

***Clear Star Shining
In Memory of Astrid Barnes
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The first kindergarten teacher at the Hawthorne Valley School was Astrid Barnes. Twenty two years ago, when her own children were quite young, she held a kindergarten for the school in her home. This was similar to how she herself was raised, for her mother had held a Waldorf kindergarten at home in Germany after the second World War. The bombed-out basement of Emil Molt's house, in Stuttgart, was transformed into a safe haven for children's play.

Astrid was a memorable figure for all who knew her - a true master of etheric strength. She worked with a will that was inspiring in our time when connection to that life force is so often misunderstood and left undeveloped. Raised by parents who worked intimately with the formative forces of Waldorf education, she had a heart knowledge of living in the light of Spirit that had been nurtured from birth on. There was a surety and strength of clarity that had a transformative influence upon children and adults alike.

How many children joined hands in her circles and danced through the seasons and years with Mrs. Barnes? Whether creeping into the secret quiet of the snail's shell, or skipping merrily to London, all of life was joy in being here now - and a learning to tend and care for it all. Astrid's happy humming held a warm presence during the business of the morning activity. Words were carefully chosen and spoken clearly and firmly. Boundaries were upheld as an etheric embrace -a simple reality made dear to all through gesture, speech, and sometimes active redirection, of what did and did not live in the kindergarten. No matter how many times the shelves were dusted, vegetables chopped, and bread kneaded, each deed was approached with a renewed intent and vigor as if it was being done for the first time. Astrid believed it was not the place of the kindergarten teacher to be hovering on Angel wings above the children. We must open to the Spirit with both feet planted firmly on the ground to bring it to earth. Her circle, games, and activities took joy in the streams of incarnation, with gesture full and true, beautifully inspired by her experience as a Eurythmist.

Modern humanity faces a struggle with materialism that can deaden thinking when thoughts become intellectual possessions stored away in a collection of terms and concepts. Astrid lived the knowledge of Anthroposophy in a way of being that met the world with open awareness and interest. All of life was accepted and learned from. In such away, life experience lends knowledge of the heart and inspired activity of will.

Two years ago, Astrid became gravely ill. It was a sudden sickness that was eventually diagnosed as an inflammation of the heart. With the kindergarten children, I would visit her at home. How lovingly did she look at the children! I wondered then at the process of illness that takes away the sense of self working in the world - the will's identity. Without that many layers of activity we so often build up in daily life, the individual is left to look inward, to touch a core of inner essence.

Astrid spent the rest of that school year in convalescence. Of course, she made the most of it! She gave more time to reading and meditation. She discovered a new relationship to rest. She traveled to the Ita Wegman Clinic in Switzerland, where her curative interests were sparked by the various therapies she experienced. When her time there was through, she visited friends and family and even attended a few short conferences in Dornach. Always, her letters were filled with hopes of rejoining her colleagues and the children in the kindergarten upon her return.

Dr. Philip Incao has said that illness is the Spirit taking hold of the physical body to reform matter - body and soul transformation being the silver lining of crisis. In the last year and a half working with Astrid, these' words have resounded clearly for me. A new brilliance of heart forces shone out in Astrid's work as never before; intensified joy to be in the presence of children, a lightness of laughter bubbling like a merry and abundant spring, and a strengthened compassion for the life's destinies of parents surrounding us.

During our kindergarten meetings, Astrid brought a dedicated focus to our child studies with insight to understand the formative workings within each child through diligent observation of their growth patterns and presence. As always, there was in Astrid the courage not to commit sins of omission, to speak the truth, coupled with a gentleness and patient presence to listen and honor the experiences of those sharing this life's journey.

Astrid's mother, Frau Schnell, always heard the angels speak the names of the children who were close to her at their birth. On July 9, 1943, at the birth of her third daughter, the name of Astrid Clarissa, "clear star shining" resounded from the heavens. The angels did speak true. There was a shining light surrounding Astrid. And yet even for those closest to her, there remained within her being a distant mystery of who she really was. "They (women open to the spirit) often know exactly when the human being is beginning its journey. Sometimes they hear the name of the child... Much depends on whether human beings open up if they want to experience something. It is hard for spiritual beings to penetrate closed doors." These words come from an article in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Waldorf Kindergarten Newsletter* by Helmut von Kügelgen, entitled "*Much Depends on Whether People Open Themselves: A conversation about angels and humans*". It was taken up by Astrid with great interest in the last week of her life.

In Hawthorne Valley, Astrid lovingly planted seeds of activity in the kindergarten, school, and community. Since her passing on December 16, 1996, her far reaching embrace, her ability to know what to do in a given moment, and do it, and the merry ringing of her distinct laughter are sorely missed. Yet death is not a finality to spirit and reverberations of her life's lessons reach us still from across the threshold.