

A Green Wall

Of all the many deficits
presented by our children,
poor reasoning abilities
are the most misunderstood
both by the mothers and the grandmas
in our F.A.S. Support Group,
and by those who struggle daily
with the stress of extreme parenting

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The Kindergarten teacher
did a “circle” on group safety,
and she carefully explained
to her group of tiny five year olds,
“Stand beside the light green wall,
far away from all the cars,
and wait until your driver comes to get you.”
And there stood little Annabel,
her back and legs and shoulders
firmly pressed against the wall.
“We have to stand here. Teacher said.”
So her Grandma stood beside her
until Annabel decided
they had done what Teacher wanted....
but the reason why escaped her.

Every day
the parents of these disabled youngsters
--those who have to reason with invisibly challenged children --
find themselves backed up against a wall,
and going no place.

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Rhonda had been carefully taught
to look both ways
before she crossed the street.
“And if a car is coming
along the street towards you,
you mustn’t move your feet at all
until that car goes past!”
The school was visible from homes,
and on the same side of the street;
an easy, safe, two minute walk.

Her teacher phoned the second day.

“Rhonda’s Late.

I can see her from my window;
she’s just standing by the fence.”

And Rhonda sobbed
through pouring tears,
“Mommy, cars keep coming past,
and I can’t move my feet to school.”

And Andrew, now fifteen years old,
still cannot fully comprehend
the basic safety concepts
we all live with,
although sometimes
he can learn a rule by rote.
He’s been taught to flip the light switch
before going down the basement stairs.
He flips it, automatically...
but whether it is “on” or “off”
is never even noticed.

The inability to reason
--an unseen wall that separates
those with F.A.S. from all their peers—
can make our children
unaware of dangers;
and their safety
the responsibility of someone else.

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Examination schedules,
available in early June,
are hard to understand the first time round.
Hamish brought the schedule home;
he knew his Mom could sort things out
and as they studied it together,
Hamish said,
“French Eight is on the Tuesday morning.
Mom, did I take French this year?”

Mackenzie, sixteen, won a raffle;
the privilege of buying
an expensive sewing machine
at half the cost.
For a large, still growing family,

this was a real windfall,
and the issue seemed so simple
to her mother.

“Your ticket pays for half of it,
and I’ll put in the other half,
and both of us will own the new machine.”

Her daughter wasn’t satisfied;
she couldn’t seem to understand.

The mother, hoping to explain,
used different words and tried again,
but Mackenzie couldn’t get it.

“Mom? When do I get the money?”

Those behind the light green wall
of defects caused by alcohol
can’t understand the word “because.”

Blair, who has intelligence,
plus all the major deficits of Partial F.A.S.,
found himself a member
of the criminal sub-culture
with an unfortunate new habit to support.

He needed extra money.
a visit home provided speakers
newly purchased by his father,
and small enough to hide inside a back pack.

His father caught him at the door,
removed the stolen property,
and made Blair very angry

“I have to steal from you,”
he said, and
“It’s because you don’t trust me.”

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Sometimes
we find the light green wall
that really isn’t there at all,
separates our families

or destroys them.

For Mina
From Leon’s Mom