



Jocelyn
Krieger

Visiting a child who never learned to want

Holiday memories always include those eyes. Dark. Vacant.

Poverty has a way of turning off the light in anyone's eyes, especially a child. In his five years of residency in this world, he wasn't impressed.

As I looked around the living room of his inner-city home, I don't remember seeing much to create an impression. A gas heater burned precariously, with a roll-away bed beside it. The little guy and his grandfather were snuggling there for warmth when my husband, Byron, and I arrived with presents in hand.

A day worker had given us this address when we had asked for a family needing help to celebrate the holidays. We had the right address.

NEED WAS EVERYWHERE in sight. No one asked to take our coats since there was little difference between the temperature inside the house and

the bitter cold outside on the snow-covered street. Byron whispered a warning to stay away from the walls.

What I thought was the wallpaper pattern was moving. Wall-to-wall roaches. Who is going to buy poison to feed roaches when they can't buy food to feed themselves?

There was no gaily decorated tree with pretty lights to remind them of the holiday. When I asked, the grandmother assured me that as soon as everyone had thrown their tree away, they would find one. If they were lucky, she ventured, some tinsel would still cling to its branches.

We placed the presents before the child who now stood beside us. He stared motionlessly at the ribbon-bedecked gifts in brightly colored paper.

"They're for you," I urged him. "Open your presents." Still he stared.

That's when his grandparents told me. If I hadn't

seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed it. The shivering 5-year-old beside me didn't know what a present was because no one had ever given him anything.

My husband slid the boy's hand along the paper, tearing it to reveal the contents. A cuddly stuffed bear. A toy car. A shiny red truck.

No smile crossed the child's face. No overcoming joy.

Slowly, the small boy lifted the bear and pressed it to his chest. As he rocked back and forth, no one existed for him in that moment except himself and a fuzzy, soft bear. A tear inched its way down the side of his nose until it reached his mouth. Then his lips curved upwards in a subtle smile.

THERE IS SO MUCH to teach our children in the month of December. Yet if we only ask our children what they want for each of the eight days of

Hanukkah, or if we only take our children to a suburban shopping mall to sit on Santa's lap and say what they want for Christmas, we have failed.

Why not call county social services and ask for someone needing help? Churches and synagogues have names of needy families.

Visit a home for the aged, even if you know no one living here, and just say "hello" to someone who may have no one to visit them. Encourage your older children to watch at school for other children who might be in need.

If we only teach our children to want, there will always be little ones with dark, vacant eyes who do not even want because no one ever thought to give.

Jocelyn Krieger is a free-lance writer and a former actress in off-Broadway productions. She is currently a teacher of piano and voice and is married to a tax consultant. Residents of Southfield, they have six children.

fitness

Barry Franklin



Steam won't melt away fat, but heat relaxes

Question: What health benefits may be derived from steam and sauna baths? Can they be dangerous?

L.M. West Bloomfield

Steam and sauna baths have always been associated with spas and people interested in athletics and exercise. Many community recreation centers have elaborate steam and sauna rooms for individuals who believe great health benefits can be derived from profuse sweating.

The original theory behind their use — that you can sweat or melt your fat away — is literally all wet. Normally, when an individual loses 1 percent or more of his body weight through sweating, he seeks to drink. Thus, weight losses induced by sweating are rapidly regained by drinking.

Prolonged exposure to extreme heat and/or humidity may cause a dangerous rise in body temperature, with related circulatory problems. These

dangers are compounded after exercise, when body temperature is already elevated.

BECAUSE OF THE high humidity associated with steam rooms, sweat cannot evaporate to cool the body (that's the purpose of sweat). Without this cooling effect, body temperature may rise to dangerously high levels.

Saunas, on the other hand, result in less heat stress because the humidity is kept low, allowing the sweat to evaporate.

Circulatory problems may include a rapid fall in blood pressure with a decreased blood flow to the heart. Sudden fainting when standing up to leave the sauna and heart rhythm disturbances may result.

Thus, elderly individuals or those with a history of heart problems should use extreme caution or avoid these baths entirely.

While heat baths promote no improvement in physical fitness, many people do find them enjoy-

able and relaxing. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that intense heat may bring about a significant decrease in muscle tension, and relieve nervous tension.

Along these same lines, the sauna may alleviate sore and aching muscles, relieve symptoms of arthritis and bursitis, and promote a calm and restful sleep.

SPECIFIC SAFETY precautions when using

steam and sauna baths include:

1. Lie down as opposed to sitting in the bath.
2. Remain only for short periods of exposure — don't try to "tough it out."
3. Wear no clothing which restricts sweating — the body's evaporative heat loss mechanism.
4. Don't use in conjunction with alcohol and/or drugs.
5. Leave immediately upon the sensation of unusual signs or symptoms (e.g. dizziness, weakness).

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