

Nursery Rhymes in Puppetry Workshop at Sophia's Hearth: The Weekend of the Flood

Joyce Gallardo

On Saturday morning, October 8th at 6:30 a.m., I left home in the pouring rain to drive two-and-a-half hours to Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, New Hampshire to where Suzanne Downe would give a workshop—Nursery Rhymes in Puppetry.

The room at Sophia's Hearth was a warmly welcoming antidote to the dismal, rainy, chilly weather. Seventeen women had driven from various parts of New England to attend. The large baskets in the middle of the floor were overflowing with carded wool dyed in delicious plant colors, and Suzanne's delightful finger and lap-top puppets gave a festive atmosphere to the room. Lovely, softly-colored silk and felted wool puppet aprons hung from hooks on the wall, waiting for puppets to peek out of their pockets in fairy tale and rhyme. We had lots of fun reciting nursery rhymes and singing verses as we moved the little puppets on our laps. The day went by in a hub of activity as busy hands made small wrapped and needle-felted wool girl puppets, each one beautifully unique. Lunch was served. Conversations were lively and animated amongst supportive colleagues, building community and nurturing relationship—the underlying theme at Sophia's Hearth—and why we all return again and again. And all day long, the rain pelted against roof and windows.

Everyone left in a jubilant mood, with a sense of accomplishment, and looking forward to the next day. We would meet from 9:00 to 1:00 and continue creating puppets. Kelly and I went off to Gretchen's home, where we would spend the night. We drove her car, and I left my car parked across the street from Sophia's Hearth.

All night long the rain pelted against roof and windows. At 8:00 the next morning we were on the way to the center of town for breakfast. We did not get very far. Three blocks away, we saw a large lake in the middle of the street, firemen and police directing cars away from the

flood, and many people from nearby houses carrying out their belongings. We watched a couple paddling towards the street where Sophia's Hearth is located. Later, we learned that the couple was Susan Weber and Hans Peter, her husband. They found a lake on the street and Sophia's Hearth flooded with three feet of water. Suzanne's beautiful puppets, carded wool and silks were floating in the muddy, murky waters, dolls and furniture from the infant and toddler programs were floating. Computers were not under water yet, the office files were above the water level. The sunroof of my car, parked across the street, was just barely visible and the car was completely submerged in water!

Susan and Hans Peter rescued the computers and many of Suzanne's puppets, wool, and silks in the canoe. Later several friends went back and forth in boats, carrying what they could. How strangely unreal it all seemed after the workshop of the previous day. We were all quite shaken as we huddled together in disbelief in Susan's kitchen. She shared a bottle of Rescue Remedy with us, and we each gratefully took some drops. The rest of the day was spent washing puppets, wool and silks, stringing up clothes lines, and hanging out everything to drip, keeping our hands and minds busy. Hot coffee and a cozy fire warmed and cheered us as we worked.

Many phone calls, offers of help, and visits came, and Susan was grateful for the support of concerned friends. Susan Weber and Nancy Macalaster (who also leads infant classes at Sophia's Hearth) are courageous women, deeply devoted to the work they do. They are determined to "rise from the waters" and continue the support work they have begun with families in Keene. Where and how they will do it is now an open question. They will need moral and financial support, which is certain to be forthcoming, given the many fruits already

visible from the Michaelic impulse that lives so strongly in the work of Sophia's Hearth, and in the workshops, the trainings, and the research that takes place there.

The waters of the flood had not receded by 5 p.m. Sunday, and my car remained under water. Susan generously offered to loan me her car to drive back home to Harlemlville, New York. There was not much hope that my car could be salvaged nor hope of insurance compensation. I thought about the economic impact on our family—perhaps a small concern in the larger picture.

Today is Thursday, and it is still raining...

Note: Donations to support Sophia's Hearth in making the transition to a new home may be sent to:

*Sophia's Hearth
c/o Susan Weber
22 Douglas Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431*