

*Children remind us to grow down into the childlikeness that God intends we never lose.*

By Carol Kuykendall

I spent one idyllic summer of my childhood creating miniature moss villages along a little stream near our home. Patiently, I punched twigs into the spongy green surface, making tiny houses. I piled up pebbles for fences and used pieces of moss for roofs. I worked away with total confidence in my ability to create my make-believe village.

By the time next summer rolled around, I had little interest in making moss villages. Something had become buried by the responsibilities of "acting my age."

What had I lost?

Imagination? Wonder? The ability to hear the whisper of God in my soul?

All of the above, I've decided, as I look back from my grown-up perspective. That nebulous "something" is a precious element of childhood that nearly gets snuffed out in our growing up. But here's the good news. It can be rediscovered when we become mothers because our children remind us to grow back down into the childlikeness that God intends we never lose.

Here's the way I see this process, which is really my own personal story.

We are born with this precious, passionate childlikeness. It's real. It makes a little boy dream of being Superman or some other superhero. It sends a little girl to the dress-up box to pull out anything that makes her feel like a princess, because something tells her she is beloved and beautiful, and that she can be whatever she dreams she can be. But as the months and years pass, that something grows dimmer and some of that confidence is replaced by self-consciousness.

Eventually, she grows up and becomes a mommy and watches her child play dress-up. Or jump off a tall rock, thinking he can fly because he believes he can do amazing things. And something stirs slightly in the soul of this mom. Like a whisper that reminds her she can do more than she thinks she is capable of, because she is loved.

That stirring increases as she blows bubbles in the sunlight, watching her child watch with wonder. She points out the moon and stars on a dark quiet night. Together they observe a spider spin a web and are fascinated with the ordinary becoming extraordinary. She re-reads her favorite books to her child ...

*Winnie the Pooh, Peter Pan, Chronicles of Narnia.* The stories re-stir her imagination of make-believe people and make-believe moss villages.

Then her children grow up and the soul stirrings get buried again by the busyness of life. Her children get married and then have children of their own and amazingly, she gets another chance to re-live childhood.

Again she blows bubbles and observes spiders with a grandchild who responds to the world with wonder and enthusiasm. She places a crayon in a chubby little hand and watches a child fill a blank piece of paper with a pointy-edged sun and stick figure family, with no fears about how good the drawing is.

And now she knows for sure that God himself has blessed children with this something inside them that allows them to respond to the world around them with passion and honesty. Some call it simple childish imagination. Others identify it as the ability to hear God's whisper within our souls. I now see it as the part of himself that he places within us to draw us near to him. A divine childlikeness that keeps getting buried in the realities of growing up.

Surely that's one of the reasons God gives us the gift of children. Because children remind us to rediscover that special something and respond by growing down into a world of wonder and awe and possibilities.