

CHILDHOOD STUDIES NEWS



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Our Maiden Issue

By Lara Saguisag

I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer. I am currently enjoying this respite from the hectic pace of the academic year, and in between watching reruns of *Top Chef*, puzzling over crosswords and pretending to read ahead for the upcoming school year, I found some time in my very un-busy schedule to put together this issue.

It took some tinkering with MS Word and MS Publisher, but the inaugural issue of the Childhood Studies Graduate Program has finally found its way into your inbox. This first issue may appear rough in some parts, and I take full responsibility for all its flaws (yes, the newsletter name lacks spunk). I do think this newsletter is a gem, thanks largely to the wonderful contributions of PhD students Diane Marano and Dianne Fabii. Diane M. provides us with an insightful profile about fellow student Marla Wander, while Dianne F. gives us an inspiring article about her practicum experience. This newsletter also got off the ground

Graduate Student Spotlight: Marla Wander

By Diane Marano

Marla is a member of our original class of PhD students in Childhood Studies. She is also about to begin her tenth year teaching psychology at Camden County College, and currently has two master's degrees, one in experimental psychology from Villanova University and another in educational psychology from the University of Delaware. Her undergraduate degree is from Beaver College, now Arcadia University.

Marla has always wanted to pursue her PhD, and her three daughters encouraged her to become a student once again. Nonetheless, Marla says, "My

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because of the enthusiastic support of Dr. Dan Cook, Dr. Lynne Vallone, Dr. Dan Hart, and the always generous Nyeema Watson. Dr. Cook also provided the text for some important department announcements.

I am already looking forward to working on the next issue (see page 6 to learn more about how you can help with future issues). Certainly this newsletter is not meant to be a one-time effort; the goal is to develop it into a regular venue for sharing experiences, information and opportunities, for celebrating the achievements of members of the Childhood Studies community.

In the meantime, happy reading!

foremost supporter has been my husband, Mark. Ultimately, I wouldn't be here without him as my partner." They have just celebrated their 34th wedding anniversary.

After completing her first year, Marla says the Childhood Studies Program has exceeded her expectations, introducing her to new substantive material and methodologies. Marla confronted many new viewpoints in the first weeks of the Proseminar in Childhood Studies, and she gave herself the challenge of learning how to approach her areas of interest "from a totally different

Please see *Spotlight: Marla Wander* on page 4

Comings and Goings

Dr. Daniel Hart Steps Down

On July 1, Dan Hart stepped down from his dual roles as Chair and Director of Graduate Studies to become a mere mortal and serve only as the Director of the Center for Children and Childhood Studies.

Lynne Vallone assumed duties as Chair and Dan Cook as Graduate Studies Director. It takes a lot to fill Dan Hart's shoes! Thanks, Dan, for your yeoman's work.



Farewell, Bruno!



The Department would like to extend its best wishes to Bruno Vanobbergen who returned to his beloved Belgium this June. As our first Visiting Scholar, Bruno quickly became part of the Department. By biking to and from Philly, Bruno leaves no carbon footprint but definitely a warm impression. Don't be a stranger, Bruno. You are welcome any time.

Journey for a Practicum...and So Much More

By Dianne Fabii

What was I thinking? Sitting on the tarmac in the middle of the night in Oman as the New Year approached, my mind raced with thousands of thoughts. This was the second segment of my journey to India. The first leg was an unforgettable adventure too, since I was miserably ill on the entire flight from Philadelphia to London. Thankfully I was able to stop in England and stay with friends for a couple of days to recover. Feeling only slightly better after the brief stopover, I boarded the next flight, and then another unexpected turn of events occurred. Due to the sudden serious illness of an elderly passenger, my flight from London to Chennai was detoured to this place so foreign to me. As I watched the drama of emergency personnel go through the motions of checking the ailing man, then evacuating him and his distraught family, I pondered all the events that had taken me to this place.

My interest in studying children in India had grown over time. Beginning through an acquaintance with some native clergy members who worked with the poorest of the poor in India, I decided to help them, and initiated a series of fundraising activities that brought in a lot of money

for several projects. Buildings were constructed and programs were started. Letters of thanks began to give me a great deal of satisfaction, but also a longing I didn't expect. It didn't occur to me at the time that eventually I would have an unquenchable desire to actually meet the beneficiaries of these efforts. Thus my initial exposure to this unlikely arena opened up a whole new world to me, albeit a rather frightening one at first. After all, of all the places in the world, India was the *last* one that I thought I'd ever want to visit. I had never even touched a curry! What I sensed to be the pungent smell of Indian cooking was enough to

Please see *Journey* on page 5



Dianne Fabii is a guidance counselor at DeMasi Elementary School. She is starting her second year in the program in the fall.

