

Children Are Angels

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I was born in 1959 in Avanos, in a region of Central Anatolia known as Cappadocia. My father was the man who opened the first soda fountain in the town in 1955, after farming for many years: Peri Gazozları. I came up with the slogan: "In the land of fairy chimneys, drink Peri!"

I went to primary and secondary school in Avanos and high school in Nevşehir. There was no high school in our town until those years.

I first studied at Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences, then at Ege University Faculty of Dentistry and Ege University Faculty of Medicine. I graduated as a physician in 1984 and returned to the land of my birth for compulsory service.

My own childhood is of course my golden age. It is my innocence, hope and dreams.

If you ask me what children are to you, I would say "angels". Therefore, children should be protected from all negativities throughout their lives in terms of both physical and mental health.¹⁻⁴

AVANOS 1965...

A hot summer day. My mother put me in one compartment and my brother in the other of the saddlebags placed on our donkey, and we were on our way to Köybağı.

After climbing a very steep slope, we stopped next to a red-brown rock facing towards Kızılırmak from a steep hill. At first glance, this was a strange rock that looked like a piece of stone that descended from the sky. My mother took me out of the saddlebag and led me to the rock. There was a deep groove on the rock that looked like a horseshoe's print.

"Come now sweetie and kiss it!" said my mother. "It is the footprint of Caliph Ali's horse."

I climbed up the rock with both hands, got to the tip, bend down and kissed the deep groove.

"Mom, why am I kissing this rock?"

"Children are angels, my sweetie. if you kiss the blessed stone, everything will be sensed to you!"

Children are angels! I have always believed that.

But look what kind of a world we have given them:

I worked as a health center physician in Ankara Kırıkkale Keskin and Bala for many years.

One of the images that never left my mind from the years I worked at the health centers was when abused children were brought to me with a relative and the police or gendarmerie to write a report. I do not know if it still exists, but this grief will not end until the courthouse stamp on the inside of the child's wrist is erased from our minds and lives.

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Cite this article as: Kesal E. Children are angels. *Turk Arch Pediatri.* 2024;59(1):1-2.

Then I resigned and came to Istanbul. I have been in Istanbul for thirty years. I worked as a health care manager in districts such as Kağıthane, Okmeydanı, Çağlayan, and Halıcıoğlu. Until the last ten years, I mainly worked as the founder and manager of health centers, polyclinics and private hospitals.

Nowadays, medicine is practiced only with a therapeutical approach and health has been transformed from being a right that people have from the moment they are born into a service that can be bought and sold. This is why vaccination, preventive medicine and early diagnosis are at the bottom of the list. Especially anti-vaccination propaganda, inability to distribute vaccines equally to the children of the world, malnutrition and unfavorable environmental conditions for children negatively affect both the present and the future of our angel children.^{1,5-7}

Internal migration in our country, which started in the 1950s, still continues. Istanbul is the city that receives the most migration. New Erzincan, new Sivas and new Rize have been established on the periphery of Istanbul for the last fifty years. Anatolia is emptying out. Families coming to the city are trying to find a place to settle down and get a foothold in the city.

Due to my work and the nature of the places I have been, I have been around children a lot. I have witnessed the stories of children growing up in towns and in villages and, in recent years, children living in the peripheral neighborhoods of Istanbul.

The state of schools and education is obvious. Education policies and routes that have been changed several times in a few years.

I experience this negativity from the inside!

I have a son born in 2006. For the first four years, he went to a school close to our home and supposedly renowned for its achievements. At the end of the 4th year, let me tell you about a scene. We were driving home and my son was sitting in the back seat. As we approached his former school, I saw him closing his eyes in the rearview mirror. I asked him why he was acting like that, he said it was because he did not want to see the school. After a while he was asking from behind, "Have we passed there dad?, I'll open my eyes".

We have condemned our children to an education system, to the schools where they close their eyes when they approach. It is a pity.

Medicine is not only about relieving the pain of the patient. A physician is a person who listens well to the patient.²

That is why children have always been a heartache for me.

The places where I work are the areas of the city that are open to all kinds of abuse and unfortunately, children are the ones mostly affected by this.¹ When I came to Okmeydanı in 1997, the children in Okmeydanı were looking out from the balconies of slum-like houses with iron sprouts on their roofs at passing cars and people, or sitting quietly on the dirty stair thresholds connecting the apartments to the street. There were no trees, no parks, no squares. They rested their innocent foreheads behind the glass windows and grew up quietly and no one noticed them.

In the midst of a rapidly changing and transforming world, children are very vulnerable.^{1,2,4}

What children experience, what they think and their dreams for the future are always at the bottom of the list.

In the cities that politicians and local administrators hand over to rent-seekers, parks and green areas where children can breathe, run and play are never considered. Is it because children don't vote?

No one is aware of the children and no one asks what happens to them.

In fact, our children are the only hope for our future!

I hope you will forgive us for what we cannot do.

Declaration of Interests: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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