

## From the Guest Editor

Nobody on Long Island will deny that 2003 has been a challenging, harsh winter. It has been one of the coldest winters in history (I thought that we were suffering from global warming) and we've had more snow than the past few winters combined. It has been a season to curl up on the couch on Saturday mornings, light a fire in the fireplace, drink hot chocolate and be thankful that you are indoors, waiting and hoping that the temperature will rise above freezing.

But, members of The Wilderness Program at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center are not fazed by snow and single digit temperatures. "Saturday" means hiking

to our intrepid Wilderness Group. When the temperature is 8 degrees, it means wearing two pairs of socks, gloves, hat, scarf and an extra layer or more. Pack a lunch, meet at 9:00 AM, and head for the trails to spend the day hiking. Do we feel the cold? Well, maybe for the first five minutes. And sometimes group members notice an icicle or two in the leader's moustache and beard. But, once we attain a rhythm, we hike and converse and joke in comfort, feeling warm and relaxed, even though the temperatures remain in the teens.

Winter hiking is admittedly more challenging than sauntering in the spring, summer or autumn, but if you prepare properly, with the

### Wild Ponies



*Wild ponies of Assateague,  
velvet coats of cream and rust,  
at once, vicious and magical,  
you kick and stampede,  
run in a herd – impulsive power.*

*Stand close together, necks entwined,  
poised in a graceful trio,  
saunter through marsh grass and  
bayberry bush.  
Appear out of the mist  
on top of sand dunes.*

*Single file, like majestic kings,  
you walk along the shore  
where wave meets sand.  
Humans pause and freeze  
to watch the royal procession.*

*Circle round the unpredictable,  
wild and free,  
holding breath,  
wishing to stroke the coarse pony hair,  
lay cheeks on those flanks,  
sniff the wild smells – sand, grass and salt.*

*Let the wind whip our hair into frenzy,  
run naked down the beach,  
plunge into the briny ocean,  
yet, we stand as statues.*

*Laurie Engel Kaufstein*

### From the Editor...

It is with much pleasure and gratitude that I introduce the guest editor for this special issue of *HUH?!?*, dedicated to group work in the wilderness. Bruce Kaufstein, - accomplished social worker, clinician, and outdoorsman - has integrated his varied experiences and expertise into a truly remarkable group service for at-risk young people. The stories and reflections in this collection offer an insider's view of group work in the wild.

This special issue of the *HUH?!?* newsletter is dedicated, with fondness, to the memory of Laurie Engel Kaufstein, whose kind and open spirit is captured through her poem *Wild Ponies*, that graces these pages.

*Andy Malekoff, Editor*

appropriate clothing, food, mental attitude and group support, the experience can be exhilarating and very satisfying. The air is fresh and crisp. Snow-covered trails reveal tracks

made by rabbits, deer, skunk and other animals. It's fascinating to gather around some fresh tracks in the snow and try to figure out what animal

» » Continued on Page 2.

» » *Continued from Page 1.* made them. And, it's pretty remarkable to realize that you've been outdoors, hiking for two to three hours in such freezing temperatures, with snow all around and you haven't felt cold at all. (Nobody will believe it, but it's true!) When we hike at Caumsett State Park, on Long Island (the trails at Harriman State Park were too precarious in January and February), we always visit the outdoor aviary at the Environmental Center, where we say "Hello" to Henri and Henrietta, two injured bald eagles and some peregrine falcons, red-tailed hawks, screech owls and a large, cool-looking barred owl that are cared for at the Environmental Center as their injuries prevent them from surviving in the wild. They have become our friends and we enjoy spending time with them at the conclusion of each hike.

The Wilderness Program has begun its 6<sup>th</sup> season in 2003. We began with a small group of at-risk, older adolescents, hiking once a month. The program now schedules activities for 2 groups of adolescents (11-14 yrs. old and 15-19 yrs. old), each group with 16 members, hiking every two weeks. Funding to help support our second wilderness group came from a generous one-year grant from the van Ameringen Foundation. Funding for the older group is provided by the Nassau County Department of Mental

Health. The Wilderness Program has scheduled 36 Saturday hikes for 2003, so each group plans and prepares to hike almost every other weekend.

