

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILDREN...

Ina Hughs, originally published in *The Oklahoma Observer*, 1988

We are responsible for children  
who put chocolate fingers everywhere  
who like to be tickled.  
who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants.  
who sneak Popsicles before supper.  
who erase holes in math workbooks.  
who can never find their shoes.

But we are also responsible for those  
who stare at photographers from behind broken windows.  
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers  
who never "counted potatoes."  
who are born in places where we wouldn't be caught dead.  
who never go to the circus.  
who live in an x-rated world.

We are responsible for children  
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions.  
who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish.  
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.  
who cover themselves with Band-aids and sing off key.  
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink.  
who slurp their soup.

But we are also responsible for those  
who never get dessert.  
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them.  
who watch their parents watch them suffer.  
who can't find any bread to steal.  
who don't have any rooms to clean up.  
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser.  
whose monsters are real.

We are responsible for children  
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday.  
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food.  
who like ghost stories.  
who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse the tub.  
who get visits from the tooth fairy.  
who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool.  
who squirm in church and scream in the phone.  
whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles can make us cry.

And we are responsible for those  
whose nightmares come in the daytime.  
who will eat anything.  
who have never seen a dentist.  
who aren't spoiled by anybody.  
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep.  
who live and move, but have no being.

We are responsible for children who want to be carried and for those who must.  
for those we never give up on and for those  
who don't get a second chance.  
For those we smother...and for those who will grab the hand of anybody  
kind enough to offer it.

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