

Reflections

by Cynthia Aldinger, Director, LifeWays North America

LifeWays North America is devoted to developing healthy childcare, parent-infant and parent-child programs, and training programs for caregivers, parents and parent educators. These activities are inspired by the works of Rudolf Steiner and the experience of Waldorf education and are supported by contemporary early childhood research as well as common sense and wisdom of many generations of parents.

This is the first newsletter we are distributing to all of the families who are part of one of our Representative LifeWays sites. To each of you we say 'thank you' for standing at the center of why we do what we do. Every time I visit a LifeWays center or home site, my heart swells. Just a few weeks ago, while visiting the Milwaukee center, I felt immediately welcomed into the "family". There were the two little boys who eagerly showed me their new skills walking a plank across the sandbox. I observed a father picking up his son at the end of the day and taking the time for a little game of hide and seek before transitioning him out of the center and into the car ride home. And I experienced the loving ooohs and aaahs of the "auntie" caregivers when we beheld the precious infant of one of their colleagues.

While we are not a family bound by blood, we are a family brought together by ideals and principles, by hopes and dreams, by a shared understanding that childhood is valid and short-lived and deserves to be given its full measure of time and space, and by a sense that there is something profoundly honest and true in simple, homelike, life-based learning.

Feeling like an adopted grandma to all of these dear children is such a gift. Leaving Milwaukee to go visit my grandson in Chicago was like having a just-right dessert after already digesting a truly wonderful and healthy meal. Both were fulfilling. Little Benjamin is already a year-and-a-half old – how did that happen?! He is loving the experience of dancing new skills into his body, including sweeping the floor every morning! It is so fun to be able to really play games with him now, and I am eternally grateful that my aging body still allows me to do rough and tumble play with this eager participant!

There is part of me that only wants to revel in the beauty of what we are all creating together. Perhaps I would be remiss, however, not to mention that, while our children are growing, thriving and learning in our restorative environments, there is a movement underfoot to develop "core standards" of expectation for children from birth to five years old. Already invading the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten world, these standards are based on preparing children for college and future employment (you can read more by going to www.allianceforchildhood.org). Rather than creating standards based on the developmental needs and learning styles of children and building curricula from the ground up, they are starting with what high school graduates "need" in order to "succeed" and pushing curricula from the top down. Part of the problem is the limited view of what measures success. It is as if we have forgotten such groundbreaking research as the *multiple intelligences* elucidated by Howard Gardner or the growing awareness of social and physical epidemics plaguing young children due partly to unrealistic expectations of how they should learn and behave in school (particularly little boys). I ask this question: Do we support a system that may produce

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Reflections...

socially and emotionally crippled intellectuals or do we advocate for a variety of approaches that allow for the creative human spirit to shine through in each individual?

Wow! I just heard my son's voice in the back of my mind saying, "Mom, do you think you are coming on a little strong there?" Perhaps. However, when a cultural paradigm is seemingly swinging the pendulum in the direction of ill-health for our children, my passion begins to flare. Thank you for bearing with me.

Here's some good news! Mary O'Connell and I, and our LifeWays Board colleagues, are excitedly awaiting the arrival of our first book ***Home Away From Home: LifeWays Care of Children and Families***. You can read a bit more about it in this newsletter. One of our dear friends, Executive Director of the U.S. Alliance for Childhood Joan Almon, is hopeful that this book can be part of the dialogue that awakens educators to what is truly essential in the care and development of young children. Please help us spread the word.

Wishing you all a spring and summer of peaceful productivity, joyful journeys and delightful discoveries.
Blessings on your work and play,
Cynthia



Little Benjamin



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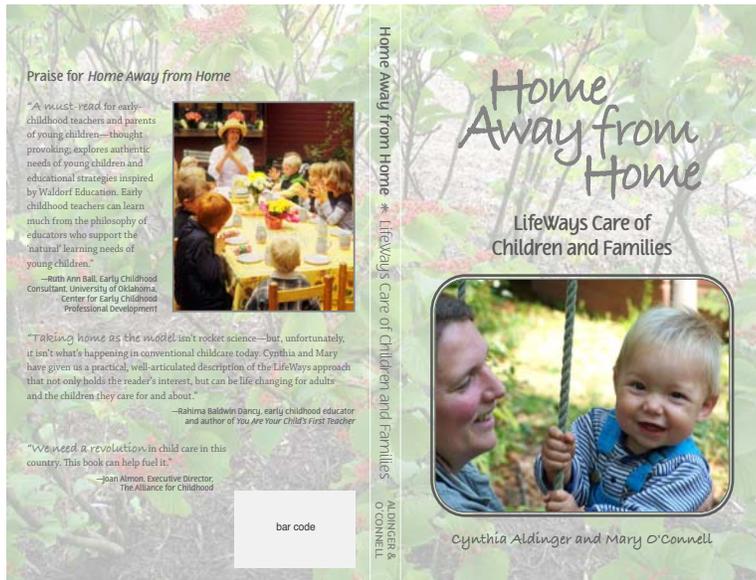
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Photos in this issue by Tracey Ostheimer, Jolanda Waites, Susan Silverio and Cynthia Aldinger

