

Out Where the Human Storm Rages

P. Donohue Shortridge

(This is a true story. I worked as a mentor to Montessori teachers who serve young children under six years old in inner city Denver Headstart programs.)

Latrell was revving up all morning; running, hitting and literally bouncing off walls. The last thing he did right before I seized him was to lunge a chair, prongs out at another child. I leapt out of my seat and grabbed hold of him. He fought me mightily. Mostly I think he was

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shocked, no one in his five old years it seemed had ever stopped him in mid-assault like that. Our colliding energies propelled us to the floor. I held my arms around him as we fell together but I managed to land on my butt with him in my lap. Perfect.

He screamed for his teacher, Miss Marian, who was putting her coat on and gathering children to leave for the playground. As she looked at us then looked away, Latrell struggled and screamed louder as he realized his Miss Marian wasn't about to rescue him from this brig. He was all shock, surprise, anger and humiliation made worse by the taunts of his cousin and a few boys. As all the children were leaving, he tried to wrest himself free and screamed louder in anger and frustration. I remained perfectly still, unrelenting. I worked on my breathing and centering. I assured him that as soon as he could calm himself we could deal with this.

In time, his shrieks dissolved into sobs, his mask of defiance cracking into teary streams down his black face. I just held him and rocked. Finally, he was spent. I continued to breathe deeply and invited him to do the same. He complied. I told him that if he agreed not

to move, I would get him a drink of water. He nodded, so I brought him a full glass. He drank it in a gulp as I resumed my position with him, holding him gently now. I met no resistance. He leaned back into me and we rocked together. Then calm.

Somewhere from within me a voice began to speak. "You know what I think?" He was shocked to hear calm sounds, yet drunk in the words. "I think you are very, very smart, aren't you." He measured my trustworthiness, then chose to engage. He nodded. "Today, you counted all the stars on my left earring, then you continued the count on the other one." You know your numbers don't you." Another nod. He leaned into me. We were

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breathing together now. After some silence I continued. "I noticed that Miss Marian wrote the names of the other children but you could write your own name."

I paused and waited for more wisdom. "I can see that you bounce around because you're looking for something that you can't find. You need something for you, don't you." He leaned into me ever more still. "You're going to have trouble all your life, Latrell, if you choose the way of violence. You are a very special boy, you are strong and brave. You are a leader. We can help you find something. We can. I'll talk to Miss Marian about finding something for you." Then quiet rocking. He was holding my fingers. Then still.

"Let's join our friends on the playground", I said finally. He calmly rose and got his jacket. We simultaneously joined hands and walked outside. As we headed across the street to the playground he pointed to the housing

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project down the street. "I live there", he said matter-of-factly. "Oh, really, who lives there with you?" "My auntie and my grandma." "Where's mom and dad?" "In jail", he said again matter-of-factly as we stepped over the used condom at curbside. "I'm sorry", was all I could muster. We walked on.

Right before we reached the playground I stopped, stooped down in front of him, took his hands in mine and looked right into his eyes. He held my gaze, then we both smiled widely. We resumed our walk, hand-in-hand all the way into the playground. Only then did he let it go and he was off.

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