

Granny's Reform School Weekend Intensive Workshop, Session One

by Angela Kubinec

Two sweaty smudges have pitched their tents under my lower lashes. Today I allowed an eight year old to slaughter me at two games of Monopoly, which I detest. I accomplished this by spending every bill I had as quickly as possible, and cheating, by telling him nothing about the mortgage option. He was huge in his slender-bodied triumph, so I failed at two more games; this time it was Blokus, which is more difficult to lose without being suspected.

We used very sharp scissors and pins which would be much too unsafe at home and he pressed the accelerator on the sewing machine with gentle accuracy, explaining his expertise was due to operating remote control cars. Fabric, glue, ribbon, possible future buttons. An old Moose Munch container became a treasure box for his siblings to envy and hate, and his mother to find tacky.

Two playgrounds (in one of which he loudly pointed out that no one was speaking English), one two-mile scooter demonstration, soap bubbles, one of those huge balloons on a big rubber band, and a voice horn thing that sounds like WFOC (Fingernails On Chalkboard) - they all formed a happy blur.

My goal was to totally wreck his limited suburban sensibilities and his goal was to be the undisputed center of attention for an entire day. We did, I think, both win. I bought him an antique mahogany desk just to chafe his mother who buys upholstered cardboard from "Rooms to Go" and hangs a smart TV over the gas-log fireplace. *What the fuck happened to art, to images one contemplates which do not move? What about simple fire, which smells like wood and smoke, with little pops, bright sparks, and wheezing as it burns?*

A request for McDonald's chicken nuggets was a ruse for a large order of fries and forty minutes in the play area, but it caused me no irritation whatsoever. He played with a black boy in a baseball uniform, later saying that he had never had any black friends. I told him that was an area on which he really needed to work, knowing that his planned community only offers what I politely call homogeneity.

Then after dark, the half-eaten bowl of Spaghetti-os he requested were deemed "too orange" and left on the table. He could name no other food when I asked him what he wanted to eat instead. As I agree about the Spaghetti-os, I made no attempt to encourage him. They do not smell like food and I was pleased by his dislike. Perhaps it will continue when he returns home tomorrow.

We even baked a cake, crumbling brown sugar with our hands. His earnestness while drizzling melted butter is something I hope I will always remember.

I would have stolen some of his candy as he slept; I felt like I deserved it, but it was Tidy-Bowl blue in color, and sour. One day, if I have my way, I he will eat no candy but truffles. Together we will find that roasted corn with mayonnaise, bought from a cart in Bucktown, is an incredible treat after a day at the Chicago Institute of Art.