The Year Ahead

Important Dates and Events to Remember

Children and War

The Childhood Studies Department is sponsoring a conference on Children and War to be held on campus and at the Society Hill Sheraton, April 3-5, 2009. The full program is not yet set but will consist of leading scholars from many fields of study who will speak on topics such as child soldiers, trauma and war, historical perspectives, literary treatments of war and childhood, among others. Confirmed Keynote speakers include noted Sierra Leonean writer and former child soldier Ishmael Beah and psychologist Michael Wessells (Columbia U and Randolph-Macon



Ishmael Beah, one of the confirmed keynote speakers for the Children and War conference, is the author of A Long Way Gone, a memoir of his experience as a child soldier in Sierra Leone

College). Details will be forthcoming during the Fall. *For news on other upcoming conferences, check out the Scholarly Resources page on the Childhood Studies Department website* <http://childhood.camden.rutgers.edu/resources.htm>

New Student Orientation

Mark your calendars. The New Student Orientation will be held on Thursday, August 28 in the late afternoon-early evening. Come and welcome the next class of CS grad students. Details to follow over the summer.

Meeting to Set Up Childhood Studies Graduate Student Organization

More *Year Ahead* on page 4

Exploring Sendak's Mysteries at the Rosenbach

Last June, the Childhood Studies Department had a rumpus at the Maurice Sendak exhibit at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia. Several faculty members and graduate students (most of whom brought along young guests) trekked to the Rosenbach to view *There's a Mystery There: Sendak on Sendak*, a major retrospective of the artist-author's work. The multimedia exhibit fills four of the museum's galleries, and includes original sketches, drafts and video interviews. The exhibit will run until May 2009. For more information, visit www.rosenbach.org.

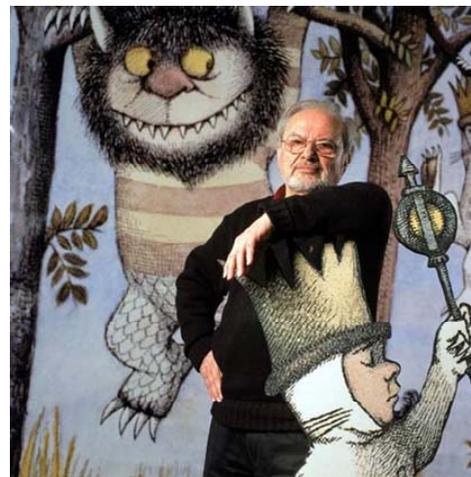


Image from Encyclopedia Britannica

“You cannot write for children. They're much too complicated. You can only write books that are of interest to them.”

~Maurice Sendak

Spotlight: Marla Wander from page 1

perspective.” Such new viewpoints excite her: “I can’t wait to talk to the other students in the class about what we have read, to discuss ideas”.

Having always viewed herself as a cognitivist, Marla has been interested in how students learn, especially with regard to memory, words and their meanings, and story comprehension. She would like to develop this focus, trying to move from theoretical inquiries to more practical outcomes, such as how to implement effective practices in the classroom. She is now particularly interested in studying how adolescents make decisions about how to use their free time. “I’m not thinking about decision making processes in the classroom per se,” explains Marla, “but about the process of decision making with regards to life choices.” With a strong background in quantitative analysis, Marla is exploring qualitative methods as well, and learning how to integrate different types of knowledge to meet the challenges she has set for herself. The formulation of a workable research question for her dissertation is among those challenges.

During Marla’s first semester at Rutgers, she was inspired by the teaching methods employed by Dr. Myra Bluebond-Langner in a course on cross-cultural perspectives on childhood. Dr. Bluebond-Langner’s work with children with cancer has also left “an indelible impression” on Marla. Marla volunteered to work with Dr. Bluebond-Langner during the spring, and she is continuing the work this summer. Her experience with Dr. Bluebond-Langer particularly inspired her to focus not just on “implementing effective learning in the classroom” but also on looking at how adolescents act and make decisions in social situations. While Marla has always felt that one’s world view influences what one studies, as well as one’s analysis and conclusions, her coursework and research have deepened her appreciation of the role played by “what anthropologists and sociologists call ‘culture’” in ethnographic and other work in childhood studies.

After completion of the program, Marla

would like to teach at the college level, implementing knowledge of ways of learning into the methodology of teaching, and continuing related research. In the meantime, Marla says she will miss the discussions in the Proseminar, and wants to find a way to maintain the exchange among all of us in the Program. She is working with Lara Saguisag and others to start a Childhood Studies student group so that all of us can better support each other as we progress through the new program, as well as continue our substantive discussions about areas of common and individual interest. As Marla points out, the interdisciplinary nature of the Program “lends itself to these meetings and exchanges” of both substantive ideas and methodologies that each of us might not have been likely to encounter individually. Last but not least, there is the social aspect of getting together: “We need to learn how to relax”, she says, “and support local business establishments such as The Victor!”

Marla Wander is starting her second year in the program this fall.