The positive impact that this program has on its members is a "no-brainer". What could be healthier for body and mind, spending Saturdays in your room in front of the TV or hiking outdoors with a group of peers? How does it feel, physically and emotionally, to successfully hike up a trail to a mountain peak that you never believed you could reach? So often, new members feel pain and fatigue during their first hike as they use muscles that are not generally challenged. During the first hour of the first hike, new members almost always take me aside and say, "I can't do this. I can't go on. Can we go back? I have a headache. I have a stomach ache. I need to go to the bathroom. I want to lie down. My legs hurt. I'm never going to do this again!" But, with the support of the group, new members make it through that first hike. They succeed at the second and third hikes and feel stronger, healthier and more confident as they successfully meet the challenges of new trails, new mountains, inclement weather and working together in a group. At the end of the year, they beam with pride and accomplishment, realizing that they are active group members hiking up to six

miles 18 times a year. Not many adolescents or adults can make such a boast.

How do we know that the program is successful? The members tell us in their words and writings. Their parents tell us. Their therapists tell us. Their teachers tell us. A few weeks ago, Bruce Kaufstein, Coordinator of The Wilderness Program discussed the program with the faculty from a school-based mental health program for students with emotional disturbances. Following the presentation, Bruce received a phone call from a representative of the teachers. She requested 45 applications for their students. It is clear that The Wilderness Program at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center has earned a reputation for providing a unique, successful and valued professional service to at-risk adolescents.

*Bruce Kaufstein, ACSW, is Wilderness Program and Clinic Coordinator at NSC&FGC. He completed Outward Bound programs in Minnesota and Maine and has planned and led wilderness adventures for youth and adults for over 25 years. He has trained social workers, teachers, environmentalists, nurses, and doctors in wilderness skills and group dynamics. He taught an undergraduate course, "Introduction to the Wilderness," at Queens College and is cited in the New Book of Knowledge for revising the section entitled "Camping."*



☞ For further information about wilderness groups please contact Bruce Kaufstein at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215 or call (516) 626-1971 Ext. 316.

### To Our Readers...

Due to growing printing and postage costs, beginning with Volume 9 of *HUH?!?*, there will be two issues per year instead of four. When the newsletter started it was only two pages. Soon it grew to four pages. In recent years we have published a number of special issues, such as the 9/11 anniversary issue. Those special issues were often eight pages long.

Please be assured that the newsletter will continue to be of substantial quality despite the fewer number of issues per year.

If you have been subscribing, please continue - if you have received complimentary copies, please subscribe to help us defray costs and keep *HUH?!?* going. Your subscription is a way of giving voice to your support for quality group work for children and youth.

Andrew Malekoff, Editor

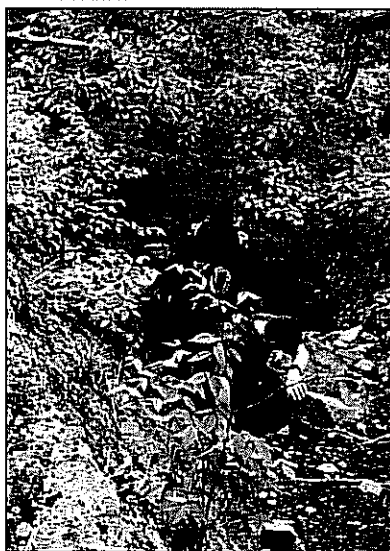
# Hiking to Hell and Back

Having written about the challenges that winter poses to members of the wilderness program (see "From the Guest Editor" in this issue) I'll now spotlight another season - spring. Our groups are happy to welcome warmer weather and trails of earth and rock that are not concealed by slick, slippery ice and snow. The obstacles of winter hiking are gone and now, as with every season, we face new challenges. The weather has been perfect, sunny and mild, and the trees are budding with leaves. Our groups are confident and animated, conversing and joking around as they enter the woods, quite a different picture from the tentative, serious, isolated, beginnings of our winter hikes on snowy trails in freezing temperature.

