



A Manner of Speaking

We gathered at the Church of Guardian Angels to celebrate the life of my friend, Irene Boor, and to acknowledge our great loss. I met Irene six years ago when we began working with St. Croix Press. Irene, Production Supervisor, and I immediately recognized a connection beyond professional necessity; and over a lunch every two months, we began building our friendship.

Irene's illness made our moments together more precious and created in me a more conscious awareness of her special role in my life. But I learned that there were many people whose relationships with Irene echoed my own — Irene was a woman of tremendous influence. She taught us about the importance of family and showed us how to live out our priorities. She helped us see how precious time is and shared skills for making choices. She taught us that sickness is no excuse for withdrawing from the world. Even in her death she focused our attention on battered women. She chose to focus her energies on living and loving and making a difference, rather than becoming absorbed by illness. She lived her faith to the last moment. And our memories of Irene call us to work harder to change the world. I'm not sure if Irene knew that she was changing so many people; but changed we are — if we allow ourselves to be. Irene did her part, now we must do ours.

I remember the husband of a friend who almost died in childbirth. As he turned from all other responsibilities and focused on his wife's return to wellness, he announced, "I will never be the same. I will never be so consumed by my work that I have nothing left for my family." He did cut back for a while, and he strained against the pressures, but it was only a matter of weeks before he was once again mostly absent and always preoccupied. Once changed, how can we maintain our new commitments, our new perspectives?



Irene Boor

"This conference has changed me forever." "I will never be able to look at things the same way." Comments such as these were common during the World Forum on Early Care and Education (April 1999). Many people shared their thought transformations as they listened to people caring for young children around the world. Some of the stories made them cry, others energized them, still others inspired, even shamed them. We all felt changed in some way. But then we returned to our routines, to the pressures of messages and tasks that waited impatiently. What makes change stick?

Changing, being changed, must be a conscious, continually renewed decision, or the impact of people and experiences on our lives will burn out quickly. It's easy to move things around for the moment, quite uncomfortable to rearrange them forever. Rather like a sharp rock in your shoe, changemakers, whether people or experiences, must always be felt — it's the awareness, sometimes the pain, that makes us react differently, that reminds us of new perspectives and commitments.

A strong message interwoven throughout the World Forum was that to impact the future, to change the world, we must focus on doing right by our children — all our children. We, as early childhood educators, are strategically positioned to effect change better than any other profession. All we need to do is to act on our beliefs. That is how we can live out Irene's legacy, that is how we can use the stories of Aleksandra Selak Zivkovic, Croatia; Rongo Atkins, New Zealand; Agatha Thapa, Nepal; Dilbar Umarovna Kurbanova, Uzbekistan; and so many others to make us stronger, more focused, fully committed to change the world for children. But first we must choose to change ourselves. 