

PROJECT UPDATE

VOLUME 8 OCTOBER 1991

Cumming Is Going

After three years, ninety-five plays, and countless maudlin good-bye ceremonies, Marsue is stepping down from the Executive Directorship of the Project. Peter MacNicol, her husband, has taken a job on a new TV series, "Love Child" and so the two are off to the west coast, where Marsue expects she will loll around the cement pond and read trashy novels. Little does she know that Leigh Curran has arranged for fifty thin children with long faces to greet them at the airport chanting "Why can't we be in a play?" For further developments, watch this newsletter.

Here's some farewell advice from the kids:

"Try to be in a movie with Peter, make some money, buy a limo, get a butler, a maid, and a castle, and pick me and my aunt and all my friends up and let us live there." Darthula Harvey, Age 10

"I'll tell you tomorrow." Andre Parks, Age 8*

"There's a lot of hurricaines...no -- earthquakes. Don't cook any food." Nyita Hanley, Age 8

* The following day Mr. Parks could not be reached for comment.

Ochs Is Okayed

Carol Ochs got okayed by the Board of The 52nd Street Project and her name has recently been hoisted up atop the Project stationary. Here are some of the reasons why she got the nod:

- 1 • Has lots of hair
- 2 • Has a really cool apartment
- 3 • Is a good eater
- 4 • Knows all kinds of stuff
- 5 • Is not too tall
- 6 • Has excellent driving record
- 7 • Plays poker
- 8 • Once smoked a cigar
- 9 • Can add and subtract in her head
- 10 • Thinks I'm funny

- Willie Reale



• • •
In with the new and
out with Marsue
• • •

See Ya!

On September 14th, I attended the screening of a film Willie and I did together during the summer of 1983 featuring a girl named Elaine Smith, and about 15 of the Project's original kids. Although, I had attended the very first production, this was my first significant experience with The 52nd Street Project. Screening it eight years later for an audience of family and friends, including seven of the kids who appeared in the movie, brought the perfect kind of closure to my past three years as Executive Director. Seeing those kids, who are now young adults, brought back not only memories, but all of the reasons why I was drawn to the Project to begin with — seven reasons to be exact. Their names are Angelica, Cara, Deneka, Domingo, Evelyn, George and Robert. The following night at my official good-bye party, I was thrilled to see eleven more of these reasons — Annette, Fran-Marie, Joanne, Jose, Karen, LaTanya, Milard, Nyita, Paula, Richard, and Shirley. And when I looked past their faces to the other fifty or so people that were there, I realized we were all involved in this Project for the same reasons. And these reasons are so compelling they have not only hooked those of us who work most closely with the kids, but also have drawn in the Project's funders, board, backstage volunteers, individual supporters, and audience members. I think if you ask any one of these people why they volunteer, give, or simply come, the answer would be the same — the kids. And so given my ten years with the Project, and the perspective it has afforded me, I would point to this one thing as the secret to its longevity and its success. As anyone who has been involved in a relationship with one or twenty kids knows, this kind of shared purpose is crucial. Personally, it is why co-workers have become friends and funders allies. It is why when I looked out at everyone at the party I knew that it had been a rare privilege to be involved in something that could inspire this kind of single-minded devotion. It is also why I know I am leaving the Project in good hands. Both Carol and Jenny came to the Project as audience members, and each of them has followed her heart to become increasingly involved. As time has passed, they have shown an eagerness to do anything and everything -- a sure sign that they are here for the right reasons. I have often said you don't really know the Project until you

(Continued on Page 4)

One-On-Ones: 20 kids linked by Food Chain

And the food played on, and on, and on. This summer marked the sixth season of One-On-Ones. In July, Annette Myrie, Victor Rojas, Mary Yamvoukakis, Eli and Jill Barbosa, Lori Quinones, Luis Santoni, Ronnie Noonan, Yolanda and Evelyn Maldonado, and junior counselor Fran-Marie Fargardo went to Block Island with ten adults. The kids stayed with host families there, who were all very generous and showed the kids a great time on the island. During the day, we all worked on the plays at the home of Dr. Christina Biaggi, learning lines between games of pool, walks on the beach, and, of course, great meals. Highlights of the visit include a plane ride by lighting designer/ace pilot Greg MacPherson, a boat ride ala Byam Stevens Senior and Junior, and a bon-fire on the beach complete with ghost stories and s'mores. The Block Island plays were an event in themselves, with such classic theatrical moments as Victor singing "It's a Munching, Munching World," Jeff Williams in fruit-drag as Georgia Peach, Mary Yamvoukakis as "a child from Manhattan who don't know nuttin' from au gratin," and Willie as a devoured piece of ziti, with one of the most unusual song intros ever, asking Jill Barbosa "Just what is an epiglottis?"

