

Leslie Hill Paisley joined the interpreter staff of the Children's Museum in the summer of 1974. Between June 17 – August 31 she kept a detailed journal of her activities and impressions.

The following pages describe her experiences with "Special Needs Wednesdays", an important part of the Museum's visitor program throughout the 1970s .

A personal

Journal of

laboratory experiences and reactions of
with children

in the environment of
the children's museum

in Boston, Massachusetts

From June 17, 1974

through August 31, 1974

Monday

June 17, 1977

What an adventure I'm about to embark on! I wait the red line subway to Park St. to make my connection. It ~~is~~^{was} a grizzly Monday morning many faces are waking up and looking hurried. I wear my yellow sticker (with doodles drawn on it by four of my little friends to scare the gloomies away) they said people who saw me in it would be friendlier because they would smile while they read the pictures and followed their eyes to the alligator in my pocket who would scare them from being too friendly. Sam drew a red right wing on my right shoulder and a red left wing on my left shoulder to make me speedier. The day has begun well as I think of these things and I am glad.

As I left the trolley with Gingy we discovered we were both heading for the museum we asked each other the standard questions and were met inside the door by all the other ^{women} 18 girls (all girls or women as some like to be referred to) everyone seemed excited and eager probably seeing the museum with new eyes - but by first impressions or altered feelings as now we are a part of the working whole not ~~a~~ visitors. Our morning began in an orderly fashion as we were led to the orange room in the visitors recycle center and were handed orange aprons, name tags and lots of advice from Natalie who is the Program Director. She outlined our job and duties she made several important points:

① To remember all the time that the kids who visit the museum at the end of the summer are as important,

and have as much right to your enthusiasm as those that you first talk with in June. - Though you have said the same things and answered the same questions thousands of times before the kid who comes in August deserves your attention just as much as the one you see tomorrow.

③ It is a do-touch place that is unusual because it strives for human interaction - subtler sometimes not coming on strong but being available.

③ Because the museum has few funds to work with the exhibits have an approachable non-slick appearance and also because they often used recycled materials they have the advantage of easily being recreated at home.
 ④ The product of each child's stamp is not important here but the purpose evidently this was a morning for meetings as we also met with Marcia, Connie and Todd (male) who are floor managers and Janet Karnien (who I've had contact with in applying for the job) Manager of the Visitor Center. They clarified some more confusions in my already muddled mind. They were matter of fact and easy going very much individual in their manner and approach as they assured us they will also be in their approach to museum space. I feel relaxed in the casualness of the setting and the constant easy humour of the way we all were approached and initiated into our new setting.

We all then met the Director of the Visitor Center Elaine who is considered to be the hard driving mysterious member of the staff who says she is notorious for popping in on any new staff person at the ~~one~~ moment when things are not going right, however things have

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gone previously. I found her clear and yet more
desire about her don't tolerates than anyone else - she
was ready for joining but earnest about her ideas for the
museum and the ways it ought to be run.

Jim Zien (Director of Community Services) met us
with volcanoes and told us of the various ways the museum
works with and for the community. He spoke of a city-wide
project that is in conjunction with the Bicentennial
Commission where kids from the community (black
neighborhoods, middle-class, other) are taught skills
in crafts etc. in order to direct these same activities
in community centers in their own neighborhoods.
This is a new program and yet has worked well so far as
the kids learn their museum skills in the p.m.
sessions in the recycle center using found materials
and they can take each activity to their center
while it is still new to them. The National Endowment
of the arts stands behind $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cost of the
community programs. Now another program in
teaching teachers is going on with open instruction
in a drop-in laboratory environment.

Jim spoke also of an earlier mobile program (for
summer) with another city program "Summer Thing"
that packed puppet shows, arts ideas etc into a
converted laundry truck and the people parked
themselves in a neighborhood for 2 weeks to do their
things. This was successful I assume but we did
not learn why they did not continue it. I had been
interested in something like this so I am curious.

by myself but will innovate, initiate, and inspire

Wednesday

June 19

Today as one special ed. group was canceled we met with only one. They were a group of about fourteen emotionally disturbed children from 8-10 years old. Their teachers claim they were not disturbed but rather were from homes where they have had problems. The school they belong to is really a residential school. Most of the students attend public school in the daytime and spend the nights at the Hilltop school. Those children we saw today from Hilltop were not yet back into the public schools. The philosophy of the school is to work with the children and the home life to make it possible for both to live together happily.

