

Chalk Talk

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PLEASE SHARE CHALK TALK WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES !!!

Letter from the Editor

Dear Subscribers:

Becoming a mother makes you the mother of all children. From now on each wounded, abandoned, frightened child is yours. You live in the suffering mothers of every race and creed and weep with them. You long to comfort all who are desolate.

— Charlotte Gray, English/Canadian Historian and Author



I received an unexpected early Mother's Day gift in the form of an essay, written by Sherry Hinman, a mother from Whitby, Ontario, that was published in the Facts & Arguments section of *The Globe & Mail* last Thursday. I was returning home on the train from a business trip to

Ottawa. Tired and hungry, I picked up a newspaper for some distraction. Instead, I found myself absorbed and moved by the story of the depth of a mother's love and the courage of a son who has muscular dystrophy.

Mothers around the world share a bond defined by a life-long commitment to their children. We call it 'raising children', when in fact, our role is to help our children to grow into independent, caring, purposeful adults. Sometimes when I'm watching my 12-year old son without his knowing it, I experience one of those magical 'mom' moments when I can see the child that he was and the man that he will become. What an honour to be at his side for the journey!

I have reproduced Ms. Hinman's essay in its entirety below. It is my sincerest hope that you will take a few moments to read it and to share this special story with your family and friends.

Taking care of the world's children is a responsibility we all share. This week's issue contains educational resources that help to raise awareness about children in need. CoEd Communications is dedicated to supporting the important work of teachers by providing resources on a range of topics for the classroom. We invite you to visit our website at 4edu.ca to view the many free teachers' resources on offer.

[Let us know what you think.](#)

Mary Kovack

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Plan Canada — Caring for Children

Plan is one of the world's largest international, child-centred development organizations, working in more than 45 developing countries providing long-term community programs that benefit 1.3 million children and impact the lives of 13 million people.



Plan believes that every child has great potential if they're given the right chances in life. Its vision is of a world

in which all children realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity. **Plan** aims to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life of deprived children in developing countries, through a process that unites people across cultures and adds meaning and value to their lives



A classroom in Guatemala - Plan Canada

- enabling deprived children, their families and their communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from their societies
- building relationships to increase understanding and unity among peoples of different cultures and countries
- promoting the rights and interests of the world's children.

Plan is an international, humanitarian, child-centred development organization without religious, political or governmental affiliations. [Child sponsorship](#) is the basic foundation of the organization.



Kids Who Care

Plan Canada's website offers educators a variety of classroom resources, "[Kids Who Care](#)", that deal with children's rights as human beings as well as related environmental factors. Through learning about the rights all children share, students will develop an understanding of how rights connect with



the global and environmental issues. To find out more about Plan Canada's "**Kids Who Care**" program, video, teachers' guide and student action guide, go to www.plancanada.ca.

Plan Canada — "Children are at the heart of what we do"



Quote of the Week

You never realize how much your mother loves you till you explore the attic and find every letter you ever sent her, every finger painting, clay pot, bead necklace, Easter chicken, cardboard Santa Claus, paperlace Mother's Day card and school report since day one. — Pam Brown, Australian Author, Poet, Filmmaker

'REVERSE MILESTONES' — Sherry Hinman, Facts & Arguments: The Essay, Globe & Mail, May 1, 2008

"How do you mark the passage of time when your child loses abilities - walking, crawling, climbing stairs?"

First smile, first time sitting up, first steps.

As parents, recording our baby's developmental milestones in a baby book is one of our greatest joys. Each new entry brings our baby closer to growing into a little person.

But what is the ritual - how do we mark the passage of time - as we watch a child lose those abilities?

Would it be morose to tear out the pages of my son's baby book, tape them back in reverse order and carefully mark the dates in my best writing: On this day he could no longer climb the stairs; on this day he could no longer walk; and - one of the worst so far - on this day he could no longer stand up to pee.

I marked all those original milestones in his baby book. I can tell you when my child first learned to crawl as quickly as the next mother can, although it happened at 14 months instead of seven.

And I can tell you exactly when he learned to walk: He was 25 months old. I'll never forget that day, partly because of the intense relief it brought. At least he'll be able to walk. But mostly because it followed, by only a few weeks, the sickening phone call that delivered his diagnosis of muscular dystrophy.

At first, I tried to avoid getting excited when he achieved a physical milestone. At a mom-and-tot gym class, he walked along a bench, placing one shaky foot in front of the other. So what if the other kids were 2 and he was nearly 4, and they walked along the narrow bottom strip of a bench that had been flipped over, while he walked along the wide top.

