

Lifeways Training

Mary O'Connell, Wisconsin

The author is taking part in a one year training led by Cynthia Aldinger. It is an activity of the Lifeways Center in Wisconsin.

I went out to dinner last night with the women from my playgroup - my lifeline, really. For years, we have been soul-mates in the journey of parenting. The conversation turned to our children, which it always does. Between us we have 19 children, and each of us has a 6 year old. The question at this moment was, "How are you explaining the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair to your first grader?" I listened carefully as each of my seven friends discussed the conversations they'd had with their children about sex, adultery, and scandal. Most felt that it was too bad that 6 year old kids needed to be introduced to all that adult stuff, but they hear about it on the news, so what's a parent to do? Others felt it was a good opportunity to teach their child values. For me, this was like many other parenting discussions of this type. I had nothing to share, because Kyle, my six year old son, has no idea who Monica Lewinsky is, and perhaps only a very vague notion of President Clinton. He never sees the news. I must admit that for a moment I felt the all-too familiar twinge of self-doubt that I often have when I'm confronted by the fact that my children are very different than most of their peers. In this particular instant, once my common sense took over, I was grateful that Kyle did not have to deal with this adult issue, and scolded myself for thinking, even for a moment, that he might be better off immersed in the current events of the day. Still, questions and doubts remain. They creep up in everyday life more often than I care to admit. Having raised our children in more of a "Waldorf way" during the past five years, my husband and I are increasingly convinced that there is a fundamental truth in this philosophy of early childhood. The more ideas of Rudolf Steiner that I learn of, mull over for awhile, and then implement in our family life, the more I am certain that we are on the right track. So, why is it so difficult for me to explain, and even defend, the path we are choosing to follow in raising our children?

What's that? My thoughts were interrupted by a question. The Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky conversation was over (thank goodness for that!) and someone was asking me to tell the group what I was learning in all my Lifeways training. Okay - all doubts aside - I decided to share with them some of the fascinating things I have been learning. I took a deep breath and tried to share a bit about the incarnation of the child, and how the lectures on understanding children's drawings were so interesting and insightful in allowing us a glimpse into the incarnation process. As I finished, I looked around the table at my friends, and I could see "the look". It was the "Oh, yeah, she's lost it" look. I'd seen it before. It was the same look I got when they were all teaching their four year olds to read, and I was putting aside the word list from the kindergarten teacher and saying, "You'll learn to read when you're older. Let's go to the river and skip some rocks." It was the same puzzled expression I saw on their faces when I fixed up an old wooden play kitchen for my daughter rather than buy a neon pink Little Tykes one.

When my respected peers question the views of Rudolf Steiner and label them "extreme", I begin to wonder if they are indeed. Have I really "lost it"? In answer to this question, I always come back to one single statement made in the Lifeways training by Cynthia Aldinger (I'm paraphrasing here). She said, "If modern science has proven Rudolf Steiner right about so many things, doesn't it make sense to consider his ideas on the things that haven't yet been proven?" Yes, it certainly does. And although my contemporaries may think that I have indeed "lost it", I think I may have actually "found it" - the truth about the nature of this period we call childhood. And although I'm not secure enough in my beliefs yet to avoid all those twinges of doubt and questioning, I do know that I'm confident enough with the way my children are growing and "glowing" to know that the right path is the Waldorf way, and I need to keep striving to learn all that I can.