. He was not sure of the way I was going about reading to him and I could tell, which made us both a bit restless. After two short books, we went together to his bed and as he lay down he began to fuss and squirm. I knew that holding him in bed would do no good, so I watched what he did. What he did was to crawl to the door and cry. I picked him up and we sat in the rocking chair again, not reading but just gently rocking while I hummed a lullaby. He continued to be less than impressed. After what seemed a long time to me, he began to settle down, now wet from crying induced perspiration. Since it was warm enough in the room I took off one of his layers of clothes, which he also disliked. Finally he was back in his bed, and beginning to relax. I lay on the floor beside him and listened for his sleep, watched for his closing eyelids. Just as the last of those breaths that come after crying had finished, and he appeared completely asleep, the portable phone in my pocket rang. We both sat bolt upright, Asher began to cry, and I clumsily pulled the phone from my pocket and attempted to turn off the ringer. Minutes more of crying ensued, followed finally by exhaustion and sleep...followed by a second phone call, and a realization that I had not turned off the ringer. AAARRRRRRGGGGGGGG! At that moment I was sure either I or the phone was going out the third floor window right next to the bed. Asher recovered quickly from this second intrusion, due either to his utter exhaustion, or sympathy for his now crazed father. It took me hours to fully recover from the frustration.



Literally, this moment is but one of many small missteps among countless others and surely more to follow, but as a metaphor I think it illuminates something that all parents face; we live in an imperfect world. While this is not unique to our time, it is a rare person these days that does not feel as though unwanted intrusions of some kind or another happen on a regular basis whether it is on a screen, from another person, or just a billboard along the road. One of our greatest challenges as parents is determining when we merely act as a filter for our children when the inevitable intrusion occurs, and when something more like an impenetrable shield is more appropriate.

I don't think I'm alone when my urge is to bravely shield my children from anything and everything that is not to my liking. When I stand back and ask myself, however, if the goal of parenting is to raise children in isolation from the sometimes scary but always exciting world around us, I have to admit that such a childhood would just plain miss out on too much. How are we to determine which experiences really matter? Is it possible to share our hope and open armed enthusiasm for the world without embracing things we utterly disagree with?

I'm more of a questioning person than an answering one, and regardless, each family must find their own way, but with just a short eight years as a parent behind me I can see there will be no simple or single answer for any of us. 🍷

Finding Goodness

Susan Weber is the director of Sophia's Hearth Family Center, a parent educator, and the director of the Sophia's Hearth training program; "The Child and Family in the First Three Years". This is one of the 'occasional' pieces that she has written for the parents in her playgroups.

Every child is born with a single vision: I am happy to be born, I yearn to find out what the world is all about, and I want to find a place for myself within it.

And yet, not every child is born ready to explore, ready to experience all the life around her or him. For some children, reaching this point in their lives takes a good bit of time. Meanwhile, we as the adults in their lives, stand there beside them. We lead them out into our world, we walk alongside. We have seen much, experienced much—and it is an amalgam of joy, of pain, suffering, discovery, celebration, disappointment—and fear, questioning. All have come to us by the time we reach parenthood. As adults, we have tremendous freedom to explore these feelings, to reflect upon our own experiences.

But for the child just beginning life, there is one single mantra that needs to guide those early steps and years: *the world is good*. No other belief will carry him forward through the tumbles and stumbles, through the mysteries of his encounters, with confidence and eagerness, without which children shrink back into themselves, lose the shine in their eyes, forgo the impulse to experiment, to see things as the adults around them never have, to imagine new solutions to the simplest experiments—piling blocks, washing a dish, dressing themselves upside down. *The world is good*—and therefore I will enter into it, explore it, wonder, stop and look, touch, encounter, meet what comes to me with confidence and interest.

