and when they were little and showed me toys and told me yellow when the toy was red I never said anything. I just accepted their words and perceptions as valid.

and when they showed me birthday lists which were written in unreadable words, I read them. I didn’t lie; I actually read the words, because loving somebody is more than deciphering letters.

and when they shot us with toy guns, we died, as much or as little as they wanted us to.

and we did hundreds of teddies’ birthday parties.

and teddy bears can come alive, you know, with feelings and souls and everything, if somebody has the creativity to think enough existence into them. On the way home with another one, they’d tear a hole in the bag, so the teddy could breathe.

and I remember how they wanted to make Christmas decorations, but only for five minutes, and then they wanted us to finish them and they went off to play something else more exciting. I remember their father gluing doily wings and tinsel wands onto tiny cardboard fairies and cursing because he bloody hated craft. I remember the fairies sticking to his hands. I remember how the children said he’d done their smiles all wrong.

and how he did them again.

and I’m not bullshitting. I’ll tell it all. We shouted and sometimes we raged and we were raw and pissed off and exhausted and spent and we lied about Father Christmas being real and we didn’t have enough money and sometimes we were hell and sometimes we just couldn’t. I’m not justifying it, there is no justification for any acts of force or power or lies levelled at children, no, I’m just telling it.

and we tried to be free with them, to do right by them, to be more than either of our histories or imaginations really allowed, and we tried to do it all with some sort of impossible grace.

and when they told us secrets, we kept them; and when they hid, we sought them; and when they were hurt, we heard them. When they were sad we never jollied them up. When they weren’t hungry, we didn’t feed them, and when they were, we did. When they were bored, we tried not to think of endless things for them to do. When they were talking to each other, we tried not to listen. When they were in conflict, we tried not to interfere. When they were happy, we tried not to trespass. It sounds so simple now, remembering, but then it often felt so complex.

and we tried not to teach them anything. When they asked us things and we didn’t know, we just said we didn’t know, and unless they were pushing for it, we didn’t get out books or encyclopedias or dictionaries, because everything isn’t knowable and I’ve always thought that not knowing is an ample response to questioning the world.

and reading and writing and adding and subtracting are just insignificant in the ocean of a whole human life.

and when I saw him small and singing to the moon, and then, years later, I saw him dancing, I saw him dancing from all of himself in an endless field, I just knew he’d be alright.

and when I saw her tiny and tasting snails from the pond and putting them back again and then years later, running, running with the grace of the wild and the wind, her running from somewhere deep inside every bone and muscle, I just knew she’d be alright.
and I knew they’d make it through a lifetime each.

and they played and played and played.

and they made gallons of magic potion, to make them invincible, like Asterix Obelix, with flour and washing up liquid and butter and grass and blue food colouring and all the herbs and spices.

and they’d put the jars back completely empty, like somehow they never realised that things finish or come to an end.

and I remember the nappies being glued together with magic mixture, one on top of the other, like a twenty-decker sandwich.

and I’m laughing and laughing because something about children playing puts the world into some sort of rational perspective.

and they played with candles and matches and bits and pieces, and they made infernos and bombs, on trays on the dining room table, and they called it fire play.

and they dug endless pits and made complex traps and plotted and watched and waited with popguns to catch Hefalumps, hundreds and hundreds of them. I don’t remember them ever getting any, or maybe they just always let them go again, to be wild and free.

and they knew that playing and friendship and loving and exploration and feeling and living and crying and laughing, they knew that this, being alive and living a real life, was infinitely more significant and profound than money and products and answers, they knew this from somewhere untraversed inside themselves.

and they didn’t know the days of the week, or the months in the year, or how to tell the time, because they didn’t ever have to, they didn’t have any schedules to keep or deadlines to meet or schools to go to or answers to give or tests to pass; because their lives and thoughts and games were timeless.

and I breastfed them, for nine years between the two of them. I’ve heard it called extended breastfeeding, I just fed them long enough to really fill up their hearts, and because weaning is an act of oral and emotional force. I slept with them beside me for longer than I’d ever admit, because it is unhuman to live together and sleep alone as if night is severed from day like a divided self. I just tried to wait until they chose. I just tried not to lead, I tried to walk beside. I’m not an earth mother, I’m not earthy enough. I am not especially patient or serene. I don’t find it easy to love like some women seem to. It’s just that I couldn’t bring them into this world without trying to remake the world. I identify as a revolutionary, an ordinary everyday revolutionary.

