

What Adults do affect children

By Valarie Bostic

Deep inside every adult lies the heart of a child. Our childhood shapes who we are and who we will become. Long into our adult years, we tend to remember things from our childhood that truly affected us, some things in a positive way...some things in a not so positive way.

When I was in elementary school, I remember this particular boy. He was a forgotten child, one that nobody seemed to care about, often coming to school dirty and unkempt. He was a target for the other children. If he wasn't being called "Pig Pen," or "Dirty Bird," he was being called, "Retardo," or "Stupid." No one ever wanted to be his partner for class projects or sit next to him at lunch.

He was an enigma for most of the teachers, who often found him too repulsive and curious to deal with. Most of them just didn't want the hassle of a problem child. When they called his name, they called his full name, both first and last, spewing it like it was a dreaded disease. He sat in the back of the classroom, away from the rest of us, never accomplishing his work, frequently being chastised by teacher. I clearly recall his tattered clothing, often inappropriate for the weather, shoes that had seen better days and fingernails encased in grime. He never got hugs like the rest of us because he was dirty and smelly, and too offensive to touch. I remember like it was yesterday.

It seemed the teacher took delight in embarrassing him about his soiled clothing. One time, he brought in a note telling her that the reason he came to school filthy was because his family had no running water. The teacher glared and huffed, muttered words like "lazy," and "good for nothing," and somehow managed to let the entire class know about his predicament, making him once again, a spectacle of sorts. He very seldom received a compliment, but when the rare occasion came, his eyes would light up, and his whole demeanor would change. He puffed up like a peacock, proud of his small feat. It was then he would become like the rest of the boys and girls, normal and ordinary, no longer a 'forgotten child.'

I dare not imagine what his home life was like. My own childhood was less than ideal, and if it hadn't been for my loving older sister and her husband who took me in and raised me as their own, I too, could have been

the forgotten child, one that no one cared about. I thank God everyday for my sister.

I often think of that young boy these days. I wonder what he is doing and how his life turned out.

In fact, I thought of him just the other day while I was at work. It was the perfect March day; perfect kite-flying weather for the children at my school. The children absolutely loved this idea. They chased after the kite, laughing and pointing as it sailed and danced in the wind. One little girl stood back, alone and aloof. She seemed hesitant, almost unsure. I recognized that look from my own childhood, so I went to her. "Would you like to go with me to see the kite?" I asked softly. She looked up at me, her eyes searching my own. Slowly, she nodded her head, and placed her small hand in mine. As I looked at her, and saw the innocent trust in her eyes, my heart caught in my throat. I realized that as an educator, and as an adult, that my actions have an effect on children. Children look to adults for guidance and acceptance. We are their role models and their mentors. They look to us for the answers to their questions and they need for us to help reassure them that even if things around them are chaotic and confusing, they themselves are okay.

Politicians talk a great deal now about "no child being left behind." I wonder how many of them realize that the concept is real and not just a selling point for elections. The truth is, so many children are being left behind, and it's all because of mixed messages from adults. It doesn't necessarily have to be from their parent, either. It can be a teacher, a coach or even a minister. What adults do and say, affect children. When I think of how those teachers used to treat that young boy in my class, I shudder. How small and insignificant he must have felt, like an outcast to the rest of the world.

Childhood is a mystical, magical time, a time when dreams are formed. It is the time when fantasies and imagination are more important than the everyday drama of life. It is up to adults to reflect upon their own childhood, and to learn from the things that affected them as children. It is up to all of us to make sure that no child becomes the 'forgotten child.'