## Bugging Out

But, twenty minutes on the trail and the demeanor of the group changes. Talking ceases and the group hikes in single file rather than in the customary social clusters. Group members are active and animated but not in response to each other. Everyone is busy protecting their faces from bugs. Gnats buzz around our faces landing in our eyes, ears and nostrils. Everyone swallows at least a few bugs. We are a group with a mission and focus — swatting away pesky insects. Everyone complains (except for

yours truly, the fearless leader). We stop for water and break off branches from trees to use as bug swatters. A few members wrap their shirts over their heads. It's not the best of times. Especially for Alan



who has a major meltdown.

Alan, age 13, is a student at a school for children with serious emotional disturbances. He takes medication for hyperactivity, impulsivity and anxiety. Alan requires persistent attention from the wilderness staff. He needs structure on the van rides to and from the hike, and regular coaching on the trail itself to address his provocative social interactions with group members. He chatters compulsively, often bragging. Despite his annoying behavior and the fact that he is overweight and out of shape, Alan hikes well. He attends all hikes and values the physical challenge and group participation.

Amid the swirl of

gnats Alan loses it. He screams, curses, and flails his arms. He cries and sobs real tears. He stops hiking. Alan sits down and refuses to go on. Group members and staff offer support that he rejects. Out of frustration he exclaims, "I'm sick, I'm having an allergy attack. Gnats are biting my eyeballs!" Then he demands, "Call my mother and have her drive and pick me up!" Alan defies all directives and starts walking back to the parking lot where the van is parked.

After a half hour of individual attention from Jim, a staff member, that involves unequivocal directives tempered with support and encouragement and the loaning of Jim's brimmed hat, Alan finally does an about-face to resume hiking in the same direction as the group. When he caught up with the group, Alan was almost his usual "loveable" self. By lunchtime, he was completely back to normal.

## Finding Strengths

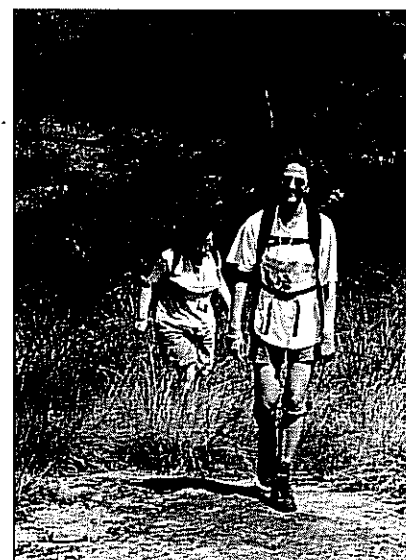
Alan was a kid that I was warned about before he had applied to our Wilderness Program. A teacher and a social worker from his school warned that Alan regressed "at the drop of a hat." I was advised that he threw tantrums that included throwing himself on the floor like a 3 year old. But, we stuck by Alan and he persevered. He

hiked on and found a way, with support from the group, to complete the hike in spite of the bugs and his emotional terror. At the end of the day, he had succeeded and was praised by everyone in the group for pushing past what he considered to be his emotional and physical limits.

## Preparing for Success

A wilderness program needs to be designed and structured to ensure success, especially for adolescents with severe emotional disturbances who have experienced nothing but failure throughout their lives. Many have short attention spans, poor impulse control, learning disabilities, poor social skills, and medication "cocktail" regimens that change every few months. Often they have been criticized, rejected, and humiliated by their peers. They don't belong to teams or social clubs or

» » *Continued on Page 4.*



» » *Continued from Page 3.* other groups. They struggle at school, even if they are very smart and they usually have exhausted the patience of their parents.

