a magazine devoted to the literary and visual arts.

sponsored by student activities

william rainey harper college

in cooperation with the communications
division and art department.
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By Carol Rusch

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Do You Beat Your Child With Your Tongue?

Carol Rusch

Much to-do has been made over the question of child abuse. During the past few months city officials have been openly confronted with the problem of physical child abuse because of the widespread publicity on the death of little Johnny Lindquist. Johnny, a six year old boy, was brutally beaten into unconsciousness by his father and as a result of the beating he died two months later. This and other forms of physical violence and aggression toward children are inexcusable and intolerable. However, there is another aspect of child abuse that virtually goes unnoticed. The aspect I am referring to is the psychological abuse that results from the way adults orally communicate with children. The effects of physical abuse are obvious. The effects of psychological abuse, although not as readily apparent, are equally as devastating.

As a parent, I am guilty of not spending nearly enough time talking "with" my children. As I find myself talking to them, at them, or around them, I always try to keep in mind that they are human beings with the same basic feelings and emotions as I have. In many cases, the average child has not yet built walls around his feelings, and because of this his feelings are apt to be hurt more easily. Many times I have heard a parent or other adult belittle a child for a wrongdoing. Suddenly the act the child has committed becomes irrelevant and the personal attack on him takes on the appearance of a guerrilla army out to exterminate a pesty ant. "Tommy, if you don't stop chomping when you eat, I'll put you in a pigpen. Just look at you. Your hair is much too long. Tomorrow you are going to the barber," says mother. Needless to say, the barber won't help Tommy with his table manners and the attack served no other purpose than tohumiliate Tommy in the presence of others and to distort his perception of himself. In her anger, mother didn't stop to think about what she was saying. As one man put it so uneuphemistically, "Too many adults have constipation of thought and diarrhea of the mouth."

Just as a child experiences love and hate, he also experiences embarrassment and humiliation, shame and guilt. When a parent consistently tongue lashes a child, the child begins having difficulty discriminating between his parent's general attitude toward him as an individual and the attitude toward his specific behavior or act. Thus, if Tommy is time and again told he is a pig, he may eventually become to think of himself as sloppy or dirty. If belittling him does alter his self image, negative behavior and aggression become evident in the forms of vandalism, delinquency, and juvenile crime. No child becomes delinquent overnight, but consistent ridicule certainly hastens the transition. As you can see, the results of psychological child abuse are as senseless and equally as destructive to the child. Criticism should be constructive, not destructive. As the Chinese have said, "Just as a sharp knife cuts without drawing blood, so does the tongue."
First Woman
Anonymous

In the Beginning there was Woman, and She said, I shall create a world of beauty and plenty, and people it with women after My own image, and no men shall be allowed. So her Mother took her down to Sears and bought her a Build Your Own Universe kit, catalogue #U235*896AB8.
At one time the Grove was a mansion of great proportions, immaculate inside and out with well-kept grounds. But over the last few decades it has deteriorated so that the outer walls exist only to reminisce about what was once the ideal home of an upper class family. The lawns are covered with knee-high grass and fallen trees. The quarter mile driveway is all but impassable for pot-holes. What was once a magnificent and inspiring tree is now a worm-eaten log. Its beauty may be remembered by some, but its present condition is a picture of time in its most destructive character.

The great main door is now supported by one surviving rusted hinge. The inside is like the vast space within some hollow mountain. The hall and the thirty rooms are empty. There is no distraction from the void. The house is like a deserted warehouse, immense and silent and lonely.