Home Away From Home: LifeWays Care of Children and Families



Here are the chapter titles:

- What is LifeWays Child Care?
- The Many Faces of LifeWays
- Other Facets of LifeWays
- Home Away From Home – Rhythms, Routines and the Living Arts
- Finding Your Colleagues
- Protection: The Safety and Health of Children in Relationship-based Care
- Creating Your Community of Care
- Regulatory Bodies and Professional Support
- Business Questions
- Supporting You in Your Work: LifeWays North America

The first book to be published by LifeWays North America will be available this summer.

Written by LifeWays founder Cynthia Aldinger and President of LifeWays of Wisconsin Mary O'Connell, this book gives an inspiring window into the *life* of LifeWays. It actually takes the reader into the daily experiences of LifeWays homes, centers, parent-child programs and forest kindergartens. Of equal import there are chapters devoted to understanding the business and administrative aspect of caring for children and families including guidelines for working with regulatory agencies. There is also a section on advocacy to encourage us to stand strong for what is best for our children.

Home Away From Home includes many practical tips and wonderful stories about life with children, about celebrating together, about how to work with other adults and about how to navigate a regulatory world that can feel overwhelming without guidance and direction.

The book includes excerpts and photographs from several of our LifeWays Representative and Affiliate members, has a great *call to action* Foreword by Joan Almon, and offers endorsements from our own Rahima Baldwin Dancy and from Ruth Ann Ball, a leader and long-time early childhood educator at the University of Oklahoma and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Co-author Mary O'Connell comments: "Is it possible to provide healthier child care? YES! LifeWays is a model of relationship-based care, where the relationships between child, caregiver and parent are highly valued. Studies show that even though the world has changed greatly, the young child still learns best within the context of relationship. Consistent caring adults are a necessity for the young child to develop. After twelve years in both a LifeWays home and center setting, I can say wholeheartedly and honestly that children cared for within the context of healthy, long-term relationships are well-prepared for school and life."

You can pre-order **Home Away From Home** for \$18.95 plus \$4.00 shipping with a check or credit card info, sent to our central office. Upon publication the book will also be available through the website, www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org

Cynthia Aldinger, Director
LifeWays North America
403 Piney Oak Drive,
Norman, OK 73072

A support worth taking in.... Life Ways Graduate Support Group

Allow me to share with you a very supportive idea which came into actualization here in Boulder, Colorado. After graduating from the LW training, some at Rudolf Steiner College in California and some from Wisconsin, many of our very enthusiastic vivacious group of graduates were wishing for a way to meet again, stay in touch etc. Of course, we came from all over this country with three of us being foreigners in the USA.

It is a theme which we all recognize: How do we stay in connection once the actual training is over? We yearn for the juice, the pulse, the exchange, the aliveness of what happens when we are in each others presence and share our stories, and experiences first hand, or simply sit in a circle and do handwork, or craft a wool-felted animal. And yes, there is a real need for this type of nourishment as we do our work with the children.

I will describe what the graduates here in Colorado have created. We have a successful GSN graduate support network.

This is how our group works:

We meet every six weeks to every other month for a period of three hours. (we chose from 11-2 on a Saturday afternoon.) There are about 7 of us who come together for these support meetings. Some have a longer drive and yet they come since it must be worth it to them.

We schedule about three meetings ahead of time. (six months of the year at a time) This way the date is marked in our books way prior to the actual event. We also chose a theme for each meeting and a place to meet at. And we take turns taking charge of the individual meetings. This entails sending out reminder emails to the whole group about two weeks prior to the date and an agenda. It also means preparing a presentation on the topic that was chosen, such as: working with special needs kids, or preparing for parent teacher conferences, or use of music in our programs. (just to name a few from many possibilities)

When we come together it is a potluck lunch and we all contribute something yummy. We sit in a circle and begin by allowing each member to give a brief update of themes in their life as well as pointing out specific challenges or questions we have about our work at that time. The person in charge of the

meeting will take notes of the themes and make sure that at least some of these spoken concerns will get answered by the wisdom of the peer group. Then we share our lunch and socialize. (Yes ,we laugh a lot and that in itself is healing and invigorating!) After lunch we have a formal presentation on the given theme. It can be that we each present our LW paper to the group or any inspiration from a new book, or a conference. We have also begun to do handwork projects together. In this way a wealth of talents and skills are exchanged and utilized.

Our group has now come together now for over a year and I experience it both as fun and personal nourishment as well as a truly enlivening and enriching my work with concrete ideas and professional perspective.

Please consider forming a LW support group in your state or city that will support you. I highly recommend that we as LW graduates take charge of becoming a professional network of teachers who stand by each other and grow together.

