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## WISE PARENT PERSPECTIVES

*Last year three WISE graduates and the WISE Executive Director experienced WISE as parents. In the following articles they reflect on this rite of passage for both themselves and their children.*

### **Marcus Brown's WISE Project at White Plains High School**

*By Steven Brown,  
Chairman of the Board of  
WISE Services and 1973  
Woodlands WISE Graduate*

For his WISE project my son, Marcus Brown, wrote a short novel in the mystery/detective genre that was popularized by Mickey Spillane and others in the

40's and 50's. I was surprised that his project was not film related, since filmmaking is his passion, and the subject he planned to study in college. He claimed that he also loved writing and has an interest in writing as well as directing.

There never seemed to be a doubt that he would do a WISE project, given our family history with the program at Woodlands and

White Plains, but he was excited about it, and devoted a lot of thought and time to researching the genre and writing the novel. He finished the project by the date of his WISE presentation, which I thought was impressive

The story was fun, and we were all proud to see him present it to friends, family, and teachers. I was more involved in his project than my parents were with mine, for example, I went to the presentation. However, despite my long history with the WISE program, Marcus was pretty much left to his own devices for his project, and I think that was for the best. He ended with a project that was entirely of his own design and character, and it will be something he will certainly look back on with delight.



*Marcus Brown with mother, Karen; sister, Anya; and father, Steven*

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**



This issue of our WISE Journal newsletter begins a year of celebrating the WISE journey.

The first newsletter, printed in 1998, commemorated the 25th Anniversary of the WISE Program at Woodlands High School.

With this issue, Woodlands celebrates its 35th anniversary of WISE, and Scarsdale and Croton-Harmon celebrate their 15th anniversaries of Senior Options (at Scarsdale) and CHOOSE (at Croton-Harmon). There are now 75 WISE schools, 15 of which have had WISE programs for more than ten years; 25,000 WISE graduates now range in age from 18 to 53; six graduates of WISE schools are now WISE coordinators; and an ever-increasing number of high school seniors do WISE projects with WISE graduates as site sponsors, mentors and task force members. Scarsdale Coordinator David Greene is retiring this year, as his son Ben is completing his senior project.

WISE Services is celebrating its 15th year and, without the contributions of our many donors, none of this would be possible.

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## WISE PARENT PERSPECTIVES (CONTINUED)

*(Continued from page 1)*

### My Own Child Does WISE

*By Franny Hertz, Rondout Valley High School WISE Coordinator and 1978 Woodlands WISE Graduate*

After eight years coordinating WISE at Rondout Valley High School and being a WISE graduate myself, I had the opportunity to experience my own child's participation in WISE. As Emilia's project morphed and evolved the feelings from a parent perspective were new and eye-opening. I had not realized how nervous parents become as their children approach WISE.

My usually laid-back husband anxiously asked me when our daughter was planning to get her act together for her WISE Project. Her pace did not match the expectations of the adults. She was excited about participating in WISE, but what she would do was undefined. Finally, she decided on some kind of travel and community service, a project that has become a tradition at Rondout.

Fortunately, we all learned the age-old WISE lesson that if you have faith, offer support when asked and give the students some space, their projects will far exceed anyone's expectations. Emilia's first plan was to go with two friends to New Orleans and help with the Katrina relief effort. The girls quickly learned through their research that New Orleans had become the most dangerous city in the country. Much to their parents' relief, they researched other communities, and decided on Biloxi, Mississippi. Then they learned that Habitat for Humanity does not accept students under 18 without an adult chaperone. Determined to go without a chaperone, they ultimately found another organization that would provide housing and supply plenty of volunteer work in Biloxi.

The girls fundraised and were given tremendous financial and moral support from their community, family

and friends. The parents of the other students looked to me, as both Coordinator and a parent, and I tried to stay confident and have faith in their abilities.

I was the parent who volunteered to do the airport transportation and the drop-off and pick-up experiences stand out vividly in my mind. Upon arrival at the airport, the girls got out of the car. I followed. They said, "we have it from here," in other words "you don't need to walk us in." It was difficult to drive away, but I knew I was only a cell phone call away, should they NEED me.

During the trip, Emilia kept in touch through cell phone and expressed that she was having the time of her life. I was so excited when they were due back, I arrived early at the airport. The flight unloaded and all the passengers disembarked, but there was no sign of Emilia and her friends. Eventually the pilot walked out, saw my distraught face and said, "they just got off the plane" When they walked through the doors, I was relieved to see them, but they were in tears. I thought something terrible had happened. They gave me a hug and explained that they didn't want the experience to end so they wouldn't get off the plane until the pilot told them to. They then proceeded to ignore me

the entire trip home as they shared stories and memories of an experience they did not want to ever forget. The travel journals would be the best way to learn about the experience my child had just had without me.

