

# Parenting path spans the globe

Saltspring couple's refreshing distillation of advice is sought from Florida to China

By Grania Letwin

Times Colonist Living staff

A Saltspring Island social worker and her psychologist husband have distilled a child-rearing philosophy from the world's major religions and are watching with astonishment as it spreads around the globe.

In the six months since Linda Kavelin Popov and her husband Dan published *The Virtues Guide* and began offering their related course, it has been sought after from Toronto to New York, from Yellowknife to Florida.

"We've even received letters from Switzerland and countries in Africa asking for information," Linda Popov said. "Two people who took our course have now taken it to China and the Soviet Union. We're completely swamped."

Funded by a non-profit organization called WellSpring International based in Ganges, the course and workbook show parents and educators how to install virtues and spirituality in children.

Popov describes spirituality as a relationship with one's creator or higher power. "An important part of the spiritual quest is acquiring all the virtues and capacities which God has placed within us."

Popov, whose two children are grown, contends that being a parent is the most complex and important activity on this planet.

"Parents are a child's first and most important educators, yet they receive little or no training on what to do or how to do it."

"We felt the best way to help humanity was to help children, so the logical thing to do was support the parents."

The couple drew their material from seven of the world's religions: the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. From them they distilled timeless human virtues.

"We don't promote the practices of any one faith, but revere the basic truths of all, and show people how to live them day by day," said Popov, who has worked as spiritual care co-

ordinator for Hospice Victoria and led workshops in parenting, women's development and marriage enrichment across the country.

Dan Popov is former chief psychologist at Letterman Army Medical Centre in Northern California. He has presented seminars on parents, family like and spiritual development throughout North America and is an instructor for the University of Victoria Chaplaincy Growing Together marriage enrichment program.

The Manual was designed by Linda Popov's brother, John Kavelin, a graphic artist and former designer and show producer with Walt Disney Imagineering, and illustrated by Duncan artist Joan Badke. The result is a refreshing, simply written book which give parents basic tools and language to build their children's self-esteem and spirituality, practical exercises set boundaries for children.

It identifies a different virtue for every week of the year - idealism, humility, generosity, tact, trust, flexibility are some - and shows how to apply each.

In describing the virtue of detachment, for instance, it says: "Detachment is experiencing your feeling without allowing your feelings to control you...it is a way to use thinking and feeling together so you don't let your feelings run away with you. It is like standing beside yourself and watching what you are feeling."

The manual goes on to describe how to detachment fosters self-confidence and inner peace.

It also explains specifically how detachment can be practiced, by asking yourself:

- Is this good for me?
- Will it help someone else?
- Is it right?
- Is it the best I can do?

Each virtue is highlighted by an inspiring quotation: In the case of detachment, it quotes the Bhagavad-Gita, a Hindu religious classic: "Perform all thy actions with mind concentration on the Divine, renouncing attachment and looking upon success and failure with an equal eye."

Interest in the program has come from more than parents. Teachers want to know how to instill virtues in the classroom. Church groups are clamoring for information. Colleges and recreation centres are booking workshops.

This fall, the course will be offered at Camosun College and Malaspina College in Nanaimo. The University of Victoria will use it as practicum placement for students in the school of child and youth care.

Popov has been asked to address the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's parents

conference, as well as the Catholic Education Conference in Vancouver and the Capital Ideas Conference for Recreation Professionals in Victoria next spring.

"We've already trained more than 50 people as facilitators and it's not enough."

One of the most exciting invitations came from the Tsawataineuk Indian band at Kingcome Inlet, which responsored a training session for about 20 parents. The isolated community, accessible by boat or plane, is on the Mainland opposite the northern tip of Vancouver Island.

"What appealed most to me was how important the use of language is when you're working with kids," recalled Kingcome community development worker Frances Dick.

"We learned that sometimes, when you are disciplining a child, your tone of voice or language can be damaging."

"We are now trying to be consciously aware of what we say in emotional situations. The development of our children depends upon it."

"I believe we all have a little child within us, so even if a person doesn't have children the project can be beneficial. It brought light to our community and awakened our spirit."

Although the workshop was held several months ago, Dick says benefits are still obvious.

"People interact differently; the behavior of the kids has changed. Two of the parents recently told me the course was a dream come true.

"It brought the community back together, not only by giving us new ways to teach children but by showing us to look and think about ourselves too."

The band's 135 members include 50 children. Their ancestors have lived at Kingcome Inlet for thousands of years.

Before the course, many residents had trouble setting boundaries, Dick said, "not only for their children but also for themselves."

"Now we are better."

"The workshop also helped us grieve old abuses and understand how we had been brought up. Some of us came to terms with physical or sexual abuse in our childhood. The course encouraged us to look back and realize what had been unhealthy."



**VIRTUES PROJECT**  
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