Clearly, a great deal of planning and preparation must go into the development of a wilderness program for adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. Hikes must be selected and planned that will allow for completion and success for



the weakest group member. Our kids have suffered enough failure and rejection in their daily lives. We want them to finish the day's hike. It doesn't matter how they do it. They can hike at their own pace and as slow as they want. At times obese and out of shape adolescents join our groups and complain and promise that they'll never be back. But the challenge is designed to be within their physical capacity, they always complete the hike. Consequently, an experience that may have been painful and

frustrating can then be reframed a success. Muscle aches and pains subside after a few days and most members return for the next hike.

### Meeting Challenges Beyond Four Walls

Group wilderness travel (hiking, canoeing, back packing) is always challenging. The challenge may be emotional and interpersonal for members who struggle to master social skills. It may be physical for members who are not conditioned for the task. It may be emotional for those who are struggling with depression or other symptoms of mental disturbance. The wilderness setting can prove soothing and meditative or harsh. It is spacious and accommodating for those who struggle with confinement in offices or classrooms.

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus said: "Nothing is permanent but change" and this certainly holds true for wilderness travel. Each hike is unique. Even if you walk the same trail each week the terrain, environment, individual and group are never the same. A fallen tree; the water level of a stream; the breeze of autumn; stopping to pick berries; the sounds of birds; the sighting of a deer; all contribute to the unique quality of the day.

The outdoor setting allows for an ebb and flow of the group that

cannot be matched by a group within four walls. When the terrain becomes difficult, group members generally withdraw into themselves to negotiate the physical and emotional demands. If the trail is wide or adjacent to a field, group members are not restricted to hike in a single file. They can spread out on the trail and cross a snow covered field, all heading to the same destination, each focusing on their unique apprehension and anxiety about the cold snow and ice, fears of injury or failure, or worries about how they fit into the group and how they fit into the world. And after they reach the apex of a hill or when the trail flattens, they relax and hike in clusters of twos and threes, horsing around, socializing and having fun. After all they earned it!

Just ask Alan.

*Bruce Kaufstein, ACSW*

## Subscribe to HUH?!?

HUH?!? was born out of a small group experience. It is a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups. It is a constant reminder to professionals and lay youth leaders that you are not alone and that we can contribute to the building of a culture of competent group work professionals and parents.

Send your check for \$10 payable to NSC&FGC; LIIGWC&Y; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.

**Subscribe today and support group work with children and youth!**

## The Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth

### ★ MISSION STATEMENT ★

The Mission of the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth is: To promote and enhance effective group work practice with children and youth through advocacy, education, and collegial support. HUH?!? is the Institute's newsletter dedicated to providing information, inspiration, and support for anyone working with young people in group settings.

**Chairpersons:** Joanne-Ditchik-Stutz; Cynthia Scott  
**Steering Committee:** Jean L. Bacon, Stacey Burke, Roseline Felix, Toni Kolb, Stacey Levin, Maureen O'Connor, Andrew Peters, and Aimee Reifer.

**Project Coordinator:** Andrew Malekoff

## When the Camera Connects, the Group Comes Into Focus

It's Saturday morning with sunshine, a bit of wind and 12 degrees. After all it's time for the Wilderness Group to venture out into Caumsett State Park for its weekly Saturday hike. I prepared myself to have an open mind and a closed winter jacket, along with hat, turtle neck, gloves and backpack containing lunch, water, clothing



accessories and my camera.

The van doors open and releases its occupants. Some are more enthusiastic than others. I'm warmly welcomed and introduced for the first time to the group by the staff. Off we go. It's my first hike as a volunteer with the Wilderness Group.

By nature and as a photographer, I'm first and foremost an observer. I try to ease myself into a group setting. After all, the group is as unfamiliar to

me as I am to them. Will I be able to contribute?, I wonder. In addition to offering support, encouragement and good company to the group, perhaps the camera can add something unique to the hike.

