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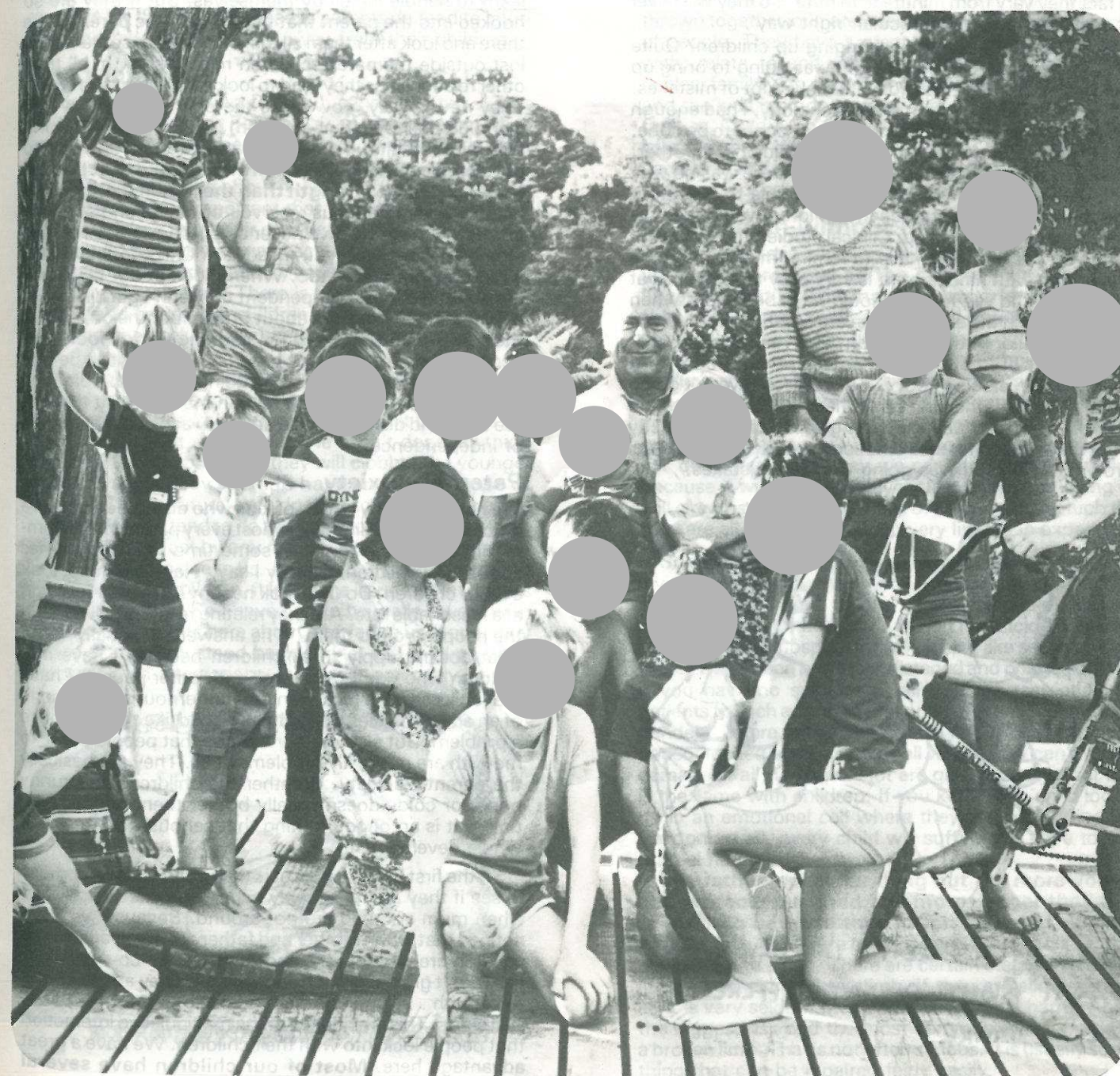
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Centrepont

ISSN 0111-5308 December 1981

Issue No. 7 80c

What About the Children?



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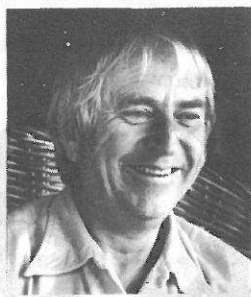
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BERT'S TALK



What About the Children?

Permission to be Human

Although I've been asked to talk about children, I'm aware of some reluctance to do so. So many books have been written propounding diverse theories about children that there is a danger of merely adding to the confusion. All the authors I have read seem to assume they have the right answer. But when you look closely at the people themselves you find that they don't have the answer. There is no right way for children to be brought up because there are so many variables: the two main ones being the parent and the child. These both vary from day to day. In fact they vary from minute to minute. So they will never fit perfectly into any particular 'right way'.

So what can I say about bringing up children? Quite a few years ago I realised that if I was going to bring up children of my own I was going to make a lot of mistakes. Having studied education and psychology, I had enough theoretical background to know how it ought to be done. But I realised that many theories contradict each other; that even if I could find the right way, there was no way as a human being, I was going to be able to keep to it and there was no guarantee my children would react as the books said they would. Clinical studies in psychology sound so pat. I always have to remind myself that they are written with hindsight. It is very easy to look back at a situation and see how it should have been. But when you are right in the situation you are emotionally involved with your child. **In that moment you respond according to your own emotional patterns, not according to someone else's theory.** So I realised I wasn't going to be a perfect father and bring them up according to the books. I was not always going to give my children exactly what they needed for their emotional, physical and spiritual growth. At times I was going to make mistakes.



LOOK! AS A PARENT I'M NEVER GOING TO DO IT RIGHT, SO WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

I still decided to have children: in fact we had four and we haven't done too badly with them. They have absorbed some positive attributes from their mother and me. That is the key. If you give them enough of yourself you compensate for the mistakes you make; your children pick up enough of your reality to enable them to form their own opinions and do their own thing.

Independence

I think it is important that children are brought up to be independent, not isolationist. I don't mean they have to learn to handle life all by themselves. But if they are so hooked into the parent that they expect the parent to be there and look after them all the time, they become utterly lost outside the parent-children relationship. In all their other relationships they tend to look for a parent surrogate. They never really grow up to the point where they can stand on their own feet and learn to cope with the world with all its faults. To be independent children have to develop their own abilities. **I firmly believe that people have a lot more strength than they realise.** Right now you have a tremendous reservoir of power and strength inside you that you have never used. You can call on this strength whenever you need to. Children have this strength within them too. When I look at our children I am amazed at how independent they are. I get a kick out of watching them, from about fifteen months on, collect their own plates and spoons and line up for food, not because they have to, but because they want to be one of the big ones. I know they are going to be fed. Someone will help them. They don't rely on mother to sit them at the table and dish their food up. They achieve that degree of independence.

Parental Anxiety

We have a healthy bunch of kids who don't seem to have much bother with life. Yet almost every parent in the Community has come to me at some time to share worries about their children. Usually I say, 'Have a general look at your children. Do they look healthy? Are they growing at a reasonable rate? Are they relating reasonably well with the people around them?' The answer is normally 'Yes'. That doesn't apply to all children because I have met children who don't relate well with other people. I have met children who look wan and undernourished in spite of an adequate diet. If you have a child like that you have a problem. But all the other worries that people come to me with are not really problems at all. They are basically the parent's anxiety. Whether the children have runny noses or colds doesn't really bother them one little bit unless it is an ongoing thing that seriously affects their whole development.

So the first thing to look at is their general development to see if they are reasonably happy and alert, especially when mum and dad are not around. Because we have noticed that when mother and father are not available the children are perfect little angels. They are co-operative, they don't grizzle, grouch and whinge. They are delightful to be with... until mother and father walk in and then it all starts. This is evidence of the manipulative interaction that people lock into with their children. We have a great advantage here. **Most of our children have several**

other adults that they go to happily if mother and father are not around. In a nuclear situation with mother and father being the only adults they relate to regularly, both parents and children are in an intensely manipulative situation that is very difficult to stand back from. Children find that they can't manipulate other people as easily as they can mother and father and so they give up trying. New children often don't fit in very well for the first few weeks. They are more hostile and aggressive than the Community children. They scream, yell and whine more. Eventually it seems to occur to them that it is not paying off and they start making friends and taking part in the life around them.

Over the last three or four years I have sometimes wondered whether the parents here have enough contact with their children because they certainly don't have a lot. The difference is that they now have a quality of contact which was previously unknown to them. Parents and children now share their feelings at a deeper, more intimate level. When I look at the children themselves, the reports they get from their schools and the comments passed by outside observers, I find that they compare very well with their peer group outside the Community. **So I can now say if there is enough depth, intimacy and reality in the relationship, children don't need as much contact with parents as was thought in the past.** In fact if the parents are not around they learn to do more for themselves because parents do tend to interfere and take responsibility away from their children.

