

Grass-roots mothers

RICHMOND, Va.

I was hanging out with volunteers last week. Not in Philadelphia, but in Richmond. They weren't scrubbing graffiti off walls in somebody else's neighborhood, or preening over ways to help somebody's else's children.

They were watering their own grass roots, watching flowers grow in the gardens they cultivate. Specifically they were attacking the thorny issues that affected them in their own families, as well as publicly, where they want to make changes that will make an impact on their children. Private



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acts, public responsibility. No photos, please.

There wasn't a rock star, a famous actor or even a famous former president among them. These were mostly moms or grandmoms of the Virginia chapters of Concerned Women of America (CWA) who got together to talk about ways to change the culture to support their families rather than work against their interests.

They're politically incorrect, as the culture measures politics at the moment, studying ways to lobby from kitchen tables, expressing themselves with an old-fashioned vocabulary that's dotted with phrases about "action through prayer." Their idea of a joke is to say that CWA stands for "Christians with Attitude."

They don't believe that Hillary

Rodham Clinton, who makes such a point of crusading for children, has their children in mind. Caring for children in their view, means power to the parents, support for parental authority, adherence to the fundamental virtue that parents know best.

George Allen, the Republican governor of Virginia, explains how such women work. Unlike most lobbyists who want something tangible in money or tax breaks, these moms emphasize issues that bolster parental rights and rigorous academic standards of excellence in education. They know how to work the phones from their homes. (One mom confided that she was horrified when her daughter, age 7, when asked to draw a portrait of her mother, drew her with a phone hanging on her ear.)

The governor thanked them for their support for legislation he signed into law, insuring that a physician inform a parent of a minor child who seeks an abortion. They argued that a parent can uniquely provide important medical history, as well as to be there to make important emotional connections at a traumatic time. That seems to them common sense.

They're campaigning for a ban on partial-birth abortion, which they regard as infanticide. They want phonics taught in the schools because it teaches children to read. They want to reform no-fault divorce laws because such laws hurt mothers and children most.

Concerned Women of America is a national organization that claims more members than the National Organization for Women, but they're often invisible in the media. Their

politics flow from momism not feminism. It's easy to depict such women as anachronisms, escapees from the '50s, but they could be the cutting edge for the New Millennium, reestablishing and reasserting the power of motherhood that requires moral cultural back-ups. Even Madonna says she wants to be strict with her daughter; Michael Jackson vows to provide "a clean life" for his new son.

Mothers don't have a celebrity leader because motherhood is not a route to fame. All the volunteer work that mothers do — whether accompanying a child on a field trip, acting as class mom, or even putting pressure on City Hall to put high academic standards back in the public schools, fades into the landscape of glamorless tasks, the stuff of parental insignificance, a mere segment in the ordinary chain of what's expected.

Most mothers, whether they work at home or at an office, are too tired to join in the flashier business of washing a wall of graffiti, building a habitat for humanity, or even participating in a volunteer summit. They're doing the grunt work of motherhood. At the Philadelphia summit you could see Oprah, Tara Holland (Miss America), and Brooke Shields drawing celebrity attention for the work of the volunteer. Good for them. But they weren't worrying where their children were, or who the nanny was who was minding them. America should remember that on Mother's Day.

Suzanne Fields, a columnist for The Washington Times, is nationally syndicated. Her column appears here Monday and Thursday.