The Cape Cod One-On-Ones in August took another group of ten kids away; any activities from this trip, however, were completely upstaged by Bob -- Hurricane Bob, that is. Darthula Harvey, Kristen Bess, Joanne Ramirez, Eric Santoni, Tina Yamvoukakis, Samona Squire, Wendell Borrero, Andre Parks, Nyita Hanley, Natasha Soto and her



• • •
Bob Survivors
trying not to
fall down
• • •

photo:
Joanne Ramirez

brother Jose as junior counselor, along with fifteen adults, were in Wareham, Mass but fourteen hours when this doozy of a storm took its toll. The storm came right into our area, and we consider ourselves lucky because the house we stayed in was virtually unharmed, and being right on the bay we had a terrific view of the storm. We'd all like to thank Dr. Peter and Helen Randolph and their family publicly for graciously letting us into their home to witness a natural disaster, and we'd like to add that we'd be delighted to come to their home in Hawaii located on the active volcano, Mauna Kea. Rookie Project kid Andre Parks, 8, made his point when he said that although he really liked Hurricane Bob, "when we went outside [in the storm], I almost fell down -- you're lucky you're not me."

Surviving Hurricane Bob was no easy feat. Thus, extra-big kudos should go to all the kids and adults who did not fall down. In particular, the true unsung heroes of the trip, who fed us in glorious gustatorial fashion in times of no refrigeration or water and on one gas stove -- Carol Ochs and Karin Barry. Somehow, in spite of five days without electricity or water, everyone managed to come out of the experience with a great play and some fun to boot. We did go miniature golfing, and as a reward for our patience The Cape Cod Potato Chip Co. sent us 160 bags of chips and popcorn.

Curiously enough, the kids' favorite activities was the daily trip to the local high school shower -- a miracle by any standard.

All nine performances of The Food Chain were more or less sold out at The Ensemble Studio Theatre, and thanks to superb volunteer crews for both shows, had dynamic productions.

Replay it, Again

On August 15th, four plays written by kids in the Replay class from last February were produced with an "all-kid" company. That is, not only were the plays written by kids, but kids also directed, acted, designed, and worked backstage for this production, called "Triple Threat." This was a Project first, and definitely not a last. The one-time performance for an invited audience of family and Project friends was a delight from the first moment, when Dawn Jackson did a hilarious take-off on Willie's curtain speech, through each of the plays by Luis Santoni, Victor Rojas, Kulondi Frier and Eli Barbosa. The directors were Dawn, Shirley Rumiak, Fran-Marie Fargardo and Joanne Ramirez, and they each were helped by four adult mentors. Michaela Murphy and Larry Nathanson were the artistic directors who supervised the event deftly and gracefully.

Daniel took eight kids in a class for a week to do re-writes on their plays, and on November 5th plays by Danny Noonan, Lori Quinones, Samona Squire, Jamar Williams and Wendell Borrero will be produced at E.S.T. Larry, Michaela and Daniel have also begun a directing workshop for the five directors who will be working in November, and they report that there is great enthusiasm all around for the next show.

Playback:

"Sometime Later" is Sometime Soon

All of you regular *PU* readers may recall that a year ago the first two adult-kid Playback teams matched up to collaborate on one-act plays went away. On September 27th, the last final teams went to Fran McDormand's house upstate: Willie Reale with novice writer Jose Soto, and Jim McDaniel and Glen Jenkins. The concept behind Playback is to pair a veteran Project kid with an adult who spend the weekend together collaborating on a play, the first act of which the kid writes and the adult then writes a second play with the same character, which, according to the theme, takes place sometime later, be it 5 minutes or 50 years. All nine "Sometime Later..." plays will be performed at the Playwrights Horizons Studio Theatre in two separate evenings. Evening A, with plays by Glen & Jim, Shamaine Gibson & Daniel, Danielle Ferrin & Jan Buckaloo, Karen Myrie & Roma Maffia, and LaTanya Godfrey & Carl Capotorto, will be performed Tuesday, October 15th to Friday, October 20th at 7:30 p.m. Evening B's plays are written by Jessica Soto & Leigh Curran, Jose & Willie, Jessica Cordero & Sybil Rosen, and Paula Myrie and Laura Maria Censabella. Performances are on Saturday and Sunday, October 19th and 20th, at 3:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. For reservations call 212 459-4107, and call soon because "Sometime Later..." should sell out sometime soon.

We're Just Gaga About Galas

This summer we not only threw a tenth anniversary gala in June, but two, count 'em, two more galas in August and September.