Don't Interfere

While we were waiting for the meeting to start, I was watching two-year-old Bonnie playing with her pram when another child took something off her. She promptly went into her own special version of screaming and yelling. Nobody did anything about it. Nobody went in and gave back the toy. It is important that we learn to stand back and let children fight their own battles. The children here have never seriously injured each other. They learn their place and they learn that they have to cope with life. This is part of growing up. There is no ideal society or ideal situation to bring your children up in. They can learn to look after themselves very readily in whatever sphere they find themselves in.

A couple of years ago I noticed that when one of the older children does something unfair or unkind to one of the younger ones, the younger one can hit back and get away with it. But if the older one hasn't done anything that they feel guilty about, they will clobber the younger one back again. **They seem to have an inbuilt sense of justice.** This is natural. We do tend to hurt other people at times. We do tend to do things which are not very nice. We are not perfect by any means. We sense what result or punishment is due to us. As soon as a parent steps into a fight between children, it loads the issue and intercepts a natural growth. So I have had to be really severe with some of the parents here about interfering until now they realise that if they stand back and let the children work out their own interactions, it all goes smoothly.



A CHILD CARE EXPERT COMMENTED ON HOW WELL OUR CHILDREN SOCIALIZER FROM A VERY EARLY AGE

A child care expert who came to observe the pre-school children recently, commented on how well our children socialise from a very early age. This is true. They are thrown together intimately and closely with a large number of people. They have a great variety of people to work with, relate to and measure themselves against. The nuclear family with mother and father; brothers and sisters and the kids next door is very limited in contact opportunities. Children in middle-class, nuclear families, up to school-age at least, are very closely monitored by the parents. They get very little freedom at all. All the time they are judged by, 'What will the neighbours think?'

No Freedom without Risks

There are risks in allowing children more freedom. **But you cannot remove all the danger from children's lives without restricting their experience so much that they do not realise their full capabilities.** If you are going to take away every source of danger to a child you are not going to let them outside the house. We have to allow children to take a few risks: not undue risks, but they have to take some. Here at Centrepont we have to accept the fact that from time to time some children are going to be seriously hurt; that sometimes a child here will die. There is no way we can stop that happening, because if we try to stop every last child from dying we will circumscribe the activities of all the rest so much that they are all going to grow up very limited in experience.

Some years ago a group of experts from Britain were invited out to study the mental hospitals in New Zealand. The Superintendent of one of the hospitals was very proud of the fact that they had had no suicide or serious incidents in the hospital for something like seven or eight years. The visiting professors listened and pointed out that if you have no suicides at all you are restricting the patients to such an extent that none of them become independent. There have to be risks in life. If you keep every patient locked up in a single cell where they can't do any damage at all, the whole lot are going to suffer for it. It is the same with children. If you keep each child locked up in an emotional cell where they are not getting any freedom at all, every child will suffer. We have to take normal natural risks.

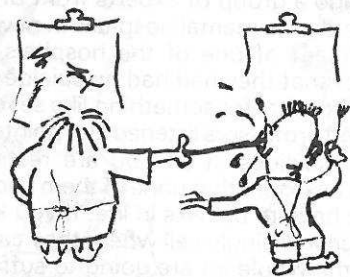
It is rather a peculiar thing but the more you try and protect your child, the more danger they tend to get into because they haven't learned skill and judgement. If they are told it is dangerous to climb, they never learn to climb. There are certain stages in a child's life when they need to climb. If they are allowed to do so it is very seldom they come to any real harm. About the biggest risk and the most common injury would be a broken limb. That is not often serious. It is usually something that can be repaired fairly easily.

Exploring Limits

It is surprising how small children, from about one on, can fall without hurting themselves. They are relaxed so they don't come down with a jolt. They tend to get away with all sorts of thumps and bangs that would badly hurt older people. I have watched our babies of about a year old climbing laboriously up our flight of stairs. They stand up there on one of the top steps, so pleased with themselves, and they sway backwards and forwards. I know they can hardly walk and I think, my God they are going to fall. At that moment I find the best thing I can do is look the other way, because if a child falls down stairs, very seldom are they seriously hurt. They are built so that they roll from step to step, yelling their heads off.

They don't stop yelling till they reach the bottom and receive some comfort before carrying on playing again. In that sort of fall they learn their own limits. All of our children have had minor falls and collected bruises and grazes from time to time. When you allow children to take risks and explore limits you say indirectly, 'We will take all the serious accident provoking areas out of your environment but we won't hang over you all the time.' We do supervise our children, especially our pre-school children, but we allow them to extend their limits a lot further than most children do.

When my own children were growing up we used to take them to Kindergarten and pick them up again later. We ran a rotated pick-up service with four or five other families in the district. The difference in the upbringing of the children was obvious. I vividly remember one little boy who lived with his very tidy mother in a house which was always absolutely spic and span. When he was at home, he was always put to play in the empty front hall with all the doors closed. He was kept in this clean, very hygienic, carpeted front hallway and that was his playground. He was only given one toy at a time to play with. When he had finished playing with that toy or rather when his mother thought he had finished she would take that toy away and give him another one. There was nothing that he could test himself out with. He wasn't allowed to beat the walls with his toy, and make a lovely noise with it. There was absolutely nothing for him. I don't know how he grew up because we lost contact with them when we shifted, but at kindergarten he was never very good at socialising. He was always asking the teachers what he could do next. He was never able to take initiative and get stuck in up to his elbows in paint, mud and sand. He always had to keep himself clean because he had to go home as clean as he left. I can remember having my children coming home from kindergarten covered in paint and mud. Children need to be free to experiment with different media and textures.



I often wonder how younger children can enjoy putting so many different things in their mouths. I've tried eating sand, unwittingly, at beach picnics and it is a gritty horrible feeling. But little children seem to get away with it. They grind away quite happily. I can remember once noticing something black in my son's mouth and extricating the remains of a wetta. The rest of it had disappeared all together, presumably down inside him. My immediate reaction was, 'Yuck! A wetta!' But he seemed to be quite happy with it. All children pick up strange things, pop them in their mouths and get away with it.

Most parents would also remember the experience of going to pick their child up after the afternoon nap to find

him standing in the cot very pleased with himself with shit smeared all over the cot, all over himself, in his mouth, in his hair! Lovely stuff! Great fun! Most children do that at least once and they don't suffer any harm. They don't die or come down with any great ills. The only thing they suffer from is mother's and father's yucks and anxiety about how to clean the poor little fellow up. If we don't make a big deal of experiences like that the children can move through them without getting hung up about their bodies and dirt.

Compensation and Balance

I really started off talking about compensating for negative emotional reactions. It is possible to strike a balance. If we give them plenty of favourable attention, acceptance and loving it will balance the other times when we don't give them what they want. **Then they can grow up accepting that life is a series of negative and positive rhythms.** In the last few weeks when my one and a half year old grandson, Jamie, has performed about doing something I want to do, I have caught myself saying, 'Okay, Jamie I am going to win this time because I am bigger than you are.' This is true. I am going to win. It is also quite realistic. Each week in your own life you do something that you don't particularly want to do, because somebody else has more power in the situation than you have. In Human Potential terms it has become a bit of a cliché to say that nobody makes you do anything. I make Jamie do things from time to time because it suits me. Providing I recognise what I am doing it is okay. At the same time I am giving him a lot of love, attention and caring. I think on balance he is coming out on top. I think that is all that we can reasonably expect of ourselves.

We need to accept the fact that at times we are going to get angry and scream and yell at them. We might even hit them. Even that doesn't really damage their psyche to any great extent providing they get plenty of love in return.

Love and Acceptance

This is where most children miss out, because most parents (I am talking now about the great majority of parents) are so anxious that although they think they are giving their children love, in fact the whole time they are worrying about it and thinking about it instead of actually just giving it. It is a real joy to watch a parent, who is unaware of being watched, simply enjoying their child. A tremendous rapport is established in that moment. It is a very beautiful thing to watch. **It is very beautiful to experience those moments when you and your child are flowing together.** If you start questioning the experience you become so anxious that you stop the beauty, fun and enjoyment of that moment for both of you. The child misses out on feeling the parent's acceptance. Yet that feeling of parental acceptance is an essential factor in developing the child's self-acceptance.