One room, however, is still part of the world. It is the library where the parties are held and where the local musicians come to display their electrified talents. The walls are covered by bookshelves which in more prosperous times contained the world’s greatest literary masterpieces. These are now the cemetery for innumerable gadgets, tools, and modern relics of a society based on replaceability and disposability. They are the resting place for the cats, and the showplace for bizarre objects collected in junkyards. Two walls of the four are comparatively naked. One of these is a twenty foot length of windows which at night (it is always night) become a mass of black tinted mirrors. Beyond are the invisible remains of the garden, but this is a matter no longer of consequence. The other wall is the one which contains the fireplace upon whose massive mantel stands the corpse of a clock. The fire is always blazing, casting grim shadows and weird lights on the room. The windows for all practical purposes do not reflect these lights. Above the mantel is one of the more peculiar denizens of the Grove. It is the pair of out-stretched arms which protrude from the wall. What makes this interesting is that the arms appear to be a part of the original design of the room. No one questions them any more. They have become accepted in the spirit of the house.

It was midnight (it is always midnight) when I entered the room. The fire greeted me proudly, announcing that it was a product of the oxidation of wood rather than the inhuman gas which is now so popular in such homes. I was alone—free. Whatever I would do would be of no consequence to anyone else. I could do anything. I did nothing. The cat awoke as I sat on the floor (there were no chairs). He looked upon me as an intruder, but one who could be overlooked. Soon enough he resumed his sleep. Typical cat reaction. The fire crackled and sent sparks up the chimney. I glanced only once at the windows, but not long enough to really see them. Time passed. It was midnight. Nothing moved. For a moment I wished I had a book, but realized that it would be blasphemy in this room. I sat thinking of how the earth was spinning around and making time inevitable. But it was still midnight. It was still now. All else was nonexistent. I need not concern myself with illusions which were not within my perception. I was content to deal with those at hand. The door opened. Bernie stumbled over imaginary furniture in his usual manner. He greeted the cat with an oath and sat down facing me. I was afraid he’d ask me what time it was. He lit a reefer and began to smoke.

"Do this in memory of me," I said. He smiled, then coughed a laugh.

"You’re a swine," was his reply. His English accent was quite forced but nonetheless fitting.

"You’re the first," I said as I refused a hit of the reefer. "You’ll never learn, will you?"
“What’s this!” I cried, “Peer group pressure?”

We laughed. He told me the others would be along shortly. This phrase amused me. I questioned him: “Just how is it possible that they could be a long shortly—or did you say a short longly?”

“Puns are out this year.”

“I keep trying.”

“They’re bringing a sax player this time—he’s supposed to be a bitch.”

“Like the drummer?”

“I was drunk—I thought he was a drummer.”

“This conversation’s becoming a bit too superficial for a story. I’m in a profound mood. Hey, I found out where you can get Coors in Chicago—”

“Bullshit.”

“No really, there’s this liquor store on Milwaukee around Jefferson Park.”

“Hmm.”

The van and two cars arrived. We knew this by sound rather than sight.

“Well,” I said, “Here it goes again.”

“Gloomy bastard.”

They brought in the drums, amplifiers, p.a. columns, guitars and other implements of the musical world. A new piece of equipment showed up: a three hundred watt Marshall amp with two bottoms. The session was going to be violent. Introductions were made where necessary and the preliminaries began. A pipe, a case of Bullfrog beer, and various chemicals in little bags. The new sax player offered me a joint.

“No thanks—makes me paranoid.”

He gave me a look of distrust, but Bernie came to my defense. “He’s cool. He’s a beer man. It’s cool.”

I felt slightly nauseated as I opened a can. I wondered if the beer was really made from bullfrogs. By this time the organ had clumsily made its way into the room. Another cigarette. There were only three more in the pack. I wondered what my lungs looked like. I presided over the tuning ceremony. Fifteen minutes later (at midnight) everything was ready. Bass, two guitars, sax, drums, and my organ were all prepared. I dedicated the jam.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, if the women don’t kill you, the whisky must.” One, two, three ... Noise. The cat became upset and left the room. I envied his good taste. The music went on and on, everyone having his solo, cheap thrills. Then it stopped. The sax player wasn’t too bad. In between songs he disappeared. He returned with a bewildered smile on his face. And, I assumed, a hole in his arm. We started again, but louder than before. The walls began to shake. I got up and, with the excuse of a weak bladder, left the room. I found the cat by the door and escorted him into the forest. He soon took off on some catly errand and I found myself alone. The music was forcing its way out through the pores of the house. Realizing there was no escape, I returned and looked in the window. It was now a television. They couldn’t see me, but I could watch them as long as I liked. I sat down.

