

Docia Shares a Story

Grown Up?

In "Dear Diary," *New York Times* (January 5, 2004), is a story from a woman who collects and wears Mickey Mouse watches. She is on a train going to New York. At a stop, a five year old and his mother board the train and sit next to her. As the coach was crowded, the boy sat on his mother's lap. The woman wrote, "He noticed my watch and looked up at my face. He repeatedly glanced at the watch, then at me, as though working out a difficult problem. Finally with a very puzzled expression on his small face, he tapped me on the arm and said, 'Excuse me, but are you a grown up?' "

We may never know what her response was, but I wonder if the child would have been even more puzzled if she had said that she wore Mickey Mouse watches because they brought pleasure to the child in her.

No matter what our age, I believe we all carry a bit of the child around with us. I don't know whether that is why we chose the early childhood field as a profession, but I do know that even at 90, I still love participating with young children in activities where learning is fun and enjoyable: bubble blowing; squishing one's feet in gooshy, mooshy mud; building sand castles and building with blocks; collecting shells, stones, pebbles, and odd shapes of wood; playing with clay; singing, dancing, painting; playing Old Maid and Go Fish; watching corks float and stones sink; playing with puzzles. How wonderful to discover, explore, test, imagine, fail, succeed, create as one learns about size, space, weight, texture, shape, sound, color, relationships, caring, sharing, safety, acceptable and unacceptable behavior . . . to be in environments and with people where tests are only part of the assessment picture because learning is so evident.

Yes, growing up is a never ending process and a question like, "Excuse me, but are you a grown up?" may never get a straightforward answer.

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.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEAN BERLFEIN