

## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

At birthday time in our Waldorf early childhood groups, the child is offered a story of the birth journey to the earth. The details differ, but the imagination usually follows a similar thread. A child is playing contentedly in another land when suddenly an awareness, a longing, awakens within the child. Memory stirs of a long-ago-made promise to travel through the stars to the earth to be with old and new friends and family with whom he will complete unfinished adventures and begin new ones. The child readies for the journey, perhaps also being given gifts that will be useful for earthly tasks to come—a crown, cape, cloak, cup, sword, lantern, or seeds to plant as possibilities. Then walking over the rainbow bridge, sailing in a boat of starlight, or even riding on the back of a great white bird, the child finds his way into the parents' waiting arms. The child is born and the earthly biography begins.

Come what may, the child has resolved to incarnate and comes knowing his or her true intention. It is not to become an accountant, ballerina, football player, or Olympic star. The truest intention is to become a complete human being, to join the spiritual-soul being with a physical earthly body in balance and health.

But on this earthly side of birth, this intention is increasingly met with obstacles and frustration if not actual hostility and opposition. Early childhood is supposed to be gotten through quickly and efficiently so we can get on to the “really important things”—facts, numbers, and productivity. With this prevailing societal attitude, little children come to our early childhood classes with their physical and sensory development incomplete, senses assaulted, nervous systems overwhelmed, and intellect awakened. Some of the children are sad. This is not the journey into life that the good gods had intended. On a spiritual level the children know this, and they are disappointed. As teachers we ask: How can we greet and understand these children and invite them toward health without intruding on their freedom to pursue their individual destinies?

North America took a step toward this topic with presentations by Philipp Reubke and Susan Weber at the 2012 East Coast WECAN February conference. Philipp, now the European director for IASWECE (The International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education) and long-time kindergarten teacher in France, shared classroom experiences with his unique children, whose “cousins” we will likely recognize in our own classrooms. His warm and lively sharing comes first in this issue to set the stage for what follows. We can look forward to Susan Weber's contributions about the child from birth to three in a future issue of *Gateways*.

To further consider these challenges of incarnation was the resolve of 1,100 early childhood educators who journeyed from around the world to the Goetheanum in Dornach for the International Waldorf Early Childhood Conference last April. The conference title, *The Journey of the “I” into Life—a Final Destination or a Path toward Freedom?* focused the questions further. What is health? Where and how do we see health thwarted and distorted? How can we observe, accept, and honor the individuality of the child? How can we invite the child toward healthy development without imposing any expectations to “fix” him or her that intrude on the individual's freedom? What are practical, pedagogical, therapeutic, and artistic tools we have to help?

In the keynote lectures, excerpted in this issue, the speakers shared the breadth and depth of their experience and study. Louise deForest, Dr. Michaela Glöckler, Dr. Edmond Schoorel, Renate Long-Breipohl, and Claus-Peter Röh shared pictures of archetypal child development, the environment into which the child steps, and consideration of the third powerful element—the child's eternal individuality with all its intentions and power to develop. They also reminded us of our obligation to do inner work and self-development. They shared happy and sad pictures of children from their own teaching biographies and pointed to

the amazing and terribly challenging conditions these children have agreed to incarnate into. The selections give leading thoughts to stimulate our thinking. The complete revised and expanded content of the lectures is published in the new WECAN publication, *The Journey of the "I" into Life*, which is now available from our office and online store. We hope that what you read on these pages will whet your appetite for the complete lectures.

Two colleagues, Janine Ping and Kyle Dunlap, share from their personal experiences of attending the conference and being in a community of teachers from 56 countries for five days. A conference of this magnitude and richness of content confronts everyone who attends with a personal outer and inner journey. Thanks to them both for sharing some description of theirs.

To carry children toward health and wholeness, they need to play, hear stories, and see artistry in the world. In the section "For the Classroom" you will find a Halloween circle from Maxine Garcia at the Sand-erling Waldorf school in Encinitas, CA; a story about helping hands from puppeteer Connie Manson, which she has presented both as a story and as a puppet play; and a puppet play about the sea turtle from Nancy Forer, assistant and then parent-child teacher for many years at the Waldorf School of Princeton, now living in North Carolina and sea turtle land.

Our issue concludes with two book reviews. Hawthorn Press has just published a new book by Renate Long-Breipohl, *Under the Stars: the Foundations of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education*. The review by Jill Taplin from Great Britain discusses this important new contribution. Dr. Breipohl has deeply researched the anthroposophic picturing of the developing human being to help deepen our insights and give us courage to do our own research into our practices "rather than just follow tradition and habit." We urge Waldorf colleagues to work with this book as preparation for the 2013 WECAN February Conference at which Dr. Long-Breipohl will be the keynote speaker. It will soon be available at [store.waldorfearlychildhood.org](http://store.waldorfearlychildhood.org), as well as from SteinerBooks.

Another very helpful new book comes from Dr. Long-Breipohl's fellow Australian, Waldorf educator Susan Perrow. To her first volume, *Healing Stories for Difficult Behaviors*, she has added *Therapeutic Storytelling*. This second book is a rich collection of therapeutic stories as well as encouragement and actual "tutorial" to help us begin creating our own therapeutic stories for the children in our care. Susan's books

provide tales to artistically and tenderly address the difficulties and challenges the incarnating child now encounters while trying to find her place in the world.

After taking in the content of this issue, the "journey of the I into life" has become for me even more breathtaking. When we see how unfriendly, impatient, how shocking and ungenerous or—on the other side—how overly indulgent and superficial our fast-paced, materialistically inclined society can be toward little children, we might ask how these little souls have the courage to come. Rudolf Steiner described that each incarnating soul has a preview of what he or she is stepping toward. And in the face of what they see, they still resolve to incarnate, because they want so badly to be on the earth at this time. What deeply Michaelic souls they must be! Greeting them with all their complications and mysteries is a daily challenge. But what an honor and privilege it is to be with these heroic little beings. May we greet and hold them well.

And may we greet and hold the parents of these little children well. Life is moving so fast that everything is changing quickly for parents, too. How we greet the parents, the life-long care-givers for these children, can also be a challenge for us. The children are calling for new responses from us; and their parents are as well. We have the opportunity to create a new professional, social art form as we interact with parents.

Toward this end, the theme of the spring issue of *Gateways* will be "Our Work and Joy with Parents." We have three great articles ready to launch this consideration; and we invite your experiences, observations, questions, successful ideas, and practical suggestions to fill our pages with further inspiration. Small stories, puppet plays, and circle imaginations are always welcomed. Another future issue of *Gateways* will focus on "Puppetry and Story Telling." So send along your contributions toward that, too. If we are lucky, we may have to have more than one issue—or maybe even a new WECAN collection—to share all that you send in.

We hope you enjoy the new color cover and overall redesign that has been completed with this fall issue. Thanks to Lory Widmer for bringing this about. If you haven't already, please also visit at our newly redesigned website, [www.waldorfearlychildhood.org](http://www.waldorfearlychildhood.org), which has a completely new look and organization. We are so excited to bring these artistic changes to you, and deeply grateful to all those who have made them possible.

May your journey through autumn and winter be blessed. ♦