
From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

The sense of life is a subtle one to understand, within the twelve senses that Rudolf Steiner named and described for us. Another way to express it is as the “sense of wellbeing.” Unlike warmth or touch or hearing, for example, which we can notice that we are experiencing, this is a sense we should be unaware of most of the time if our internal systems are nicely humming along together. Henning Köhler, in the book *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children*, speaks of the life sense as the most foundational of all for healthy development and for having a sense of security in human life. Anthroposophic doctors do all they can to help their patients protect and cultivate a healthy life sense.

At the same time, nurturing and supporting this nice, even hum of the life sense is getting harder and harder to do. Life is fast, irregular, without rhythm or predictability, and overwhelming to our senses. Seeing that the life sense is so threatened, the last two WECAN February East Coast conferences have had the theme of “Nurturing the Sense of Life.” Next year’s conference will be the third of a series on this subject.

But even when our internal hum is going along nicely, great challenges can confront us and disturb our equilibrium. If we have had the right protection and support to build a healthy life sense when we were young, we will have a better chance of responding to the hard times with resilience. In passing through such difficult times, we can still walk toward the future with optimism. We can remember that life is a celebration at its low points as well as the high ones. The healthy life sense reassures us that we will return to the hum.

This issue of *Gateways* is dedicated to this theme of **Celebration of Life**, which a healthy life sense helps make possible. The first articles you will read are highlights from the keynote presentations that have been shared at the last two years’ February conferences. In 2014, practitioners Susan Weber, Ruth Ker, and Patricia Rubano shared experiences and suggestions for supporting and nourishing the life sense in both children and adults. Susan speaks to the needs of very young children, Ruth to the kindergarten age, and Patricia to how we adults can keep ourselves vitalized. They share pictures of looking

both to the outer world and to the inner world of self for inspiration to keep engaged in the unfolding of the life path.

Dr. Adam Blanning, anthroposophic physician from Colorado, addressed the conference this past February. He described a picture of how the very young child finds her way to the security of the life sense, traveling a pathway through smell, taste, touch, balance, and self-movement. We trust that you will find this sensory path an interesting journey which the young child shows us.

This issue carries only highlights. The full content of these contributions is rich and full and needs to be honored with publication of each speech in its entirety. At the end of this conference series next year, we intend to compile them into one publication. What you will read here offers insight into this mysterious life sense and gives practical suggestions of how to support its healthy development. Everything we can do for the children will be protection for their futures.

The future often brings along difficulties to celebrate as well. In September, 2013, Boulder Waldorf Kindergarten in Colorado was nearly wiped out by a flood. Their classrooms were filled with four feet of flood water and mud. The school had to be moved out and temporarily housed in a synagogue while the school was being cleaned, repaired, and resupplied with all that goes with a Waldorf early childhood program—equipment, toys, optimism, celebration, dedication, and spirit. The teachers from Boulder Waldorf have written a description of the practical challenges and social and spiritual gifts they have received through this unexpected and traumatic experience. Thanks to them for sharing this thoughtful reflection.

Conflict with other people, as well as the elemental forces, is part of life. We want to learn to celebrate this, too. With no challenge or conflict, we have less opportunity to learn and grow. Though our current world is frightened by conflict, as shown in its anxiety about bullying, it is more frightening to think that our children will not have opportunities to learn how to come through and resolve difficult encounters. “The Value of Conflict” by Kimberly Lewis is printed as an excerpt from the new WECAN publication, *Creating Connections*. This book is about

birth-to-three programs—particularly parent-and-child groups—but the discussion of conflict among toddlers has valuable insights and suggestions for managing conflict that extend to older ages. A book review of *Creating Connections* is also included in this issue, describing the many valuable and useful contributions from birth-to-three practitioners that this book contains.

Rachel Kennedy from the Hartsbrook School shares how she has come to celebrate and support the life sense. Her article, “My Path to the Forest,” takes us with her on the many steps which formed her decision to make the forest her classroom. This essay is both a beautiful biographical reflection and a moving affirmation of how the rhythms in nature and purposeful human work are threads that can offer healing support to the life sense. Rachel’s words have already been shared in the AWSNA journal, *Renewal*, but this whole picture speaks directly to the heart of early childhood.

Another new WECAN publication is *The Singing, Playing Kindergarten*, by Daniel Udo de Haes, translated from the Dutch. This book looks at the significance of traditional singing games and how to use them appropriately with young children. In the child’s first seven years when the life sense is strengthening itself, the child will remain dreamy if untroubled and not prematurely awakened by the environment. In this issue, “Singing Games and the Young Child” is excerpted from chapter three of the book. The life sense hums while the child dreams. This chapter considers how we can respect and protect this cooperation by gradually bringing the right elements of singing games at the right time.

Birth is a threshold into physical life which we celebrate with great joy. Death is a threshold at the other end, leading to celebration of birth into the spiritual world. At Michaelmas 2014, the passing of a beloved kindergarten teacher, Lyn Barton, saddened the Spring Valley and wider Waldorf community. Lyn had been the farm kindergarten teacher at Green Meadow. She was admired for her quiet humility, simplicity, and dedication to the children. Her colleagues have written their memories of her as a tribute which we include here. She was very special. It is an honor to celebrate her life with us and her transition across the threshold.

Lyn and her kindergarten also left us with a delightful gift. The kindergarten classroom was the sheep barn and its environs where many magical

things happened. Through a marvelous collaboration, “Stories from the Sheep Barn” were captured in written words before Lyn’s passing. These are stories of delight, wonder, and marvel in the magic of the natural world and how the human being can respond with awe and wonder to the miracles of each day in the encounter with life.

Spring is here at last! This always gives our life sense a boost as we celebrate the renewal of life and vitality in nature and ourselves. We are fortunate enough to share two spring stories provided by Larisa Kuznetsova. Russian by birth, Larisa chose to translate stories from Russian as her final project in her teacher training. You will find one translated story and one by Larisa herself. These will make you smile, too, and bring delight to your classroom story time.

Another gift for your classroom is a spring circle composed by Laurie Clark with some additions by Clair Orphanides of the Brooklyn Waldorf School. Mother Goose rhymes and other spring songs brought the lively playfulness of baby animals and budding plants into a Brooklyn kindergarten. The natural world is not easy to experience for these city children, but this circle imagination made them laugh and pinked up their cheeks—a sure sign of life-sense happiness.

As we ponder these many facets of nurturing the life sense, we know that the natural world is a potent source for help. We can consider ourselves very lucky if we have easy access to open space, land to tramp upon, trees to climb, water to splash, and gardens to dig and tend. But many of our early childhood programs are in urban settings surrounded by concrete and brick, where senses are overloaded, and space is limited. The need to protect and nurture the life sense here is even more urgent since natural rhythms are displaced. How do we do that? How do you do that? *Gateways* would like to carry this question into our fall issue. We have enormous diversity across this continent. The setting of each Waldorf program has its gifts and its limitations. But we have embraced the task of supporting healthy human development through the richness of Waldorf pedagogy to all the children everywhere. There are so many creative and inspired ways to do this well no matter where we are. Help us continue to celebrate how we support life for our children in city, forest, desert, mountains, and plains. Please share your experience for the fall issue of *Gateways*. ♦