There was an old man lying on a cot with his arms folded across his chest. His face was covered with miniature canals. He was smiling. Somewhere a young girl was giving birth to a baby. This was of no concern to the old man. The band was becoming louder. It seemed the glass would shatter. Slowly, the old man got up, walked to the sink and stood there gazing into the mirror. The baby screamed. The bass guitar was out of tune, but there was so much distortion that no one noticed. I began to think about the concept of being suspended in time. It was midnight. The baby was now entering junior high school. He was twelve years old. He had a profound love for the Beatles. I realized that all events are suspended in parallel planes of time. The bass was in bad need of re-tuning. The old man knew he was dying. It was unavoidable. He had only seen one person die in his life, and became afraid at the idea. The twelve year old was at his
piano lesson. He played a song called "Swans on the Lake" and then "The Triad Waltz." The old man looked down at his arthritic hands and wished there was someone he could talk to. The young boy was at a party. Someone was offering him a marijuana cigarette. The sax player realized that Bernie's bass was out of tune.

"How horrible it is to die," sighed the old man. He remembered the dead man in his past. He wanted to say something to him. The boy was graduating from high school and going to work. The music stopped. The old man thought of the gun. He saw the murder committed in his memory and wished there had been something he could have done.

The boy was now in college. He was a good organist and played frequently at an old mansion called the Grove. There was lighting inside the house. The sax player was freaking out about the bass being out of tune. The old man could see the fight. If only—The boy was walking out to the forest with the cat because the music was too loud. The old man's face grew distorted as he recalled the sound of the gun. Chaos. A shot was fired.

"My God! Bernie!" cried the old man.

There was such great confusion in the house that nobody seemed to know what was happening. I jumped up and ran to the window. Bernie was lying on the floor curled up with his hand over his face. The boy was looking through the window. His best friend had just been shot. The old man sat down on the cot shaking.

I called for an ambulance even though I knew it was too late. It was midnight. The library was now empty. The fire greeted me as I entered the room. I sat on the floor. I was alone—free. I could do whatever I wanted. I did nothing. Somewhere a young girl was giving birth to a baby. Somewhere an old man was dying. The cat looked upon me as an intruder. I stood up and stared at the reflection of the outstretched arms in the window. Then at myself.
The Stranger You Passed on the Street Today

Diane O'Dea

Like a knife
his tear cut his face
a smooth pane of glass
now broken.
The feelings,
icicles inside
jagged points piercing
his mind.
“At last!”
they cried, “We are you.
What more do you need?
Do you need?”
Among spikes
spongy brain shuddered
quivered and pulsated
oozed together and bubbled.
Thoughts sputtered and
splashed;
waves of grey flames; lapping,
licking, thirsty cannibal,
devoured the spikes.
They drained down his
thoughts
and his world shook
with his scream.

Laurie Peterson

Writer’s Cramp

Rich Giovanoni

Why waste your time writing a poem?
It doesn’t say nothing that needs to be told.
You’d be better off sleeping or picking your nose
Than trying to write a good piece of prose.
If writing’s an art, then I’m glad I’m a clod
’Cause Shakespeare leaves me as cold as a cock.
Don’t want to be famous or covered with glory
So I ain’t gonna write any goddam short story.
If I Live
Mary Lou Ghanan

Everybody called my grandmother Busia—the Polish word for grandmother. Her name was Mary, but she was Busia to our neighbors, our landlady, and even the laundryman. It was as if she were grandmother to the world. Everyone loved Busia, especially the kids. She had a knack of making even the youngest know that he was extra-special to her. Busia never lost her peasant philosophy of valuing children as the wealth of a family.

