

Emmi-Pikler-Haus, Part II

• Joyce Gallardo

Part One of this article, published in the previous issue of Gateways, described a visit to Emmi-Pikler-Haus, a residential home in Germany. Part Two gives more background on Emmi Pikler herself and on the two teachers who took up her work in relationship to that of Rudolf Steiner.

A Brief History of Lóczy

After many children had been orphaned by the war, pediatrician Emmi Pikler was commissioned by the City of Budapest in 1946 to organize and direct a foster home where children would live until they were three years old. The fundamental ideas on which this home was founded have a history which goes back to the 1920s in Vienna, where Emmi Pikler went to medical school and received her medical training under Prof. Clemens von Pirquet at the University Hospital.

Dr. Pikler always referred to Prof. von Pirquet and to Prof. Hans Salzer, a child surgeon, as her first teachers. Under their influence she came to the views which would determine all of her later professional activity. She was particularly influenced by Pirquet's interest in the children's everyday existence in the hospital. Meals were prepared there under his guidance, and under Pirquet, it was forbidden to make a child eat one single spoonful more than he wanted.

All of the children, including the infants, spent several hours in the fresh air each day—even during the winter—and they were kept warm in sleeping sacks, without being wrapped up or swaddled tightly in blankets in a way that immobilized them.

Above all, Pikler learned nursing care at University Hospital in Vienna in a way that gave infants and small children a sense of well-being. After her studies in Vienna, for over ten years Dr. Pikler guided and supported more than 100 infants and small children when she worked with families as a pediatrician. She made daily visits to

the family for the first ten days after a baby's birth and weekly visits for the next few months. Pikler emphasized, as did Rudolf Steiner, the importance of the first three years in the life of a child and how important it was for the whole of his life that he be carefully tended and cherished during these early years.

Choosing the Nurses at Lóczy

When Lóczy (named after the street on which it is located) was first opened, trained nurses sent by the City of Budapest were employed, but these nurses became the greatest source of worry for Dr. Pikler. "They do not really care for the children, they bathe, diaper and feed them in a matter of minutes and with the least possible exertion. So much time is given to the care and distribution of the linens that there is no time left for the children," she is known to have commented.

After three months, she and her colleague dismissed all of these professionally trained nurses and employed young girls from the villages who had little education and no professional training, but had a real love for and were interested in bringing up children and learning to become nurses. With the changing of the nurses from those previously trained to those who were trained by Emmi Pikler herself, something completely new—"artistic" caregiving as French psychiatrist Myriam David would later call it—could happen in the nursery home on Lóczy Street. The cornerstones of this "artistic" caregiving, simply stated, are respect for the self-initiated autonomous movement of the child and respectful, cooperative caregiving.

Choosing the Teachers at the First Waldorf School

This is reminiscent of how Rudolf Steiner chose the teachers for the first Waldorf school just 23 years earlier. He did not so much pay attention

to the amount of knowledge they possessed as to whether they had a real love for children. He sought for and trained those who cherished in their hearts the main qualification for a teacher—the desire to educate themselves. Steiner radically and consciously rejected century-old practices of the bureaucratic state school system when he founded the first Waldorf school and created something completely new—an artistic education out of the Spirit, where each child is seen as a spiritual being in his own individuality.

Pikler, also, radically and consciously rejected century-old practices in hospitals and orphanages where the care given babies and small children was determined by an impersonal system. Without trying to duplicate the affective relationships in a family, she created a comprehensive, consistent, holistic approach to caregiving that brought forth healthy children who were able to bond with and form relationships with the people around them. Myriam David once said after observing at Lóczy that “a mother loves the child, therefore she cares for him, but a nurse cares for the child, therefore she loves him.” The children became open for learning, capable of a deep, long-term emotional relationship and of active social adjustment. The foundations upon which Lóczy is based and operates today existed from the very beginning, as do the foundations upon which Waldorf education is based.

