

«More Waldorf...»

On my work in the Kufunda Waldorf kindergarten in Zimbabwe

Johanna Birth

When I arrived in Kufunda, a wonderful course on the foundations of Waldorf education was already taking place for 23 women working in Zimbabwe's Waldorf kindergartens. IASWECE had found just the right person in Susan Rubinoff to send to this very special country! She led the women through serious content in a light way and was always interested, cheerful, generous, and open for everything that came from the group.

On the fourth morning, Annah Benedicto, the kindergarten teacher from Kufunda, stood up and said the following words: "We are all grateful from our hearts for this course! You have shown us that we are doing our work well. And now we have learned from you, what it means for the children, how it affects them, and how we can do it better. Thank you!"



After the course, we were invited by a group of kindergarten teachers from Rusape to visit their kindergarten and advise them and - most importantly - to be their guests. We traveled by bus to a dreamlike landscape in the vicinity of Rusape. In one of the tiny villages stands a small, brightly painted house - the first kindergarten, completely filled with all kinds of playthings. We were somewhat shocked at first by the mouldy odor. Then: "Can you help us make a real nice Waldorf preschool here?" "Yes, we can!"

Later it turned out that they had not had enough money to seal the floor, and the walls were covered with plastic; this is what led to the odor. After an hour of shared work, furnishing and equipping the room, and \$40 USD for cement, they were much closer to their goal!

The next day we walked to three other kindergartens in the area. Despite all that they had in common, each also had its own special history and challenges. Lonely but "centrally" located, each kindergarten covers



a 5 km radius for walking on foot. The entire area has only Waldorf kindergartens!

Back in Kufunda, work was about to begin in the kindergarten. We were surprised by a sudden "storm" of young men who arrived to help. "When there is a large task in the community, the community sticks together!" After an hour the room had been cleaned out and the walls repaired, so that the teachers could focus on the fine technique of lasure painting. The kindergarten teachers Annah and Maryiaperera revealed themselves to be master painters!

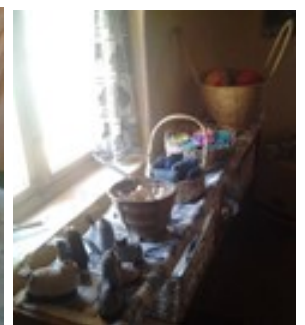
Susan Rubinoff had to leave, but the work continued for one more day. With strength and perseverance, the two women spent their entire holiday working



in their kindergarten. They built "play stands" for a doll house from branches and boards, bought materials in the city, sewed curtains and doll clothes, repaired toys, and felted blankets.



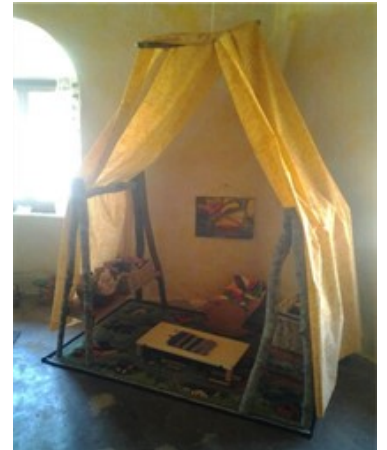
And finally the dollmaking course took place. Unfortunately, the kindergarten teachers from further away could not participate. The women worked at their dolls with great skill, and each made two dolls. Eager to understand more, they took in the laws of human - and especially childlike- proportions. And wonderful, perfect, real Waldorf dolls emerged, dressed in lovely clothes.



Here I would like to especially mention Annah Benedicto, the lead kindergarten teacher. In my view she has wonderful leadership qualities and unlimited, excellent handwork capacities. Her contact to the children is full of warmth and devotion! She has once visited South Africa for a "Look and Learn Visit" and last May she came to me to the kindergarten in Germany to learn. Training her well would be one of the most important tasks, since she is leading the central kindergarten and from there she plays an important role as a wonderful example for the others.

The Zimbabweans are a proud but generous and peaceful people! They take their problems into their own hands, but they never push themselves forward. "You are our friends, not our employers!" Nonetheless they are aware that they need help and are happy to receive it. In order to really help them, we must be ready to take a step back to accept and respect them as they are. They are full of light and warmth; there is no season of darkness there! What does this mean for Waldorf education and its festivals? We must become questioners before we can hopefully become appropriate teachers.

I am very thankful for everything I experienced and was allowed to learn in Zimbabwe.



Johanna Birth is a Waldorf kindergarten teacher in Göhrwihl/Germany. Her daughter founded the association "Simba Kufunda" to support Waldorf kindergarten initiatives in Zimbabwe.

(ariadne.birth@t-online.de)