None of us can do this work alone!

Best wishes to your important soulful work, wherever you are!

Warmly,
Charlotte, 'Miss Lotti'
now in Boulder Colorado, soon to be
in Hamburg, Germany.



sewing aprons in the Boulder Training

Our Trainings and Workshops

I hope you enjoy the reports from the various LifeWays trainings across North America. Every group that I am privileged to meet has its own unique flavor with one common factor – the individuals who find their way to this training are wonderful – progressive thinkers, social activists, loving carers, focused seekers.

While we continue to build our already established training sites, others are knocking at our doors. If you or anyone you know would be interested in participating in a training at one of the following locations, please contact me soon: Columbus/Athens, Ohio; Vancouver, British Columbia; Austin, Texas; Hawaii (island to be determined) or Washington D.C.

We are also in a conversation about starting a LifeWays course for Extended Care providers (sometimes also called After Care providers) in schools. While LifeWays is a non-school based approach to the care of children, we want to support those children who must be in school settings at the end of the school morning or afternoon, whether it be preschool, kindergarten or grades. We also want to support the individuals who are providing this care by helping them to develop home-away-from-home care environments and experiences for the children. We'll keep you posted!

— Cynthia Aldinger



Wisconsin students Chinyelu, Lisa and Suzi with their dolls

Wisconsin LifeWays Training 2009-2010

Our sixteen Wisconsin students have completed three of their four sessions and will have their graduation ceremony on June 26th, 2010, in Milwaukee. Please, if you are a former LifeWays student who lives nearby, come to the graduation ceremony that morning at the Milwaukee LifeWays Center and celebrate with us! Hopefully it will bring back fond memories.

Just a few weeks ago, guest teacher Trish McPhee, an anthroposophical nurse from California spent two days nurturing and nourishing them with her soothing touch as well as her profound understanding of child development. The day before that they birthed their heavy baby dolls with handwork teacher Dawn Imes.

On our last evening together, we celebrated a very simple spring festival. Along with “dyeing” blown eggs by covering them with tissue paper, they also learned how to make a magic pop-up matchbox story about a little seed becoming a flower. It was delightful to hear that Michiyo’s nine-year-old son was even spellbound when the little flower popped up.

The women in this group of students represent the full spectrum of the nurturing care offered by LifeWays graduates - from full-time mothers to full-and-part time caregivers to established preschool and kindergarten teachers. One of our students is a child care provider in the first Waldorf school to offer LifeWays child care within the school. One or two others in this group are in serious conversations about doing this in their schools as well.

This will be my last group of students to direct in the Wisconsin training as I am handing the reins over to Mary O’Connell as the new Wisconsin LifeWays Training Director. While I will continue to teach many of the classes, Mary will be the organizing “nurturer” of future Wisconsin trainings. I am so grateful to her for saying ‘yes’, and I am deeply grateful to all the students I have had the privilege to direct as well as to the teachers and mentors who make up this fine group of colleagues. Wisconsin is where it all started, and it will always hold a very special place in my heart.

I am looking forward to graduating this group in June right at St. John’s Tide and summer solstice. That festival truly fits this group of fiery individuals!

—Cynthia Aldinger

Trainings and Workshops

First LifeWays Graduation in Boulder

The first training in the Rocky Mountain states drew to a close March 13th with an inspired graduation ceremony developed by the twelve students and held at a local church in Boulder. The graduation and the classes leading up to it that week were filled with memories of the learning and celebrating that occurred in the four week-long sessions.

This training is the first to have used the format of meeting for a week each quarter over the course of a year, so there were memories of each of seasonal festivals, which were enhanced by being in the beautiful mountain home and center of Young Sook Kim and her family. For the Whitsun Festival in May, we were able to parade around the land with our white paper doves and plant wildflowers on the earthen roof of this special home. And for the fall Michaelmas Festival, we were able to again climb up and throw our meteor (beanbag) streamers off of the roof.

Many of the festival songs were presented in the graduation ceremony, choreographed by Gwyn Schmidtberger and the group. Another student, Verola Spider from the Walakota Waldorf School in South Dakota, blessed us all with two prayers in Lakota. The keynote address was given by Suzanne Down, founder of Juniper Tree School of Puppetry Arts, who lives locally and teaches in the program. Congratulation to all the students!

The next training in Boulder will be starting June 26th-July 3rd. Please tell your friends!

