

Wonder fuels a love affair

Keeping the wonder alive as our children develop their love affair with Life

Here is a paradox worth exploring if we are to enjoy this planet and grow in our sense of belonging: it is all ordinary, and at the same time, it is all extraordinary. Now I know this paradox applies to information technology, to numeracy and to literacy, it has to, simply because it *is* all ordinary and extraordinary. I, however, want to go back to basics. It's logical, if you don't have a good grounding in the basics, what follows can be very precarious.

Basically, we are a part of the biosphere of this planet. As far as we know, we are the one species which, as a part of the creation, can reflect on and wonder at the creative process, that is, the Life on this planet. For adults, it is in the reflection and the wondering that the extraordinary is revealed.

Take rain for example. Most of us have been heard to moan about the rain. That's us responding in our 'most ordinary mode'. In our 'extraordinary mode' we will wonder at the moisture in this Earth's finite water system being evaporated into vapour, vapour gathering in the sky and returning to earth to keep gardens watered and plants growing. And this cycle goes on eternally. Now that is pretty extraordinary. Will we wonder out loud with our children? Will we stay in appreciation when it rains because we know our lives depend on it?

Children wonder at the rain. They wonder with their bodies and their senses. They play in it, they catch it in their hands or on their tongues. If we let them. So why don't we let them more often, do we really have good reasons for curbing their love affair with rain? Or is it that we have lost our sense of wonder?

Babies are natural scientists and 'wonderers'. They wonder about everything, but not with their minds the way we do, their minds are in the very early stages of formation. Infants and toddlers wonder with their bodies and their senses.

We can join them at that sensory level, being very present, in-the-moment, wondering, noticing and matching their intentness they explore. Intuition is the most reliable guide over when to say silent, when to speak and when to wonder out loud. To be sure, children need us to wonder out loud. How else will they grow their vocabulary? How else will they learn that the cicada has spent years under the ground before crawling to the surface, 'birthing' itself from its skeleton, and then flying and singing for the first time?



We'll also need to be quiet enough to see that this ordinary old cicada 'shell' is quite extraordinary. With the child, we'll both silently notice it has dirt on its forelegs, it has a long straw for a mouth. There is a split in the shell, the very place that it extracted itself from. And we won't

tell the child any of this, but we could ponder out loud after we had noticed:

I wonder what that's for? I wonder how that got there?

Answers aren't important, it's the right question that allows us to enter more deeply the mystery of ordinary-extraordinary. The right question doesn't have a right answer. The right question generates more wondering and pondering. The wondering is very focused, it is actually a meditative state. Brainwave patterns change, and you and the child enter a focused peace together, a resonance. Wonder full.

Like any love affair, wondering takes time - a love affair with the rain, with the cicadas, with your family, with Life - it all takes time. Great. That's what we are here for and we've got plenty of time. All this talk about not enough time and too busy shows how badly we neglect the basics in our culture. Too busy doing what? As Goethe noted, "Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least".

Wondering is a non-judgemental state. In the act of wondering you don't judge, you just notice. There is no 'good' or 'bad', it just is. So snails aren't bad, snails are simply snails, ordinary and at the same time, extraordinary. The way we speak about and behave with snails can grow wonder, and it can also dismiss wonder and even kill it:

They're just snails.

Yuk slime. Get them out of here at once.

We'll poison them.

Aargh! Squash them. Now.

The toddler who was fascinated with how the snail moved, amazed by the iridescent trail, intrigued with the retractable 'horn-eyes', in awe of how it could all fit back in its shell-house now ends his love affair with the part of Life called snail.

What then is our role in keeping the wonder alive? Two thousand years ago we were given a clue, "Except you become as little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven". Whatever other levels of meaning this quote carries, it is also about the love affair children have for Life on this planet. Children are curious, they explore, seeing freshly with non-judgemental eyes. They are already in heaven, here, on earth. And how do we encourage this?



- **We have to go outside**

Make provision for lots more outside time together. You need to be outside to lie on the grass and wonder about the clouds. Daisies, slater-bugs, sparrows - these extraordinary things live outside.

- **Stop watching the clock and start seeing**

In the long run, does it really matter if you are late for lunch because you were in the middle of watching a blackbird pulling, pulling, and persistently pulling her lunch from the lawn?

- **Start watching for and weeding out judgements**

Take the tiny scarlet pimpernel flower and the buttercup, these are known as weeds and treated accordingly, yet each is as ordinary and as extraordinary as a lotus or an orchid - if you stop judging. The Teton-Lakota people do not even have a word for weed, there is no such thing.

- **Look small**

Truly, and ant, a cockroach or a stick insect is just as amazing as a giraffe or a jaguar, just smaller - and easier to get to spend time with and getting to know.

- **Watch what we say**

Our words can encourage wonder and love for Life, or they can kill it stone dead.

- **Get yourself a personal trainer**

Probably the best qualified mentors I know are children. Infants and young toddlers model to you how to relax, take time and concentrate on your wondering. I've observed they have a far longer attention span for concentrating and exploring single-mindedly than many adults. When it comes to a mentor on questioning you can't go past a child. Children ask the best questions, decent juicy pondering questions like - "Well, how does the moon make the tide come in?" and "How does the baby get in there?"

- **Save your money**

Basics don't cost anything. You don't fundraise for a visit to make a daisy chain or to make mud pies. It costs nothing to find a fairy toothbrush or to lie on a newly mown lawn. Your 'consultant' will not charge you the earth when she asks "what makes the grass smell?" and "why is one cloud white and that other one black?"

Between the two of you, in your love affair with Life, you'll be growing curiosity and belonging, intelligence and understanding and you will be keeping the spirit of wonder very much alive. That's very ordinary and paradoxically, most extraordinary.

Pennie Brownlee

*First published in **The First Years: Nga Tau Tuatahi, Vol 6, Issue 1, 2004***

