

#630

June 22, 1983

PROFILES...

Because Janet Kamien is such a creative and multi-faceted individual, trying to neatly delineate either her, or her career, is no simple assignment. In fact, the task is rather like attempting to describe the bits of glass within a kaleidoscope as they rearrange themselves into new and different patterns. Actress, costumer, stage manager, administrator, exhibit designer, researcher, writer, trail-blazer--- will the real Janet Kamien please stand up?

After graduating from Boston University in 1972 where she majored in acting, Janet took a decisive step in her career when she realized that the life of an actress, with its built-in frustration and rejection, was not what she wanted. Interested in working with the handicapped, Janet was hired as an attendant at Fernald State School for the Retarded. For a year she was part of a research project involved with teaching a severely retarded adult to speak, but left in protest after the patient was abruptly returned to the ward when funding for the program ran out.

Her next job was as a stage manager for a company that produced children's plays, and Janet first learned about BCM in the course of looking for spaces where the company might perform. Simultaneously she was employed as a costumer for Harvard's Gilbert & Sullivan troupe, the Savoyards. Then luck (or fate) intervened, and Janet noticed an ad in the paper announcing a three month internship program at BCM. The pay consisted of a less than princely sum -- \$25 a week -- for the duration, but, nevertheless, she applied and was accepted.

At the end of her internship Janet was planning to work as a costumer in a Rhode Island theatre group, when she was asked to manage the exhibit center, a job she initially refused because she felt unqualified. Fortunately for the Museum, Elaine Gurian persuaded her otherwise, and after agreeing to "clean up her act," i.e. stop wearing cut-off jeans over red tights, she joined the Museum staff.

Filled with a healthy dose of fear and trembling, "I had no idea what I was doing," Janet recalls, she began hiring interns, organizing special events, and initiating the Friday/Sunday performance series. Because BCM was more informally structured ten years ago, she was also involved in building operations, arranging for adequate staff coverage and numerous D&P meetings.

Approximately a year later, Janet became the developer of the Sit-Around Space, which was then an open exhibit area used for puppet shows, movies and other performances. In addition, she was heavily concerned with the training and supervision of interns, with a new group arriving at the frantic pace of every three months.

In 1974 Janet came up with the idea which eventually led to the creation of the "What If You Couldn't..." exhibit---perhaps the most outstanding of her many achievements. She obtained a grant from NEA, and with the help of an assistant, spent the next six months conducting extensive interviews and research on the subject of children with special needs. Because she felt "out of touch" and wanted to be involved in direct service again, Janet took the summer off and worked at a camp for special needs children.

The resulting exhibit, a pioneering effort in raising public awareness and helping special needs children enter the mainstream of our culture, was an overwhelming success. It led Janet and several other Museum staffers into the field of curriculum development, and in 1976 they began to put together a comprehensive unit designed for the use of teachers in public school systems.

Eventually Janet went on to write a book based on the concepts employed in the exhibit which has been widely acclaimed and used both in this country and abroad.

In addition to her already hectic schedule, Janet then decided to return to school part-time, and two years later received a Master's in special needs education from Leslie College, using the material in her book as the basis for her thesis.

When the Museum began planning for its relocation to the Wharf, Janet became increasingly active in the area of design and production, especially in the creation of Playspace and the re-installation of the "What If You Couldn't...?" exhibit. She was also busy developing plans to make the new building accessible to the handicapped, and as a result of the knowledge gained through her research, she spent the better part of a year writing a "how-to" manual on the subject of accessibility.

Once the move was over, Janet began conducting an eight week long training program designed to help teachers better understand and cope with the needs of handicapped children, a program which she led three times a year. Besides her "routine" administrative duties such as office scheduling, budget planning and supervising the floor managers, Janet became particularly interested in video production, an interest which culminated in a series of taped interviews with handicapped couples.

For the last year and a half Janet has also been working on the now funded exhibit on Death and Loss. In between, she managed to squeeze in a month in India as a guest lecturer at various museums, an experience she described as "wonderful."

Even though Janet is officially leaving the Museum on July 1, she will continue to serve as the developer of the Death and Loss project, and will return to Boston for "Special Needs Month" in October. She may also be involved in an exhibit with the Harvard Medical School on the subject of women in science. So fortunately, we only have to say "au-revoir" and not "good-bye."

Janet is not sure exactly what awaits her in Florida, but the development and planning of exhibits is now her chief interest and one in which she hopes to become increasingly involved. And if nothing else is certain, at least one thing is: whatever direction(s) Janet's next ten years take, there is every reason to believe they will be as rich, full and impressive as the last decade.

All the best, Janet, and we'll see you in October...

HALLMARK RATES BCM: THE VERY BEST!!!

Dear Michael:

June 9, 1983

As always, it is a special treat to come to the Boston Children's Museum; for since my first visit, it has been my benchmark for judging other children's museums. Our group unanimously pronounced Boston Children's the best we saw! We all appreciated you taking time from your busy schedule to give us a personal tour. You have every reason to be proud of your facility, as it is so well thought out and executed. We were all most impressed with the total scope of the program. Particular highlights were the Resource Center, the Youth Outreach Program, and I must confess to coveting the Japanese Home/Resource Center. We all commented on the wonderful way your museum serves your community and wish you continued success. On behalf of all our group, thank you again for showing us through the museum. It has been and will continue to be, a source of inspiration to us all.

Sincerely, Rachael A. Chambers, Director, Kaleidoscope, Hallmark Cards