Rahima Baldwin Dancy,
Rocky Mountain
Regional Director

Photo, right:
*Ickle ockle, blue
bockle, Fishes in
the sea, If you want
a pretty maid,
Please choose me.*



Photo above: making graduation crowns

Left: Boulder graduates with faculty:

Back row, l. to r.:
Suzanne Down, Cara Barone,
Tracey Ostheimer, Rahima
Baldwin Dancy, Gwyn
Schmidtberger, Megan Davis,
Young Sook Kim, Ashley
D'Ambrosi Masters, Linda Allen
Front row,
Verola Spider, JeanAnn Vander
Heyden, Ginger Davis, Sara
Alizadeh, Noelle Stilts, Cynthia
Aldinger

Trainings and Workshops

News from the Maine Training

I am pleased to announce that our LifeWays Northeast training will now take place in Rockport, Maine at Ashwood Waldorf School! We are being warmly welcomed to meet in Rosewood, the Early Childhood Center. I am happy that we will be meeting at the school where I was the founding teacher. And now that we have just completed the new grade school building (it only took us 23 years!) there is also a shower on campus for those who would like sleeping bag or tent space at \$10/night. Campers will have a kitchen in one of the kindergarten rooms. There are also some homestays available.

We will also be very close to Spindlewood Waldorf Kindergarten and LifeWays Center (and my home) here in Lincolnville for our silk-dyeing and gardening workshops. And John Palumbo, the assistant kindergarten teacher at Spindlewood will be able to set up his kitchen and nourish us with the organic meals that he prepares with such heart and soul, while still being near his young family. He and his wife Michelle will be offering three mornings of LifeWays style care on campus to support and supplement the caregivers and families of students' children.

I am looking forward to being joined by excellent and inspiring teachers including:

- Rachel Ross, a curative eurythmist who offers Waldorf Remedial Teacher Training in Ireland, Spain, Brazil, Canada and the US.
- Amy Robbins-Wilson, award-winning author of *Transformational Mothering*, singer/storyteller and creator of www.Lullaby-Link.com, teaching lyre and singing with children.
- Suzanne Down, founder and director of Juniper Tree School of Story and Puppetry Arts, · www.junipertreepuppets.com who does trainings throughout the country.
- Cynthia Aldinger, founder of LifeWays North America, renowned speaker and co-author of the soon to be released *Home Away from Home: LifeWays Care of Children and Families*.
- Elizabeth Sustick, anthroposophical nurse and trained natural foods chef who owns and operates a natural foods restaurant with her husband and son in Northampton, MA since 1981.
- Sarah Baldwin, author of *Nurturing Children and Families: One Model of a Waldorf Parent/Child Program*, who taught Parent/Child, Nursery and

Kindergarten at Ashwood Waldorf School for ten years. She now owns and operates Bella Luna Toys www.bellalunatoys.com .

Camden/Rockport, where “the mountains meet the sea” is considered the “jewel of the midcoast” with a harbor full of windjammer schooners, small shops and restaurants, a hiking trail to the top of Mt. Battie and much more! There is even an airport now in nearby Rockland/Owls Head with Cape Air flights to and from Boston that are not much more expensive than the Greyhound bus.

So! Our next session is scheduled for July 11-22, 2010. It will be the first of the next cycle of sessions, to be continued October 8-11, then a long weekend in March and 12 days in July 2011 culminating in a graduation ceremony.

Wishing you all abundant life!
Susan Silverio
Northeast Training Director



Trainings and Workshops

California Coast Training

Our once-a-month sessions that began in September of 2009 continued into the new year with “wonder-full” all day Saturday classes. In January Dr. Susan Johnson and Cynthia Aldinger offered insights on healthy child development and the LOVE approach to discipline.

Early in February we met at Hill of the Hawk Farm in Big Sur, the home of Co-Director Heather Lanier, for a rainbow filled winter weekend. Wood-working instructor Daniel Peterson led the students in creating a wooden spoon from oak found on the property.

Our special friend, Monique Grund, Kindergarten teacher at the San Francisco Waldorf School, joined the group for the weekend and assisted everyone as they made felt boards for storytelling. Using the wool we had dyed during our fall weekend in Big Sur, we all created beautiful, gentle felt pictures.

In addition, Terry Walters from the Santa Cruz Waldorf School community led us through the nutritional background of soaked and soured grain baking. We mixed, rolled, creamed, and happily ate sourdough rye crackers, cornbread, spelt cinnamon rolls and the



best chocolate cake ever!

Our February session at Greenwood School in Mill Valley was graced with the radiant creativity of Suzanne Down. Everyone finished their story aprons and explored the use of nursery rhymes.

Each Saturday session begins with singing and circle games with Andrea Alfonso Gibbs. We also include a number of other classes: lyre and singing, spatial dynamics, watercolor painting, and eurythmy. An additional half-day lyre workshop helped our students become comfortable with tuning and playing their lyre between class sessions.

Another half-day workshop in April highlights our commitment to practical work as the

students learned to lazure paint a space for young children with lazure artist Judy Turnbull of Berkeley. This continues the theme of working to deepen our understanding of child space, both indoor and outdoor.

With just a few more months of Saturday sessions and two long-weekends in Big Sur remaining our students are busy finishing their final projects and observations. Graduation for this first class will be on Father's Day weekend in Big Sur as we welcome all the families of our students for a celebration weekend, camping along the beautiful California coast.

