

Conversations With Thomas: The Courtship of Life

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Conversations with Thomas the first title in Amelie Diamant-Holmstrom's three-volume Courtship of Life series is written for "parents grandparents friends and all those involved in guiding children." A distillation of the author's lifetime of observations and over forty years of teaching experience the book contains forty-three letters addressed to "Dear Parent" and an equal number of missives to "My Dear Child" the child being Ms. Diamant-Holmstrom's first grandchild Thomas. As well there are letters of endorsement for her views from several prominent US citizens an introduction that outlines the author's views on child-rearing and pays tribute to her deceased husband and an end section titled "My final thoughts and philosophy about parenting." Just over two dozen well-chosen black and white photo album candids and a reproduction of a touching thank-you letter from Thomas provide intimate visuals of a loving family over the years.

The letters to the child and to parents at large are clear succinct and thoughtful. Grammar and spelling are impeccable. The encouragement of interactivity between parent and child to reinforce various principles is commendable and a known best practice in educational circles. The included workbook activities also serve as a valuable teaching tool and the use of a "chest of drawers" analogy adds a special uniqueness to Diamant-Holmstrom's approach. Her various references to her husband Thomas's grandfather James R. Holmstrom as a judge and a *Mensch* in her letters to the child helps to personalize the couple as does her penned signature at the end of each one. Although most of the recommendations in the book are common sense and well known to professional early childhood educators the author's personalization of them and her family setting for them provide a rationale for a second look. Her suggestion regarding religious education will undoubtedly concern some readers.

Of major concern is the design formatting and spacing of the text. The clear clean lines of the cover and the choice photographs are offset by the book's cluttered interior. On some pages the flow of a letter is interrupted by a blank space that could easily accommodate the overflow of the text on the next page. The result is an inconsistency so that not all of the *Dear Parent* letters begin on the left-hand page where they should be in order to precede the letters to *My Dear Child*. On other pages the spacing between paragraphs is disruptive as either double or non-existent. A table of contents would also be a major asset. Despite these concerns there are nuggets to be found. (August 21, 2009)

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