A study of contradictions, she was imp and angel, bawdy and prudish in turn, intelligent though illiterate. She didn’t waste anything, whether it be chicken parts or happiness. Her life’s experience taught her to accept adversity as the norm, so when good fortune made its transient appearance she’d say, “God bless,” and get the most out of it.

I can see her now in that old third-floor walk-up apartment we shared; my mother, we children, and Busia. Always Busia. Busia walking from the sink to the stove; Busia making her famous Polish bread, measuring the flour and sugar with her hand; Busia always there when we needed her, and it seems we needed her all the time. She was a whole family’s security blanket, our resident fairy godmother.

In those precious days we didn’t have to wait for Monday nights for our “Laugh-in.” Busia provided that any day of the week. Her advice, in broken English, on how to handle an errant husband was basic: “Take ‘um pot, hit ‘um head.” When a girlfriend of mine confided to my grandmother that she was 1/32nd American Indian, Busia forever after referred to her as “the Indian.”

Busia loved to travel and was always making plans. She’d say: “Next winter, if I live, I’ll go to California to see Judy,” or “Next spring, if I live, I’ll plant some pretty flowers in your garden.” “If I live”—when talking of the future, she’d always add, “if I live.”

We’d all laugh at her. If she lived, indeed! Busia would always be here. She was as much a fixture of life as the earth we walked on, the air we breathed, the sun in the sky. Busia was immortal, naturally!
One morning, two days after Mother’s Day, the phone rang. Busia was dead. The sun was shining, the mailman was delivering the mail, my tulips were coming up. It was all wrong! Why wasn’t the earth shaking? “This can’t be just another beautiful day,” I thought, “my Busia is dead! Tulips, how dare you bloom when Busia can’t see you?” I watched the children skipping along to school, and shook with rage at the sight of them laughing and playing as if it were the same world it was the day before. I wanted everyone to mourn Busia. It wasn’t right that it should be just another day.

The past mentally reclaimed me. I was a child again and wanted my Busia. I could feel her holding me in the rocking chair, singing a Polish lullaby. I could see her dusting the furniture. She wasn’t in that coffin. All this couldn’t be real.

And yet amidst the delirium it occurred to me that the manner and timing of her death was of divine inspiration, rekindling my long forgotten belief in a just God who now blessed her in death as he blessed all who knew her in life. Busia had died peacefully in her sleep with a rosary clutched in her hand and a look of satisfaction on her face. A job well done?

We cried, though not for her. She had the love and well-earned respect of her family and friends. Had she lived ten years longer, she couldn’t have been more assured. How many have that special reward? We cried for ourselves, selfishly thinking that she no longer would be there. Now, finally we had to grow up. No more would she provide that haven where, whenever the pressures became too great, we could escape into childhood again.

“If I live,” she’d always say. A week later I was grating potatoes for potato pancakes and noticed the angle of my arm. It might have been hers. Suddenly she was there with me. The pancakes even tasted as if she had made them. At night I open a jar of cold cream and the scent conjures up countless memories of her. I catch myself, oh how often, saying an expressive Polish word she used.

Busia, did you say, “If I live”? If there is a heaven (as you stubbornly insisted) you’re up there laughing at us for believing that spectacular joke you pulled off. You know you’re living through all of us, through all the love you taught us to share. Who could stay sad thinking of you? We recall some poignantly cute thing you’d say or do and laugh out loud.

“If I live,” indeed! What a silly thing to say, Busia, you’ll live forever!
The Requited Lover

Don Bimmerle

Desperations spur him on as he strives to reach his goal.
Left with little love for man, only bitter feelings grow . . .
Darkness mounts within the soul.
Searching for another man, stealthily through the night he goes,
Unaware he's being watched; unaware his quarry knows
And hides in shadows from the blow!
The jealous quarrel scarred the hunter; spiteful vengeance could not wait.
The lady and her lover new, they had cast this pitied fate
And left him filled with only hate.
The moment fast approaches now, confrontation near to them.