Before each special ed group on Wednesday we read cards concerning the children's likes dislikes interests, particular problems or difficulties so we will know what to expect. Then upon arrival each child is paired off with a staff person in a one to one relationship. The pair explores the museum at their leisure for a duration of 1 HR. Afterwards we have a staff meeting to talk about problems, ideas, share support and hear the teachers interview given by the floor manager.

These kids really enjoyed the museum today. There were only 2 few and an overwhelming no. of staff people so many of us just floated

around - adding interest or observing appropriate to the situation.

The most loved area was the Living Things exhibit where kids actually got to "love" and hold an animal that lived back. Also many kids helped overcome some fears they still had. Some left teachers unwillingly at first but had a great time eventually, others had fears of snakes but overcame them enough to hold the snake for a few seconds at least. One teacher commented that Johnny was always reserved in class yet he was more outgoing than she'd ever seen him. Another girl who opened up in front of a movie camera - talked about herself: "My name is Becky, I ~~like~~ come from . I like my town. There is a lot to do there. I go to school. It is very good to go to school because you learn a lot there and teachers try to help you learn things. I think I'm pretty for my age and I like myself a lot." This little girl really said I truthful - I wish her mother could have heard her.

Another girl took 4 poses in the booth

forgotten. She told Suzanne when she was leaving "On my card it says horseback riding and dancing... well put karate on there too."

Our group of staff people was very impressed by this group. Several staff members feel that if they had not been told the child was emotionally disturbed they never would have known it.

I worked for a long while after the meeting putting together some of the camping exhibits. I did paper mache' on the "wilderness walk exhibit". I really "got into it" glue and all. Edith and Todd both seem to know what they are doing construction-wise yet the idea of the exhibit is somewhat not to my liking in that it is not as original as some of the ideas used in other areas and does not follow the "do-touch" notion of the place - Many birds and insects will be behind glass which is a simulation rather than the real thing. Though one can almost touch-with-one's eyes here is the method of display it seems somehow less than satisfactory for the space and the needs of those visiting the museum. Part of the problem is that much of what will be shown will be from Collections which are rare and old things stored away for certain displays and moments.

The rest of the afternoon 2-5 I spent with Janet (my program developer), Susan (old staff)

Wednesday

July 10

We had an early morning special education meeting. I read the cards for two boys I was to be responsible for. The teachers ~~had~~ ^{we asked that} made out background cards for our use so we would be familiar with some of the specific problems or conditions of each child. I was given one fellow Tony ^{6 yr. old} who was in a wheelchair and incapable of any sensation or movement below the waist. The other fellow Michael ^{normal} This school is unusual in that it places preschoolers who are "special" in an environment with "normal" kids. The environment at the museum is good for this but the school had previously found it difficult to get accepted into special tour groups, programs etc. because it wasn't strictly a school for handicapped children and it ^{isn't} ~~wasn't~~ strictly a school for normal kids either. I was forewarned that Michael is an explorer and a very active discoverer and that Tony takes in everything but cannot always adapt as quickly to new surroundings as fast.

As they arrived I met Michael first and saw that he was as eager as anyone - through the door first - going where he shouldn't. Then the wheelchair kids came through and Tony was ahead of them all. He wheeled himself to the head of the group but took one look inside (and with the confused jam up at the door with so many waiting) and seemed to panic. He didn't want to go in at all. I felt I had to stay with him yet Michael was racing ahead already and I couldn't deal with both kids at once so

I stayed with Tony for a few minutes while his teachers dealt with him and quickly decided he should go with his friend the staff person Susan. I raced to find Michael who was already watching himself on the T.V. cameras. I could relate easily to his 1 year old curious temperament because I've known many other 1 year olds at his interest level. We discovered lots of things together and finally stayed longest at the turtle area and the guinea pigs & rabbits. His teacher later remarked that she never saw him sit still for as long at once as he did this morning. I know I cannot take full credit for this but I feel pleased anyway. We followed Michael interests, yet I tried to answer his many questions and explain things as we went along so he could think of asking more. I nevertheless couldn't help thinking about Tony and his time at the museum. I had a chance to see him quite often with different staff people all the time.