Right now we have a number of youngsters moving into early adolescence. Their bodies, interests and ideas are changing. Many of them are still conditioned very strongly by the society we came from, rather than the one we have now. They have problems with their self image. We look at them and see beautiful, delightful children, but they don't see themselves that way. They see themselves as deficient and inadequate. Recognising this means we can feed in more acceptance and positive feedback.

In a nuclear situation it is a lot harder. Parents tend to be highly critical of their children. I don't mean parents consciously try to destroy their children but they try to make them fit a socially acceptable image. We have this ideal picture of a nuclear family with a mother, father and two children all living happily in a three-bedroomed house on a fifth-care section in the suburbs. I don't know the origins of this beautiful family ideal. Politicians talk about this family as the foundation of our lives! What family? Where does it exist?

The Changing Family

I read recently in the American magazine, *Psychology Today*, that this family doesn't exist in the States any more. The male-dominated two-parent family living in suburbia is no longer in existence. The majority of women work. The women's lib movement of course has been active in decrying male domination and promoting equal rights for each parent. This is a radical change. When I was a child there was never any doubt as to who was the boss of the house. It was always father. Sure, mother in the background might have been running the show in a more manipulative way but no one every questioned the fact that father was nominally the head of the household. These days when they send out census forms to be signed by the head of the household it raises the question of who signs this document when both parents are working. Many men these days stay home and look after the house and family. There are many solo-parent families. Many families include children from previous marriages. The whole idea of family has changed in a matter of fifty years. When people talk about protecting the sacrosanct 'family life of New Zealand', they are not very specific about what this family life is or where it exists. How are we going to maintain it when it hardly exists right now? Most of us here have recognised the stresses and strains that this ideal family life is under. We have recognised that it hasn't worked for us personally. Most disturbed children come from single families in suburbia. They don't come from mixed groups of people particularly, so why hold on to this mythical notion.

I'll love you if . . .



**CAN YOU GIVE YOUR CHILDREN
LOVE WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS.....?**

There are certain fundamental needs no matter where or how you live, and one of them is love.. Can you give your children love without any conditions, without having to earn it? I know that many of you have never experienced that from your own parents. There was always an implication that you had to be a good little boy or girl to get that love. In other words, you had to earn it first. Nearly all children in New Zealand grow up feeling they have to earn approval. It is simplest to earn approval in the very dictatorial family which lays down clear conditions about work and behaviour. The children have fixed chores to perform each day. When they do them, all is well. Children can easily understand such a definite contract. Looking from the outside you might say, 'My God, those parents are real slave drivers. Fancy making the kids work that hard!

I remember a headmaster I worked with once saying at a Parent Teacher Association meeting to a roomful of

farming parents that the human animal is the only one that makes slaves of their children. There was a great fuss over the statement but it was quite true. In the country most children have a lot more work to perform than children do in the towns. Children can cope with that because it is easily understood.

But the emotional demands are rarely laid down so clearly. It is much harder to earn affection, loving and caring when nothing concrete is laid down: when there is some amorphous, good, high-achieving child that you have to be but nobody tells you exactly what that good child is like. In fact your parents are expecting you to achieve the perfection they never achieved. There is no way you can fill that expectation. So whatever happens you will never be quite good enough. This results in a tremendous amount of resentment and hostility between parents and children that is usually not worked out because neither of them recognise what is happening. The parents cannot see the conditions attached to their loving. **Children need to be loved unconditionally.** They need to be loved just because they are children. I watch the children around here being loved not just by their parents but by a number of other adults. Almost everybody that goes past has something to contribute to them just because they are there. They don't have to perform in any particular way.

What about the Children?

People say, 'Oh that dreadful Community! Fancy children having to live there just because their parents want to live that way.' Nobody's children have freedom of choice about where they live. Children go where their parents go. They live in whatever situation the parents set up. Children are considered on space grounds. They may be consulted but they don't have the power to decide whether they live by the sea, in the country, in the middle of town or what suburb they live in. They move when their parents move. They live where their parents live. They live in the sort of house that their parents select. So I ask myself what freedom does any child have to choose where they live? What freedom do children have to run their lives in their own way?

What about the Mess?

Even to the way they keep their bedrooms. There have been a lot of jokes made about the mess in children's rooms. Children like living in a mess. They like having all their stuff right there where they can pick it up, play with it and put it down spontaneously. They don't see the need to have everything tidy. They don't care how much junk is spread around. We have inaugurated a weekly clean-up just so we can get into the rooms. The rest of the time it is over to them. Children also keep their rooms in a mess because it is a wonderful way to get at mother. She can harp and harp at them to go and tidy their rooms. . . 'Why don't you clean up your mess? Look at the mess you are living in? Go in right this instant and clean it up! So they go in and spend about an hour moving stuff around. When they come out there is hardly any visible change and mother says, 'It's not good enough,' and they say, 'Well, I've worked all that time.' So mother says, 'Well you'll have to tidy it up again tomorrow.' They have won. They have scored a point and tomorrow they will have mother's energy hooked again. So the saga goes on. Some of you are smiling. Probably because you have children of your own that have done this or are doing it. Children and parents can play this game for years.

Yet the normally messy child is far more healthy than the child who is absolutely meticulous and has everything in its right place all the time. **When I see a child who is compulsively tidy I look for deep emotional and psychological problems.** I remember a man on one of the early groups I ran who was extremely neat in everything he did. He was always neatly dressed. He kept his things neatly folded in a rucksack in a corner of the room. He didn't like other people tidying his things. He didn't

like other people putting books on his bookshelf at home because he had a special place for every book. But on about the fifth day he started to crack up and become untidy. His things were strewn all round the floor. He was going through an alteration of his whole attitude towards life. It wasn't very comfortable for me because I was watching this guy slowly going crazy. The question was whether he would bring the two different parts of himself into balance or whether he would merely switch polarities and become totally disorganised. Over the next few weeks he was able to integrate his experiences and develop a less rigid and more satisfying life for himself.

The child who has to be completely organised outwardly is totally disorganised inwardly. Watch the meticulous housewife who has to have everything absolutely right all the time. They are the ones who are going to break down when something unscheduled happens. Those of you who worry about your untidy children, just accept that they are probably pretty healthy. Those of you who have children who are compulsively tidy, take another look at them because they are the ones you will have problems with ultimately.



I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE ... SOMEWHERE.
HURRY UP AND TIDY THAT ROOM!

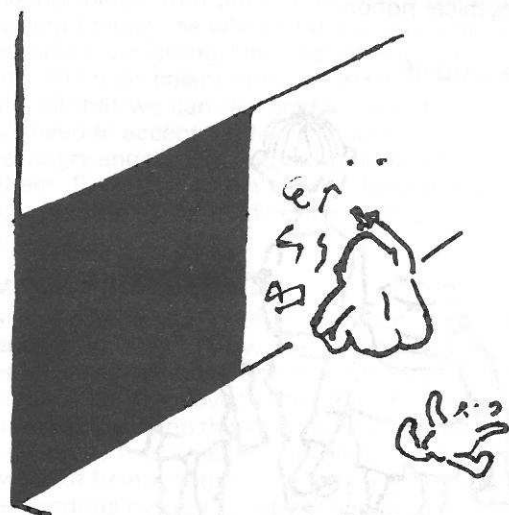
Freedom to make mistakes

Children also need freedom to experiment. They need to know they can make mistakes and still be accepted and loved. The adults living here are beginning to realise that mistakes are a learning opportunity. People often come to me and say, 'Do you think I should do so and so?' I say, 'Well, what do you think?' and they tell me. I could say, 'No, don't do that. Do this because I know it will work.' But they wouldn't learn much from doing what I told them to do and I would be responsible for the outcome. When children come to you and you either tell them exactly what to do or you do it for them you are taking the responsibility. If it is important to them they will do what you say and it will work very nicely but they know the credit for it is yours.

But usually they will start doing it your way and mess it up. Then they can come back to you and say, 'Look I've done it your way and it doesn't work. Now what are you going to do about it?' So you give them the next list

of instructions and they go away and mess it up again. As parents you are always trying to be reasonable so you think, 'Perhaps I didn't explain it very well,' or, 'Perhaps they didn't hear me,' so you explain it again. This is a manipulative way your children can hook your energy. You don't get satisfaction out of it, but they do, because boy, are they frustrating you! In the end you say, 'Look I'll do it for you.' And you take over and do it for them and it is not their's any more.