On August 12th, film producer and Project Board Member Ben Barenholtz offered us the premier screening of "Barton Fink," the movie that scored the Palm d'Or in Cannes, in order to grease our palms with a little d'or. Directed by Project pal Joel Coen, and starring Project pal John Turturro, we couldn't have dreamed of a more ideal benefit. Lots of people came and we raised nearly \$6,000. And if anyone was feeling a little discombobulated after the movie, they were immediately set straight by the scrumptious Flyer chocolate bars donated by chocolate-caramel maven John Paris.

No sooner had we deposited the last checks from that gala did Project actress and pal Lili Taylor call to offer a screening of her new movie, "Dogfight" to benefit The 52nd Street Project offshoot in Los Angeles. As if it weren't enough that this benefit was Taylor-made, producers Rich Guay and Peter Newman were very generous to offer and facilitate this benefit, and on top of all that -- they threw a party too! The entire event was tremendous fun, and we raised well over \$5,000 to get the L.A. Project on its way (more on that later).



The Project on the Tube

For all you *PU* readers who are couch potatoes, you've probably noticed the Project on TV quite a bit. CBS Sunday Morning with Charles Kuralt did a piece on The Block Island One-On-Ones with Charles Osgood as correspondent. The show aired on Sunday, August 4th on the last day of the performance, and we think they did a wonderful job at capturing the spirit of the One-On-Ones. Meanwhile, the documentary, "Three Minutes from Broadway: The Story of The 52nd Street Project" has been doing reruns on PBS.

Speaking of reruns, Project kids Alex Bess and Jose Soto have been seen rerunning this summer -- and we are waiting for them to take us out to lunch on their residuals...how about it fellas? Also Jose will be seen sometime this season on The Cosby Show playing a teenage father. Also playing a teenage father is Project adult (we think) Jeff Williams -- don't we teach you guys anything? Look for high fashion model Kulondi Frier in an Esprit commercial.

American Playhouse at PBS is interested in making a fictional program based on The 52nd Street Project. We have been talking with them, and they've asked us to be co-producers of the piece, which will enable us to have artistic control on decisions which will factor into the show. We also hope that Marsue will be the Associate Producer of the program, so we'll have further input and guarantee that someone who knows the spirit of the Project can ensure that it will be delivered on the screen. On September 24th we invited all the Project parents and artist volunteers to attend a meeting with us and our lawyer about what the process entails and to answer any questions. We had a good discussion, and as soon as we know more we will inform all interested parties -- and maybe even throw an interesting party.

LaLa Land gets Project

Leigh Curran, who's been heading up The 52nd Street Project/West, has reported lots of good news. First of all, they have a new name: The Virginia Avenue Project. We like that. She also reports that on October 3rd she's anticipating the approval of the Board of the Police Activities League in Santa Monica to sponsor the Project, and eventually house it in new facilities which are currently under construction. She expects to start giving the kids acting classes in January, and is planning the first Los Angeles One-On-Ones for April. The Thatcher School in Ojai (an orange-growing community in a valley) has offered to host the One-On-Ones there, and they will be performed at Highways, a performance space in Santa Monica. "All we need now," says Leigh, "is the money." We're very excited for Leigh, and even more excited for when things get rolling so we can organize an east-west Project exchange and we'll all stay at Marsue and Peter's palatial home -- we like that.

If you'd like to contact Leigh (or maybe send a check -- we like that), the address for The Virginia Avenue Project is 3782 Redwood Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90086, or call 213 398-3546. However, you can catch her in New York during most of October, performing with Jessica Soto in "Sometime Later..."



The Kindness of "Strangers"

Part of our 34 plays in 30 days statistic includes the Playmaking program we did with Graham-Windham. June Ballinger took on the challenge of being the artistic director of this affair. Along with Susie Willerman as Playmaking instructor, who had help from Jeff Lee and Kiki Ingenthron, June took ten kids between the ages of 12 and 17 to EST's Tannersville retreat for a weekend in August (thanks to the Curtman) where each kid wrote a play. On August 17th and 18th, "Strangers" was performed at E.S.T., with a fabulous group of actors and dramaturg/directors who were mostly newcomers to the Project (thanks for the new blood, June), not to mention a dynamite seven-member backstage crew of kids from Graham-Windham. Graham-Windham, which is a foster-care home in upstate New York, is now talking to us about initiating a year-round program with us. We think one kid from the group, Claudette, expressed the sentiments best, "I don't like writing, but I love writing plays." If anyone's interested in working with teenagers on this kind of project, contact June.



Funding News::

Primerica	\$3,000.00
Citibank	\$500.00
Joseph & Carol Reich	\$500.00
The New York Times	\$3,000.00

Thanks to everyone at these organizations for their kind support.