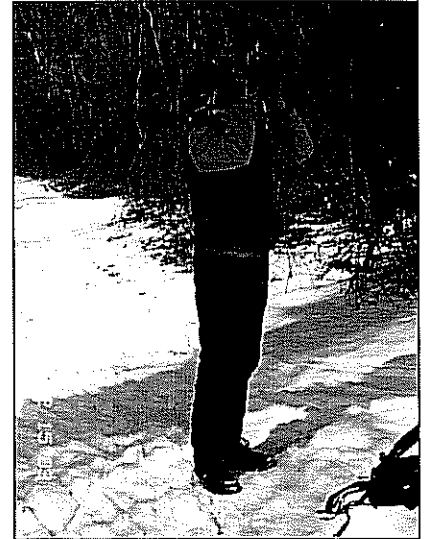
A camera can be an effective ice-breaker. Everyone is somewhat familiar with photography. It offers a chance for a common bond and involvement in the group, no matter if in front of the lens or behind it. And for me, a volunteer and new to the group, it is a way to communicate without forcing the issue.

My camera piques the curiosity of some members, who approach and indicate a desire to learn about photography. I let them examine the camera. They look through it to see what I'm doing. Usually they ask, "Can I try?" And they do. They like to fiddle with the zoom lens and describe what they want to photograph. They take some shots. Many times they want to take my picture and do so. In time, they might develop the needed patience to experience the camera as an instrument of artistic exploration and expression. Perhaps they will learn that in photography, when using a camera, another world can exist, a different

perspective that is yours to share with others or to occupy your own mind. It offers a chance to show your unique perspective, to capture and express what you visualize or feel. The camera can stimulate the mind, which in turn can lead to open conversation about a wide range of subjects not limited to the natural surroundings of the hike. In other words, the camera connects.

As a photographer, I generally hike at a very slow pace. This makes it natural for me to hike at the tail end of the group along with the group members who are designated "sweep". Their role is to insure that no group member ever falls behind them during the hike. They are equipped with whistles and can signal the rest of the group to stop and wait, if they lose sight of the hikers ahead of them. This is a very critical role, but the hikers who volunteer for "sweep" probably don't appreciate the importance of their role.

"Sweep" hikers are often group members who are out of



shape and who have difficulty keeping up with some of the more athletic lead hikers. At water breaks they are always catching up and arriving at the rest stop, only to witness the rest of the group taking off once again. I have learned that hikers who often volunteer for "sweep" are recruited to lead after a few hikes. Anyway, as a photographer, I commune with the "sweep" hikers, and they have shown a great deal of interest in my camera and photography. Perhaps, assuming an identity as a photographer

» » Continued on Page 6.



» » *Continued from Page 5.*  
is a step up from being identified as "sweep".

Early on, many of the group shied away from the lens. Some of them are now hams. The group as subjects of photography seem to fall into three types: the show-off, the unwilling, and the willing. The show-off is eager to be "the" subject even in a group setting. I wonder if they are seeking attention to not only "look at me" but to "notice me". The unwilling subjects are similar in that by shunning the camera, especially in such dramatic ways, they are grabbing attention as well. The willing subjects seem to range from "don't rock the boat" to those who embrace the idea of memorializing the group photographically. As time goes on, the latter reflects the increasing majority of the group. As time passes and they meet the challenges of the wilderness together, the hikers "groupness" is more easily and naturally captured by the camera. In a sense, the group comes into focus.

*John Christensen, is a nature photographer and wilderness program volunteer for NSC&FGC*

## Moving ?



We don't want you to miss even one issue. If you are moving, please send your old and new address to: HUH?!?; NSC&FGC; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.

## 📖 Of Note 📖

### A Uncorrected Advance Proof Book Excerpt from Author and Former *U.S. World and News Report* Education Reporter David Marcus

“The first thing anyone arriving at base camp noticed was the smell. It was an overpowering odor of teenagers who had been sweating for days, mixed with the acrid tang of shirts and pants that had been next to campfires day after day, mixed with the stench of unwashed socks. On Sundays, the kids went to a river to wash off, first the girls and then the boys, but the water was cold and no one really got clean.