Some of our kids have just made a rabbit hutch. It is all their own construction effort. If it falls apart or the rabbits escape no one is going to blame them or say, 'There you are, you can't even make a decent rabbit hutch. You are absolutely useless.' But parents often say that sort of thing to their kids. Why not say, 'Oh well, it didn't work that time, try it again another time and see what you have learned.' **We all need the freedom to make mistakes with the security that our families will accept them as part of our learning process.** You have all made a lot of mistakes in your own lives. You might have thought they were very important at the time, but were they really important in the long run? They haven't destroyed you. You are still here and probably still blundering along in your own inimitable way. It is fairly rare for children to believe that they are acceptable no matter what they do. It is rare for children not to be afraid of being put down because of the things they do. They may not have the skill, dexterity and strength that an adult has but it is surprising how much they can do if they are left alone.



Exploring the Territory

I get a bit niggly at times when I see them carrying junk around the place and building huts in my beautiful bush and generally not doing things the way I like them done. Then I think it would be a lot easier to have a community with adults only. Then I look at the mess the adults make ... and ... well, I just let the kids carry on building their huts in the bush. Instead I teach them what destruction means: that trees take a long time to grow. That if they cut down even a small native tree they are destroying twenty years' growth. They can learn care and respect for nature and the ones that have been here for several years are pretty trustworthy in the bush. Every so often I have to give a few more lessons for the new ones that come in who are not used to the country.

When we first came here the kids very seldom went more than about fifty yards from the house because most of them had never lived in the country. Town was the safe place with fast cars, buses and trucks. They had probably visited relations or friends in the country but it was foreign territory to them with vast open spaces, trees and fan-tails. So they stayed right in close at first then gradually spread out. Now I find huts in all different parts of the bush. I am surprised at how much energy they have in taking timber and iron quite long distances out to build these huts.

Sometimes I resent them spoiling the appearance of the bush. Then I sit back and think, 'Well does it really matter?' If I live thirty more years before I die, I may just see the tops of the native trees I am planting coming through the teatree on the escarpment. As I plant the trees I think, 'I'll put a kauri tree there and a rimu there and when they grow up they will fill up this gap,' and I imagine what it will look like in a hundred years time. I realise that in a hundred years time most of this iron will have rotted away and the untreated timber they are using will make good compost. In five hundred years there will be very little sign of their activity and in a thousand years when those trees are really mature no one will know whether the kids made a hut in the bush or not. So when I get things into perspective I can give them the freedom to play their games and use their imaginations to work out their fantasies and expand themselves in ways that kids in town cannot.

We lived in the city for four or five years. There were parks nearby but there was nowhere that our children could go to climb trees because it is against the by-laws to climb trees in a public park. There was nowhere they could go to build huts. This hit home to me because it was my children being restricted. Then I realised that huge numbers of kids in the city have nowhere they can go to make huts, dig holes or climb trees.

When I was a kid we had acres and acres of land to play in. We had trees to climb and even cut down. We dug holes and made underground huts. We had huts all over the place. We did all sorts of things and nobody worried about us. But as soon as you bring kids into the town the trouble starts. City children cannot use their imaginations and physical energy in this way. On a nice fifth acre suburban section you don't dare have any chaos in the front. The grass has to be cut, the edges trimmed and the flowers planted because of what the neighbours will think. Out the back, dad has his garden and another neat bit of lawn and again there is nowhere that kids can really experiment with life. How can we give our children more freedom? Can we create our own mini-society changed to the extent that we can change ourselves?

Sex: the Hot Potato

There is one particularly difficult area regarding children's freedom and that is sexual freedom. This is a very hot potato. Children's sexual freedom is not allowed by law. The law states quite explicitly, you are not allowed to bring your children up to be sexually free. If you do you will be prosecuted. **I believe sexual freedom and sexual experimentation are moral issues. They don't need to be covered by criminal law at all.** But this is not just an old out-of-date law. It is a law that is backed by the majority of the New Zealand population, because they are all scared of their own sexuality. They don't want to know that freedom is even possible because if they did they would have to look and see how wasted their lives are and how lacking they are in real intimacy. If we want to bring our children up in a spirit of sexual freedom we inevitably come up against religious opposition. People say, 'You can't do that. It is against the law of God's creation.'

In some areas of children's sexuality the law is not very explicit. Our little pre-schoolers, the two and three-year-olds, like to get into fucking games. If we encourage them, I mean if we say, 'Come on, get into it,' we would definitely be breaking the law. But I don't know what sort of a view the Courts would take if we just allow it to happen. Which we do. If the pre-schoolers want to play sexual games that is up to them. We let them play and experiment. We let them learn what it is all about. We take all the hocus pocus and mystery out of sex. So our pre-schoolers play very explicit fucking games. Where does the boundary come? When do you move from breaking the law by allowing things to happen, to the point where you are forcing it to happen? I think if we forced kids into sexual activity then we would be doing harm to

them, but we don't force them. Then there is the question of age. At what age does sex play stop being legally acceptable. I don't know. The law is not very explicit. It would probably depend on how uptight the judge was. Not many people are prepared to stand up and say sexual freedom is good for children. It is healthy. **I believe children should be allowed to grow up from birth through to adolescence having sexual experience appropriate to their own level.**

It is quite obvious that girls in Western society are not waiting until they are sixteen. Some are fucking when they feel they are ready for it. Some are fucking before they are ready for it. They don't know what it is all about, but they are curious. The children growing up here will not be very curious about sex. They know what it is all about. They have seen it quite freely and openly. They can come and sit in a Long House and watch a couple fucking any time they want to. The funny thing is not many of them want to. They are just not interested now. They'd rather go and play football or bullrush. They had a lot more interest when they first came to Centrepont. New children still do, particularly ones of about eight, nine or ten. They nudge the other kids and giggle and want to see what happens.

For many children there is this great mystery. When they say, 'Where did I come from?' they basically know they came out of mummy's tummy. They wonder how they got out into the world but what they really want to know is, how did they get in there! They can't imagine their parents fucking! Never! It never happens in our house! So how did I get in there? They literally don't know. There is no evidence of it ever happening. Mother and father never even touch each other until they get into their own bedroom with the lights out and the blinds down. They are very quiet because the children might hear.

People here have learned that it is fine to make a noise, but most children grow up without even hearing their parents. We want to bring our children up with full sexual knowledge. I don't mean merely theoretical knowledge, I mean practical knowledge. I want them to know and see what happens. I want them to feel the emotions involved. I want them to have standards and aspirations much higher than the average of the population. I hope the quick bang in the back of the car won't occur for our children. I hope that they will learn to have some real contact and communication with their partner first. I hope they will have enough loving in their own lives to be able to share it with the person they are with before they get into their sexuality. I believe this can happen for our children. But I don't believe it can happen for most of the children of society. I believe that most children in society at large will never learn what real loving is. They will have all the theories about it. They will talk about it. They will read about it in popular magazines and the latest how to do it sex book but these give a mere theoretical knowledge and life is not theoretical. Life is basically a pragmatic practical matter of actually living.

In Conclusion

At this point I would like to reiterate. Children need to be loved without any conditions. They need to have the freedom to experiment and make mistakes. They need to be held responsible for their actions and not have things whitewashed for them. I think if children have loving, freedom and responsibility in their lives they will grow up pretty complete human beings.

What can we do about it? We can learn to be more accepting of ourselves and our children and recognise that we are going to make mistakes. We can learn to take our limits off and accept responsibility for our actions. I believe learning to do this is an ongoing life process. **In the meantime I think our Centrepont children are very healthy emotionally and physically and I am very proud to be associated with each one of them.**

— Taken from Bert's talk given at Centrepont on Saturday 31 October 1981

Let the Children Speak

I HAVE A CHOICE

Some people who are objectors to this Community say, 'Oh but what about the poor children who had to come to Centrepont because their parents did.' Well I have a choice to live here because I could easily go and live with my father who lives in Birkenhead and who is manager of a company, but I have chosen to live here for the last four years. We are not treated like prisoners in a Nazi camp!

I don't think there is a lot of difference between my father's home and Centrepont. There is some difference: at my father's it is quieter, and here people show their feelings more openly. At the moment I am thinking about going to live with my father when I start college the year after next to see what it is like living in a nuclear family again. Hopefully I will keep visiting Centrepont in weekends and holidays. It was about two weeks ago that I thought I might want to do this but I think that it is really a bit too early to decide about it. For all I know, I might have changed my mind by the end of next year.

I do find some things difficult about living at Centrepont. For instance at school even though all my friends treat me like a normal person (I've only been abused once about where I live) I still feel different and I don't like mentioning Centrepont at school. Since I have lived here I have felt like running away about three times. These have normally been when someone has said or done something that I have not liked and I have been upset about it.

I like the way that here if you have a problem that you want to sort out with someone but you don't really want to tell your parents, you can learn to trust someone that you really like and talk to them about it. Also I think that living here makes most of the children become independent.

Overall I think that Centrepont is a really good place to live and I really like living here.

