

In Praise of Parents

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset

My siblings married late, even very late. There are, of course, reasons for things like that; every family has its eccentricities, some more than others. Because my siblings married late, I have been and continue to be the older aunt of two very young nieces. One of them has just become a teenager; the other one has just turned four. My first niece, Rachel, born when I was already middle-aged, immediately became the light of our family's existence. She burst into our tired lives bringing immeasurable joy, and honestly, at holiday times and on summer breaks, we just sat around and watched her grow, crawling about behind her so she wouldn't hurt herself, putting up with the cacophony of the noisy toys she played with (I almost killed her Big Bird), rushing up and down the Pennsylvania hills pulling her on a cardboard box sled. After each trip, she'd yell "again" and again it would be. Anything for Rachel. Rachel was a child who wanted to be played with and told stories to. Until she was about nine, every time I visited her, I slept in her upper bunk and labored to create stories until she fell asleep, an alarming amount of time later. I played games I had never heard of and could barely understand, suffering the humiliation of being beaten far too often. She was also a dress-up child. I draped myself in ludicrous costumes and danced around in ways that should be confined only to small children, memories I hope have not been rendered too concrete in photographs. Whatever we did, I always slept well at night, tired to the bone.

Chloe Rose, born much later, and another great gift, spent her first week in distress in the neo natal unit. You would never know that now. A large, never-still, vocal child, she races through life her long brown curls flying behind her, her eyes and voice noting her changing moods. This Christmas, I spent four days taking care of her from the time she got up until she went down at night. I have not worked that hard in years. I made sure I was up long before I thought she'd wake to grab a shower, get dressed, and maybe have a cup of coffee before I heard her cheerful (she is a morning child) call. At that point my life was not my own. Having dressed her, I tried to tempt her to eat a healthy breakfast, sometimes something of a chore. Until her nap many hours later, I stood on my head to keep her happy and busy—reading stories, hearing her recite "A Partridge in a Pear Tree" more times than I can count, rescuing the cat Gracie from her vigorous affections, making cupcakes, and occasionally watching Barney. The two hour nap gave me time to clean up the house, think about supper and perhaps catch ten minutes. Then the routine started all over with the addition of a bath out of which I always emerged soaked. At night, with her asleep beside me, I lay and stared at the ceiling, too tired to move. The morning I got in my car to drive back to Chicago, I was utterly glad to have been there but completely bleary-eyed.

Parenthood, properly done, responsibly handled, deserves a tribute. Every time I see a mother or father managing one or more toddlers at home, not to mention at the grocery store, on the street, or in church, I think about the tiredness they must feel, the courage they muster, the calling they are committed to for the love of their children. It is a purposeful calling, of course made sweet by the joy of having those children, but, nevertheless, a work requiring soul, mind, and body. That's what I think.

For Moody Radio, this is Rosalie de Rosset