



Speaking of 25 Years

Dear Reader,

Twenty-five years ago we made our own granola. We belonged to a food coop, so college students called us up in the middle of the night to order mung beans. We bought flowered sheets and made curtains and kaftans. We sewed decorative trim on our jeans and wove macramé belts. In the mornings we awoke to care for our two small daughters. We converted our living room into a play space and welcomed young children to our family day care. Our dream was to open a day care center, so we started a magazine.

Now, 25 years later, we still make granola. Our bed sheets stay on the bed — and they're flannel, not flowered. Our four children are building creative, thoughtful lives and our nest is almost empty. We delight in thinking of the day when young children will again play in our living room; but we try to appear patient. The Happiest Place on Earth Child Care Center never came to be, our version of it anyway. And we continue to work on this magazine.

Directors 25 years ago needed a place to celebrate and share their successes and a way to connect with other directors for affirmation and inspiration. Directors today, both new and seasoned, tell us they need connections to each other; they need support; they need to know they are not alone in dealing with the tremendous challenges of providing a quality program and in sharing the immeasurable joy of knowing they are doing so.

This is our work — to connect people and ideas and information. The work that we have done for 25 years has become our work. The collection of printed materials, conferences, and speeches now has bulk to it. It's nice to see that.

Twenty-five years is a long time. The need for connection still exists.

We were recently asked an insightful question by Buck Smith of Talaris Research Institute: "What rejuvenates you? Where does your energy come from?"

Big question. Simple answer. "People."

... the people who create the magazine — staff, writers, advisors, our Brain Trust, the Panel of 300, photographers, you.

... the people who use the magazine and web site — directors, teachers, trainers, consultants, advocates, media, you.

... the people who challenge us to grow and change — mentors, colleagues, friends, you.

... the people who support us and this work — friends, family, you.

. . . the people at the center of our focus — children.

You . . . early childhood people — what an amazing group of people. The image of superheroes flashes across our minds. In fact, the Super Director was our very first promotion for the magazine. Early childhood people have extraordinary capabilities:

- generosity of spirit, a willingness to share — your ideas, your systems, your successes, your challenges. Although there are still divisions among us, directors are eager to contribute to the success of others, to build community, and create networks.
- tenacity. Early childhood people know what is right, what is good, what is quality. Compromise comes with great difficulty. You live to an ideal of what children should experience and you never let go of it, even when the challenges seem overwhelming.
- a sense of outrage and responsibility. Early childhood people are on guard 24/7 on behalf of young children and families. You monitor the work of politicians and bureaucrats and continually seek creative and effective ways to use your voices.
- sacrifice. Quality programs for young children are possible because early childhood people are willing to sacrifice their personal financial gain for the love of children and the work itself. This was wrong 25 years ago and it is still wrong today. People who do the most important work possible, early childhood people, should not have to do their work at the expense of their own needs and the needs of their own families.
- courage. Early childhood people are fearless. You do not walk away from any issue involving family and child well-being in your community. For many of you, the world is your community.

And that is a good thing. A great thing, really. In the troublesomeness of these times, we can be proud that our work is for children. Agatha Thapa, child advocate extraordinaire, recently sent this message from Nepal:

“How sad it is for all of us — the world family, who are working for children; because somewhere in the world, there is always war and conflict going on which is continuously affecting the children negatively Our responsibility becomes even greater as early childhood development itself is a strategy for peace.”

Our work has taken us into the world. We now know early childhood people near and far, people like Agatha, who do great work in extremely diverse and challenging settings. You have taught us to value the ability of dedicated, heart-living people to create wonderful environments and programs for young children with and without financial resources. We’ve always known that quality depends on people . . . you’ve taught us again and again that your work and our work is about much more than inspiring children to read and enabling parents to work.

Things in the world are wrong right now. Threats to well-being, fear, and uncertainty are the daily reality for far too many people. And just as people are at the root of all that is wrong, it is people who will eventually bring peace, safety, and well-being to our planet. Early childhood people can impact this vision by raising a generation of children who live thoughtful, productive, spirited lives in community with one another. Let’s get back to work.