The Melding of Two Pedagogies

The melding of the pedagogies of these two pioneers in early childhood education, Pikler and Steiner, has been successful in the care of children at Emmi-Pikler-Haus mainly due to the long and rich history of the two main pedagogues, Ute Strub and Elke-Maria Rischke, in Waldorf education and in Anthroposophy, and to Ute’s long involvement in the work of Emmi Pikler as well. Ute attended the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. Her teachers were among the original teachers chosen by Rudolf Steiner himself—Herbert Hahn, Erich Schwebesch and Karl Stockmeyer, to name a few. Her mother was an anthroposophist and her father had a deep interest in biodynamic farming. Ute’s gymnastics teacher, Elfriede Hengstenberg, was a friend of Emmi Pikler, and showed Ute photos of children

from Lóczy who were sitting upright, with backs as straight as an arrow, and of children who were learning to walk.

A Visit to Lóczy

Later, when she was working as a physiotherapist at the university hospital in Freiburg with patients who were paralyzed, Ute remembered the photos and wanted to know how the human being learns to walk and become upright. She knew she had to meet Emmi Pikler and to see her work in order to get an answer to her question. In 1979, she went to Budapest to observe the children at Lóczy and met Emmi Pikler. There she observed children who were learning to walk by taking side steps first, before they began to take steps forward. (She later encouraged her patients to side step in her therapy with them before they attempted to take a step forward. It worked!) Her question was answered at Lóczy, but much more was given her.

She learned that at Lóczy the children were seen as perfect in each moment of their development. There was no hurry, no one “trained” them to turn over or to sit or to stand. On the contrary, each stage of their motor development was appreciated and honored. The adults did not interfere in the freely-initiated movement of the children. Ute noted that the children were capable of independently self-initiating an action and of performing it independently, and that their actions were effective.

Respectful, Cooperative Caregiving

She continued to return to Lóczy, where she observed the exquisite and profoundly respectful care of the children by the nurses there. She saw how the children, whose trust in the adults around them had been betrayed through the trauma of mistreatment, neglect or abuse, were thriving under the loving attention they received. Their trust in the adults who surrounded them was slowly restored at Lóczy and they were able to bond and form deep, lasting relationships with their caregivers. Both Emmi Pikler and Rudolf Steiner had pointed out that the actions and words of the caregiver must be worthy of imitation by the child, since the way that young children learn is through imitation. At Lóczy the children were engaged and cooperative during care times,

taking their cues from the sensitive hands, loving hearts, and kind words of their caregivers, who encouraged them to be *active participants* rather than *passive recipients*.

In between these caregiving encounters, the children were peaceful with themselves or with exploring the world around them. As they grew older, they naturally reached out to play with the other children. Ute recognized, however, that a child's desire to be active was highly dependent on the degree of intimacy, joy, and mutual trust he experienced in his relationship with his nurse. She noted that the two factors were interdependent: the child's self-initiated activity and the way the child is handled in the care situation, which is the basis of the human relationship.

Emmi Pikler's Work in Germany

Ute helped to translate Emmi Pikler's first book, *Peaceful Babies—Contented Mothers*. She invited Dr. Pikler to Germany to give lectures and seminars. Ute also began to give seminars in Germany about Emmi Pikler's work. After Pikler's death, Ute worked with Anna Tardos, Pikler's daughter, who is a psychologist and the director of Lóczy. She was invited by Anna to give workshops at Lóczy for the German and English-speaking seminars. I first met Ute in June 2004 in Budapest at the first English-language course offered at Lóczy. That very year the association was formed out of the impulse of a former colleague of Ute's for the creation of a residential nursery home for abandoned and abused children in Germany, and Ute became a board member. She has traveled to the US for the last two years at the invitation of Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, New Hampshire, to give workshops on the Pikler principles. It has been a life's theme of Ute's to bring together the Pikler and Waldorf pedagogies in the care of young children in need of special care, such as those who live at Emmi-Pikler-Haus.

Out of the Work of the Waldorf Kindergarten

Elke-Maria Rischke, caregiver for the older children and board member of the association of Emmi-Pikler-Haus, was a Waldorf kindergarten teacher in Germany for thirty-three years. She founded Waldorf kindergartens in Bonn, Ulm, and

Hildesheim. Ute visited Elke-Maria's kindergarten in Hildesheim in 1985 because she had heard that Elke-Maria had taken up Rudolf Steiner's indications regarding the importance of giving knotted handkerchief dolls to young children. Steiner had said that a child can understand and really love such a doll. Elke-Maria had decided to make knotted dolls for the children in her kindergarten out of soft, natural-colored wool squares which she had knitted.