Revolution has to be laughed and climbed and pretended before it can ever come true. It has to be imagined in childplay before it can ever be conceived into manifestos and action. It has to be made in mud and plasticine, and goodies and baddies, and hide and seek, and truth or dare, and dens to spy enemies from and teddy bears loved enough they come to life. It begins when you can change the rules in the middle and make up different endings and when you fall down dead you can get up again. Revolution is overthrow, that upturning, that movement of completely revolting and evolving into unthought possibility; and before this upturning can happen, before thought can become action, before silence can find words, long before this upturning can take place, there has to be that childhood where ideas are turned over in our minds and passions are felt in our hearts and a self is grown through play.

There is no revolution without selfhood, because revolution is that act of transforming the world from our self vision. The extent of revolution can only be determined by whatever we hold
in our souls. Without an awareness of our self significance, we just put up and shut up.

Think about girls skipping. Think about hopscotch. Think about jacks and those repetitious games we played by bouncing tennis balls against endless walls. It was phobic and perfectionistic behaviour. It was obsessive. It was safe. It channelled the vigour and danger and raw aggression, which we were condemned for expressing, into refining limited and narrow skills. Children react to the limitation of their thought and curiosity and action with varying degrees of inhibition and phobia. I’m thinking about contemporary games, the computer games and the addiction and the repetition and the hypnosis and the warfare. Playing violent computer games is possibly less serious than the grooming which prepares children to desperately want and enjoy them. Think about this. Think about what these games are preparing the children to become. Think about what came before, think about what we’ve already done to these children.

Think about the skipping games we played in the playground, over and over, the hours and days and years, like verbal and physical chants instilling our future monotony and passivity into the psyches of our being and bodies. It was like we were in a state of hypnosis. We weren’t playing, We weren’t expressing freedom. We weren’t alive, although we sang and jumped. We were ritualistically training ourselves and each other to be tamed of vitality and a revolutionary consciousness. We held down our skirts. We sang the songs in our voiceless little voices. We jumped that rope. We were learning that this was our extent and whatever else came after, whatever else happened along the way, nothing would ever again reflect to us who we might have been, or our potential to reach into the world with conviction, or to engage with dangerous ideas, because nothing would have the capacity to reflect us any further beyond the childhood bounds and monotony and initiation of how absolutely that symbolic skipping would define our entire lives.

We can take the world to where we can think and imagine it, but only if we can first think and imagine ourselves. This is not narcissism, or indulgence, or vanity, or false pride, this is the recognition of our human implication, our meaning, each of us uniquely. It is the recognition of our human and political right to all of ourselves and demanding a revolution, a world, a life, to reflect this infinite expanse of identity. Revolution can only create the world into who we are. We can only create the world into unthought possibility and beyond, if we can recover, and become, and live the unthought and beyond of who we were forbidden from being.

...To infinity and beyond....

Buzz Lightyear, Toy Story.

They are born with infinity within them, but their unthought possibility is taken away. It is put up on a high shelf out of reach and withheld, with the sweets and matches and adventure and anything else nice and exciting. The beginning of our delicious and inspiring human lives, the real lives of us, our right to be creatively and autonomously alive, this is put on that shelf out of our reach. However tall we get it remains beyond our grasp. Children are denied their existence. It is the sad attrition of a self because schooling and spellings and bedtimes and boundaries erode their childhood; it all gets in the way of their real life, and their playright, which they will never ever get to live and play again. They can come to the end of their playground before their time, by force; or slowly, in their own time, with that gradual grace of growing up and beyond.

and we can’t go backwards, we can’t live childhood again, not as children do — that’s why Wendy house doors are so low, because childhood doesn’t let grown ups back in again.

and they’ll be grown up soon. I’ll look up and there they’ll be, taller than me.

and sometimes we were just shit to them.

and sometimes I see the happy and lustre of them reflected in their eyes.

and it makes me shine.

Excerpted from Revolution Within by Sammy Kantin, available from www.informedchoice.com.au or direct from Praxis Publications, 44 1548 830987. Sammy is an award-winning writer. Her children have never been to school. Over the eighteen years of their childhoods, Sammy has developed a radical understanding of children’s freedom and of the possibility of humane parenting within our everyday lives.