

Missed convention, but got the T-shirt

The Right of the Child to be Heard is this year's theme for National Child Day, held every year during this week as a reminder to cherish and celebrate our children.

There were 100 of these Rights of the Child put together back in 1989 at a United Nations' Convention on the rights of the child which Canada adopted the 1991.

I didn't go to the convention but — as the saying goes — I did get the T-shirt.

In fact, I still have it.

This once-colourful T-shirt sports every one of the rights of the child in bright hand-drawn scratch. I have always thought of the drawings on the shirt as a subtle reminder of both the folly and the necessity of declaring such rights for an entire planet of children.

The "right to be heard" is depicted on my T-shirt by a child yelling out while at play, while the next image is the simple declaration that children have a right to a home. This picture is much more dark and I have no doubt the child who drew it had a tougher time holding on to her life let alone her home or her right to be heard.

I keep the T-shirt for a few reasons that make little sense to those around me who only see the stains and faded words. I found it while nursing my first child and used to read the words as she nursed peacefully in a warm, safe house in a warm safe country. She spit on it. Tore it. Wore it as a nightgown when she got older. A walking billboard.

My daughter's voice has become louder since then. She has, in fact, no problem with making herself heard — and to be truthful — more often than I'd like. She is the one asked to be quiet during circle time and at the dinner table. But she doesn't. Sometimes I think she could be the poster child for this year's theme.

She has the naïvely powerful notion that the world wants to hear from her. She decided in Kindergarten to take on her principal to save an old maple tree that had been deemed unsafe. At five, she took her clipboard and her moxie and started knocking on classroom

doors looking for names for her petition. Thankfully, she had an understanding principal who, with the skills of an UN negotiator, encouraged my daughter to speak out. Supported her dissent. Welcomed her voice to the discussion.

My daughter got the names. She climbed up into one of those big office chairs to meet with the principal and had the bulldozers stopped. For awhile. Then, in another UN-like act of international diplomacy, the principal laid out her reasons for continuing on her course and promptly had the tree cut down.

Failure? Maybe, but my daughter wasn't as upset as I thought she might be.

She had been listened to. Valued. Her viewpoint was given more than a polite nod. Kids know the difference. And because she trusted the principal, the two met shortly afterwards and hatched a scheme to plant some new trees in its place. Besides, the UN didn't include anything about her always getting her way.

The UN has its work cut out for it on the global scale. But I keep thinking about that principal when I think about this year's theme of The Right to Be Heard and our efforts locally. She made it look easy. Listened to the children in her care. Respected

them. Included them. A hard act to follow. Me, I think I need to hang onto the T-shirt a little longer just to keep me on track.

For the Love of Reading



Lynn
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• You can find out about ways to put the Children's Right to be Heard into action at http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/ncd-jna/index_e.html.

Mission Early Childhood Development Committee representatives will be at the Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival on Nov. 25-26 where they will be giving parents of young children a voice by conducting their survey on barriers to programs and services in Mission. As well, keep an eye out for the Understanding the Early years float at the Candlelight Parade on Dec. 1.

Make some noise and make sure they hear you — loud and clear.