If we as adults listen to the outer world as it often presents itself, how do we then find our own paths to believing in the goodness of the world? It is of utmost significance that we strive toward this belief, for our children look to us for signals, for pictures of where to begin seeking their places in the world. They imitate our deepest inmost feelings and beliefs. Take a walk, find your way into nature, and hold deep in your memory the most recent good thing you have encountered. Begin and end your day with gratitude for the good in your life—however it may feel at moments. Pick a tiny bouquet of wildflowers or seasonal things from the nature just outside our doors—the wonder of one acorn, one brightly polished apple—these things can remind us of the wonder of the universe. Find a poem, even if you have never thought of poetry as your interest—just a few lines—copy it onto a piece of paper and put it on your refrigerator. Recall a human relationship that has helped you along your way. And see if, step by tiny step, you can rediscover, in difficult times, that the world truly *is* good. 🌱



Pikler's Trust in the Wise Infant

Jane Swain is the associate director of Sophia's Hearth's early childhood training course, "The Child and Family in the First Three Years". Jane is also a pediatric physical therapist and movement therapist. This article is an excerpt from a longer piece recently published in the new book; A Warm and Gentle Welcome: Nurturing Children from Birth to Age Three—a compilation of articles from the WECAN RIE/PIKLER Working Group.

The Pikler Institute—often called Lóczy (pronounced Loh-tsee) after the street where it is located in Budapest, Hungary—was originally built in 1946 as an orphanage for children ages birth to three whose parents were killed in WWII or were in tuberculosis asylums. In continuous operation since it was founded by pediatrician Emmi Pikler, Lóczy today cares for children up to six-years-old, most of whom have been abused, neglected or abandoned, and a few of whom have special needs. More recently, the institute began offering parent-child classes and a day-care program. It also serves as a training and observation center that draws participants from around the world who wish to learn more about Lóczy renowned practices that support the healthy development of children. At the core of the institute's philosophy is an understanding of the need to provide an environment in which children are nurtured, respected and allowed freedom of movement so that they may grow and develop in security, relationship to others, and self-mastery.

In June 2007, I took a two-week course for professionals who work with young children, and also had the opportunity to observe in the orphanage. During the first week of the course we studied gross motor and fine motor development, along with their relationship to cognitive development and attention. During week two we studied the attentive, caring activity of the adult.

Pikler's theories grew out of observation

Emmi Pikler (1902–1984) was a pediatrician with exceptional observational abilities. Early in her career, she and her husband lived in Trieste, Italy for a year, and there she spent time on the beach observing parents with their infants. Her observations showed her the tremendous importance of the parents' love for their child. Pikler also witnessed parents “teaching” their infants to sit, stand and walk before they were able to do so on their own, causing the infants to do something different than they would have if left to their own initiative.

Pikler saw this gesture of the adult as a distrust of the child's abilities. Instead, she believed that children have an innate capacity to direct the unfolding of their motor capacities through self-initiated movement, if given the time and space to do so, and she based her practices on this idea. Pikler believed that each child was qualified for this task—in fact, infinitely more qualified than any adult. It follows, then, that infants should not be taught motor skills, but instead should be allowed gradually to come into the vertical positions of sitting and standing entirely through their own efforts.

The relationship between the infant and primary adult

Pikler saw the infant's ability to self-initiate movement as a function of the security of the relationship with the primary adult. This is a concept generally lacking in therapeutic practices in this country. At Lóczy, each child has one of his nurses, as the caregivers are called, designated as his primary nurse. The primary nurse knows the child very well, takes responsibility for consideration of his welfare and development, and records in-depth observations of the child on a regular basis. I found this practice to have elements