There I was, facing him and walking backward, holding his small, sweaty hands in mine, smiling and trying my best not to cry. Or worse - get my hopes up. He'll just lose it, came a voice too quick to hush. That voice was strong, but my motherly pride was stronger.



Years ago, a co-worker suffered a miscarriage when she was far along in her pregnancy. To cope with their loss, she and her husband decided to name their baby and hold a funeral, complete with all the rituals we perform to help us make sense of death.

All this for a baby who had never been born. But everyone around them understood the need to perform these rituals. When we lose someone close to us, we need to mark that person's life in a permanent way so we never forget this person, this child, this baby was here, touched us and then left.

We understand the need to mark the loss of someone who dies, but how do we mark the loss - and what are the rituals - when we lose someone a little bit every day? There's no funeral. And there's no reverse baby book.

Yet maybe there is. We don't mark the same milestones, but there are still milestones in our son's life, and mark them we do.

A few years ago, I anticipated with dread the day we would have to move his bedroom to the main floor because he could no longer climb the stairs. But when his room was ready, the move was a celebration. His favourite colour is purple, so we painted the walls of his new room the deepest crayon purple we could find. We bought him a purple shag rug, purple cushions, and - who knew you could find such a thing? - a purple stuffed orangutan.

The day he took his last step was not monumental. We did not enter it into any baby book. But one of the most special days in his life was when he said to me, "Mommy, I think it would be better if I had a wheelchair."

I knew this was not something we could force on him, even during the months when the need was so great, the risk of falling so treacherous, that it was obvious to everyone except him. I had already made all the necessary inquiries; we just had to wait for the day the decision became his. And,

luckily, manual wheelchairs come in purple.

Now we are on the brink of a new stage, a new milestone, while we await his first power wheelchair. When I tell people he will be using one, I observe a sorrow on their faces. This always takes me by surprise.

Using a power chair will represent several firsts for our son: the first time he will be able to move about independently and do the only driving he's ever going to do; the first time he'll be able to make decisions about when and where to go, under his own steam, whether it's across the street or across a room; and, for the first time in his 14 years, the ability to spend a few moments by himself.

Now that's one for the baby book."

[\[Click here\]](#) to link to *The Globe & Mail* article]

Education and Disability

Children with progressive neuromuscular disorders face many barriers within their educational experience. Nevertheless, these children should be encouraged to pursue education as any other child so they still have the opportunity to develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Furthermore, as persons with neuromuscular disorders are rarely able to participate in demanding physical work, an appropriate education provides the means to secure knowledge based employment.



As most children spend a significant portion of their lives at school, it is particularly important to understand the impact of the child's disability on their school experience. Teachers and parents alike should be aware how children with neuromuscular disorders manage their disability and their environments, how they feel about school, and what supports they require.

Educators are invited to check out the 22-page teachers' resource guide, [Muscle Facts](#), produced by **Muscular Dystrophy Canada**, to learn more about students with neuromuscular disorders.

[Source: [Muscular Dystrophy Canada](#)]

In the News

[Top researcher returns to lead new U of T school](#) — Joseph Hall, [Healthzone.ca](#), *TheStar.com*, May 1/08

"A top U.S. researcher is returning to his native Canada to help build what he promises will be a public health powerhouse at the University of Toronto. The U of T announced yesterday it will be opening the country's largest school devoted entirely to public health research and instruction, at a time when epidemic ailments from obesity to pandemic flu are sparking widespread concern. Canadian epidemiologist Jack Mandel, who heads a similar school at Atlanta's Emory University, has been named the first director of U of T's new Dalla Lana School of Public Health."

[Lessons in acceptance at Sunny View](#) — Noor Javed, [ParentCentral.ca](#), *TheStar.com*, April 26, 2008

"Sierra Gies steps up to bat during a T-ball game in gym class at Sunny View Public School. She pops one to the right side of the gymnasium, and gets ready to run the bases – by rolling to first in a wheelchair. It's her way of levelling out the playing field in a setting where she could easily have the upper hand, since Gies, 7, is not disabled. She is one of six "regular kids" in school with children who have severe disabilities and fragile health through a program called "reverse integration." Instead of having disabled children join mainstream classrooms, this program brings mainstream students into the classrooms of children with profound physical and developmental challenges – those for whom integration is not normally an option – and lets them learn together, as well as from each other."

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