

Written by Jamie in the spring of 2009, just prior to her retirement from public education, and copied from the This I Believe Website: www.thisibelieve.org

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I Believe in Spending Time With Children

“Try it Mrs. Turner” they squeal, urging their principal to join in the fun. I do. And it’s pure joy. The 6-9 year olds and I, together on the playground at recess, watch for the exact moment a leaf begins to fall to the ground. We watch and anticipate which way the wind might carry the leaf. We watch to avoid colliding with one another as we try to keep one eye glued to the falling leaf and one hand outstretched before us. Some children make it look easy. It takes me several minutes and much perseverance before I am a successful leaf catcher. “Yea, I got one,” I shout, a large red leaf in hand. The children are happy for me as I am for them when they grab a leaf from the sky.

I believe in spending time with children. As I approach retirement from public education and reflect on my long career, it is the time spent with children that renders the most vivid and meaningful memories. I could bore anyone who will listen with their stories. Even their most maddening moments have sustained me through conflict, stress, and long exhausting hours.

I’ve always been drawn to children. What I didn’t realize until that leaf catching day was why. Kids just seem to trigger that reserved part of me, the part that at times holds me back from diving fully into life and appreciating what is right before me. Do you know an adult who actually tries to catch a falling leaf – or takes the time to even notice a leaf? That perfect fall day, witnessing the pure joy of children at play put me in touch with the present moment – feeling the simple joy in life.

Driving in my convertible I start to worry about my hair blowing in the wind. Will the wild strands calm down and look presentable when I arrive at my destination? Then I remember the children. Would they worry about their hair? No way! They would delight in the feeling of the wind whipping their hair this way and that. It’s amazing how this helps me to do the same.

And no one can make me laugh like a child. After sharing my retirement news with the students in school I visited a kindergarten classroom a few days later. As I walked in the door, Alex called out, “You told us you were retiring so why are you still here?”

As an adult it has been impossible to find balance between work and play. I’ve tried. Clearly I have too much work and not enough play.

As retirement approaches I think about how I will shift that balance back to those free days of my childhood when I rode my bike and climbed a tree without a care. I know when I restore that balance and play finally overtakes work I will still be thinking of the children. The lessons they have taught me have been greater than those I have taught them. I haven’t yet figured out how I will stay connected to children once I leave my school but I know I will find a way. It is through spending time with children that I am most able to make a joyful connection to life.