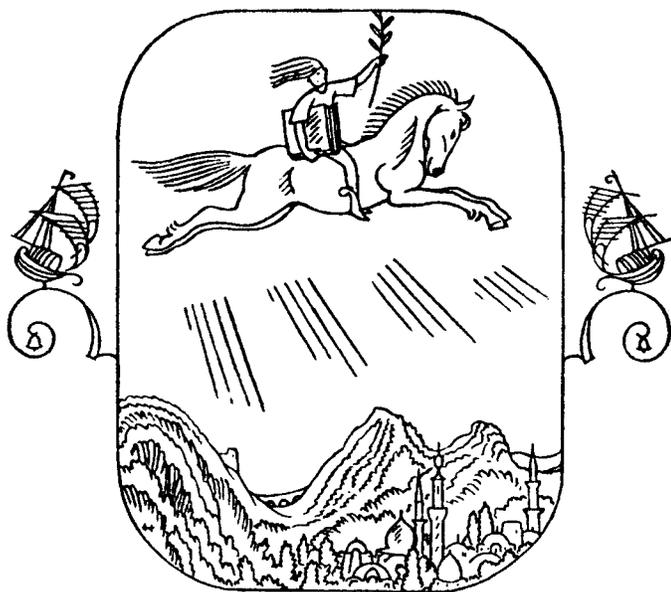
of both mainstream documentation and Waldorf child studies. At Lóczy, if an infant is experiencing difficulty in movement, the first consideration is the relationship with his primary nurse.

Similarly, within Lóczy 's newly offered groups for parents with their infants and toddlers, great sensitivity is shown by the staff to the needs and feelings of the mothers. In the course, we were cautioned to employ common sense and careful consideration in our approach with parents, so that they would not be made to feel inadequate in any way. The goal, true to the Pikler model, is to safeguard the relationship between the parent and the child, for it is out of this tender and sacred relationship that healthy self-initiated movement can emerge.

Caregiving activities of feeding, dressing and bathing are viewed as opportunities for building this relationship. The infant is not viewed as an object to be acted upon—to be fed, for example. Rather, the infant is seen as a capable human being and is invited to participate at his own level in the feeding, which is viewed as a cooperative activity. The adult's responsibility is to make the child feel welcome, to read his cues and to take into account his individual preferences; for example, does this child prefer the cereal lumpy or smooth? The consideration of the child's preferences and the focus on self-initiated activity are similar to occupational therapist Jean Ayers' principle of activating the child's “inner drive” during sensory integration therapy.

The children at Lóczy become exceedingly capable in their self-care at an early age. However, the goal of the nurse is not to promote independence, but rather to share in the joy of the child's developing self-mastery. The nurse does not praise the child, but if the child looks at the nurse, then she will warmly acknowledge that she sees the child's accomplishment, or struggle.





As a result of the intimacy experienced during the caregiving encounter, the child is “filled up,” so that when he is placed in the playpen, he is happy to be on his own to move and play.

Pikler tried out these practices initially with her own first-born, and then used and developed them further in her private practice as a pediatrician over a ten-year period. Finally, Pikler employed them on a larger scale when she started Lóczy, directing the orphanage for 39 years.

A different rate of motor development at Lóczy

In the U.S., the vast majority of infants do not achieve verticality through their own efforts; they do not negotiate the gross motor sequence that leads to sitting or standing through self-initiated movement. Children are routinely put into positions they cannot achieve through their own efforts. This is the usual mainstream cultural practice upon which our expectations for quality and timing of motor development arise, and is also the model pediatric therapists study in school.

Lóczy is the only place in the world I know of where gross, fine and oral motor development have been studied through the lens of unhurried, self-initiated motor exploration. The unhurried pace was beautifully expressed by Anna Tardos, current director of the Pikler Institute: “What’s the rush? We have our whole lives to be vertical!”

For more than 60 years, caregivers at Lóczy have made detailed observations, taken photographs, made videos and conducted scientific studies. I will quote one study which I

found particularly fascinating. In this study, which involved 591 normal infants with birth weights over 5.5 pounds, it was observed that the infants, on average: ...turned onto the side at 17 weeks, onto the belly at 24 weeks, and from belly-to-back-to-belly at 29 weeks. They began creeping on the belly at 39 weeks, and then crawled on hands and knees at 44 weeks. They sat [sitting is defined as sitting simultaneously on both sitz bones with hands free] and stood up in the same week at 49 weeks. At 66 weeks (15 months), they took the first steps. At 72 weeks (17 months), they walked with ease.

These data have been averaged, so there is a substantial deviation surrounding each value, and the deviation becomes more pronounced as development proceeds.

