



Photograph by Jean Berfjein

Docia Shares a Story

WONDERING AND QUESTIONING NO MATTER WHAT OUR AGE

When Sarah was four years old, she would go to her grandmother's house for Sunday breakfast. One Sunday she arrived earlier than usual. Her grandmother was dressed but didn't have her dentures in. Aware of the puzzled expression on Sarah's face, her grandmother excused herself and said, "I'll be back in a moment,

Sarah. I have to go comb my hair." When she returned with dentures in place, Sarah looked at her and said, "You look prettier with your hair combed."

Michelle Longoria, a center director in Yuma, Arizona, for many years, was the center's opening teacher. Billy and Tina were always the first two children to arrive. One morning Michelle overslept and, realizing she didn't have time to fix her hair or put her contact lenses in, quickly put on glasses and a headband. By hurrying, she made it to the center minutes before the two children arrived. When Billy came in the front door and saw Michelle, he stopped, stared, and then slowly walked over to her and whispered, "Miss Michelle, is that you?" "Yes," said Michelle, later explaining to me, "Such a look of relief came over him. I had to answer a lot of questions about why I looked different and reassure him that all was ok."

At an early childhood meeting, I sat across the room from someone who looked familiar. She smiled at me and I smiled at her. Instead of listening to the speaker (sorry!), I found myself trying to figure out who she was. Why did she look familiar? What was her name? Did we know each other? It wasn't until the session ended and we had the opportunity to visit that it came to us that we had taught together in a Santa Monica Hanham Act child care center during World War II days. We hadn't seen each other in over 45 years, but the memory from those "olden" days was still strong and vivid.

The process of arriving at a conclusion seems much the same no matter what our age. We all try to make sense out of what we are observing and questioning. The difference is that as adults we usually have more experience and information to interpret and draw on to reach an answer. For me, there is also one other difference: I smile and laugh more at some of the conclusions children draw; for example, I asked a child what he thought being old was and he said, "When those things on your face are deep."

Docia Zavitkovsky has furthered the cause of young children as a practitioner in the field for over 50 years and as past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Known far and wide for her storytelling, she has traveled extensively as an early childhood consultant, lecturer, and adventurer.