The hunted breathes a single sigh; wishes lighting not so dim,
Wishes killing not so grim . . .
The hunter passes quietly, seeking only his just due.
The hunted springs from hiding place and thrusts knife into
His neck . . . spurs crimson hue . . .
Hunter's dying on the spot, wishing that he hadn't found
The trap; the pain when steel came down that served to silence every sound.
Revenge had plunged him to the ground.
But cackling marks his end to life. The hunted's vict'ry turns to fright.
Behind him stands the lady dear, the cackler to her right . . .

He's the killer of the night!
His gun is drawn, a shot is fired . . . the hunted now lies still.
Laughing was the husband true when he spat upon his kill . . .
Seemed to have some mad urge filled!
With eyes shot blood he turns to her, as frozen as she was in fear!
Her death was next—she cringed at thought.
Instead he begged while drawing near, "Arrange another, could you dear?"
Prejudice, Perpetuated, Continued &....
Carolyn Gorr

Toward mathematics I have no inclination,
My head suffers defacto, numerical starvation.
My brain, unbiased by indoctrination,
Can't cope with an algebra examination.
Bigoted, me?
Intolerant, sí!
I'm saturated with mathematical discrimination.

49c
Meg Thibaudeau

we bought
goodwill umbrellas
i wanted'
old red with thick
plastic handle
"no this one's fine,"
i lied
blue plaid pink detoured
a year of raindrops
and was a parasol
for a halloween clown
then yesterday
rain kept a lady
on church steps
handing her
blue plaid pink
i yelled
"keep it"
knowing this one's fine
Our Fairy Tale World
M. Bartsch

He's only 9 months old,
he giggles and gurgles
People smile, care, love a lot
and start to build the mind within.
He's two years now, the terrible twos
He walks, He talks, He touches
He questions.
And little does he know of sadness and pain.
Today he is four, He can count to twenty, sometimes
He lives in a world of Mouse Factory,
Fisher Price toys and fairy tales.
Slowly but surely he will finally grow up.
But in between he will sadly learn that the biggest
fairy tale of all
is what he was told
and thought
and felt
this world was.
You see, for some strange reason
He thinks the world is a beautiful
peaceful place to live.
Where people care and love one another.
And for Why? must he cry and be hurt?
When he learns that that world is only a
fantasy, never ever to come true?
For Why can't this earth
start growing up,
open its eyes and see!
The hurt, the pain, the war,
the bloodshed, the filth,
the confusion ...
all of it is real and must be stopped!
And maybe someday a little boy will
grow up and the fairy tale world will be
his reality.
Please God,
help this world,
for I fear we can't help ourselves.
Dear world,
just cuz we grew up like
that doesn't mean it's right.
So change it!
Maybe people will live.

My Back Pages
Scott Elliott

Waking up in morning
The sun flies in my eyes
Wishing for another time
Perhaps a new disguise
And as I go and give things up
Almost before they start
An endless stream of hopes
and dreams
Goes running through the pages
Running through the pages
The back pages of my heart.
Waiting, wanting, battleworn
Pen firmly in my hand
I sit and fidget, make a song
About water o'er a dam.
And so I sit here stumbling
Forcing words into a rime,
(believe me!)
An eternal flow of things I know
Goes running through the pages
Running through the pages
The back pages of my mind.
But yet I sit and scribble
Voice crying for an ear
I stand in the sun impassive
And not yet shed a tear
Legs dangling in the canyon
Lie on a grassy knoll
A ceaseless run of things I've
done
Goes running through the pages
Running through the pages
The back pages of my soul.
Leigh just didn’t seem to be getting anywhere. It was always the same old thing, boredom followed by snacking followed by more boredom. He sat on the bed in his dorm nibbling on a handful of Fritos. The crumbs were falling on his bedspread, which hadn’t been washed all semester.

