



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

caring for our children

My nephew Christopher emailed me yesterday about the birth of his daughter, Camille: “She is so precious and beautiful! The day of her birth was the best day of my life and she has completely stolen my heart!” The birth of a child lifts us to a place out of the ordinary, filled with wonder and awe at such a miracle. Our values and priorities are absolutely clear—protecting this tiny infant from all harm.

Camille is off to a good start in life with parents who will do everything they can to love and care for her, but that will not be enough. Raising children has never been easy but increasingly it seems the well being of a child is dependent on things far outside of a parent’s control. No longer does it take just a village to raise a child, increasingly it takes a nation and will take a world to make sure that this earth continues to be safe and habitable. What would our world be like if the safety and well-being of our children were the guiding principles behind our policies?

There is much talk about budget cuts at state and national levels, but it is my belief that there is plenty of money in this country; it is a matter of will and priorities, not scarcity. I will cite only two examples. I recently read that the Koch brothers have designated 869 million dollars for a “war chest” for funding their candidate in the next presidential campaign. The Waltons, owners of the Walmart chain are among the wealthiest people in America and their wealth is such that their descendants will continue to be among the wealthiest in America for generations. Their wealth is built on stores that do not pay their employees a living wage, and that hire mostly part time employees so they do not have to pay them benefits. Taxpayers subsidize their employees with food stamps and health care costs. In the past the store even placed boxes for customers to contribute food so their employees could have adequate holiday meals.

We have tried “trickle down” economics for more than 30 years and it has not worked. While the wealthiest in this country have benefited, the lower and middle classes have suffered economic downturns. Banks were bailed out while homes were foreclosed on, creating massive hardships from which many will never recover. And yet we have seen in other countries and here in our own, that when money is placed into the hands of the poor and especially women, the standard of

living for families and communities rises and the economy benefits.

I believe the only hope for our country and the world is a shift of consciousness, a shift from the culture of greed to a culture of compassion.

We love our children. Why don’t we ensure that every child has nutritious food, good water, adequate housing, basic health care?


We say we value families. What if everyone earned a living wage, had adequate and affordable health care, paid maternity and paternity leave and vacation time every year?

We say we value education. What if all our schools had adequate supplies, our teachers were well paid, and the arts and humanities well funded to foster the stuff of dreams? What if our children were taught how to think critically, evaluate and solve real problems, and were encouraged to develop their own unique talents and skills? What if all children who suffer the effects of trauma were treated and helped to heal?

We say we value community. What if our communities were places where everyone was treated fairly, where differences were respected, where police were seen as trusted keepers of peace, where there was justice for all?

We say we love our earth. What if our environments were protected from degradation, our water, air, and land were treated as the finite resources they are?

I know this sounds utopian, but why not dream of what might be and make that our goal?

So much of what will happen to our children and grandchildren will not be under our control. The quality of the environment, the safety of our communities, the affordability and excellence of our schools, health care, living wages—all of these are controlled by governmental policies. One of the most important things we can do for our children is to be informed citizens who take an active part in electing officials who will take the well being of all children into consideration as they make policies. We often feel powerless to effect change but in fact we are not. If we vote we can make a difference. We owe it to ourselves and our children to do whatever we can to make the world a better place. 

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