

mobile life made me sensitive to the difficulties all children face as they grow and develop. It also made me sensitive to the need all children have for strong family support. At the same time, as I observed the ways in which my children were coping with their difficulties and marvelled at the survival skills of the poor children at the project in India where I worked, I learned how much children can actually do for themselves if only we provide the necessary means.

And then there was my father-in-law. I both loved and admired him. The way he thought about human beings, his respect for human rights, his internationalism, his commitment to peace, the compassionate attitudes and honourable beliefs that motivated him — all had a profound influence on me. So did his sense of humour, which was such a part of the way he looked at the world. And he was a delightful grandfather; pieder rather than patriarch. Our children adored him.

Yet for all Lester Pearson's understanding of human rights and sympathy for children, children's rights never became an issue for Canadian foreign policy under his term as foreign minister nor under the terms of his successors, including Joe Clark. Human rights were important for all of them, but attitudes about them were caught in the prism of the Cold War. Children were seen. Few of us will ever forget some of the photos from those days: the Biafran children with swollen bellies, the big-eyed refugee children taking refuge in huge sewer pipes during the birth of Bangladesh, the burning children running in terror in Vietnam. We looked at these images with compassion and grief, yet I don't recall that we actually saw those children as persons whose human rights had been abused or to whom we should listen because they just might be able to tell us how to respond to their plight. In those days, children were seen, yes, but they were not heard.

This public attitude toward the world's children, an attitude of genuine concern that recognized their needs but not necessarily their rights, persisted until quite recently. Now, however, it has changed. In the Speech from the Throne that opened the Second Session of the 35th Parliament, the Government of Canada made an explicit commitment to the promotion of children's rights. And when the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy became Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 1996, one of the first things he did was