— Sophie Elworthy (12 years)

MUM AND DAD TROUBLE

Before I came to the Community my parents were split up. It was quite upsetting for me but since they didn't live far apart and had joint custody of me and my sister we could go and stay with whoever we wished any time. A few months after they broke up Mum left to travel around the world with her boyfriend. They planned to stay away for about three months but after visiting Australia they went to India where they stayed with Rajneesh at his Centre. The liked it so much they were away for seven months!

Meanwhile Dad heard about Centrepont and was thinking about coming to live here and after a while we did. I was totally against coming to live here and tried to hate every moment so that Dad would feel sorry for me and move. I was also set on living with my Mum when she came back and never talking to Dad again (that would teach him).

But eventually when Mum came back she came to live here because all her friends were here and she liked it. I was totally disappointed so I decided to make myself enjoy the place since there was no way I could go now. Mum stayed at the Community for about ten months then left with her new boyfriend. I definitely didn't want to live with him and since I enjoy it here now, I saw no good reason to leave.

That was quite a while ago now and I have found a new Mum who I have really good times with. (She's not quite as good as my real Mum.)

— Vicki Mendelssohn (11 years)

IT'S MY HOME

I like living at Centrepont because of all the people. There are four girls my age and lots of other kids so you don't just have to stay around your sister or brother. I also share a room with one girl who is my age.

My Dad lives at Centrepont and I have lots of other adult friends as well. I enjoy adult friends a lot to talk to and for company. I often share things with them and ask them to help me. Many of my adult friends have babies. I love little babies. I love holding and watching them and helping their mothers and fathers to look after them. My Mother doesn't live at the Community. She left about a year ago. I miss her but I see her in the holidays.

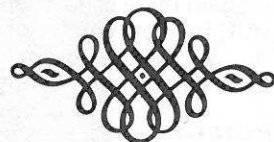
I go to Northcross Intermediate School and I really enjoy all my friends and the school. All my friends have come to my place and it doesn't really bother them where I live. Nobody makes a big deal out of it at school. I choose to live at Centrepont. It is my home.

— Emma Mendelssohn (13 years)

NOW I THINK I'M REALLY LUCKY

When I first came here I didn't like it a bit. It was really scary being amongst so many 'unknown' people and having to make new friends. Now I think I'm really lucky to live here with so many people who know me and are really friendly towards me. Since the beginning I have made lots more friends. We often fight, but I suppose everyone fights now and then.

— Amanda Schmid (12 years)



I LIKE . . .

Jane: Having lots of kids to play with and having lots of space.

Jason: The trampoline, having the bush to play in and the pottery and workshop to make things in.

John: All the motor bikes, the guitars and playing music.

Gareth: Free movies.

Mark: Even if they are behind the times when we see them.

Jamie: Being able to keep rabbits and work on the bikes.

Mark: Trapping opossums.

Samantha: Living here.

I DON'T LIKE . . .

Jamie: The kids being rough with the bikes and equipment.

John: Other kids nicking my stuff.

Mark: People pushing me around.

Jane: Some of the adults and I think the toilets should have doors on for when visitors come.

Gareth: I miss my friends in Thames.

Jeremy: Having no swimming pool. At my old place we had a waterfall and we could swing over it.

ABOUT BERT

Samantha: I like Bert. He's a neat person.

Jamie: He understands your problems. Sometimes I'm scared of him.

Mark: It depends on what you've been doing.

Jamie: He's got an answer for every question.

Mark: Even if you don't understand it.

There is no freedom out there. There is only the freedom you experience within yourself.



No Freedom without Risks

I LOVE IT HERE

As I have been living here for almost four years, I have witnessed a lot of happenings and changes and have learnt a lot. It may seem strange to some people but after a while you get used to the surroundings. Some people say that the children aren't looked after or helped in any way.

Most of the children, including me, do live a free life. We play our own games and queue for our own dinners. I love it here. It is an education learning to live with each other and be part of a helpful family. I myself have learnt much more in the Community than in a nuclear family. It is a good place educationally and the children themselves are learning what is going to happen in the future.

I have special people to help me in my school work, exams, etc. I have been involved in making a film at Centrepont. I have learnt that it is not as easy as you think. It has its ups and downs but slowly it is getting under way.

We have a children's meeting with the adults on Tuesdays. We share our feelings about school or the Community and ask for anything we want like help or special outings, trips and parties. We get to feel how a chairman feels chairing a meeting. We also play games with the adults at the end of the meetings.

When I first came here it was a bit scary but when I see other children coming here to live I realise how scared they feel. I realise if they'd moved in first and I was coming in now, I would be feeling just as nervous as they do.

— Stefan Schmid (13 years)

I FEEL DIFFERENT

I am seventeen now. I came to live at Centrepont by myself when I was fifteen because my job, my social life and my life at home was generally unsatisfactory. I guess my main problem was that I didn't know how to enjoy life. It seemed such a serious and unhappy business.

But now I feel different. I went back to school and I love it. I've just completed my sixth form year and will be returning for a seventh form year which is the total reverse of my previous attitude. I feel this change has come about through being more sure of myself and feeling more stable, secure and loved. I feel as though my blood family of eight has extended to a family I never imagined. I have found a calm place in me which tells me I'm all right no matter what I do. This is because I know the people I live with will always love me.

One of the greatest things I have discovered through living at Centrepont is that my Mother is human and that I can love my brothers and sisters. My parents and I found it almost impossible to communicate for a few years but now I can share nearly all things with my Mother. It helps to know that parents are just people as well and that there are other people in the world that I can go to for parental comfort.

I find I have enough confidence in myself to exercise personal choice: to allow myself to do what I like and take responsibility for it. I know I'm lovable. I know I can love other people.

— Lorn Smyth (17 years)

To Nell

Nell was born in National Women's Hospital seven weeks premature, weighing 4 lb 10 oz. Within 24 hours her inability to keep down food indicated a bowel blockage. While being prepared for surgery, to explore the extent of the problem and hopefully rectify it, Nell suffered a heart stoppage and was placed in the neo-natal intensive care unit, where she lived till her ninth day.

On Thursday morning I found myself yearning for Nell so we decided to go to the hospital to see her. The night before the doctor had said he was going to try reducing the amount of breathing assistance she was getting and we'd joked about how Nell would throw a spanner in the works. It seemed that every time things starting looking positive, she'd come up with another complication.

We arrived at the hospital and sure enough, she'd done it again. She was lying on her bed looking yellowish-grey. The oxygen was on full and the ECG was showing a very odd looking heartbeat. I felt scared as hell, shaky in my stomach and aching for my baby. We talked to the doctor and found out that it was as bad as it looked. We decided to stay. There was no way I could leave Nell now until she recovered — or died.

Dave phoned Centrepont and Annie and Sue Mendelsohn came to the hospital to be with us. Dave and I sat by her bed all day, with Annie and Sue watching through the window. Nell would slowly improve, her colour would get better, her oxygen requirements go down, she'd move a little and kick, then suddenly the figures in the oxygen read-out would plunge and she would turn from pink to grey and lie almost lifeless. I held her foot most of the day. It was one place on her that had no tubes or sensors attached. I can still remember how her foot felt, as if I am still holding it.

When I felt low and tired, Annie and Sue would beckon me out and lift me up again. They were right there with all their love and strength and somehow they'd pass it on to me and I in turn passed it on to my baby. When I told them I thought she was dying they said, 'Okay, have that thought for a minute and the feelings that go with it.' They would hold me while I cried and after a bit they said, 'Now come back to what you've got now. Nell is still alive right now.' I went back in to Nell feeling calm, warm and full of love. Nell responded each time by picking up a little when I came in, but it didn't last. Around lunch time, Sue talked me into a hypnotic trance. It wasn't for very long but afterwards I felt as though I'd slept for hours.

Dave and I sat and watched Nell's life spiralling downward. She'd pick up from each crisis but to a lower level than when she started. Scot Macfarlane, the doctor agreed that it looked as though she was dying. He had run out of ideas and she was still getting worse. But he said she was still fighting to live and while she fought, so would he. He asked if I was all right. I said, 'No, but what do you expect.' I burst into tears yet again and he gave me a hug. I told him how good I felt about him and the rest of the staff; how supporting they'd been. He said we were an easy couple to support. Some people blame the doctors and nurses for what has happened to their baby and don't let any caring in at all. He also said it was marvellous how our friends had rallied round us.

Nell seemed fairly stable so we left a contact number and went for dinner. I was very fidgety away from her. We phoned the hospital and although they said she was okay I just had to go back. When we arrived there were half a dozen people from Centrepont there. Dave was really pleased to see them, but I only wanted to go to my baby.

