
Group Birthday Celebration in the Nursery

— Lori Daniels

I began teaching in Waldorf schools more than fifteen years ago and learned from the teacher I was assisting how to bring a beautiful kindergarten birthday ceremony. A year and a half ago when I was hired to teach a nursery program, I was filled with excitement and a bit of hesitation, knowing I would be holding a class of fourteen two-and-a-half to four-year-olds for the first time. Many questions began to swirl in my mind, especially about how to celebrate birthdays with this young group. Do I invite parents in, possibly disrupting the children's dreaminess? Oh, the tears the children may shed when their parents must leave after a glorious celebration! The teacher should carry the best interest of the child at all times, yet, of course, we want to show parents how beautiful a birthday celebration can be. In the celebration is the young child to experience something deeply spiritual, or is this experience as much or more for the parents?

As I pondered all of this, I began to wonder about a group birthday. Could all the children together be celebrated in a meaningful way? Yes, this could be possible. When would this group celebration occur, and what might be just the right gift for this young group? The world has become so bogged down by materialism. How can that be kept from entering this sacred space? A solution has held true for two years now, so I want to share my experiment with others who may be carrying the same questions.

I decided to hold the birthday on the last day of school before the holiday season. This rang true. We have a half-day of school, so why not invite the parents in at the end of the morning to join together for a beautiful story filled with love and wonder to take with them into the holiday season? As I prepared for this special day, I honestly had no idea how it would be received by both the children and their parents. This was an intimidating leap of faith.

At the very first parent meeting of the school year I informed the parents about this special birthday celebration and asked them to mark it on their calendars. This was not to be missed! I explained how birthdays are typically experienced in Waldorf kindergartens, and why a different form had been

chosen for this young group. These young ones are still in a group consciousness, and attention brought so directly to them individually can be uncomfortable, even overwhelming.

Arriving very early to school on this festive day, I set up our 'big room' where I hold our parent meetings. This is special for the children because it is a space we never enter as a class. The previous day, loving hours of baking and decorating produced star cupcakes—more than enough for each child and parent! These I set out along with flowers and golden star napkins, all then covered carefully with a star-and-moon silk. RSVPs from the parents told how many cupcakes to bake, as well as how many chairs to place in an arc around the small, round birthday table covered with a rainbow silk and holding a golden candle. The table also holds a lovely needle-felted moon boat with an angel holding a baby resting inside it. Music would sound from a fine marimba.

As the parents arrived and chatted quietly in their chairs, the children and I sang songs as we waited with anticipation in our little classroom. They clustered around me singing and followed as I led them into our big room to happily snuggle onto their parent's lap. Everyone was quietly greeted with a smile and a few words. The rainbow silk was lifted. Then I sat down behind the round birthday table and played the marimba. As the music danced through the room, the assisting teacher carefully placed a starry crown on each child's head. Once each child had been crowned, the candle was lit, and the song of "In Heaven Shines a Golden Star" filled the room.

The weeks leading up to this ceremony, the children had heard stories of the wonder of a child coming and of how everything in the world is born. The room filled with quiet expectation as the following story was shared—

Once upon a time a long time ago, but not so long ago, and far away, but not so far away, all of you children were not here on the earth at all. You were star children together up in the heavens. Each of you had a big angel who was always by your side. So happily you all played together, for

you were not far from one another. You loved to listen to the beautiful music there and gaze at the many splendid colors around you.

One day, the clouds parted in the heavens and all of you looked down and saw the big, blue, beautiful earth below. Looking in amazement, you saw pretty birds flying in the skies, colorful fish swimming in the waters and then—what was that?—children! Children with skin of many colors and eyes shining with the light of the heavens. These children were running, building sand castles, swinging, walking down tree-lined paths, and gazing at majestic mountains covered with snow. You noticed grown-ups with the children. Those grown-ups had twinkles in their eyes. They were kind and good and longing for children of their own. All of you ran to your big angels and cried, “Can we go down there and be with them?” “Yes,” replied the angel, “but first you must each make a long journey.”

