

The Normal Children

By P. Donohue Shortridge

Just what does a normal child look like? Not typical, but normal. I saw a group of them the other day and so I shall paint a picture.

We were on the road in the heartland of America, in Nebraska, as a matter of fact. It was the Independence Day holiday and the modest roadside hotel where we were staying was bustling with activity as travelers were arriving and children were excited to get to the swimming pool.

Poolside, there was a group a families gathered, obviously friends/relatives including parents and a large

They were free to be children

group of children from an infant to about twelve years old. A red checkered tablecloth lay over a side table spread with food; corn-on-the-cob, Rice Krispie treats, brownies and jello salad. Dads were grilling hamburgers and hot dogs. Moms were talking to other moms and dads while simultaneously seeing to it that everyone had something to eat, while simultaneously watching the children in the swimming pool not three feet away. Dads were either in the pool, grilling or talking to the other adults while simultaneously watching the children in the swimming pool. No one was dressed in trendy fashion, neither the children, nor their parents, they were instead all dressed in clean clothes appropriate to their task; the dads looked like dads and moms looked like moms and most significantly of all, the children looked like children of the age they were.

The children were mostly in the pool; swimming, jumping, playing games, dropping objects into the pool then diving for them, racing and laughing. When they got out, they found their own towels, dried off, found a chair and joined the adults and other children. They

looked at the adults when they spoke, one boy gave up his seat to a mother and her infant; they drank/ate something and went running back to the pool. When it was time to leave because it was getting dark and a fireworks show was about to begin, the children did not really want to stop the pool fun, but the dads came over to the pool and said, "time to go boys, get out of the pool and get ready to go to the fireworks". Moms and dads were busy packing up the food, folding up the table and loading the cars, while simultaneously talking to the other adults and children and watching the children in the pool. No one yelled, no child whined, not one begged, no one scolded or told a child more than twice to get going.

The parents' demeanor was clear; while having fun and engaging with the other adults, the first priority was with their family and their children. These parents were attentive without fawning, they were available, but not obsequious, they were strict without being a tyrant. They were serious, but natural about being parents.

They were serious, but natural about being parents.

The demeanor of the children was clear; they played children's games, yet engaged easily with the adults; they were in their bodies, they felt safe, and knew that their parents were right there with them.

They were free to be children.

Donohue Shortridge is a consultant to Montessori schools; she speaks and writes about children and their families in the American culture. pds@pdonohueshortridge.com

P. Donohue Shortridge

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