In other words, in the Lóczy model, there are tremendous differences between the children, and motor milestones are reached significantly later than we would expect from our experience in the U.S. For example, many of us in the U.S. would worry and try to teach our child if he did not take his first steps until 15 months, the average age at Lóczy. Many of us would be proud if our child walked at an earlier age, thinking that he may be more advanced than other children. However, it may be that the timing is more a function of environment.

Faster development is not necessarily better. Activity that takes place in the horizontal plane, before verticality is achieved, lays an incredibly important foundation for later life. Some of the work of the remedial therapist is essentially a recapitulation of what an infant would do unassisted if placed on the floor to explore the wonders and possibilities for movement of his own body, and his relationship to the outer world. Why not give infants time and space to do their work? They know far better than we do as therapists and parents what they need!

An astute observation made by Emmi Pikler illustrates this point beautifully. In this model of self-initiated motor exploration, Pikler observed that infants whose parents had previous histories of back pain spent longer in the horizontal activities of rolling, belly creeping, and crawling on hands and knees before coming into the vertical positions of sitting and standing than did infants whose parents did not have histories of back pain. The infants who were genetically predisposed to back pain and who stayed in the horizontal longer, had more variety in their movements in the horizontal positions than did the infants who became vertical faster. Movement in the horizontal plane provides opportunities to strengthen and elongate the muscles and ligaments of the spine—opportunities not possible in the vertical position. It was as if the infants were working to prevent future back pain! Clearly, Pikler recognized the genius of the infant in his very individualized work on the floor, and Pikler sought to create an environment whereby the infant would be free and unhindered to do this work. 🍷

A Dormant Landscape

“The second stage of dormancy—called rest—is controlled not from without but from within. A seedling in the resting stage will not grow, no matter how favorable the environment. A warm January will not tempt it out; it heeds an inner clock, and emerges from dormancy only in the fullness of time, under the most deeply favorable conditions.

This aids in the safe and healthy propagation of life.” —Wayne Muller, Sabbath; Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives.

The year was 1946 when Jeananne Farrar moved into a large farmhouse on upper Court Street. The house had a wrap-around porch and a large attached barn. They had three horses and three dogs, and Jeananne spent many hours riding her horses down along the banks of the Ashuelot River that runs behind the fields of Court Street. Rolling hills, open fields, and farms were the only scenes dotting the landscape. Summers were spent picking strawberries and blueberries, playing hide and seek on moonlit nights, and joining together with neighbors and friends to hay the fields. In winter, ice skating was a favorite pastime for all the neighborhood children.

Today, on that same road, there still lies a field. An open rolling grassy space has remained... waiting. Children played upon it in the days of Jeananne's childhood, but it has remained undeveloped despite the years that have passed. As businesses and residences have grown up around it, this one empty place lingers. Empty, but not barren—rather, this land has been waiting, *dormant* one might say, in expectation of the destiny coming toward it.

As most of you know, this lovely field belongs to Sophia's Hearth Family Center. This beautiful piece of land is in its final dormancy phase, resting and waiting peacefully for *the fullness of time...for the most deeply favorable conditions*, to allow it to emerge.

And yet *we* must not rest. *We all* await the sounds of children being cared for daily on this fertile ground. Through our steadfast commitment, mutual efforts as a community, and conscious intention we will enable the dormancy to be broken, as with every seed. 🌱