I learned a lot watching as ~~he~~ also experienced many exhibits from the point of view of many youngsters whose major achievement for the day was climbing the stairs to the Grandmothers Attic. One girl had a language day - where she could point to certain basic pictures of things - if she wanted to go to the bathroom, ask where her coat was etc. The problem with this day is it doesn't give enough words and cannot give enough pictures for many emotions such as kisses or sad or happy. I feel that the emotions and expressions

These kids showed really affected us. Their appreciation of a good time was communicated by even those who could not talk.

One leader compared her experience last summer with this summer and she said she was very well pleased. She noticed more supportive communication of good behavior with kids who are learning basic skills and for whom ^{executing} basic skills are a supreme achievement. She says the supportive "good stair-climbing", "good button pushing" is so totally a take off in her speech now that she catches herself saying to her adult peers, "good cigarette lighting." But she was sincere and we left those children with whom we shared 2 hours of ~~their~~ ^{our} lifetime, very reluctantly but in time for a 10 minute meeting before the 10 o'clock ~~meet~~ opening to the public. We exchanged comments, teacher interviews were reviewed and we all feel more comfortable for our next group of spec. ed kids.

We decided to do shadow puppets for our space time activity while Penelope and I had program time where we would submit a program of possible projects for next week.

On that list for next week we will include Wednesday - a magician for children named Johnny Sisson who will give 2 performances in the Sit Around and a group of Israeli folk dancers on Thursday. I am excited about both of these but we wish now - we could have

Wednesday

July 17

The special education groups that arrived this morning were a group of 9 emotionally disturbed children who were referred to a psychologist by their schools and now live in another school. The group of six grown-adult men ^{were} from Fernald Institution (a state institution where many of these men have lived their whole lives) Two staff people went with each special ed. person for support and ease. We were prepared or warned that this group might be very hard to deal with because they were older men with often unresolved sexual fantasies as well as a whole life of institutionalization and many could not be understood when they spoke. One fellow Stanley had been tied to a crib for 27 years (he is now 30ish) in an institution. He was not mentally handicapped but he is a rare occurrence in mixed genes - he has webbed hands and a flat almost featureless face. He seemed very bright and the school has done a lot with him since he was released from the bed. He has even been trained for janitorial work and rarely is quite a comical character, enjoys people and new things and has a good time. Many of the other men we knew little about because there were no cards sent in advance. Many were very shy though.

John, who Paulette and I took around, seemed somewhat overwhelmed with the museum at first. He didn't want to be ~~led~~ led through the museum

however. He seemed to want to stick together with the other men. I guess we hurried him a bit. I took his non-reaction somewhat as boredom (later I found he said "I'm tired" when he wanted to do something different) Elaine explained ^{told} that reaction time is slow in most of these men you must really often have patience to wait for an answer to a simple question.

John spoke a lot about Sheldon his friend who went home, - he said over & over "Sheldon went home ...". John also kept one hand under his chin all the time - he seemed to put it there when he was feeling shy or nervous. He also mentioned that he was dressed of the color of his pants - Raymond's pants. Colors were some of his most frequently used words. "Brown bed - orange bed - green pants - brown pants."

I was a bit disengaged as he didn't seem to want to do anything on his own or of his decision. He followed those ahead of us. His eyes often were fixed on what the other men were up to even though his hands might be feeling something unusual or alive.

The one time he really showed concentration was with the colored plastic shapes and mirror designs. He sat right down and filled the whole space in himself without urging or encouragement.

Since the men operate on behavior modification techniques and positive reinforcement they are given colored tokens to wear on their belts to earn meals. They need 3 tokens for each meal. John showed his supervisor the design - and was given 3 tokens and lots of praise. We left that museum space following the supervisor for the rest of John's visit until...

The best part of the whole experience happened unexpectedly. John, directed by us to the only part of the museum he hadn't seen before the end of his visit, went to Grandma's Attic. I showed John a big comfortable chair since he had been saying that he was tired and because I thought we could begin talking about beds - how he could almost fall asleep there. He responded to this but after awhile there was nothing more he could do in the chair and was not interested when we called him and the old fashioned telephone or showed him an old washing ringer. Perhaps because he doesn't have the use of any of the more modern of these conveniences, he has nothing to compare them with. John though found the chair next to his - was a rocker - he actually got excited and called Jimmy (another one of the men) to come see him in it. He rocked excitedly and then gave everyone else a turn. This "made" his visit - and our experience too. I feel that he had come through

the shyness here - we had helped him feel something good - helped him have a good time.