The doctor was by her bed. The oxygen was on full, but the dials showed she wasn't getting enough to prevent brain damage and the ECG machine showed a very weak heart beat. The doctor said, 'Sometimes at this point the parents like us to turn off the machines and hold their baby for a while.' Inside me I was saying, 'What'll I do? What'll I do? I've got to decide.' I asked the doctor, 'Is there no chance left that she'll live.' He said, 'Well I can't say that definitely.' I put my hand on her little tummy and thought, 'Oh God, how can I decide to kill her. I want to hold her while she's alive but how can I know that she won't live.'

Just then she decided for us. The heartbeat line went flat. The oxygen read-out went to nought. 'She's dead,' I said. 'Turn the machines off. Get the tubes out, I want to hold her.' The doctor turned off the ECG and the oxygen read-out machine. A nurse was saying, 'We'll put her in a cot and wheel her down to the office.'

'No, I want to hold her now. How do you turn this bloody machine off.' The machine that pumped air into her lungs was still going and her tiny chest was moving up and down even though she was dead. Suddenly I found it horrible. . . it was infringing on my baby's right to peace . . . it was desecrating something sacred. My fingers fumbled over the knobs searching for the 'off' switch. The doctor turned it off and took the tubes from her stomach and lungs; the drip from her scalp; the bandages from her eyes; the heart and oxygen sensors from her chest and I picked up my baby and held her. She was warm and limp. I suddenly felt peaceful. The panic was over. There was nothing left to worry about. I was hurting very deeply, but I was also feeling very quiet, almost floating. The nurses fussed about me trying to wrap Nell in a blanket and I finally twigged that they were scared I'd walk down the corridor to the office howling my eyes out with Nell, lying dead in my arms and freak out all the other mothers who were visiting their babies. So I let them put a rug over her and walked down to the office. I sat with her, naked on my lap and stroked her all over. At last there were no tubes in the way.

The Centrepont people came in and stood around me, Nell and Dave and we just stayed there for ages and ages, sometimes crying, sometimes silent. I was still really proud of her and how beautiful she was. I showed her off to everybody. Her thick fluffy hair, her beautiful mouth the exquisite tinyness of her. I was full of love for her.

She quietly grew cooler. I was a little frightened of her turning cold and stiff in my arms but I was totally at a loss for what to do. For a moment I felt silly, not knowing the etiquette of what to do when your baby's died. Then I just asked, 'What do I do now. I can't just sit here all night with a dead baby in my arms.' So someone went to get a nurse who brought a little cot and put her in it and I kissed her goodbye.

The doctor asked permission to do an autopsy. I didn't want to decide right then. I wanted to know what caused her death but I hated the thought of someone cutting into her body. I said I'd phone them in the morning. When we arrived home the lounge was half full with people waiting for us. I went to Bert and cried and cried. People



Children need to be loved unconditionally.

came to me and shared the hurt. I roared out the anger I felt about the autopsy, that nobody but me had any right to touch her. When all the anger had gone I decided to okay the autopsy. I found that I wanted to know exactly why she died.

On Friday night we brought her home. Graham had made her a little coffin and Pat dyed some silk to pad it with. Maureen, Pat and Gerry brought her from the hospital and I took her from the van to the house. I was scared to look at her. Bert took the lid off the coffin and she still looked beautiful. We took her into the lounge, put her on a little table and everyone, including the children, came to see.

The next day I sat beside her all day; sometimes touching her face; sometimes just looking; often crying; sometimes just sitting near. We had the funeral on Saturday afternoon. Bert talked for a bit then suggested we close our eyes while people who wanted to, spoke their feelings. I was amazed at the enormous effect my tiny little girl had had on so many people. Many had been scared of death, scared to be anywhere near it. Most had never seen a dead body before and most were amazed how beautiful and peaceful and still she was. She looked as though she'd take a breath and open her eyes any minute. We all learned a helluva lot from Nell.

For me I learned that I can be as strong as I need to be; that I am capable of a depth of love that I never knew existed and that my family at Centrepont are the most amazingly supportive loving, caring, group of people there is. They take me however I am.

— Miranda Woodward

PLAY HOUSE

Watcha doin' Baby Mama?
Playin' Mothers n' Fathers with Baby-doll Baby there?
Havin' a good game with Baby Papa there?

Where ya goin' Baby Mama?
Don'tcha wanna play with Baby Papa any more?
Are you gunna stop the game?

What's the matter Baby Mama?
You wanna take baby-doll Baby away?
She's your Baby Baby, you say.

Whatcha doin' Baby Papa?
You wanna keep Baby-doll Baby with you?
You're holdin' on are you Baby Dad?

Whatcha done! Whatcha done!
You pulled a leg off Baby Baby
While you're playin' tug-o-war.

How you feelin' Baby Baby?
Your Mama and your Papa they want you so much
They're pullin' you apart.

Now you're cryin' Baby Mama.
Your little baby's hurtin'
And you can't stop the pain.

Baby Mama! Baby Papa!
Don'tcha know. It takes two to play tug-o-war,
And only one to let go.

— Barrie Sweden

From the Pre-School Supervisors

FINDING THE CHILD IN ME

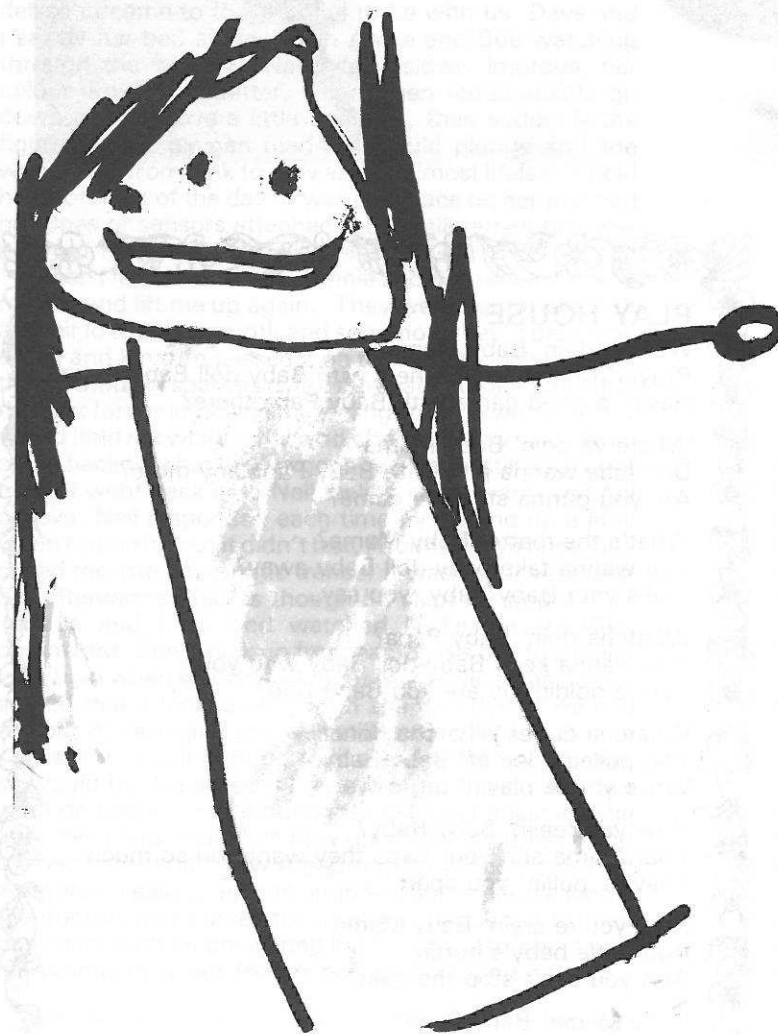
When I decided to take on the job of looking after our five pre-schoolers in 1978, I was coming from a place of dissatisfaction in me. Until then I was minding them half a day a week and by the time I returned to them a week later the children had changed and I felt out of touch with them. (Looking back it was me I felt out of touch with.)

I started full-time pre-school minding without ever having been to a kindergarten myself and having struggled with shyness at primary school. At first I felt like Grandma . . . you know . . . 'The old dear. She'll mind the kids for the day.' The children were a different generation. I felt too grown up and at the same time unskilled and uneducated in the ways of children: I didn't have any of my own.

However, when we played together I would catch myself goofing around enjoying the game and not at all like Grandma, more like a two to four year old. I carried around many programmes of what we would do for the day only to find that given some choices the children made suggestions that sounded even better than my intellectual approach. They were into themselves in a big way! It was catching. I've gradually become closer to the child in me who is spontaneous, open and trusting.

I am reminded of the verse: 'Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' At times I am a hungry person but when I am right in with our children, I feel beautiful, whole, infinite.

