

## Children, the Master Teachers

by Kathleen Smith

I'm always coming across those books like, "Everything I need to know I learned in Kindergarten", or "What your child needs to know in the first grade" or something like that. But I have a new one. I would call it, "Everything worth knowing can be taught to you by a child". You'd be surprised what a child can teach you. The trick is to learn.

One of the first things I learned from a child, and I mean really learned, not just lip service to some vague principle, was discipline. Most people perceive discipline to be some sort of corporal punishment for unacceptable behavior. However, the word discipline comes from the word disciple, meaning, follower. I learned from children that force begets force, fear begets fear, and love begets love. I learned that if I wanted the child to follow me, or be disciplined in a certain pattern of living, I first had to show the child the pattern by living it myself, then allow them to follow. In other words, I couldn't expect the child to go to bed at a certain hour if I myself did not also go at the same time, or I couldn't expect the child to be kind to others if I was always unkind to them, ie spanking, yelling, punishing. When I used my own life as the model, the children followed, without even thinking about it. I learned from children that force never works but true discipline always does.

Another lesson I learned from a child was that whining works. One day, as I was lamenting the fact that the children seemed able to wheedle almost anything out of me by whining about it enough, I realized that I had hit on an amazing principle. That is, that people will do almost anything to stop a whiner. Now that might sound like nothing special, but I realized in that moment that I had been wasting my time with consequences and punishments, threats and force. When it came to getting the chores done, or taking baths or anything else for that matter, I simply needed to start whining! Yes, that sounds bad, but the results are indisputable. I invented my own kind of whining that works wonders. Children, when faced with a calm, quiet, unrelenting, insistent voice reminding them to do their job, are just as weak as you and I are and eventually they will do what you ask just to shut you up. It works. The first few times might take a bit of time, but after that, they just do it because they know that you will not give up until you get your way, just like they do. And, as long as you do not become angry, or impatient it will win over even the most stubborn customer. I love chore time at our house now, because they see me coming and they get to work. I don't have to say anything except what jobs need to be done. The work gets done and everybody is happy.

One of the toughest lessons to learn from a child is that people don't want easy things to do. Children are especially optimistic and will take on any challenge no matter how impossible it seems. One of the secrets to happiness is learning to have faith in yourself and others enough to let them try the impossible. How many times do children ask their parents if they can build a tree house, or ride a long way on their bike, or run a power tool? So, let them. Maybe not every time, but sometimes. Give them the hard job. Let them take a turn and watch them. Children grow up in the light of your approval while you watch them do the hard things that you do. I knew a woman who never allowed her children into her kitchen. She cooked for them, and they ate it, but they never got their fingers in the dough, never tried making cookies or a cake, never knew the joy of success that comes when Mom or Dad watches you do a hard thing, like following a recipe when you are eight. Of course I don't just turn them loose on a motor and say, "There it is, fix it!" But, when you allow them to watch and help and participate while *you* do it, then you have made the impossible possible for them, and they will be forever grateful.

These few things that I have learned from children have been the most important lessons of my life. And, with a few more years of practice, I may be just about as good as some of those children. One can only hope.