

relate with our own children. I particularly related to her Jewish upbringing as it reminded me of parts of my own. Harriet is a self-confessed worrier, and she fights with her husband. For every psychiatrist or psychologist you ever have wanted to send to therapy, Harriet does the heart good by freely writing about the times she has dispensed great advice but has not taken it herself. Mother dance or family dance, Harriet's dancing is at times like all of ours, full of good intentions and really loud yelling.

Creating Balance in Your Child's Life

Beth Wilson Saavedra

Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Books, 1999

Reviewed by Carol Hult

Pressured to help our children adapt to a fast-paced world, we have filled their days with lessons, sports, and homework. But does relentless activity serve their best interests? In *Creating Balance in Your Child's Life*, Beth Wilson discusses the importance of including both scheduled and unscheduled time in our children's lives. It is essential, she writes, to teach our children about balance and to allow them "unrushed time" in which to play, imagine, and feed their spirits.

The signs of over-stressed, out-of-balance children are everywhere: stomachaches, anxiety, shortened attention spans, chronic fatigue. Wilson cites the need for children to be offered time to rest and recharge. She says a parent needs to "trust the cadence" of her child's development. Wilson's challenge to me, as a mother of three, is to identify and nurture each child's unique strengths.

To help us understand temperament, Wilson offers several tools including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. While this personality test is often used in educational and corporate settings, it also allows parents to see the vital aspects of a child's nature. That knowledge can be applied to decisions made daily on the child's behalf: choosing schools and activities, setting TV limits, structuring unhurried time. Rather than defining balance universally, we need to respect individual needs. A quiet, intuitive child who is tuned into the feelings of others may need small class settings and regular time alone to think things over. A lively, extroverted, intellectual child may need plenty of active stimulation but also ways to slow down.

Several chapters explore key components of balance. "Nourishing with Nature" describes how a connection to the natural world helps children to connect with themselves, with others, and with a higher source. "Communication and Balance" discusses the significance of actively listening to our

children. “Building Character and Optimism” offers ways to teach empathy, courage, humour, and other qualities that instill an essential inner sense of power. Another chapter considers ways to create balance in the electronic age.

The book’s strength is not in mining any one area but in covering a wide territory. Each chapter offers insight, advice, and resources for further exploration. As a whole, the book is an effective catalyst as well as a reference guide for busy parents who themselves need more time to pause and reflect. This brings me to another desire: for help with my own balance. Perhaps I need to turn to Wilson’s previous book *Restoring Balance to a Mother’s Busy Life*. One of Wilson’s greatest gifts is her focus on mothers as well as children. She knows that creating lifestyles that support today’s families involves everyone.

Wilson’s voice is compassionate and realistic. Speaking from experience as well as observation, she knows that motherhood is not easy. She understands the challenges of raising a spirited child and the desire to help one’s child excel in a competitive world. But she is wise to question a path that disregards the need for rest and rejuvenation and offers a model of parenting that attends to our instincts rather than societal pressures.

Reunion: A Year in Letters Between a Birthmother and the Daughter She Couldn’t Keep

Katie Hern and Ellen McGarry Carlson
Seattle: Seal Press, 1999

Reviewed by Amy Cuomo

Reunion is a moving account of a relationship between two women who are biologically mother and daughter, yet complete strangers. Linked by their joy in writing, as well as their biology, the women reveal themselves to one another as they begin a process of discovery. Katie Hern and Ellen McGarry Carlson are writers whose love of craft is apparent in their letters. Their correspondence is humorous, occasionally painful, and uncompromisingly honest. The book reads like a finely crafted epistolary novel and gives its audience the furtive pleasure of reading another’s mail. *Reunion* encapsulates the year in which Katie and her birthmother Ellen first make contact after a separation of twenty-six years. The letters and emails, which constitute the book, provide the reader with extraordinary insight into adoption and tell of their remarkable journey. The book is arranged chronologically and begins with Katie’s letter of introduction to her birthmother. The letters are intimate and revealing. The early letters are particularly provocative and raise the question, “What do we choose to