

Sophie

October 6th 2007

Admissions Essay UCLA

The thing that moves me most in life comes in what some might consider an unusually small package: about 2½ feet to 3½ feet tall and less than 45 pounds.

But passion, like love, lands where it lands. In my case, the landing pad was a private preschool classroom, where I have indulged my love of children without having to have any of my own quite yet.

To some people, it might seem like teaching preschool is a wonderful way to avoid having to think. But just the opposite is true. Little kids want to know everything, from how the picture gets in the television to how the moon hangs in the sky. Children literally wonder what makes the world go round.

As Danny, age 4, once asked me, “Why does G-d cry so much that it rains sometimes?”

Try answering that one, or not answering it. My nights are often spent looking up information that no sane adult would otherwise feel compelled to know. Sometimes the youngest minds are the ones that push a person the most to think critically.

I love it. I love that I am constantly being pushed out of a safe intellectual space by the smallest of children. Because they are so hungry to learn, I have to keep learning. I have to learn to express myself so that anyone and everyone can understand, regardless of age, regardless of native language. In that first classroom – I’m now on my fourth – English, Persian, Hebrew, French and Russian were all spoken. I now speak English and French, my first language, followed by Hebrew, fluently, plus a smattering of the other two.

I’ve also learned to have a more positive outlook on life, since my charges tend to see everything in shades of pink, or innocence. Their energy, like their enthusiasm, is contagious. I might collapse at the end of the day, but I collapse with a smile on my face.

Yes, I am an influence on them. But so are they, on me. I realized early on there is always more to learn, and that gathering the experiences of others is an experience in and of itself. That includes kids, who are often ignored but always have a funny or silly or unexpected take on what adults often take for granted.

The result is that as I help my students take their first tentative steps into the wider world around them, I have allowed myself to become more childlike in some ways. I am now more open than ever to new ideas and the odd description. I understand the importance of knock knock jokes that on the surface appear to make no sense. I also believe anew that I can achieve anything, and that there are no boundaries to what I might accomplish.

That’s one of the joys of being around young children, and why they both are my passion and fill me with passion. They help me believe that the improbable is possible. They believe that they could become astronauts and ballerinas, rodeo cowboys and veterinarians – maybe all at the same time.