

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

The “Real News” from Disaster’s Aftermath

AN ANCIENT JAPANESE LEGEND holds that folding a thousand origami cranes earns the granting of a wish. Led by first grade teacher Margie Obendorf, who lived in Japan as a child, students at The Meher Schools are diligently creating cranes—yes, a thousand—to send to a school in Japan. Their wishes are for children and grown-ups there to heal and flourish in the face of their challenges. Kim Leonard’s third graders are collecting shoes to donate.

Sending good thoughts on paper wings and shoes to keep feet warm are the stories children need to hear when the news is full of disaster. In contrast, a four-year-old boy shouted scary news of the tsunami to his preschool peers, potentially creating feelings of fear and panic. (“Where is the tsunami?” “Is it coming here?”) The daily news depends upon the latest frightening nuance of stories in order to keep the audience alarmed. So in that sense, it’s bogus news.

Since we can’t prevent natural disasters, the most vital stories we need are the inspiring ways people respond to devastation—the qualities that emerge in ordinary people. Perhaps you have read a widely circulated letter written by a teacher in Japan. Here are some lines that convey the stories of cooperation and care we all need to hear:

☞ “During the day, we help each other clean up the mess in our homes.”

☞ “If someone has water running in their home, they put out a sign so people can come to fill up their jugs and buckets.”

☞ “I come back to my shack to check on it each day, and I find food and water left in my entranceway. I have no idea from whom, but it is there.”

☞ “People talk to complete strangers, asking if they need help.”

☞ “As I experience these events happening in Japan, I can feel my heart opening very wide.”

On some level, this is the real news. If your child asks what would happen if we had another earthquake here, you can answer, “People would help each other just like they did in Japan.”

March 30, 2011