

# Counting on Kindness

Caryn Hacker-Buechel looks ahead to the hopes of parents and kids for the coming school year.

**We hang on to those last days of** sultry summer, when the air sizzles with the aromas of coconut suntan oil, chips with peppery salsa, seared burgers in warm sesame buns and an intense basting of salty sea air. This excitable mix entices us to continue our journeys through the heat of the month toward the beginning of yet another school year. As we think of our children marching into 10 months of academia, we toast to new beginnings, finally muddling parental happiness, sadness, hopefulness and fear-full and less-ness into a repetitive, yet familiar, cocktail.

This is the annual parental mental excursion that follows summer trekking and family bonding; a trip into the magic mirror of hope, for us and our children. As parents we delight in the initial freedom brought on as our children return to school, which is quickly followed by the delayed yearning for our children's return. We visualize their academic success as they are surrounded by like-minded "wholesome friends." We dream of a year marked by little drama and, above all else, we wish their lives be filled with happiness, peace and the absence of bullying. We, as concerned parents, would like to chase away anything that would cause them pain. All too often, we hear (either first-hand or through the media) the woe-filled cries of students (and then their parents) who tragically suffer at the hands of a bully.

"Eighteen million kids will be bullied in the U.S. this year and three million students are absent each month because they feel unsafe at school," reports Lee Hirsch, director of "The Bully Project." This new, feature-length documentary chronicles a year in the life of America's

bullying crisis and recently premiered at the 2011 Tribeca Film Festival. Its website, [www.thebullyproject.com](http://www.thebullyproject.com), offers resources for parents, students and teachers and information regarding this important film's upcoming debut. Encouraging children to stand up for each other is a central theme of this

groundbreaking movie. It promotes kindness from one child to another and in that conscious moment, interpersonal protection and security are born.

Ultimately, kindness needs to move to the forefront of necessary interactive behaviors and be viewed with importance on par with as scholarly



or athletic endeavors. The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation ([www.randomactsofkindness.org](http://www.randomactsofkindness.org)) admirably lists tips, projects and websites related to promoting and providing various "kind" services and undertakings. One can also subscribe to the Kind Living Newsletter ([www.kindliving.net](http://www.kindliving.net)) which, according to Founder and Educator, Andy Smallman, inspires people to both recognize and bring more kindness into their lives.

Recently, this author was honored to speak at a writer's tea at Oakridge Middle School, hosted by teacher Vicki Peterson and her eighth graders. These culturally diverse students, dressed in their finest attire, sipped tea from flowered English china, nibbled on dainty teacakes and peered into the world of writing through this author's eyes. I, in turn, inquired about their feelings regarding returning to school following summer vacation.

A kind and gentle Caitlin related her thankfulness for a terrific summer at home and hoped to have a great year, even better than the previous one. An observant and verbal Jordan explained that the beginning of school meant the potential to "get in trouble in two places, instead of just one!" The students, collectively, admitted they looked forward to seeing their friends, but also recognized that (like their parents' feelings of mid-day freedom) that newness wore off after approximately three weeks and they wished for the closeness and summer comforts of home once more.

In general, they related feeling anxious, nervous and worried and like their parents, desired a calm environment with nice teachers, no drama, great friends and no bullying. Another student, Thalia, stood before her classmates and read an original short story regarding the effects of bullying on her central character (a high-school-aged

female) by classmates which resulted in a dramatic and tragic conclusion. Today's youth are certainly aware of the issues related to bullying.

As both the author of a book concerning this issue and a mental health professional, the beginning of the school year reawakens my passion to assist our youth in their development of conscious kindness. They are our planet's best hope and we are their guides through the last days of balmy summer vacation, onto their contemporary academic journeys, and then to their original and awaiting futures.

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