We are now accepting applications for the 2010-11 session, with a 12 student limit on enrollment. Please visit www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org and click on Training/Training Centers where you will find us and all the LifeWays North America trainings listed.

In gratitude,
Marianne Alsop and Heather Lanier
Co-Directors



Top: nature observation and hiking at Big Sur
Left: Suzanne and the students wearing their story aprons
Photos by Jolanda Waites

Cleaning and Clearing at Spindlewood

by Susan Silverio

Doing Dishes with a Lively Group of 3-6 Year olds

One of the challenges of including three-year olds into my Waldorf kindergarten has been how to provide the care and assistance the younger ones need while still creating a flow of purposeful work of which the five- and six-year olds are capable.

At one time the transition from the snack table (although my memory may be rosy in hindsight) was fairly smooth with each child clearing his own dishes and washing them before stepping into the bathroom and then dressing to go out of doors.

With the large group of three year olds with us now (has anyone else noticed a post 9/11 baby boom?) we began to experience a bit of chaos~ and I don't mean the sensitive chaos that I happily orchestrate during free play.

Of course, it is easier to do the clean-up ourselves than involve the children, but when Cynthia Aldinger came to observe me during my LifeWays training practicum, she gently broke the news to me that "I could expect more from the children" in the practice of the Domestic Arts. She suggested that I assign some individual tasks to the children, in particular the older ones. This I did, but I often had the uncomfortable feeling that I was giving orders.

What to do?

One of the parents here at Spindlewood, Maine is now a LifeWays graduate who has taken up home life with vision, passion and commitment. It was she who shared with me how she had created a "job board" at home with key tags on key hooks showing her two children's household chores on one side and when the tag was turned over upon completion, showing a smiling face or occasionally a treat, such as "ask Mom for a hot chocolate!"

I wasn't too sure about using this system in the kindergarten. I have always relied upon the Waldorf arts of using a firm and clear intention of what is developmentally appropriate and expected, communicating with gesture and enthusiasm, and relying on the children's ability to imitate as they are carried along with my "washing up" song.

But...

A eureka moment arose during Lifeways training one summer when we began our own table setting and washing up at lunch time as a community of adult



Lifeways students and faculty, when Hanna, one of the students who had served a year at a Camphill community suggested as we attempted to work together, "Let's Camphill the clean-up!"

Soon we had a sign-up sheet, and a happy division of labor with individual tasks and sufficient orderliness that we could work quietly and mindfully, carry on a conversation, or even form a dishwashing choral group as we worked.

Hanna also showed us the job board that her mother uses as she teaches her Waldorf grade class. I decided to create one according to her design.

We began with the assistant teacher making "tags" during the outdoor time by sawing slices of a small tree branch with the help of the children and then sanding them and drilling a hole in each one.

The board was a scrap of Masonite from my husband's workshop. A piece of plywood would work also. I covered it with a piece of watercolor paper and pasted on pictures done with colored pencils of the individual tasks. I painted the entire surface with Mod Podge to protect it from water damage. White school glue, diluted, would probably do the job also. Then I nailed in small tacks to hold the wooden "tags" that I

Cleaning and Clearing continued

had painted with each child's symbol.

To my surprise the children "read" the pictures and identified their individual tags without my explanation and seemed pleased to have their "own job" that they recognized without my instruction.

Last year I thought it was necessary to rotate jobs weekly, with each child rising up the chart in her "race to the top" to become the master dishwasher before recycling down to the job of compost bucket. But this year, I have adopted more of a "real life" approach by teaming up pairs of children who seem compatible, and giving them job security until they express an interest in another field of endeavor. Then a few may "change jobs" together. To my surprise, they seem quite content with this situation.

Ours is a class of 16 children each morning. It seems fine to have several of the younger ones "unemployed" whose job it is to use the bathroom and dress to go outside. When they are six years old, they can assist a younger classmate with dressing before going outside themselves. I have been surprised at how capable the older ones can be in caring for the younger ones if it is expected.

Our job board is a handy visual reference to remind ourselves of which children we are missing on a given day. The removed tags can be placed outside the board when a child is absent. And the children seem happy to recognize their own symbol on the board. It also is the one visual tool in our room that is so helpful for a child who has special needs.

Recently when a prospective family was visiting the kindergarten, a 2 ½ year old boy spotted our job board. His first spoken words during this first visit to the kindergarten were "I want to touch those buttons!" In our push-button (and touch screen) world, I am pleased to be offering these hand-made wooden buttons that stand as a portal to the real work of our community's domestic arts.

Susan Silverio is the director of the Northeast LifeWays Training based in Rockport, Maine. She is the lead teacher of Spindlewood Waldorf Kindergarten and LifeWays Center in Lincolnville, and was the founding teacher of Ashwood Waldorf School. Susan is a gardener and a beekeeper.

