PS1 for Dec. 25, 1986#A CHRISTMAS LETTER TO MY GRANDCHILDREN#

The airwaves and the newspapers are filled with advertisements for children's toys. Christmas is redundantly merchandised for children: buy them dolls, buy them guns, buy them all the exciting new items whether you can afford them or not.

As the mother of six children, who has always made a ""big production'' of Christmas with filled stockings, a big tree, a creche and a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, I know the magical mantle of joy that envelops a family with children at this special time of the year.

Yet, we know that the meaning of Christmas is not in the material manifestations, but in the love behind the present. But this column isn't to restate the obvious which has been said many times better than I can say it, such as in O. Henry's ""The Gift of the Magi.''

This column is about urging young mothers to savor those first few precious years, because they will pass all too soon. This column expresses the hope that the children who are little and bright-eyed this Christmas may be fortunate enough to have parents who will keep them at home for their first six years of life.

A combination of the exigencies of inflation, the high price of homes, the feminist ideology of selfish self-fulfillment, and the cultural fashions of the Me Generation seem to be drawing young women into the vortex where they disdain the role of mother care and try to substitute a variety of non-mother-care expedients. Demands are escalating for institutionalized day care, early childhood education, mandatory kindergarten, and for turning public schools into babysitters for employed mothers.

No replicable evidence exists that any of these alternatives to mother care is good for the child. These alternatives are clearly designed for the convenience of the mother, not for the welfare of the child.

If I have one Christmas wish for my grandchildren (I already have five, and hope for more), it is that they be fortunate enough to have a mother who

will not institutionalize them before the age of seven. No amount of material Christmas gifts can ever compensate for the emotional security of being at home with a loving mother, available to give them daily ""lap time,'' until the age that has traditionally been called ""the age of reason.''

Many women, when asked, say that the happiest day of the year is the first day of school. That's an acquired mental attitude which reflects the stereotypes imposed on us by a society that has made schools an article of faith as well as custom.

My experience with six children taught me that school before age seven is a waste of time, academically speaking. It is also a positive detriment to the child's psychological and social development.

Any academic lessons a child may be taught in kindergarten, or before, can be better, more easily, and more quickly learned at a later age. Those who are misleading parents into thinking that early education will give children a headstart in comparison with their peers are committing a fraud on the children and their parents.

Those who are trying to persuade mothers to put their children in kindergarten or pre-school will often say, ""Your child needs to learn to adapt socially to other children.'' On the contrary, you do NOT want your child to adapt socially to all those other children who have bad habits and lack your standards, values, language, and courtesy.

Keeping your children out of institutionalized socialization until the age of seven will help to keep them from being peer dependent. At home, your child can learn self esteem, value judgments, and civilized behavior before he faces the challenge of association with those who lack those civilities.

I hope that my grandchildren will be fortunate enough to have a mother who will teach them how to read at home by the phonics method. That will assure that they will be good readers who can enjoy the great literature of past and present ages.

Teaching children to read at home at the age of six and THEN entering them

in school will guarantee that they will be academically ahead of their peers. Most other children today are bored with school by the age of seven, having endured years of the ""reading readiness'' nonsense that occupies hours of the time of three, four, five, and six-year-olds in the institutionalized setting.

Does this take commitment and time and patience on the part of the mother? Yes, teaching a child to read takes three or four months of a couple of hours in the morning. But it's worth it, and your children deserve it.

Does the role of motherhood take time, love, many hours and years? Yes. But those years pass so quickly. The day will come soon enough when your children don't want to sit on your lap any more.