Elaine saw this happen and was eager to let John be the one to ring the bell to let everyone know the museum is closing. He started out enthusiastically. Ringing the bell in everyone's ears he passed (probably ^{comes from the government}) But later he needed to be encouraged and finally said, "I'm tired" meaning I don't want to do this any longer.

We had a ½ hour meeting afterward with Elaine when we exchanged ideas and successes. We need some supportive interaction often after these sessions, it has been decided.

Lizabeth broke down and began crying after the bus left. She was physically exhausted and mentally drained. I also guess she had not prepared herself totally for the type of impairment she saw.

Janice however said she had the best time she'd had with an older person. While Lizabeth's Archie was a gentleman who didn't respond to most of the many stimulus Eisebach exposed him to (she left him feel rabbits - he'd pat and look the other way - as with mirrors);

Janice's Raymond was the most affectionate of the 6 men who visited. He carried a box of crackers around with him and ~~was~~ is notorious for "lifting" anything he sees that is

within reach. Janice caught on and she dealt with the situation by going in partners with Raymond. She said to him, "Let's see how much we can get." This made a comrade of her and made him feel he did not have to escape (as he had tried earlier with near success - he is a huge man) Everytime he would try something too out of reason - Janice simply had to remind him that her boss was near by and she was gonna get real trouble if she got caught. I guess Raymond could identify with this so they paled around for the full hour oblivious to everyone else - though conspicuous. Janice and Raymond had a marvelous time. We all decided that this was one of the best and most successful experience with special education groups.

Later this afternoon we had a special program that I booked - a comedy children's magician - Johnny Sison. Of course I was anxious for it to be especially good but I was not prepared for ~~what~~ his type of magic. He is 59 years old and dates to depression times with a vaudevillian flair to his act. It is mostly comedy with a little magic mixed in. Actually in each of two performances he did approximately 5 tricks altogether.

What I didn't like (though the kids seemed to really enjoy him) was the type of part-making he did with kids. He seemed to turn the kids from their parents to him. He loves kids

Wednesday July 24

Special education groups met with our staff again today. This Wednesday they were mentally retarded children who were from a day camp. The total camp came - all 20 and this we felt meant a lot in the total success of the morning. These kids all knew each other so when they were doubled up with our staff (we had short staff and more kids) the experiences were good.

My two girls Regina (who was described as having a short attention span) and Sarah (who was described as educable) became alive more & more as we visited each exhibit. What impressed me about them is that they both tried everything and were successful in relating to each space in a unique way. Sarah helped ^{mountain} Regina's interest and Regina was a good person for Sarah to play with - talking on the telephone, trying on Dr. Attic clothes, ~~and~~. They each seemed to interest the other in an area that might not be of particular interest ~~but~~ because the other showed attention to it both would.

One example of this is Sarah - wanting to hold a guinea pig - she held it so nicely that Regina (asked ^{when} a second time) said she did want a turn. Both girls loved the T.V. screens seeing themselves on T.V. and operating the cameras themselves. Sarah did not grow tired of it as soon as Regina did.

We really covered the whole museum

and thoroughly - having time to do something in each space.

Regina's attention span seemed good - I was pleased and Sarah's speech impediment did not hinder our conversation.

They seemed together about leaving too perhaps because we really covered the whole museum. In the end - leaving was my biggest reward - Sarah said, "I'll see you again when I visit with my family." Regina smiled for the first time all day. A broad smile and thanked me.

Perhaps partly because all these kids live at home and the fact that they work and play together & feel comfortable with each other - they had a successful experience.

In our meeting afterwards there were no problems - this is rare.

reported

The rest of my morning I spent doing mylar dancing. We used strips of silver

satin type plastic that reflect the lights on our ceiling. We began by using familiar music with kids and progressed to listening between songs - freeze until more music comes on. The Nutcracker Suite was well suited to the dancing with mylar paper because it had many tempos and wacky tones so try different speeds of steps. At one point we lay out the strips

Wednesday August 7

Before the museum

opened - this morning as Paulette, Bill and I were carrying boxes from the new computer outside we heard screams of excitement from diving things. Mrs. Smith (a guinea pig) had her basket for babies. When we arrived all crowding inside the pen, we saw that only one baby (of ten) was still alive. Judy immediately took Peter, the father, out of the cage so he wouldn't kill the baby that was left. We cannot be sure if Peter was the one who killed them, if they were stillborn, if the mother refused to feed them, or what exactly happened because they were born in the night.