LifeWays Trainings

for 2010 -2011

Maine LifeWays Training

Ashwood Waldorf School, Rockport, ME
Contact Susan Silverio silverio@tidewater.net
207-763-4652

Meeting: July 11-22, 2010
October 8-11, 2010
March, a long weekend
and 12 days in July 2011

Rocky Mountain States LifeWays

Training Boulder, Colorado - Contact Rahima Baldwin Dancy rahima@informedfamilylife.org
(303) 546-0070

Meeting: June 26 to July 3, 2010
October 2 to 9, 2010
January 29 to February 3, 2011
May 14 to 21, 2011

California Coast LifeWays Training

San Francisco Bay Area and Big Sur, CA
Contact Marianne Alsop alsop@sbcglobal.net
415- 453-9122 or Heather Lanier
hillofthehawkfarm@gmail.com

Course runs from September 2010 to June 2011
Meeting for ten, once a month, Saturday sessions;
up to five Saturday half-day workshops all in the
San Francisco Bay Area, and four seasonal long-
weekends in Big Sur at Hill of the Hawk Farm.

Midwest LifeWays Training

in Milwaukee, WI Contact Mary O'Connell
lifewayschildcare@gmail.com 414-562-0818

Meeting: October 17-24, 2010
February 13-20, 2011
May 1-8, 2011
July 31 - August 6, 2011

Rudolf Steiner College, call 916-961-8727

For full information and application forms
please visit our website

www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org
click on Training/Training Centers

Wonder Garden Washes the Floor

by Vicki Flanagan

True confession: I can't remember the first time I washed a floor, but it was definitely long after I left home for college. Imagine at eighteen years old, trying to figure out how to wash a floor! Without a connection to it, I didn't know where to start, what materials to use, and frankly, was embarrassed to admit it and ask for help. As a result, back then, I hated washing floors.

Flash forward: When I work on any of the chores that need tending to in our Wonder Garden classroom, the three, four and five year old children are right there, wanting to work beside me—whether it's washing the floor, watering the plants, cooking, setting the table, or doing any of the numerous chores that need to get done during the course of the week. Imagine at four years old, having such a visceral connection to a wide variety of chores!

Great Discovery: As soon as the children see me with my snow or rain pants on *inside* the classroom, they know that it is time to wash the floor. The great discovery we had in our classroom, to help make things go smoothly for just about any chore, is to just begin, and let the requests to help, unfold naturally or organically out of imitation. The children don't really need instructions, other than, "you may put on your snow pants if you wish to join me," as this will help keep them dry. At this age they are working completely out of imitation, so they will live in your gesture.

I get out my bucket and fill it up with warm warm, some lavender soap, and a dash of tea tree oil. Whatever environmental-friendly cleaning solutions you have will work. We push all the furniture to one side. They can do this and just love putting all the furniture back when we're done; which is such good



physical work for them. We dip our brushes and sponges in the bucket and begin to scrub. The most essential part of our this process, is that we sing while we work. In this case, we sing the song "Old Broom" but have changed the lyrics to: "Old sponge, scrub my floor, old sponge, scrub my floor. Fairies all love it when my floor shines bright, and they dance and they prance to the silver moon light..." You will find this song in Mary Thienes-Schunemann's "This is the Way We Wash-a-Day" Songbook & CD which is filled with inspiring songs for work and play. In her songbook she says: "*Singing while we work can also help to deepen our breathing, balance our life of soul, and help us become more present in the moment. As I sweep the floor and sing our sweeping song, I find I am actually more IN the task of sweeping. It is a simple, fun way to practice mindfulness. Being present in mind and heart will make us better parents and teachers, AND singing makes our work easier and lighter.*"

It is important to understand that the attitude that we have regarding the work we do is of the utmost importance. In other words, if our children live in our gesture, they are not only living into the physical movement that we are doing, they are also living into the attitude we have or the "how" we are doing it." Think about the tasks or chores you do... Do you iron with love? Do you set the table in a caring way? Linda Thomas, who managed the cleaning services at the Goetheanum, wrote in her article, *Chaos in Everyday Life: About Cleaning and Caring*, "If we are unable to lead the meditative, spiritual life we wish to lead, we can try to find a spiritual attitude towards everything we do in our daily lives. In other words, if you are not able to do what you love, you should try to love what you do. Things that repeat themselves



constantly either turn into routine, which can have a very dulling effect, or you can try to make an exercise of awareness out of the most menial task, and already you are starting on your spiritual path.”

So don't hesitate...wash those floors! Sing and practice mindfulness. Wear snow or rain pants to create a stress-free environment that allows the children to move freely, remain dry, strengthen their will forces, and enjoy a rich sensory experience (the soothing smell of Lavender, the warm sudsy feel of the water, the motion of scrubbing, etc). The result is a clean and beautiful classroom which supports the sense of life and well-being.

Vicki Flanagan is a teacher at Wonder Garden at the Prairie Hill Waldorf School in Pewaukee, WI and a LifeWays graduate.