Rudolf Steiner further emphasized the importance of this simple kind of doll for a child, rather than the so-called "beautiful" dolls which can move, have moving eyes, painted cheeks, real hair, etc., "If we give the child the kind of doll made from a handkerchief, the plastic, creative forces in the child that arise in the human organism—especially from the rhythmic system of breathing and blood circulation—and build up the brain, flow gently upwards to the brain. The child looks at the handkerchief-doll, and that becomes the formative force, real formative force, which then flows upwards from the rhythmic system and works upon the structure of the brain" (Steiner, 11). (Some seventy years later, Joseph Chilton Pearce wrote in his book *Evolution's End* that optimal development of the brain occurs in children if they play with objects that were not meant to be "toys," but leave the children's imagination free).

Since Ute wanted to leave the imagination of children as free and undisturbed by the interference of adults as possible, just as Emmi Pikler and Rudolf Steiner wanted to leave the gross motor development of children free from the interference of adults, she was interested in knowing how the use of only knot dolls in Elke-Maria's kindergarten would influence the children's play. With the introduction of the knot doll in her kindergarten, Elke-Maria soon realized that other things would also have to change. She gradually brought in more soft, less-formed toys in place of the formed animals, people, boats, etc. that were in the kindergarten then. She substituted the more formed toys with objects directly from nature—shells, bamboo sticks, stones, pinecones, acorns—all with various different textures—smooth, rough, bumpy, even. She began to notice that the children's play with the dolls and the

objects from nature was fuller, richer, and more imaginative than before. A pinecone became a baby bottle, the top of an acorn a little cup for the baby, a seashell was the baby's dish, a stone became a cookie for baby. These same knotted dolls and objects from nature are the playthings of the children who live at Emmi-Pikler-Haus.

After her visit, Ute gave Elke-Maria a copy of *Peaceful Babies—Contented Mothers*. It wasn't until a year later that Elke-Maria communicated with Ute and told her, "You have left me a wonderful gift." Their friendship grew, and Elke-Maria visited Lóczy to learn more about the Pikler pedagogy. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Elke-Maria went to Jena and helped to bring to birth a "free" kindergarten at the request of a group of parents there.

The caregivers of Lóczy and Emmi-Pikler-Haus are caring, devoted, and courageous women. The words of Karl König below reflect the quality of the work these women do in service to the children in their care and, ultimately, in service to the children of the world:

There is a knighthood of the twentieth century whose members do not ride through the darkness of physical forests as of old, but through the forest of darkened minds. They are armed with spiritual armor and an inner Sun makes them radiant. Out of them shines healing—healing that flows from a knowing of the image of Man as a spiritual being. They must create inner order, inner justice, peace, and conviction in the darkness of our time.

References

Steiner, Rudolf. *Understanding Young Children: Excerpts from Lectures by Rudolf Steiner*. Silver Spring, MD: Waldorf Kindergarten Association, 1994 (distributed by WECAN).

Joyce Gallardo has been an early childhood educator for more than twenty-five years. She is the director of Los Amiguitos, a family daycare home, where she works out of the insights of Waldorf early childhood education, offering a kindergarten-nursery program that is enriched by the work of Emmi Pikler. She has completed RIE Level I training in the U.S. and introductory and advanced training at the Pikler Institute in Budapest, Hungary.

Waldorf Education in the Middle East

In October, 1922, Rudolf Steiner said, "The most important thing is to establish an education through which human beings learn once more how to live with one another."

I often think about the comment, and take it to be the core of the work of Waldorf education. And I recently heard of some people taking that idea to a new level. I attended an inspiring presentation by the Salaam Shalom Foundation. They are working to create peace in the Middle East through three visionary programs. One is an Arab Waldorf school, already serving a mixed Arab community of Muslims, Christians and Druze, building bridges of common activity and festivals with their parallel classes at Harduf (the nearby Jewish Waldorf School). Another program is Ein Bustan where Arab and Jewish children attend Waldorf kindergarten together in equal numbers, with similarly diverse teachers. And they are creating a teacher training for Palestinian teachers in the West Bank. Their work toward peace is very hope-filled! More information can be had at www.ssefoundation.org. For information about the Arab-Jewish Kindergarten program go to www.ein-bustan.org and click on the language of your choice.

—Stephen Spitalny, ed.