— Sue McKenzie



This is my mum.

Rose Street (3½ years)

Centrepont supports a pre-school of twenty children ranging from babies to four-year-olds. A team of six adults supervise the children under the leadership of Sue Moore.

WHO'S TEACHING WHO?

One of the most important experiences for me at Centrepont has been with the pre-school children. Somehow their immediacy, even their ruthlessness with each other and me, has given me a lot of insight into myself. At times I have become the harried little girl being teased and tormented, at other times the mother struggling to keep order amongst their laughter. Then I find my own spontaneity and playfulness; the past forgotten and no judgements held. They stretch me to my limits all right!

Although I've often toyed with the idea of finding another way to spend my work times I always come back to children with the feeling that I never want to leave them.

— Susie Oakes

TRANSFORMATION

When children first come here the process of integration into the peer group can be a relentless and bewildering experience. Despite this I have yet to meet a child who does not emerge as a full member, happier and more self-assured for the experience. In the pre-school where I am the supervisor, the process is almost brutal. Under-fives give no quarter and position in the group is hard won.

Take as an example the four-year-old boy who came into the Community with his mother sometime after his parents' separation. This little boy was very insecure, clinging to his mother and refusing to join the pre-school, then joining in but rushing out every time his mother went past. Sometimes his mother looked positively haunted when she saw or heard him coming. In the pre-school he was aggressive and would violently stake his claim to objects. No-one was allowed to touch any of the huge collection of expensive toys he kept in a tin trunk in his room. It wasn't long before he realised the great bargaining power of such exciting toys and of the lollies he was constantly demanding from his mother. We became very familiar with the sentences, 'If you will be my friend I'll give you a lolly when my mummy comes home,' or 'I'll let you play with my racing car if you'll let me keep that boat!' We were gentle with him, understanding the difficulty of sharing belongings which represented a stable anchor in his rapidly changing world. We watched how the children at first enjoyed the fruits of accepted bribes then backed away from his game and in fact refused the rewards of his 'friendship'. We tried to help him to see what was happening. We tried growling when we heard him trying to negotiate a deal. We tried explaining to him what sharing was all about. He continued to alienate the other children and also most adults with his behaviour. It was heart-rending to watch him walking about alone during breaks, clinging to his mother when she was home, rushing to greet her when she returned from work with loud demands to see the lollies she had brought home with her. The child was unhappy, the mother was unhappy. Although people kept telling me to trust the process, which I usually do, I worried for good measure.

It seemed ages before we saw the obvious: the network he had developed to support his behaviour. His mother continued to buy him lollies and treats even though she resented his treating her merely as a supplier of 'goodies'. Also a concerned friend of his mother frequently invited him to stay for weekends with the promise, that as he couldn't have a lot of treats at the Community, she would buy him goodies and take him to special places. This reinforced his already strong conviction that the only thing worth having was money and consumer goods.



Our children are healthy emotionally and physically

When I shared all this with his mother I found that her world was also changing. She was beginning to feel the support that is available to parents here at Centrepont. She was also beginning to learn, as we all have, that she was not the only guilty parent in the world and that it is no advantage to the child or the parent to be manipulated into all kinds of superficial compensations by this universal guilt. She was therefore ready to trust that we loved her son and wanted him to be happy. She was as aware as we were that his present behaviour wasn't bringing about this happiness and was absolutely ready to try something different.

She stopped supplying him with goodies that the other children didn't have, explaining at the same time how it alienated him, and telling him how she felt hurt, unseen and unloved by him when he regarded her merely as a dispenser of lollies and other treats. She asked her friend not to overlay the loving that prompted her weekend invitations with her customary promises of lollies and trips but to simply let the boy see that she wanted him there because she loved him. Most important of all, his mother really did show her son she loved him without relying on things to prove it. As this was happening we absolutely forbade him to leave pre-school during sessions. This was to give his mother the complete break from him that she needed and to throw him back on his own resources, with the pre-school supervisors for support. We all made sure he got plenty of cuddles and positive reinforcement for new behaviours.

As often happens here, our timing meshed perfectly. Our realisation coincided with the mother's readiness and these both must have coincided with some dawning of

realisation within the child because the change in his behaviour was instant, total and apparently permanent. Not once have I noticed any regression to his old forms of behaviour. I was cautious about believing that such a rapid and total change was real. Knowing him to be an exceptionally intelligent boy, I thought he may simply have adopted a more acceptable set of rules. But when I look at him and see how much looser he is in his body; how much calmer he is; how many more spontaneous cuddles he receives and how his eyes sparkle with real happiness when he is involved with other people, I know that the magic of Centrepont really has touched yet another person.

As well as no shortage of playmates, he now has several adult friends at Centrepont. When his mother had to go into hospital for three days recently he was able to come and ask these people to put him to bed, read him stories and give him cuddles. He certainly didn't seem to be lonely and pining, as once he used to, if his mother was away for an hour.

So often people say to me when discussing this place, 'But what about the children?' I know that I'm very glad to have brought my own teenage children here and only regret that they weren't years younger when this Community was founded. I know of no other place where children have more opportunity for special attention or general all-round stimulation than they have here. Where else can children turn to a number of other people when they are in a bind with their parents or siblings. I wonder if there are many places where ordinary mortals live that contain so much magic as this place?

— Sue Moore

From the Parents

PARALLEL ADAPTATION

When we decided four years ago to join Bert and the group of people that founded Centrepont, I had a lot of worries about how my children would like it and how they would cope. It was a real joy for me to see my children then aged 4, 6, 8 and 9 adapting to a completely new world in a matter of weeks. For Gian, my youngest boy, it was easy whereas Amanda, my eldest daughter, seemed to find it more difficult. I know from observing my own and the other children here, that I was and still am on the right track. I know now that my worries about my children entering Centrepont were mine and about myself really.

It is a completely different matter to unhook myself from the games I played, and still play, in the relationships with my children. This is a very slow process and involves a lot of risk-taking for me. I have learned to stick to a decision that feels right to me. I can also allow myself to change and 'lose face'. This unhooking process is more difficult for my older children, Stefan and Amanda to accept because they had many more years of upbringing in a nuclear family where they relied totally on their two parents for support. They therefore had to accept my games to earn my loving.

Looking back I can see the parallel development of my children and me even though there are some great differences. I came here because I wanted to. The children came because they had to. It took them only a few weeks to adapt and accept, whereas I am still in the process of doing so. I am learning from them every day. Their laughter, their capability of sorting out their own problems, their playing and fighting and generally their way of living are a constant pointer for me of their unlimited love. They are always showing me the way.

— Ulrich Schmid

TO SHARE WITH LOVE

When I think of our children my eyes prick with tears. With each one of them my relationship as mother and friend is so different. Between Ueli and myself we have six children. Dayna is from my first marriage, Pippa is our child. Amanda, Stóffi, Jeremy and Gian are from Ueli and Carolyn's marriage. At times I think, 'Hell. It's all so bloody complicated,' and yet it feels very simple.

Dayna: is the mirror of my images daily.

Pippa: 'Emotional strings' are the words that come to mind.

Amanda: is my friend and enemy at heart.

Stóffi: I'm his step-mum.

Jeremy: is the son I've never had.

Gian: is the clown in my life.

When I think of the children and Ueli and myself, I also think of Carolyn who I love dearly. It is through our children, particularly through Pippa, that I've grown to love her so much. I found throughout my pregnancy with Pippa that I loved Carolyn and hated Carolyn and loved being pregnant and hated being pregnant. At times I would let my loving flow with Carolyn and let her in really close and at other times I would feel guilty about being pregnant and hold her out. The guilt wasn't to do with the fact that Ueli was Carolyn's ex-husband, but to the doubt over whether Carolyn and her husband John could have children. A few months ago I went to Carolyn and shared with her my past guilt: quite a break-through.

I remember the day Pippa was born. All my family was around me and as I looked at them I saw Carolyn, her eyes brimmed with tears and full of love. I so much wanted to reach out and bring her right into me but my stupid pride and judgements got in the way. And I remember John at the end of the bed *trying* to take photos. These two people, Carolyn and John, mean even more to me now. Just recently I said to Carolyn that when we have our next baby I'd give them Pippa. I know deep down I already have, only sometimes my old self-pride and judgements get in the way.

— Casey Schmid

BIRTH RE-BIRTH

After witnessing the birth of the Community's newest little baby, Eve, I've entered another upward swing in accepting, yes, more babies. That is what life is all about really: babies, humans, people, loving, caring, fighting. What I do in between people is just filling in!

