

The “Early Years Series” Hawthorn Press

Martin Large at Hawthorn Press has launched a new collection of books called the “early years series”, which is described in these words: “The series promises to provide parents and early years educators/carers with an extensive range of authoritative, accessible, practical books. Its principal focus is the promotion of healthy child development... Each book arises from parents’ own pressing questions and concerns about their children.... The series is therefore very much driven by the experience of parents themselves.” Upcoming books include one on play by Sally Jenkinson and an introduction to Waldorf early childhood education by Lynne Oldfield.

Already in print is *Storytelling with Children* by Nancy Mellon. This book inspires parents (and others) to make up stories for their children. I know how often parents shared with me the special characters they had made up for their children, characters who returned night after night. In the Foreword, the well-known author and psychologist Thomas Moore shares some of his own experiences in creating tales about King Francis and Queen Maeve and someone with the fascinating name of Ananda Coomeraswamy. For the past five years he has told such tales to his children, and each evening new scenes develop. Regarding Nancy’s book, he says:

“And so I’m delighted with this new book by Nancy Mellon on storytelling for parents. She, too, has many ideas but she presents them without any annoying theory. She can appreciate many variations in the practice and the mode of stories told. She helps articulate what is possible by letting us know what in fact is done in families. At the same time she helps us see how family stories can have classic themes and forms. She understands the importance of voice and articulation, but she doesn’t offer rules.”

I wish I had had Nancy’s book while I was teaching and making up a weekly tale of Mother Earth and her creatures. I know I would have learned a lot from her. And of course it’s never too late, for story telling can take place anywhere – at the bedside of a child, in a kindergarten classroom, on trains and planes or wherever one finds oneself with a child. In addition, with five babies born into our family last year, I feel I’ve been given a new chance to exercise my skills as a storyteller.

Another book in the “early years series” is *Helping Children to Overcome Fear – the healing power of play* by Russell Evans. Russell and Jean Evans live in the U.K. They travel to the United States and lead inspiring workshops on themes regarding personal and social growth. I had not realized that Jean had an extensive background in working with young children as a play therapist in the children’s ward of her local hospital. This book, written by her husband, recounts many of her experiences and the insights gained from them.

The book reminds me of Joan Salter’s books in that there is a deep common sense, imbued with spiritual awareness, honed and nurtured through the daily practice of anthroposophy. Her many examples in the book bear testimony to this, but one in particular touched me deeply.

“It seems that children under five years of age rarely have any fear of death, although they often pick up and are affected by the anxiety of their parents and others around them. A mother who had just been told that there was no more that the doctor could do for her child asked if she could speak to Jean. ‘I’ve just been told that my child is going to die,’ she said. ‘Why am I being punished? I love

him and I have always done everything that I can to help. Many of the children here weren't wanted but he is a love child. Why? Why? Why? Tell me! Why me? What have I done?'

"Her anguish was so deep that Jean tried hard to find some words that would have some kind of meaning. 'I don't know how I can help you,' she said. 'I can only tell you what I believe, but you don't have to accept it.' 'Well, at least tell me', said the mother.

At this point I could not help but wonder, what would I say to this mother? How could I relieve her suffering? I was moved by Jean's answer:

"I believe that before children are born they already have a preview of what they have to go through in their future life, that they have come to earth to find those who will be their parents and their friends, knowing what they have chosen to face. Imagine that your child already knew that it was to face this illness and its own death. Would it not look for parents who were loving and caring and who would support it throughout its short earthly life? Well, he chose you as his loving mother to help him through this difficult time.

"After some time the mother gradually became calmer and appeared thoughtful. 'Well, if that is true,' she said, then I will find a way of coming through this – I can do it.' The change in her was incredible..." (pg. 38)

More information on these and other Hawthorn Press books can be found at their website: <http://www.hawthornpress.com>. If you have trouble ordering these books from a bookshop, you can get them from Anthroposophic Press c/o Books International, telephone 800-856-8664.