At our all-staff meeting this morning we heard from Elaine about her trip to Canada. She said they (her whole family) went to 16 museums in 12 days. She was eager to compare ours with other places for kids. In Ontario is a place called The Children's Village with the Ontario Science Center and Ontario Place (a playground for kids to try things. Lots of it sounds like a water playground where kids are challenged to slide on stuff - use giant rubber things to bump their friends etc. The nature of the set up encourage kids to try.

Elaine was enthusiastic but

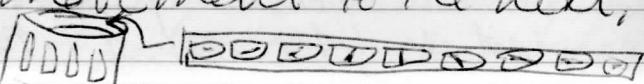
said of all the places they visited she is very proud to be from the children's museum, because there is nothing like it. Other museums claim to be for kids to do things but none come near to the kind of participatory play with staff people that is experienced here.

I really look forward to meetings with our staff because they are so personal and always so interesting - they are too short. Elaine has a manner that one can do nothing else but love. I think the museum is fortunate to have someone like her around.

When the schools were to come we realized that there would be 3 groups this morning with a total of 25 kids from the 3 places. There were some kids (6-8) from Cranston, R.I. who came to see the museum they have various emotional problems or are mentally retarded, 12-15 yrs. old. There was another group of preschoolers that were mentally retarded from Camp Joy which is a free (Boston Run) summer camp program. The third group was from Sudbury. The woman who brought her 8-10 year olds runs a group program called "a walk in someone else's shoes". She trains young children to deal with children of special needs. Some of these kids are as young as 6 years old and they are becoming

aware and concerned about kids who have fewer advantages than they do. We felt it would be interesting and beneficial to let these kids tour the museum at the same time - and hoped for some interaction. One little boy from this group approached his teacher amidst all the other children and said "But where are the children of Special Need?" to which his teacher replied you have just graduated from my course.

I was given a boy ^(Bobby) of about 10 years to show the museum to. We started from Grandmother Attic, sneaking up the back way because I wanted to show him the guinea pig that was just born before everyone else saw it. I was pleased that he saw it first but he was not so interested, perhaps he was interested but not so excited. He seemed a bit afraid of the animals but I managed to get him to sit with a guinea pig on his lap though he didn't look at it much. His eyes were roaming around the rest of the museum. We had a leisurely visit and got to see some things of particular interest - twice. Bobby loved making his own movie - because he could show it to the others that came to zoetropes, and he could take it with him when he left. Zoetropes are those movie makers - fast action drawings. By spinning the drum looking through the slits each frame appears to make a movement to the next.



Wednesday 21

Again we anticipated our special education visitors. This time from Warren Day Camp for emotionally disturbed kids. Only half shaved up which meant no staff was asked to double up and each had a whole guide to him/herself.

Prior to this adventure with Camp kids Elaine wanted some feedback on the special program because it was her project and she needs to know the value, strengths, weaknesses, short sightedness and advantages of this program where kids are given again "special" treatment as they tour the museum on non-public time. This is rather a special program as there is no other like it in the world. She had us each talk about our experience because, she feels only when we are forced to verbalize our feelings do we realize them. We talked about the value of meeting "special" people and learning to relate to them (not as a set of conditions or symptoms) but as people - different but the same. We realize how short a time we have together and have established the value ~~of~~ of meeting time afterward and both are so important it is hard to decide if one ought to forfeit more time to the other, which to be? the best thing about the whole program was the lack of real training that is involved

and with great success people learn to train themselves

During project time Janet, Paulette and I had to begin evaluating our experience in terms of our space and specific things about our developer and program director (Natalie). Janet knew Natalie would also write up a self evaluation as she interviewed us each separately. This time was to vocalize any comments so Janet would have some feedback for her to work from in thinking about how to handle things for the next group of museum workers.

We talked about the sit around space itself. We felt glad that we didn't depend on films - we couldn't resort to showing a film because every time the projector was in order, we had no films and just as we finished arrangements to borrow films from Boston University's film library our projector broke. We wished we had more time (as is always the complaint) The time goes so quickly! We regretted that we had tried more varied programs. We tended to draw from our improv club activities. Janet assured us that we should not apologize because each staff person that has the space emphasizes different things. There is no way we could have completely covered all music, dance drama activities that we wanted. It is probably wiser to experience completely one facet than