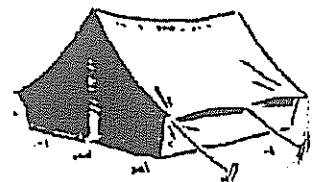
The second thing was the eerie quiet. Marc couldn't get over the quiet. He missed the sounds of summer in the city – people shouting out windows, buses and gypsy cabs whooshing up the streets, even the alarms whining. Marc missed his little house in Queens.

In the woods, he could hear a single mosquito from three feet away. At night, he heard coyotes, or something that sounded like coyotes, anyway. The only noise came from the counselors' walkie-talkies, which occasionally crackled with veiled comments from supervisors on campus. The kids at base camp tried to decipher the messages to find out if a new student was coming out. Most of the chatter, though, was about logistics: whether broccoli was running short or rice needed to be restocked.

The third thing was the deprivation. There was no electricity, no music, no magazines, no toilet. There weren't even chairs for the kids, who had to eat and do writing assignments while sitting on the ground. When it rained, everyone crowded under tarps. The counselors explained that base camp was meant to remove the distractions from life, as well as the comforts – cell phones, pagers, credit cards, radios, watches, midnight snacks. That way, the kids could focus on their emotions. Marc found that dumb. His fingers kept groping for the remote control or for the console of his PlayStation II; instead there was nothing but dirt and leaves.”

↳ This is an advanced proof excerpt from David Marcus', as yet untitled and soon to be published book on his experience in a therapeutic boarding school for teens in Massachusetts. According to Marcus, a former education reporter for the *US News and World Report*, "I wanted to write about kids who'd already gotten into a jam and who, along with their parents, were getting help. I wanted a broad sample, from working class kids to teens who seemed to have it all."

To be published in Spring 2004 by Houghton Mifflin, this book is intended for a general audience.



## Three Reflections on the Trail by Myriam Sullivan, CSW; Wilderness and Intensive Support Program social worker for NSC&FGC

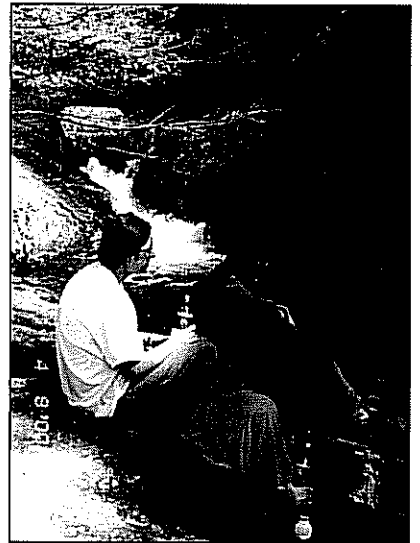


### "I can't do this."

I remember one hike when Regina, 16, was trying to climb up a hill with great difficulty. She became anxious and started to hyperventilate as she usually does when she feels stressed. She stated "I can't do this", "I'm never coming back", "I want to go back to the van!". Some group members offered support and quickly realized that she needed her own space. She practiced a breathing and visualization exercise that she learned until she was ready to try again. She made it up the hill. Once we stopped for lunch, Regina sat with the other kids, speaking about the experience with a sense of pride and accomplishment. As time has passed, it has helped Regina to reduce her anxiety when she is reminded of coping skills that she used successfully in a difficult situation. It also reminds her that she can gain mastery and control over her anxiety. This therapeutic tool of group wilderness hikes is priceless. Under normal circumstances Regina would have avoided her fear and given up, continuing a pattern of unhealthy coping. By generating a feeling of calmness and control, with group support, she overcame a very real and fearful experience. She is now able to utilize this understanding to overcome daily fears on the path to meeting her life goals.