Basic Wood Cleaning Formula

This is good for cleaning well-used furniture...a cutting board or butcher block and unfinished or unsealed wooden toys.

- 1/4 cup distilled vinegar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon liquid soap
- A few drops olive or jojoba oil
- 3 to 5 drops essential oil of your choice

Combine ingredients in a bowl, saturate a sponge, loofa or cotton cleaning cloth, squeeze out the excess and wash the surfaces. The smell of vinegar will dissipate quickly.

Shelf life: Indefinite when kept in glass jar with screw top lid

Variations: Substitute lemon juice for the vinegar, this will help lighten damaged or stained wood, store in the refrigerator.

Antiseptic: Add 5 to 10 drops of rosemary essential oil instead of other essential oils. Rosemary adds a nice scent and provides antiseptic qualities.

We're Not Afraid of You! Thieves Blend

by Mary O'Connell

The story goes like this:

During the Black Plague, there were some bandits who went around robbing the homes of the victims of the plague. Somehow, this group of marauders never contracted the plague themselves. It turns out, they were perfumers by day, robbers by night. The four men made a concoction of herbs and essential oils in a base of vinegar and would douse their body with this before they went out plundering! They had a pretty good track record of stealing riches until the King found out and captured them, forcing them to give up their secret weapon against the plague.

At the LifeWays centers in Milwaukee, we use this special blend of oils to spray down surfaces, door handles, and more. We diffuse it into the air. Some families massage the oils into their children's hands and feet, although the cinnamon oil may be too strong for some children's skin.

It smells great, and research shows these essential oils have been noted for anti-bacterial, anti-viral, antiseptic and anti-catarrrhyal properties while stimulating the immune system, circulation and the respiratory system. According to research at Weber State University, Thieves Oil Blend was found to have a 99% kill rate against airborne bacteria when diffused.

You can purchase Thieves oil online, but it is quite expensive. At LifeWays, we prefer to make our own.

Here's the recipe for Thieves Essential Oil Blend:

- Equal parts of
- Lemon essential oil
- Clove essential oil
- Cinnamon Essential Oil
- Rosemary Essential Oil
- Eucalyptus Essential Oil

To diffuse: Purchase a plug-in diffuser and put several drops of Thieves blend on the pad.

To spray: Mix 25 drops of Thieves blend (5 drops each oil) with one tablespoon rubbing alcohol. Pour this into a spray bottle. Fill the rest of the way with distilled water.

(If you just mix essential oils into water, they will break down. The alcohol keeps them stable, so you can keep and use your spray for weeks.)

Confessions of a Waldorf Mom

by Esther Leisher



This collection of ideas about housework and Waldorf parenting got started when a mother asked Esther Leisher what she had done about housework when her children were young. They were first published on the

weblog www.waldorfinthehome.com and are reprinted with permission. For more articles by Esther, search under her name at Waldorf in the Home.

You asked about how to get the housework done. I expect you already know most of the usual things like:

- 1) Schedule a particular day for housework, then you don't have to think about it until then.
- 2) Get your kids used to doing things for themselves.
- 3) Have a shoebox-sized basket for each person's things—baseball cap, picture to send to Grandma, things they must take to school, unfinished crocheting, or whatever.
- 4) Do some of the cooking on the weekend and freeze it—double batches, triple batches, whatever you have room for.
- 5) Or make a main dish for supper first thing in the morning; then supper doesn't find you having to make do with tuna sandwiches.
- 6) Fill the kitchen sink with hot soapy water before you sit down for supper and have everyone scrape their plates and put them in the water after supper. The dishes are half done.
- 7) My favorite trick was the clutter-clearing basket. Carrying the basket around the house, I put in everything I found on floors & tables. Then I put away everything in the basket. If putting things away is just what you can't bear to do at that moment, put the full basket in the closet to take out and deal with at some less frazzled time. The peace-saving basket creates such a wonderful sense of order in less than 15 minutes. I often did not get everything put away, but every child knew where all the "lost" things were—in the basket! That basket restored me to my better self. Also, the system is the most wonderfully instant

"company is coming" housekeeping. Fifteen minutes to pick up clutter, 15 minutes to hastily clean the bathroom, and 10 seconds to close the bedroom doors.

8) Make lightness, happiness, imagination—even in housework—a priority.

Deciding what to do about housework has to be so individual, tailored not to some ideal, but to the life you actually live. Nothing anyone says should make you feel guilty. You have your own way of doing things. Talking together thoughtfully with other women should not leave you discouraged, but should bring intuitions. Each person in the conversation begins to know what it is they want to do in their own situation. It's okay to say, "I just want to get it done without interference from the kids."

The following tales from my own family life are more moods and qualities than housekeeping tips.

