



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

Chairperson Report

CCCABC Annual General Meeting, 2005

On February 11th child care advocates waited with baited breath, together with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and Canada's children, for that special moment – that historic moment – the accumulation of close to three decades of hard work – our hopes and dreams all coming together at the Westin Bayshore in our very own Vancouver to mark the beginning of a national child care program. Thursday, the hype began, our media event was a big success and I remember joking that I had 24 hours of hope left. By mid-morning on Friday, the doubts were beginning to set in and by mid-afternoon we were hoping for a sign on of at least a couple of bi-lateral agreements. By late afternoon we learned there would be no historic moment that day.

I went home that night and had a few drinks then did what no one should do – I drank and dialed – I phoned my mother. She wasn't home and I don't really remember the long message I left on her answering machine, but flowers arrived for me in the morning with a message from her "Stay strong. You have all climbed the mountain together, you just haven't planted the flag yet".

Saturday I nursed a headache but by Sunday I had a different perspective of what happened. The truth is that what we are attempting to do is to change history – the creation of a new social program, embedded in legislation, a future right of every child in Canada. And history is not made of historic moments; it is a series of turning points. Events large and small that turn the historic cog just enough to impact the movement of the universe. And, my friends, last year was indeed a year of tremendous turning points.

A federal minority government and child care is back on the agenda – a turning point not of our making, perhaps, but significant. This government needs a win and thought child care could be it.

A guy who was used to winning, a competitor, perhaps even a champion, is appointed as our new federal minister. We demanded a champion and we got one, another turning point, not perfect in any sense of the word, but we had a voice and it was loud and it wanted to win.

Parent voices steadily unite. The cross Canada network is strengthened – parents begin to empower other parents. Another turning point.

In BC a program is threatened and the call goes out to the child care community for help. Within hours the mobilization has begun and advocates across the province unite to apply pressure to their Board to reconsider their decision – and they do. Temporarily maybe - but a turning point none the less as it examples the strength of our support for each other.

Across Canada advocates unite their voices together in monthly, weekly (even daily) emails and conference calls. Our voice is one, we are unified, and we are together all the way. I had the pleasure of sitting at a child care table in Ottawa hosted by Tony Martin. Around the table were advocates from every part of Canada together with our inspirational brothers and sisters from Quebec along with

representatives from our great First Nations community. And as we developed our strategy, we were joined by an MP from the Bloc. The decision is made that if the need and opportunity arises, the Bloc MP will stand with her colleague from the NDP and will introduce together a private members bill. Meetings like this one from coast to coast to coast – all turning points.

And we will never forget the conference in Winnipeg last fall, when over 700 advocates stood together to reaffirm the message we had been delivering for twenty years and more, that Canada needed and Canada's children deserved, a national child care program that was high quality, affordable, accessible, accountable, publicly funded and grown in the not-for-profit sector. But this time, the speakers included economists, social policy analysts, international experts from the OECD, and others. The turning point – others were taking our message forward. Our words had become validated through pages and pages of evidence-based research and our words were becoming a part of every day language.

We were not hysterical do-gooders, or a self serving minority – we were simply right.

And the auspice issue, which had been silenced for so long in the interests of provincial and national cooperation was now front and center of the debate. Indeed, discussion of the complexities of international trade agreements moved us into a world of stock markets vs. public good and uncovered the real threat of the big box, commercial day care sector.

Talking out loud about auspice all across the country – that's a turning point.

And at long last we have the ear of the media. Front page news, national TV coverage for a week, and while the debate may have brought out the minority right wing voice, it engaged other Canadians to claim their right for every child to have a space and for their families to be able to afford it. Once you've had media coverage like that – it's a turning point.

And then there was my personal favourite turning point – who else but us led by my good friend Avi Goldberg, could take words meant to hurt and bully us into silence and change them into a fashion accessory. "Proud to be a profoundly tiresome advocate". You betcha.

There were others, all moving the cog of history a little farther forward. I don't know the equation but I know that once a critical mass of turning points has accumulated you can't turn it back. We're not there yet – we continue to stand strong on our principles, and speak loudly and often but each time we do now we move that cog along. Perhaps the most challenging part of the fight is still ahead of us – but we are up for it. We are history makers.

And that historic moment. I think it will be different for each of us. I know when mine will be. I see it clearly in my mind. The phone will ring. I was hoping it would be one of my daughters, but maybe it will be my one of my granddaughters. "Good news grandma" she'll say. "I got that great job I was hoping for. I've called the daycare; you know the one beside the community centre across from the school and the community park. They say I can come by tomorrow, fill out the paper work and then the baby can start her gradual entry next week. Grandma, do you want to come with us?" That will be my historic moment. And until we have all had our historic moments, we need to keep our sleeves rolled up, our drums ready and our marching shoes in good shape, because we won't stop the work until it's done.

On the day of our media event I was standing with Hal, a steadfast community child care advocate. We were looking out over all the folks busy with lots to talk about, anticipation in the air, a festive moment. "Here you all are", he said "all of you together. All of you still here. Every day each one of you had a good reason, to turn your back and just walk away from it. But you didn't. Not one of you did."

It has been my sincere honour to continue to be a small part of this wonderful organization that has had reason every day to just turn around and walk away – but doesn't. The days ahead may get messy, they may be tearful and they may be exciting and promising. Either way, we'll be here together.

But squeeze over, there are more and more of us every day.

Respectfully submitted

Susan Harney
March 3, 2005