

as a mother. "I'll be daddy", she announced. This brought me no great surprise, rather approval at her ingenuity. And yet I was to be surprised. A boy-child responded to my call for a 'mummy' for a 'crying' child, "I'll be her mummy". Immediately I was embarrassed, and a little anxious. The one child quiet and sensitive, the other robust and daring embodying attributes reserved for sexes, not individual personalities, in this society. And there was I, priding myself on my ability to develop each child's whole personality, startled by a boy saying he'd be mummy.

What can I say in conclusion? There are other stories, such as the boy who said to me "I've got muscles. Girls don't have muscles". Or the boy who chose to push the new pram rather than ride the new aeroplane, and was laughed at by his mother as she arrived to pick him up. Or the child who questioned me about a boy in a nurse's uniform, "He's wearing the nurse's dress. Is it alright?" Or the three cousins who played in the house all day and every day, until I temporarily banned them, and they found other things they could do, and blossomed in the process. Or the fact that some boys would play Batman every time they were outside if I didn't intervene. (Which I do, disliking the paucity of their television imagination and encouraging the use of their own minds by censorship - which does happen).

It is complex, watching and nurturing children into their wholenesses. I give myself that focus and not the more strident one of pushing them out of obvious sex-role behaviour. But there is also the positive. The new entrants, mostly girls, play more widely than the older girls, with all the equipment; track and trains, home corner and bricks alike. With care maybe I can keep this breadth of activity alive as they grow older.

ODD QUOTES FROM AMERICAN JUMPING BEANS

The tomb of Emperor Herkimer the Soup-king was placed in a area the size of Salt Lake City. The tomb was half a mile high. Its gold into which had been set diamonds, rubies and emeralds sparkled so brightly that migrating birds were baffled. A trumpet corps sounded the hour. Sentries stood guard day and night. It was a monument to resentment at being born from a womb.

On the shore I wondered which was making me more lonely - the rain rising in the abandoned boats or the foghorns sounding like a cow as high as a mountain.

I learned that the inventor of Chinese boxes - one smaller than the other was inspired by removing a series of idols from a wall.

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