Year Ahead from page 3

New and continuing students are invited to attend a planning meeting for a Childhood Studies Graduate Student organization. The meeting will be held on the campus sometime in August. We will discuss the organization’s name and objectives, as well as brainstorm on possible activities. We may also elect or appoint officers during the meeting. Email Lara at malasa@camden.rutgers.edu for suggestions or questions.

Faculty Search

In the Fall, the Department will be conducting searches for as many as three new faculty members. Two will be sought at the junior level and one at the senior level. Graduate student involvement is needed and encouraged. There will be talks by candidates, meetings with graduate students and dinners with candidates all

Journey from page 2

send my stomach into a swirl. Nonetheless, in 2000, I made my first trip to India, and life was never again the same.

The experience of meeting and interacting with so many different people, especially children, who lived in unbelievable conditions so different from the daily life of comfort I'd known, shook me to the core. The words of Mother Teresa resonated in my soul: "You can't comfort the afflicted without afflicting the comfortable." That journey to India was the start of a whole new path for me, and I came to the realization that I had to do *more*. After recovering from the culture shock and crying for three weeks over the abject poverty I witnessed, I decided to stop crying and start doing something on my own, although I didn't quite know what that "something" would be at the time.

Fast forward to January 2008, to my fifth trip to the country I grew to love. This time the trip was for a different reason. At that point, I had completed the creation of *The Rose Foundation for Children*, my new venture to be an activist to continue fundraising efforts. My first term in the Childhood Studies program was behind me too. Fascinated by what I learned in Myra Bluebond-Langner's course, *Children in Cross Cultural Contexts*, and encouraged by Dan Hart to pursue an independent study and pre-dissertation research, I thought *Why not give a try?* Why not see what I could do to learn more about Indian children's lives, and how they are the same or different from the lives of children with whom I work every day? So I decided to immerse myself for a few days in an Indian school. Since my daily work involves children's mental and emotional health issues in school settings, I wanted to learn how these are handled in India. With IRB approval in hand, I ventured into Infant Jesus School in Coimbatore, located in the state of Tamilnadu, and spent three days interviewing children, parents and school staff. Lively conversations erupted among them all as I asked the same questions over and over again about how children express their emotions, and to whom they go for help when problems arise. Because Indian middle

"After...crying for three weeks over the abject poverty I witnessed, I decided to stop crying and start doing something on my own."

class society is changing at such a fast pace, modernity and tradition often clash, with a growing generation gap influenced by unprecedented access to Western media and technology. Parents lamented about losing some amount of control over their children. School staff actively offered their opinions on the need for more professionals and training to help children cope with a rapidly changing world. Adolescents and children were as eager to question me as I was to listen to them. They loved the opportunity to speak in English to an American. The days flew by and the audiotapes filled to capacity. Laughter punctuated the serious discussions. Numerous cups of tea were poured, and lots of photos were taken. I was given VIP treatment and told that it was an honor that I had chosen to come to this school...but the privilege was all mine.

Tired from the heat and lingering illness, but nonetheless thoroughly exhilarated, I completed the interviews, all the while wishing that I could have had more time with everyone. My final day at the school was capped with an assembly during which children performed cultural dances for me. As I exited the school grounds, cheers and applause broke out. I looked around wondering what had happened, only to realize that the students were giving me a hearty goodbye. They lined up and surrounded the car that



Dianne with the students and staff of Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

What's Next?: The Second Issue and Beyond

(Or, Lara's Humble Suggestions)

Although I had fun figuring out how to put together a newsletter, this project can only get better if it becomes a community effort. I hope it did not seem like I kept this first issue to myself, and I look forward to working with other students to produce better issues in the future.

The next issue is set for release on October 1. Deadline for contributions is September 15.

Volunteers are always welcome, whether to help on a regular basis or just on a particular issue. You can help by writing or soliciting articles, compiling information for any of the newsletter's sections (see below), copyediting and laying out text and images.

Proposed Newsletter Sections. We can develop regular sections for the newsletter, such as:

Student, Faculty and Staff News: A section where we can update one another on recent personal and career highlights.

Graduate Student Profile: Get to know a fellow student better through this profile section.

Calls for Papers/Grant Deadlines: Information on upcoming conferences to attend and send proposals to, as well as information on research and travel grants.

Mark Your Calendar: Dates of talks, readings and other events.

Contributions. Articles (and images) are welcome! Tell us about your expectations, goals and experiences as a member of the Rutgers Childhood Studies community. Although it is best to keep articles to 250 words or less, we will consider publishing slightly longer articles,

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What's in a Name? "Childhood Studies News" lacks panache, don't you think? Send me suggestions for the newsletter name at malasa@camden.rutgers.edu. Hopefully we can gather enough suggestions and vote on a new name in time for the next issue.

Email Attachment, with Option to Print. The quickest and most affordable way to disseminate this newsletter is to email it as an MS Word attachment. You can either read it online or print it out on your own. We will set up a mailing list and also post the newsletter on the Graduate Student page on Sakai. In mid-August, you will receive a message requesting the email address you prefer to use to receive the newsletter.