With all you have to do, including all that wonderful Waldorf stuff, how do you get the housework done? Everyone comes up with an individual way of coping with it, a happy solution or a not-so-happy one. Mine was to involve the kids in whatever I was doing. In their early years children learn through imitation; they want to do what they see you doing. For my children that meant they were involved in sweeping, mopping, cleaning the bathroom, washing clothes, preparing meals, washing dishes. In a way they were apprentices, not so much in housekeeping, but in attitudes toward life. We did lots of other things besides housework of course, wonderful things, but housework was not separate, not a category of "unwonderful things."

Sweeping a floor meant an inner experience of the broom, the floor, the dirt. We had linoleum floors when they were young (four kids, remember) so sweeping happened often. The little ones wanted to help, of course, but the adult brooms were too awkward for them (small brooms satisfy some children, but not mine). So they took turns holding the dust pan, intently watching my Zen sweeping. I swept lovingly ('I am scratching the house's back', I felt, while listening to the sound of the broom scritch across the floor.).

Having listened carefully, I noticed, and mentioned, that the broom seemed to be saying not "sweep, sweep, sweep," but, "Peees, Peees, Peees," with

Confessions continued

the hard sound at the beginning. You could hear it, really. Were the little ones listening to the broom? Watching the dirt form a pile? Or learning that work can be entrancing?

The broom thing took on another dimension when I found a lovely, soft, strange-looking broom in an import store. We bought it, felt it, examined it. This broom was made by a human being and we thought with gratitude about the person who put it together. “We have a special broom,” was the feeling. “How fortunate we are.” The new broom, curiously enough, spoke differently. Its soft sound was at the beginning, not at the end. It said a genuine “sweeeP, sweeeP, sweeeP”. Of course the children were allowed to use the broom whenever they wanted, but I was the one who loved using it most. Sweeping became a moment of soul restoration for me: a soft broom, a soft sound and a clean floor. The children felt it. They came running when I started sweeping, and one winter’s day they told me with great concern that Daddy had used the special broom to knock snow off the car. The sacred broom!

I remember that I had three mops because three of us mopped the kitchen floor. Or one did—me—while the two little ones went through the gestures. (In this instance the older ones were at school. There was a wide gap between the first two and the second two children.) Even though the mops were identical, my mop was “better” because it went straight. Their mops went in all sorts of unexpected directions, so one child or the other continually wanted to exchange mops with me, so they could use the “good” mop. But then that mop would go in all sorts of directions so they would trade me again. I found it more amusing than frustrating, but by then I was years past the anxious feeling of “Just leave me alone, I have to get this done!”

My children were fascinated just by the gesture of mopping when they were younger. But by the time Paul and Laurel were about 2-1/2 and 5 years of age, we were making wet patterns on the kitchen floor with the mops. (Would you call it a prelude to form drawing or just a movement experience?) By age 5 or 6 they could mop alone (with an audience). By age 8 they were choosing mopping the kitchen floor as a chore they did alone on Saturday morning.

Laundry was another activity they gladly participated in. By two they were helping me sort out the clothes in front of the washing machine: white, dark,

light, delicate. (I also did some unobtrusive re-sorting, of course.) Then, while the machine was filling up, they got to put the powder in and then the clothes. The gesture of picking something up and tossing it in some pile appealed most when they were younger. By the time they were five, they wanted to learn how to turn on the washing machine. I showed them and stood by. By the time they were eight, they were washing their own clothes. (I know, nobody believes it. Recently I had to assure my son Craig’s wife that he really did wash his own clothes from a very early age.)

Bathrooms: Even a two-year-old will gladly help with the bathtub. A wet sponge, a can of Bon Ami (no chlorine) and the challenge of shaking the powder only onto the sponge—one of those many things that you show them rather than tell them. (The baby gets just a wet sponge to fiddle with) Lots of scouring powder gets spilled by a young one who is not yet well coordinated. You don’t say a word beyond, “Thank you for helping me.” You will rinse the tub again the next time you are in the bathroom.

With bathrooms you also have the magic of water. “Water magic washes our sink and carries away the dirt,” you might say. “See, there it goes.” Amazingly enough, water, this very special stuff, flows out of our faucet. (I’m sure your house is just as magical.) Here again is the Zen feeling and the reverence. In our dry land (New Mexico), water especially matters. I never see running water without a sense of wonder. How often I said to them, “Look, running water!” Wonder, thankfulness, the inner experience of water sets a mood. By experiencing mood, gestures, example, they soak up inner qualities--without any preaching on your part.

Another water experience was washing windows with rags and squirt bottles—fun, but messy. The result wasn’t very impressive, but the kids liked the process. And it’s always the process and the meaning that count. Laurel, at four-years-old, assured us that we had wonderful windows that never let any bad thing in at night, only starlight. Washing them was special.

Esther lives in New Mexico with her husband; her four children are now grown up. This is an excerpt from her biography: *My Waldorf experience has been largely home based, though I had mentors, a curriculum, conferences and study groups—and always, always, a steady supply of radiant and life-filled thoughts.*



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