One by one, when each of you was still a star child, you traveled alongside your big angel and went to visit and receive a gift from the House of the Sun, the House of the Stars, and the House of the Moon. When you arrived at the House of the Sun, you were given the gift of strength, the strength you would need on Earth to do your very best. You thanked the Sun. Soon you visited many, many, shining stars. A special star reached out, giving the gift of the twinkle you would have in your eyes on the earth. Thanking the stars, you all continued on to the House of the Moon. There the Moon gave the gift of courage, the courage you would need to stand up tall, to do right for all. You thanked the Moon. One at a time, each of you climbed into a little moon boat of your very own, which gently rocked to-and-fro, to-and-fro [here I held up and rocked the moon boat that is sitting on the birthday table]. You knew it was time to leave the little boat.

A Rainbow Bridge stretched all the way down to Earth. You slid down the bridge of beautiful colors right to your place of birth. Before each of you took your journey to be born on the Earth, your big angel gave you a hug—and a kiss that

is still with you [pointing to the indentation above the lip]. Your big angel said, “I will always be with you.” So down the rainbow bridge each star child went... First our dear Cahill and Tyler were born to their mommy and daddy. Next to be born was Savanna, then Meets, followed by Huddy. These children on earth were now waiting for the other star children to be born from the heavens! Soon after, dear Yvette and Nathaniel were born. These seven had made their way from heaven. Now they were on the earth as babies and they began to smile, roll and crawl, for they were happy to be with their earth parents after all! With twinkles in their starry eyes, they heard star children calling who had not yet been born, “We’re coming soon!” and it was true. One by one from the heavens they were born. Next came Nolan, Ehro, Mirabelle, and Esme who joined their mommies and daddies here on the earth. Nelly and Luna were next to arrive. Soon after, Matilda, Thomas, Lucy, Park and Harper were born to join the laughter of their friends here, too. All of these dear children began to walk and talk, and as they had planned in their starry bower, they joined together here at Starflower [the name of our classroom]!

The whole room was quiet while I carefully reached down and picked up a big basket filled with gifts for the children. Going back to concerns about materialism, what would be a right gift to give each child? The first year I gave each child a small doll wrapped in a little piece of silk. I hired a friend to help me complete the dolls beautifully on time. When the birthday story was finished, I sang the words, “Star baby, star baby come down to the earth. Star baby, star baby, it’s time for your birth.” The children sat very still and somehow knew not to open their gifts until each child’s hands were full. When they opened their precious baby, there were gasps of excitement heard throughout the room. The candle was snuffed out and the children came running to give hugs and thank yous. It was a most heart-warming sight.

Considering what to give this year after the joy of last year’s celebration, I decided on a woolen angel wrapped in a golden play silk. This year, knowing

the angel would be the birthday gift, the angel was integrated into the story of the child that would soon be born. When the children carefully unwrapped their angel, again there was a gasp of excitement and, again, they ran to give hugs. A quiet mood of contentment and communal gratitude and love filled the room.

Entering winter break in this soulful mood allowed the birthday celebration to sink in with deep contemplation. Had the ceremony brought what the children needed? Was the truth and beauty kept alive from years past? Yes, a resounding yes! The children were calm, attentive, and starry-eyed. The quiet—even while eating cupcakes!—was a clear indication the children had a true connection with the story. The gift did not bring a sense of materialism. One very awake,

precocious four-year-old child asked, “Miss Lori, how did you even make these angels?” “Oh, with so much love!” With that response, the child smiled, satisfied.

Will I continue to hold birthdays this way in the future? Yes, until another seed of inspiration comes. ♦

Lori Daniels *is currently the lead preschool teacher at The Denver Waldorf School. She is married and has two sons, ages 21 and 24. Before coming to Colorado almost five years ago, Lori taught and assisted at City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minneapolis, MN. With a passion for those children who love to challenge us teachers, she hopes to open a therapeutic kindergarten in the near future.*