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kept us informed about ongoing abuses of children's rights and directed us how to respond.

So, at the end of the twentieth century the world talks very differently about children than it did a hundred years ago. Does it matter? Of course it does. As a woman I can easily trace in my own lifetime the extraordinary differences that language can make. I had a happy childhood in a loving family, but neither I nor my parents could envision a future outside the words used then to describe possibilities for little girls. And my youthful understanding of the conditions of childhood in the rest of the world was largely framed by verbal exhortation. "Remember the starving Armenians!" my grandmother urged when I wouldn't eat my dinner. "All those little children with nothing to eat." But my childhood imagination could not grasp that these were children just like me. All I knew was that they were creatures I should feel sorry for. The vocabulary of the time didn't include the human rights of children. So I never thought of children in that context.

Then the war came and I grew up. The language that described women and children began to change. Once they were born I had no trouble comprehending that my own children were persons or accepting that they had rights. And when we went abroad, especially to India, not only my but also their eyes were opened to the realities of other children's lives. Then the starving children my grandmother told me to pity (but never taught me how to help) became young persons whose rights to survival and protection had been trampled upon, young persons with whom I could now identify and with whom I could work in partnership so that together we could find solutions to their problems.

By 1979, when I became the vice-chair of the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child (IYC), I was open to the challenge. My experiences that year politicized me. My fellow commissioners and I sought information from a variety of sources. One of our activities was to cross the country to listen to what Canadian children and young people had to tell us. After all, it was their year! We were both surprised and dismayed to discover how few of them felt truly valued and respected by Canadian society. And how rarely they were consulted about important issues. This was less a reflection on their parents than a comment on the social environment in which