

Preface

The Australian Aborigines have the longest continuous living culture on the planet. They have no written language. For over 50,000 years, knowledge has been passed from generation to generation by elders who tell stories as a way of entertaining and, more important, educating their people on proper behavior and customs. Wally of the Anangu people told me that an elder will often create a story using mischievous spirits called Mimis to tactfully get across a message. Following in the tradition of the Aborigines and anyone else who has ever told the story of *The Three Little Pigs*, I too use stories to both entertain and enlighten. My stories are told to help teachers and parents better understand young children, how to interact with them, and how to teach them.

I hope you find the stories so interesting and entertaining that you keep turning the pages because you just can't wait to see the next story. I'd like to suggest that when you are done reading the book you do not put it away on a shelf. Instead, choose a topic that you are comfortable with and reread that chapter. As you do, take the time to think and reflect. How does the material apply to you in your circumstances? What could you try, what could you improve on, how could you modify some of the ideas to fit your particular situation?

Use this book as your own personal mentor. To help you do this, I have included a resource: *Creating Your Own Plan for Improvement*. Every year your skills and understanding will increase, and your experiences will influence you to see things in a different light. I hope you will use the chapters in this book as mini workshops and refer to them over and over again during the course of your career. My expectations are high; please don't let them frustrate you. Instead, let them inspire you to soar to greater heights.

While what I have written comes from many years of experience in the preschool classroom, my advice is based on established

theories and research on child development and learning by psychologists and educators such as Bruner, Dewey, Elkind, Froebel, Piaget, and Vygotsky. The material in this book is equally applicable for both parents and teachers. We are after all on the same team.

I cannot answer all of the questions you may have or predict the problems you will face in the future. I can only offer some of the principles that have guided me over the years. Try to empower young children and give them the time and freedom to explore a rich, safe environment. Recognize that play for the child is not a diversion, but an important way to learn about the world. Understand and respect the children's interests and developmental level. If we are sensitive and observant, they will show us the way.

This book focuses on developing children's social skills and creating positive teacher-family relationships. I have also written a companion volume, *More Help! For Teachers of Young Children*, that addresses the equally important subjects of promoting intellectual development and creativity.

Nuts and Bolts

Each chapter in this book contains a brief introduction followed by a number of stories. After each story, I provide help and questions for you to ask yourself. At the end of each chapter is a section called "Try This" that contains a few suggestions for you to try. I hope these will inspire you to think of many more things you can do with children.

Child care provider, care giver, early childhood specialist, preschool teacher, and educator are just some of the terms frequently used to describe people who work with young children. To keep things simple I use the term *teacher* throughout this book. I use the terms *center* and *school* interchangeably rather than differentiating between them. Finally, to avoid the grammatical awkwardness of "he or she" I use one gender or the other when referring to children. I chose to use the pronoun *she* when referring to a teacher or director because the majority of them are females. My apologies for this slight to the dedicated and much valued men who also work with young children.

In all instances the names have been changed to protect the innocent, the guilty, and me from a lot of phone calls.

My mother taught me a simple philosophy of life. I can still hear her saying, "Don't just take, you should also give back; lend a helping hand to the next guy." I hope you think this book is a helping hand.