Tid Bits

• Playmaking started this month, with ten young new fresh faces, and some old, Project faces (old, but young, that is). Daniel has several adult mentors to help with the class, so the kids are sure to get a lot of individual attention, and will probably teach those adults a thing or two, too. The Playmakers will go away in November, each kid equipped with two adult actors and a dramaturg/director. There they will write a play which will be performed in December.

• The Project has a new place to hang its hat... Producer and Board Member Stephen Graham has graciously donated his corner office on west 42nd Street to us, so we now have a real office for our computer, and a good view of New Jersey, and a sofa for Willie to take nappies on. It's heaven. But we have by no means forgotten from whence we came, and visit the west 52nd Street office every day after school gets out so we can see all our pals and get our daily dose of bubble gum.

• 10-year old Danny Noonan and 11-year old Victor Rojas are both making short movies with guys named John -- we don't know if this has any significance but anyway... Victor just finished a 15-minute movie with John Henry Davis about a boy who finds a magic lantern. Danny is currently working on a film directed by John Raffo called "Big And Mean," also starring long-time Project actor Greg Germann (we believe Danny is playing the title role).

• *Project Update* is more and more becoming the Jessica Soto Update. In the last *PU* we printed a letter from Jessica, who spent a splendid summer in Maine at camp. Jessica is now enrolled at the Hun School of Princeton (as in 'Atilla the...') on full-scholarship. Yeah, Jessie -- take those preppies by storm!

• *Fish Update*: Sparky III and Mina, the Project goldfish, are adjusting to Project life swimmingly. So all you cynics out there -- stop sending those nasty postcards asking if they're dead yet (okay, Jessie!)

• Now that Robert de Rothschild has kindly sent kids to both the Harry Belafonte concert in the spring, and the premier of "Dogfight," we'd really like to meet him. One of the kids is quoted as saying: "Who was that masked man? I wanted to thank him."

• Producer/set designer and Board Member Heidi Landesman donated 40 tickets for Project friends, kids and families to go see "The Secret Garden." Not only does the show star Howard McGillin and Daisy Egan, who greeted everyone after the show, but it is has Project mom, Patty Yamvokakis, as an usher. You can rip our stubs any-time, Patty!

Wish List:

Custom shelves for the new office, a desk chair with lower back support, that big house in the country, printing contacts, money contacts, contact with someone who prints money, contact in sporting goods, contacts in paper, contact in contact lenses.

See Ya! - Continued from Page 1:

return from a week or a weekend away-- are locked out of the P.A.L -- have one spare child with nowhere to go -- and about ten miscellaneous pieces of clothing you have to take home with you because no one has claimed them. But Carol and Jenny have already been there. So, there is no doubt in my mind that they, teamed with Willie, the very first person to have been sucked in by these kids, will keep the Project on a steady path. As some of you may know, Peter and I came dangerously close to leaving New York three years ago, only a couple of months after I had joined the Project. Peter recently pointed out that it was now clear why we didn't go. This was the time we were meant to be a part of the Project's life and the Project was meant to be a part of ours. It has graced our lives, and given us more than we could ever return. We will not say good-bye, but simply repeat the message that was on the cake the kids gave me on my last day at work -- "See Ya." And I know we will.

-- Marsue Cumming "



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Aerial view of Marsue's
cake
• • •

Photo: Ace Pilot Greg MacPherson
Cake by Cupcake Café (yummers!)

Peter's Out

• • • •
Yeah yeah yeah we're gonna miss Marsue. We love her. She loves us. Enough already. What about Project husband Peter MacNicol? Where's *his* cake? Where's *his* party? Where's *his* front-page *PU* coverage? Where's *his* set of removable tatoos from Neal Mazzella? Oh the inequity of it all. Didn't he, after all, serve as play doctor for countless plays? Wasn't he referee for innumerable executive-level Project squabbles? Didn't he single-handedly teach Mikey Lugo the meaning of Halloween? I'm fed up.

-- WR

Project Clerk Risks Life For Benefit Mailing

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While we were braving the elements up in Wareham, David Margulies clerk/actor for The 52nd Street Project was working on a mailing with the lovely and talented Phyllis Somerville. Phyllis opted to take some of her clerking home while David worked in the office. After having licked some hundreds of stamps David recalled feeling a little queasy, "At first I thought it might be the glue from the stamps but then I realized that there was actually something in the air...in the atmosphere...I was asphixiating. I ran down and found a young man to help me." That young man, Raymond, the P.A.L. custodial engineer, found a faulty fluorescent light in the office ceiling and turned it off. Said Raymond, "The light was broken, so I turned it off." The air cleared and the mailing was completed. It was later discovered in a conversation with Project grampa/chemist Bob Reale that fluorescent lights can emit mercury gas. "Mercury is supposed to be toxic so you better throw the thing out." We thank Phyllis and David for all their hard work and for this chilling *PU* item.

--WR