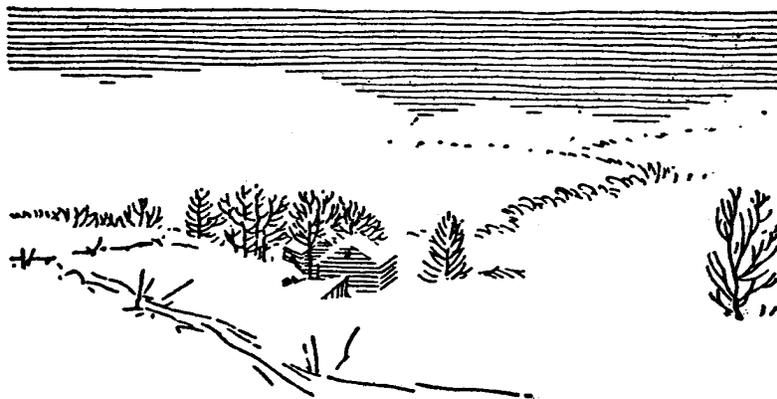
Thoughts from a Board Member

Branwen Gregory came to know Sophia's Hearth in the way many do... as a mom of an infant. Now, five years into the parenting journey, her relationship continues with this organization. She now serves as secretary for the Board of Directors. She lives in Jaffrey, N.H. with her husband Kelly Dowd and son Eamon. She works in Keene, N.H. as a public defender.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Sophia's Hearth Family Center. There are many ways Sophia's Hearth has touched the lives of families and very young children over the past ten years. As my son embarks on a new adventure starting Kindergarten this year I think back to my own first experience of Sophia's Hearths Joyful Beginnings classes, when I came as a new mother of an infant. In those days so much was unknown and overwhelming to me. It was wonderful to be able to come to a warm and welcoming space where I could sit with other new mothers. I would watch my son, dwarfed by the sheepskin he was lying on as he would wave his arms, sometimes gently like an underwater plant exploring the currents of the sea, sometimes wildly, as he responded to some internal excitement I could only imagine.

Just that hour or so a week, where I could observe my baby, and appreciate him, gave a richness and depth to the sometimes frantic hours at home where I was trying to learn, all at once, how to nurture the miraculous new person who had come into my life.

Now, five years later, my son has begun a new phase of his life. But I remain thankful for the support and perspective that Sophia's Hearth Family Center provided for me when he was an infant. Having that chance to step back a little bit from our children, to watch them and to share that moment with other new parents is a gift that Sophia's Hearth Family Center has provided to many parents over the years. I feel fortunate to be able to serve now as a board member and help to provide an opportunity for a growing circle of parents and children to have this same experience. 🌱



The Significance of Adult Sleep

Amy Robertshaw is a recent graduate of the Sophia's Hearth training course, "The Child and Family in the First Three Years." The following is an excerpt from her research paper prepared during this year long training course. Amy lives in Keene, NH with her husband Alan and her two young children, Isaac and Ava.

My Granny used to tell me stories of when she was a young girl growing up in the rural mountains of North Carolina. She spoke of evenings when her folks, neighbors and kinfolk would gather on the front porch of her family home. She and the other children would lie on a blanket listening to the sounds of the harmonica and fiddle. Granny described gazing at the stars and the fireflies as she listened to the music, stories, laughter and the night sounds all around her. Together they were all held in the embrace of darkness.

My Granny's lovely memory is a wonderful example of a healthy night. It gives us a picture of a community embracing the darkness and the natural life rhythms that night time brings.

This past year I developed a research project through my training at Sophia's Hearth Family Center. I explored sleep; particularly the sleep of mothers with young children. My research into sleep brought me down numerous paths. I discovered that sleep is sacred... sleep is spiritual... sleep is healing... and sleep is often overlooked as an important aspect of health. My hope is that sharing some of these discoveries here with you will remind you of the significance for us all to get enough sleep.

How much sleep is enough sleep? I did a small study of mothers who participated in Sophia's Hearth playgroups. Of the 14 respondents, only 2 answered with a clear "yes" to the question, "Do you feel you get enough sleep?" Those two respondents had one thing in common: **They both slept 10 hours a night.** Ten hours a night? This was a surprising outcome. Further, those averaging 9 to 9 1/2 hours of sleep a night answered either "no" or "sometimes" to that same question.