I came to this Community pregnant for the fifth time. I was at my wits end. I'd spent all my life as a practising Catholic and even though I was very involved in the Church, my life seemed to be getting crazier. I had all these kids yet I just couldn't spend enough time with them. My days were full of washing, cleaning, cooking, shopping with so very little time for my man and my children. When I got pregnant yet again I decided that the only sane way I could have this baby was to leave Jim and the kids and go away somewhere by myself. But I didn't really want to. I knew if I just had some help I'd be all right. I was sick of being home on my own all day — just me and the kids. I wanted to pull down the walls of my house, so my neighbours could come in.

On a visit to Centrepont I was blown out by what was happening: mothers, babies, fathers too, all supporting each other; sharing things; working and playing together; all that I'd read and dreamed about; what I'd understood a lot of the Bible to be about. It seemed as though my prayers had been answered. I had doubts and fears before eventually deciding I'd only know by trying it. We went home; packed up the goodies we wanted; sold off the rest and moved in boots and all.

The two older children were a bit concerned about changing schools, as they'd done it twice before but this time going to school with about twenty other kids was fun and they didn't experience any of their past settling-in problems. The two pre-schoolers seem to thrive on having other children to play with during the day, in fact I hardly saw them. Jim found himself a job and there was just me: no kids to mind, no pile of dishes, no pile of nappies and no messy house. I looked around for something that I wanted to do.

Over the months I relaxed and gradually accepted my pregnancy until I was actually looking forward to this baby coming. I had to have Luke in hospital, but we were home twenty-four hours later to be greeted and welcomed home like . . . oh words could never tell you.

Jim and I spent three days holding, cuddling and just being with our baby against our bodies. Something we'd never done with any of our other children. We then had about three weeks neither of us doing any other job other than getting to know Luke and spending lots of time just being Mum and Dad.

We've now been here eighteen months. The kids have all grown up a lot and so have we. Yes, we've changed. I find I am experiencing my life as my own and not owned by others. My children are all doing really well. I see them relate to other children and especially to other adults with a confidence I never had as a child. If I am not available, I know they are capable of getting what they want from adults that they trust and love. It took me a while to accept my kids didn't need me as much as I'd thought. They want me a lot more than they need me. But, oh, at times I still very much need them.

I realised after seeing Eve born, that the birth of each of my children has been like a re-birthing of me; my life has changed course. I wonder where the next one will lead me.



— Helen Henley

Cover Photo: Community children with Bert

Editor: Barrie Sweden
Asst Editor: Debbie Knapp
Layout: John Sweden
Photographs: Phil Fogle
Cartoons: Larry Brinton
Published by: Centrepont Community Growth Trust
Mills Lane, Albany, New Zealand
Printed by: Centrepont Printing

Saturday meeting

There is a public meeting every Saturday afternoon at 1.30 pm at Centrepont. Most Saturdays Bert is available to give a talk and lead a meditation. This meeting provides an opportunity for ex-group members to maintain their link with Bert and for new and interested people to make contact. Community members are also available to talk and answer questions and to show visitors round the community. Afternoon tea is available. A donation is welcome.

Visitors

Visitors are also welcome by appointment or just to drop in to see what the community is all about. If a visitor wants to stay for a day or two they can arrange this with Gerry in the office. If they want to stay longer their application goes to the weekly business meeting. This is usually only a formality. We try not to turn anyone away, believing that if they fit in they will stay and if not they will leave. We call it 'trusting the process' and it works.

Cassette Tapes

Cassette tapes of Bert's talks are now available for sale at the following prices (postage included):

New Zealand	.....	\$6.00
Australia, South Pacific	.....	NZ\$7.00
North America, Asia	.....	NZ\$7.75
Europe, South America, Africa, Middle East	.....	NZ\$8.35

Tape No 1 Two Talks. (Sexual Relationships. Therapy & Religion)

No 2 Centrepont (Talk and Meditation)

Magazine

Centrepont is a quarterly magazine. Each issue includes a talk by Bert, contributions from community members, plus articles, poems, photos and news items.

Subscription rates for four issues are:

New Zealand	.....	\$3.00
Australia, South Pacific	.....	NZ\$5.00
North America, Asia	.....	NZ\$6.00
Europe, South America, Africa, Middle East	.....	NZ\$7.00

Back Issues

available (50c per copy)

No. 2 Birth at Centrepont

No. 3 The Fear of Loving

No. 4 Our Parents/Ourselves

No. 5 Change: The Only Constant

No. 6 A Spiritual Community

Brochures

Centrepont is a Community of 130 people gathered under the spiritual leadership of Bert Potter. We live on 92 acres of land in Albany, 20 miles north of Auckland, New Zealand. We are committed to learning to live with each other honestly, openly and lovingly. If you would like further details please send for our free brochures on the Community and on the therapy we offer.

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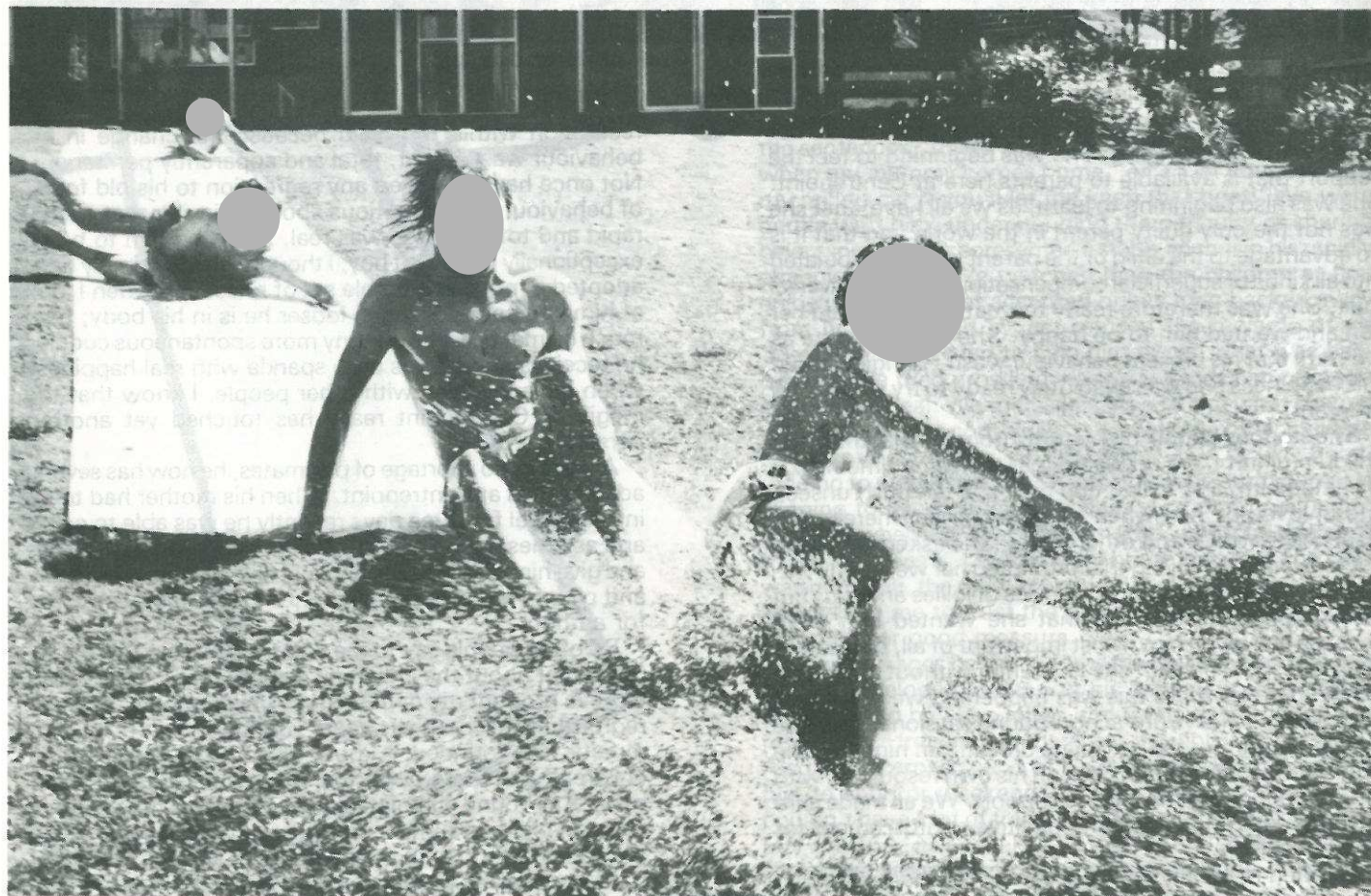
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They need to learn skill and judgement.