

Benefiting from the Presence of Children in Community

Marjorie Gray

“You said your mother was involved in politics. Do you think your interest in social causes is a way she taught you about compassion?”

I smiled at the sharp perception of my 15-year-old Enabler, before I replied, “Yes, I have been surprised to find myself so much like my mother, when she was my age.”

We were in a gathering of women, talking about what we’d learned from our mothers about compassion. We had clustered in triads, with each person taking a turn at three different roles: Sharing and being drawn out by an Enabler, at Enabling another’s sharing, and being an Observer of the process between the other two. I had a moment of doubting whether Kathleen, at 15, could know what questions to ask me, a 54 year old woman. I soon relaxed under her alert listening and wise questions. I should have known I was in the presence of a very competent younger equal, as she had earlier shared so articulately about the lessons she had learned from her mother about compassion.

I have no children of my own, so experiences like this one are rare and special to me. I had witnessed this young woman grow over the years, from a chubby child to a beautiful young woman whose insight and youthful vitality were a pleasure to experience.

It was during my stay at Sahale, as first caretaker of the community’s country property, that children became a part of my everyday life. I had not been very comfortable with children before, but found myself warm to their individuality, sense of fun, and curiosity. Kathleen’s family had come out to Sahale regularly, and I shared many meals, tasks and fun times with them. I especially remember a memorable New Year’s Eve spent with Kathleen, her mom, and another mother and daughter, eating pizza and playing board games. I felt so blessed to be included. I learned from them and other families with children, that I could enjoy kids. Their spontaneity and fresh perspectives brought out my own inner child and creativity. I found I did, in fact, have a maternal instinct, but also that I had a unique, perhaps less “invested” perspective to offer, as a single “aunt” in the extended family of the community.