

The Extraordinary Gift

By P. Donohue Shortridge

A child manifests what nature intends for humans. His inherent inner drive compels him to become an autonomous human being who encounters the world with dignity and curiosity. He seeks meaningful relationships and assumes that his encounters will enjoy mutual good will. Thus it is with awe and admiration that we watch the young child who, after extraordinary effort finally stands erect and joins the family of man. We make a record of his first words because we know this moment to be one of the significant turning points in his life. And this child moves us profoundly with his very

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early extraordinary acts of empathy and compassion. We honor these benchmarks because the child is becoming fully human; self reliant, critical thinking and benevolent.

The adult, recognizing that the child will learn from every environment in which he is placed, provides appropriate surroundings that protect him from that which he is not ready for, while at the same time offer ample opportunity to freely explore. Further, the adult

guides the child by engaging in regular, respectful interactions rather than either coercing him to blindly submit to adult authority on the one hand or else emotionally abandoning him to his own devices or turning him over to others for his care on the other. And finally, the adult models for the child what it is to be human; a love of life, a respectful approach with others and an optimistic perspective that the world is rational and knowable.

This philosophy of life indeed dignifies our relations with children, but it also serves as a reflective model for critical self evaluation. Moreover, it ennobles our adult relationships, both the personal and in the wider culture in which we live.

Essentially, we are all self-educators, seeking meaning in our own lives while pursuing our place in the world.

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fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture