

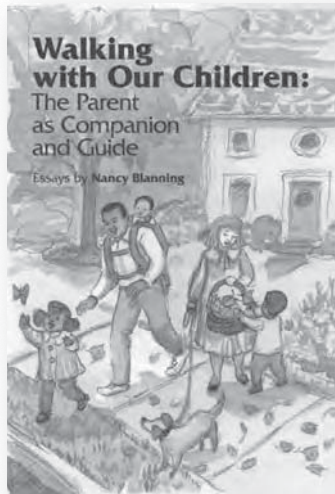
*Walking with Our Children*  
by Nancy Blanning  
Review by Lory Widmer Hess

During the ten years I served as managing editor for the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN), I had the privilege of working with and learning from many amazing early childhood educators. One of these was Nancy Blanning, a longtime member of the WECAN board and for the last several years editor of *Gateways*. I worked closely with Nancy on realizing her vision of making the journal a richer and more useful resource for Waldorf educators, and was blessed to experience her humor, her knowledge, her humility, and her deep, compassionate concern for the healthy development of the young child.

In order to fully address this concern, we must go beyond the child to the family, and indeed to our entire world, which is so tragically confused about the very question of who we are as human beings, and thus can hardly be expected to provide healthy learning experiences for our most tender and vulnerable members. But how to meet this confusion with knowledge that enlivens and inspires, rather than creating more confusion and defensiveness? How to connect the spiritual principles that alone can bring healing, with the practical needs of everyday life? It became a wish for us in the WECAN publication program to move in this direction, expanding our mission from that of purely supporting Waldorf educators, in order to reach out to a wider audience of parents, families, and others who shared a concern for young children as representatives of our human future.

It was with this goal in mind that Nancy took on the task of writing a series of articles for *LILIPOH* magazine, very short, practical essays that were grounded in her deep spiritual practice and years of experience. We didn't at the time necessarily intend to compile them into a book, not knowing how long the series would last or what direction it would take, but after several years it became clear that this was a treasure which needed to be made even more widely available.

*Walking with Our Children: The Parent as Companion and Guide* is a slim volume collecting



all of Nancy's articles, accompanied by beautiful monotone illustrations by Sheila Harrington. Arranged in four thematic sections—"Quality Time with Young Children," "Work and Play," "Supporting Healthy Development," and "Guiding Childhood's Inner Life"—it covers a wide range of topics including storytelling, transitions, discipline, practical work, touch and boundaries, technology, addiction, gender identity, and much more, including the question many harried parents never feel free to ask: "What about me?"

Each of these themes is touched on with incisive brevity, not superficially, but with a penetrating understanding of the central core of the matter. Each one can become a springboard for further pondering and exploration, and the many examples from Nancy's life as a teacher, therapist, mother, and grandmother give living pictures that can help readers find ways to apply her experience in their own lives. There are occasional references to Waldorf education in particular, but it is not necessary to be a Waldorf parent to benefit from the ideas presented, which arise from closely observing and learning from the nature of the young child rather than from any dogma or "system."

Nancy seeks to inspire in us a vital sense of the challenge presented to us by our children, who ask us to wake up to a new sense of responsibility, and to be willing to change ourselves in order to care for them. And to our surprise, when we do change ourselves—taking the time to do a few things well rather than many things quickly; learning to read subtle, nonverbal cues; becoming conscious of the importance of transitions and rhythm; filling ourselves with warmth, positivity, and joy—we may find that it is we ourselves who are being healed and transformed by these small messengers, who remind us of what is truly important in life.

This book is a companion and guide that can help us as parents to undertake our mighty, incredibly challenging task, for which almost none of us has any training or support. There's nothing we need more than a wise, empathetic friend, who can point out our mistakes without blame and give us the courage to try again. Thank you, Nancy, for putting yourself into this book, which I hope will become such a friend to many. ♦