



The Kindness of Children

Vivian Gussin Paley

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Visiting a London nursery school, Vivian Paley observes the schoolchildren's reception of another visitor, a handicapped boy named Teddy, who is strapped into a wheelchair, wearing a helmet, and barely able to speak. A predicament arises, and the children's response--simple and immediate--offers Paley the purest evidence of kindness she has ever seen.

In subsequent encounters, "the Teddy story" draws forth other tales of impulsive goodness from Paley's listeners. Just so, it resonates through this book as one story leads to another--taking surprising turns, intersecting with the narrative unfolding before us, and illuminating the moral meanings that children may be learning to create among themselves.

Paley's journey takes us into the different worlds of urban London, Chicago, Oakland, and New York City, and to a close-knit small town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Her own story connects those of children from nursery school to high school, and circles back to her elderly mother, whose experiences as a frightened immigrant girl, helped through a strange school and a new language by another child, reappear in the story of a young Mexican American girl. Thus the book quietly brings together the moral life of the very young and the very old. With her characteristic unpretentious charm, Paley lets her listeners and storytellers take us down unexpected paths, where the meeting of story and real life make us wonder: Are children wiser about the nature of kindness than we think they are?



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