### "Do you think we are safe here?"

I vividly recall one day during a water break when we were sitting on the rocks overlooking a stream that flows underneath a small wooden bridge. The only sound you could hear were the birds and the water as it flowed under the bridge. It was several weeks following September 11, 2001. The conversation began with one teenager asking "Do you think we are safe here?" For a moment everyone continued sitting quietly, pondering the question. Joey, 15, responded, "It's the only place I feel safe." Then Chris, 14, said, "I don't feel safe anywhere." The conversation continued as group members and leaders shared their feelings and fears and offered each other support that was very much needed for all of us. The wilderness provides a safe place to explore feelings, especially in the aftermath of traumatic events. There is something about the tranquility and harmony of nature that reverberates for group members on the wilderness trail.



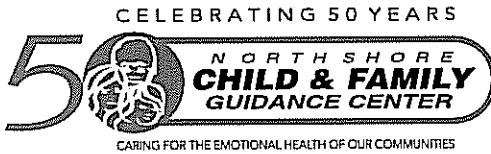
### "Daddy, do you remember?"

The Wilderness Program not only helps me professionally but has brought back some fond personal memories. When I was a little girl, my dad was full of strength and health. He would wake me up very early on weekend mornings to go to the beach or take a walk around the lake. It didn't matter if it was 10 below, raining or a blizzard! All I could remember was feeling that this is nuts. How could anyone enjoy anything in this weather? I remember thinking I should be home in bed or watching television! My dad would point out a pretty flower that somehow survived the winter or make me sit quietly and listen to leaves whistle in the wind. On rainy days now, I

often wonder how many of our hikers are saying the same thing. In fact, they often tell us they won't be back. Most of them do come back though. It reminds me that life has balance, that amidst the stress and worry of everyday life, nature has a way of reconnecting you to a calm, wonderful place within yourself. When I am overlooking a waterfall or sitting quietly on a rock at the lake I remember how special that time was for me as a little girl. My father is no longer able to take trips like that, so I visit and tell him about my days in the rain and the flowers or berries that have made it through the winter. He enjoys my stories immensely. Nature truly is a gift to be shared with others. I am sure that when our members look back they will be able to share similar stories and re-connect with the peacefulness and tranquility of the wilderness.

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## Dedication ...

## In Memoriam

This special Wilderness Issue of *HUH?!* has been dedicated in memory of the life and work of Laurie Engel Kaufstein, ACSW, who was a social worker and staff member of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center and a skilled group worker. Laurie was the family recruiter of Turnabout, the agency's foster care treatment program that trains and works with families caring for children with serious emotional problems. Laurie's professionalism along with her warmth, generosity, and loving smile had a profound impact on her clients and colleagues who honored her recently at a memorial gathering.

Laurie was the wife and partner of Bruce Kaufstein, NSC&FGC's Wilderness Program Coordinator, for 25 years and the dedicated and loving mother of their two sons, David and Jonathan. She was a certified Yoga instructor, graduate of Boston University and the University of Utah School of Social Work. Laurie was a gifted writer and poet. "She will be loved and remembered ... forever."

*HUH?!* is the quarterly newsletter of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth, a program of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Hgts., NY 11577-2215; Phone: (516) 626-1971 •• Fax: 626-8043. Executive Director/CEO: Marion S. Lovine, ACSW; Associate Director/NSC&FGC and Newsletter Editor: Andrew Malekoff, ACSW, CASAC. Newsletter Design and Layout: Jane E. Meckwood-Yazdpour, BS. Participating Agencies: Coalition on Child Abuse & Neglect, Garden City; Youth Directions and Alternatives, E.Northport; Herricks School District, Albertson; Sanctuary Project, Huntington; Plainedge School District; L.I.Crisis Center, Bellmore; L.I. Center for Social Therapy, Floral Park; SUNY Stony Brook; Temple Sinai of Roslyn; Huntington Youth Bureau, Huntington; South Huntington School District, South Huntington, NY. © Copyright September 1, 2003/USA.

