

# Docia Shares a Story

## SAYING JUST ENOUGH



Photograph by Jean Berlfein

This spring I traveled from my home in California to Atlanta, Georgia, for Jamie's fifth birthday. My daughter Ann and her friend Parker flew in from Seattle, Washington, for the celebration also. We made a cake from scratch, had a turkey dinner, opened presents, and had a wonderful time just being together. Ann and Parker had only the weekend, but I had the luxury of being able to stay for two extra days. I was glad I did. Otherwise I would have missed a touching conversation with Jamie.

Jamie and her mother always read a story at bedtime and then share what happened during the day. On the evening before I left, Jamie asked me to be the one to talk with her after the story.

We talked about her birthday party — who had been there and what fun we had — and suddenly, in a serious voice, Jamie said, "Let's talk about sad." When I asked why she wanted to talk about sad, she said that she was sad because she didn't want Parker and Ann to go. She wondered why we couldn't all live together and not go far away. She said that we should move "here" or she and her mom should move "there." She wanted to know why we couldn't all live in the same place.

I didn't think Jamie was interested in a long explanation that was beyond what she knew or understood, but rather wanted someone to understand her sad feeling and give her some support. I tried to pick up on where Jamie was coming from. Simply, I shared with her that I knew about that sad feeling because I always had it when my visits with Ann and people I loved came to an end. I told her that Parker and Ann wanted to stay longer but had to go back to Seattle because that was where their work and their home were. I reassured her that we would keep in touch with her by phone and mail and that we loved her very much. I did not tell her not to feel sad, or that she would feel better in a day or two, or that separations are a part of life, or that sad will just go away.

A cascade of words was not necessary. Remember in Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* when the boy Milo says to the dog Tock, "I never knew words could be so confusing," and Tock answers, "Only when you use a lot to say a little."

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*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.*

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