"Who gives a damn?" Leigh spouted to the mirror in a manner accustomed to him. Frankly no one did give a damn. He glanced out the window at a passing chick with obnoxiously large breasts, which made him think of his present ex-girlfriend. "No deposit no return, yes that's it, no deposit no return."

She had been a groupie just like the others; cheeseburgers, clearasil, and big brown machinegun eyes. She loved T-Rex and had a "hubcap diamond-star halo" which sounded nice even though she didn’t understand it. She screamed in bed, so she had to go.

"Expendable, recyclable," muttered Leigh with emphasis on the "a bull" part. Boredom. He gave up on his homework and went to bed.

He woke up feeling mean; his first class was history with the old bitch Mrs. Kragg. She always talked in eighth notes, waved her hands around, bumped into empty desks with her Hindenburg body, and repeated the phrase "In this
thought about it before. "After
Hamilton had dissuaded the
Federalists from supporting . . ."
"Flintstone."
"Frank Zappa."
"Gomer Pyle."
The whole class was going,
this was great.
"Burr, Jefferson was duly
elected . . ."
"Dogcatcher."
"Latrine scrubber."
"President."
"seduce."
"remove some of the so
called . . ."
"Dildos."
"aristocratic tendencies in the
government, reduce the
national . . ."
"income."
"debt and"
"fornicate."
"govern as little as possible."
It was way out of hand. She
just didn’t seem to be getting
anywhere. By now she was
practically hiding behind the
podium. Why were they doing
this? How could she stop them?
And if she couldn’t, what
would it lead to? The class was
giving her some answers to her
last question. Someone in the
back was yelling, "Hang her!
hang her," while people on the
right side were throwing
Pennies, shoes, nuts from the
desks, pencils—anything they
could get their hands on.
"You call yourselves college
students?" She was practically
in tears.
"Do you call yourself a
teacher?" snapped Leigh. He
was standing up now, sort of
in the spotlight. He stepped out
into the aisle and scuffed his
way down to the podium.
Raising his hands in the air he
gestured to the class.
"Is this a teacher? No really,
is this what you want to pay
thirty-six bucks a semester
hour for?"
Mrs. Kragg was horrified,
frozen.
"Look at her, she’s an
Enormousaurus, an air bag of
quivering whale blubber."
He gave her a little kick in her
overstocked posterior. He
signalled to the class to be
silent. Sniff, sniff. "Ah ha," he
was sniffing in her direction.
I detect a sweet fragrance
here."
He paused for suspense,
much like my grandmother’s
sweaty Right-Guard armpits.
He was horribly bitter.
She gasped, her eyes as big as
her mouth.
"Also notice the way
everything is paired, as if in
the normal fashion. Two eyes," he
pointed to her eyes; "two
arms," he pointed to her fatty
arms; "two legs," he pointed to
her legs, "and two of these."
He poked her in the left breast
with his index finger. It just
sort of sunk in. She swung to
slap him but he’d already
ducked. He had her pinned up
against the blackboard with
one hand around her layered
throat and one circling
menacingly in the air. The class
was on the edge of their chairs.
What would he do next?
Would he . . . kill her?
Leigh stared her right in the
eye; he had total control: it
was his game.
"There’s something I always
wanted to tell you, teacher
dear," he hissed. The other
hand was now on his belt
buckle.
She was too shocked to
breathe, to move, or even to
think. Leigh moved in closer,
squeezed her neck a little more,
and moved his right leg in
tightly between hers. He kept
staring her right in the eye.
"Yeah, that’s it, expendable,
recyclable," he sneered a
vampire’s smile. His breaths
were shorter and heavier now.
Suddenly he jumped back and
screamed, reeling wildly, "You
bore me to death."
The class applauded and Leigh
returned to his seat. The game
was over.