The amount of sleep adults need is generally stated as between 7 and 9 hours per night; however, there is also a sleep debt (hours slept less than individual optimum) that we must pay off before we can get to a place of feeling well rested after 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Otherwise we end up with what is referred to as chronic partial sleep deprivation.(1) Given that most mothers sleep is disrupted at least once a night, (only 4 of my respondents stated "yes" to "Do your children sleep through the night?"), perhaps 10 hours should not be so surprising. In fact before Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb, *people slept an average of 10 hours a night.*

Has the light bulb indeed changed our sleep in such a dramatic way? Before I look at the effects of light, I want to share the results



of a study conducted in 1999 by Thomas A. Wehr. This study was specifically looking at natural sleep patterns prior to excessive nighttime light:

He found that when healthy adults were prohibited from using artificial light at night—from dusk until dawn, their sleep patterns went through an unusual transformation. Participants in Wehr's study developed a curious pattern of lying comfortably awake for an hour or more before falling asleep, sleeping deeply for a few hours, awakening in peaceful contemplation for an hour or more, and then returning to sleep for a few more hours.(2)(3)

Wehr's study gives us a picture of what sleep was like before the light bulb. Our inner life mirrored what was happening in the outer world. We became quiet, contemplative, inward. Even during the time that we were not sleeping, we were able to *be* in the darkness.

So, what has the light bulb contributed to our culture of nighttime and sleep? Today Americans average 6.4 hours of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours per night on weekends. (1) That is a significant drop since the advent of the light bulb! In our modern day world we are more and more illuminated by lights. Light at Night has *significantly shortened our nights.* Think of that for a moment. A man made object has resulted in shortening the natural rhythms the earth provides.

As I researched the importance of sleep and the myriad of sleep problems in our modern day world, I was particularly struck with how our culture overwhelmingly denies and suppresses the natural tendencies of quieting and slowing down at night. Instead we have 24 hour pharmacies, grocery stores and restaurants. "We refuel with caffeine, sugar, adrenaline, and yes, gratuitous evening light. Rather than allowing ourselves to gradually let go of the day, we extend an active, waking, daytime posture into the start of the night. In fact we extend daylight itself."(2)

Even so, I can hear all you busy mom's saying, "there is so much we can do and get done after the kids are in bed!" I know. I struggle with it, too. The allure of getting one more thing done before bed can be just too tempting for a busy mom, as well as the rest of our culture that is juggling more tasks than can fit in a 12 hour day. The night times of my Granny and her family and neighbors seem to be a distant memory in a culture that keeps a frantic 24 hours a day pace.

As the rest of the living world exists within the rhythm of the rotating earth, our species has found a way to bypass this natural inclination. But at what cost? After *just one night* of sleeping less than 7 hours, studies show poor judgments, slowed reactions, reduced memory and concentration. Not only that but we are also less patient, more irritable, short tempered, and have mood swings.(4) As professionals working with parents of young children, this information alone ought to encourage us to stress the importance of sleep for parents. As parent educators, we spend time and energy stressing the importance of the sleep of children, but do we often enough encourage *parents* to get a lot of sleep? If a parent begins making their own sleep a priority, I would hypothesize that their children would be getting more sleep as well.

We have an odd notion in Western civilization that we have to stay awake longer to get more things done, but what our studies have shown is that actually getting a good nights sleep allows you

to get much more done.”(5) In my parent survey, "getting more done while the kids are asleep" was the primary reason for not getting enough sleep. In my own personal sleep recordings, it became evident that after sleeping at least 9 hours, I was much more productive the next day.

So, we know we need more sleep. We need to make up for our sleep debt and then sleep more per night. 10 hours is not too much in fact! As students of anthroposophy and in particular as students of the growing child, we are greatly familiar with the importance of rhythms in our daily lives.

Let us not count ourselves among the sleep deprived, sleep walking, drug induced, awake only by the sake of counterfeit energies, mass of people on this planet. Rather, let us recognize that the only way we can ever be fully awake and present to the life we have been given, is to go to sleep. 🌙

1-National Sleep Foundation website: www.sleepfoundation.org

2-Healing Night, The Science and Spirit of Sleeping, Dreaming, and Awakening, By Rubin R. Naimen, Syren Book Company, Minneapolis, 2006.

3-"Lighting Steals your Sleep" on Morning Edition of National Public Radio (www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18177087), 17 January 2008.

4-"Science of Sleep" CBS 60 Minutes news show, 2008 (also available through the National Sleep Foundations website under "videos").

5-"In Today's World, the Well-Rested Lose Respect" by Margot Adler on Morning Edition of NPR (www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=2100166), 17 January 2008.

