

## ***There Be Monsters!***

As parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins and godparents we spend a great deal of time socializing the young children in our lives. We teach them to verbalize needs and wants. We teach them "No!" We get them to mimic our behavior with activities such as "Peek-a-Boo!" We teach them to speak. We let them learn to read our body language, to know when we are happy or sad. They recognize smiles as warmth and safety. We get them to perform little recitative exercises that allow us to applaud little necessary victories. To accomplish this we even get them to recount for us the horrors of the Black Plague. For some reason, the recounting of the recognition of the onset of bubonic plague, implementation of superstitious practices to ward it off, the necessity of funeral pyres to handle the staggering number of dead, and the inevitability of death sung in a sing-song voice by little moppets holding hands while parading in a circle brings joy to the hearts of the children's caregivers. Remember "***Ring Around the Rosy?***"

Before they go off to sleep, we read them Fairy Tales from long ago. We'll even read them a story about the disappearance of over 130 children from a medieval town in Germany. Among the theories about the genesis of this tale are that of a child abductor and that of a glib-tongued recruiter from a neighboring land that leads the children away. We will present the off-putting to our children without hesitation. Our children watch movies with whimsical, protective monsters as the protagonists. A recent commercial portrays a young girl listening on her cell phone and speaking to the gigantic creature at the foot of her bed; she says to him, "***You're not real!***"

But the monsters are very real. They are not hiding under the bed. They are not in the closet or in the basement. They walk among us in plain sight. Just ask the family of Carlie Brucia. Abducted, murdered. Gone in an instant! Taken by a stranger!

According to statistics compiled by the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ), over 800,000 children go missing each year. This number could be supplemented with several hundred thousand additional children since not all instances of missing children are reported. Over 58,000 children are reported annually as being abducted by non-custodial adults. Of that number, over 21,000 are abducted annually by true strangers. ***This means statistically there are at least 69 children abducted daily in the United States, or more than 1 per state per day.*** One child missing/abducted is more than should be tolerated. Consider these numbers.

Along with these Fairy Tales we tell children, we need to tell another tale, a quiet, cautionary tale that instills from early childhood awareness of the world around them. The Rose Brucia Educational Foundation has taken this as its mission. The Foundation's goal is to reduce the number of child abductions.

Through our program of little plays, we hope to instill in our audience a degree of awareness about Stranger Safety. We hope it is a reinforcement of what children already know and practice. We want to prepare them for a world where they will be able to practice excellent safety techniques should they meet a too real monster.