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## From the Editor

— Nancy Blanning

As early childhood educators, we are constantly striving to better understand how to support the healthy incarnation of the dear, brave souls who are coming to this earth. Waldorf education is fortunate to have the insights provided by Rudolf Steiner about how children learn to inhabit their bodies and experience the body as the physical house for life. The divine plan is that this body will be a comfortable home and a safe shelter. From here the child can venture out into the world to explore, discover, and learn about the wonders surrounding us and all the people who will encourage, support, and guide him or her to fulfill the individual destiny the child has affirmed for this life.

Feeling safe and sheltered is essential. Without a sense of security, the child may feel anxious and timid, afraid to explore, afraid to risk approaching something unfamiliar and uncertain. Stepping into the world without feeling secure and confident, the child may feel overwhelmed by sensory experiences she cannot digest and put into order. This can manifest as manic behaviors of wild craziness that the child cannot contain. It can show as meltdowns where the child falls apart in frustration and even rage. It can result in withdrawal; life is just too much so it is better to not leave the house at all. Distress from inaccurate or inefficient sensory streams disrupt the serenity the child seeks. The monitor of how all the senses are cooperating and whether the child feels well and at ease and comfortable is the **life sense**.

When all is humming along well, the life sense reassures the child that the house is secure and all is well. If health and harmony in the life sense are jeopardized early in the child's life, the incarnational road ahead may have many stones and uneven places where the feeling of security and safety is hard to come by. Guarding, protecting, and supporting the life sense is hugely important. This Spring 2017 issue of *Gateways* looks at the life sense from several perspectives.

We are honored to have “The Life Sense” by Barbara Baldwin, WECAN 2016 February Conference presenter, to lead the **Featured Topic** section. A curative educator from Australia, Barbara is a tireless and fearless advocate for each and every

child, especially challenging ones. Her presentation helped teachers to understand how difficult behaviors we see in the classroom are so often expressions of a disturbed life sense. Her deeply thoughtful and informative presentation offers guidance to understand, without judgment or condemnation, that the child is communicating his distress to us. Realizing this important fact opens a door to more objective seeing and the opening of eyes and hearts to more compassionate observation. Her article in this issue is but a part of her whole presentation, which will be published in its entirety in an upcoming volume that will include all the keynotes from the three years of WECAN conferences dedicated to the life sense. Thank you deeply to Barbara for this prodigious work.

Proper sleep and rest are fundamental in supporting the life sense. Aniko Gereb shares “The Afternoon Program: Working on Inner Quiet,” describing what she has developed at her school. As you read this, you may experience it almost as an art form with the conscientious thought and care given to all the details. Each of our settings is different in the possibilities we have to create such a quiet and serene rhythm. Yet here is a source of inspiration for honoring and supporting the life sense through proper rest.

Healthy nutrition is likewise essential to a vital life sense. Providing this becomes harder and more complicated as we see children in our programs with food allergies and sensitivities. Zoë Rothfuss took on this topic for her teacher training research project. “Food Restrictions and Allergies: Feeding Our Children Well,” her discussion of meeting and accommodating allergies—particularly gluten issues—is practical and considers sharing food from the standpoint of social inclusion. It is fascinating reading and accompanied by gluten-free recipes she has used successfully in her classroom. Laurie Clark looks at nutrition from a pedagogical perspective in a companion article, “The Pedagogical Importance of Nutrition.” Thanks to them both for addressing this very timely subject.

**Pioneers** celebrates the life and work of Eva Kudar, a prominent Waldorf kindergarten teacher,

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who crossed the threshold on Michaelmas Day last fall. Her contribution to Waldorf early childhood in North America was important and inspiring. She was one of the first members of the WECAN board in its earliest days. Her biography, as shared here through reminiscences from some of her colleagues, is a dramatic story in itself.

**For the Classroom** brings “Nursery Rhyme Bean Bag Games” for the kindergarten from Laurie Clark. These are enthusiastically received by the children and playfully and artistically support sensory integration. Colleague Trice Atchison describes her work cultivating quiet observation in parent-and-child classes in “Stepping Back.” Playful, artistic, incarnation-supporting movement and the quiet, interested attention of caring adults also bolster health to the life sense.

**For Our Growth** shares a “Call to Self-Care,” proposed by California colleague Kathy Rinden. We pay great attention to how we support the life sense of the children. In all we do toward this end, we often neglect care of our own vital forces. Kathy invites readers to share how you have found ways to continue doing our very demanding teaching work along with holding body and soul together without burnout.

The **Book Review** for this issue features a WECAN publication, *The Seven Life Processes*. This was not intentionally planned to coincide with Barbara Baldwin’s article, but it is most fortuitous that it does. I took on the task of reviewing this myself out of a professional interest in this topic, never expected this to be gripping reading, but found myself surprised and delighted by an engaging discussion. The etheric forces of the life sense and these seven life processes came alive for me in a totally new way. The life sense’s constant seven selfless servants—*breathing, warming, nourishing, sorting or secretion, maintaining, growing, and reproducing*—are really alive and dynamic in what they provide to us. Through this sevenfold lens we can see the life sense of our classrooms in new and very provocative ways. Please do add this book to your reading list.

**International News** wraps up this issue with news from the IASWECE conference last fall in Estonia. Louise deForest shares glimpses of this far-away country, the birthplace of Dr. Helmut von Kùgelgen, the founder of the Waldorf International Kindergarten Association.

**Gateways Issue 73 (Fall 2017) will be dedicated to stories and storytelling.** We will lead off with the content of Susan Perrow’s WECAN February Conference Keynote talks on therapeutic storytelling. We will be so happy to share the warm, inspiring, and healing content of all she offered during the conference. There had recently been an online conversation about storytelling in our classrooms. Children’s impatience with listening to stories was a topic of discussion, along with whether it is still relevant—and even possible with short attention spans—to tell any fairy tales, much less any longer ones. Stories, fairy tales, nature tales, protection stories, puppetry, “acting-the-story-out,” and stories “dramatized” in movement during circle time are part of our rich Waldorf early childhood cultural and spiritual heritage that we do not want to lose. We warmly and earnestly invite your contributions on this topic.

This letter began by emphasizing how important it is for the child to feel safe and sheltered. We can further say that in our unpredictable and sometimes confusing times, it is urgent to find ways to assure our children that the world is good through the goodness of people who live here. Artistic means of reassurance, images of protection and sheltering through stories, verses, songs, and movements are all invited as submissions for *Gateways Issue 73*. There is so much circulating in the world today that is antithetical to all that Waldorf education pledges to provide to our children to give them courage for the future. We invite you to share your stories, ideas, and activities that affirm life so that we can flood the world with goodness. Thank you all in advance for what you will share on this very important need in our time.

Best wishes to all. ♦