There was a significant difference between Emilia's home journal and the one she kept while in Biloxi. Her home journal had been a beautiful collage of words, photos and pictures describing her very busy senior life. Her travel journal was a written document of great detail, insight and reflection with a few pieces of memorabilia included. The journal described a life-changing experience shaped by the people and places that she had experienced. She learned first hand about faith, hope and courage and what the human spirit is capable of even in the most devastating times.

Emilia detailed the experience in photographs. Her photo essay showed a place of devastation, hope and beauty. At the final presentation, family and friends gathered to share with the girls this most inspiring experience.

As a parent, I am most astonished and proud of the insight Emilia gained from the entire experience. This is best described in the final entry of her travel journal where she wrote, "In the beginning of this travel journal, I explained how I feel as though this journal is much more real and more reflective than my home journal. I realized this morning that it's because it is much harder to think and reflect where you have lived your entire life. Everything is predictable and already known. Hurricane Katrina, United Life Ministries and WISE have brought me outside of my comfort zone. Being in Biloxi has opened my eyes to a whole other part of life..."



*Emilia Hertz Stern, Vic Leviatin & Franny Hertz at Emilia's presentation.*

## WISE PARENT PERSPECTIVES (CONTINUED)

### Charlie Basler and WISE

*By Linda Greene, Executive Director of WISE Services, former WISE Coordinator at Nyack HS*

Over the past 11 years, I have been involved in many WISE projects as a Mentor, Coordinator, and Workshop leader. Last year, I had a totally different experience, because my own son, Charlie Basler, did a WISE Project at Nyack. After first suggesting that he would skydive for his project, and then leaving me in suspense as to whether or not he signed up for the program, it was a relief to find out that he wouldn't be skydiving (his idea of a joke, I think), but would be focusing on his passion at the time, Musical Theater. He was slow to pull it together, making it difficult for his mentor (La Mentora, as he called her). He worried his WISE teachers and, perhaps most of all, his nervous mother. We all wondered if he would be able to complete his journal and get his presentation together.

At the time, I received a note from one of my WISE (in many ways!) colleagues saying, "I hope Charlie's presentation went well (of course it did, those young actors are poised and confident, aren't they?)". In fact, his poise and confidence were much in evidence and after severally extremely long nights, putting the finishing touches on his journal and preparing an outline for his presentation, Charlie went out there and made his parents very proud. He spoke of his experiences performing in two shows, described some of the trials and tribulations that affected his proposed internship and one of his performances, catalogued the challenges he presented to his mentor, and summarized what he thought had been accomplished. During the course of the presentation he displayed photographs of his performances and of the musical "Curtains," which he was privileged to learn about and visit both in rehearsal and in performance. He also interwove four songs into the narrative "I Can See It" (choices for this project), "Mr. Cellophane" (a tribute to John Kander and a reflection on how he felt), "Try to Remember" (his experience performing in "The Fantasticks"), and "Impossible Dream" (his goals for the future).

I think I was finally able to relax when I saw him wheel a piano into the WISE Room (transported from the Music Room, which is located on another floor with the help of his physical education teacher, who was not involved in his project!) This ability to "borrow a piano," arrange for it to appear in the proper location with the help of some friends at the eleventh hour, is typical of the resourcefulness that characterizes my son, who likes to live "on the edge." As his journal documents, his WISE

experience wasn't easy, but over-all it was special, and his presentation, which brought tears to my eyes, will long live in my heart as a unique and wonderful conclusion to his project.



*Charlie Basler with his mentor Robin Maslaneck.*

## WISE PARENT PERSPECTIVES (CONTINUED)



*Nicole Brown and father, Gary .*

### **Nicole Brown's W.I.S.E. Project at New Rochelle High School**

*By Gary Brown, 1979  
Woodlands WISE Graduate*

I am the son of Bill and Phyllis Brown (both WISE Services staff members), and the father of Nicole Brown. I participated in the W.I.S.E. program back in 1979. It was a wonderful experience for me. I was part of Tony Howarth's theatre troop, and the whole process was quite rewarding.

Of course, I had no idea that my children would ever have the opportunity to take part in the program, since W.I.S.E. only existed at Woodlands High School at the time. But, as fate would have it, my children would enjoy the same rewards I had as a high school senior.

I think my daughter Nicole would have come to W.I.S.E. on her own. However, she wouldn't have had much of a choice ultimately. If the pressure didn't

come from me, it certainly would have come from her grandparents. At this point, it's pretty much a part of her legacy. Nicole's father participated, all her uncles, her two cousins (White Plains High school), and ultimately her younger brother will as well.

Nicole's W.I.S.E project focused on politics and music. She wrote an essay on Politics and Hip/Hop. Her presentation was quite impressive and informative. I was pleased that she had the opportunity to explore her own feelings and attitudes towards many aspects within the two realms. I was quite taken by her insight and knowledge on the two subjects. It was impressive.

Numa Rousseve, a member of the WISE Services Board of Directors, was a member of the Greenburgh Central 7 Board of Education: "As a parent, I was proud of what my children did, of course. As a school board member, and as president for the last two years, I went to a number of other presentations and laughed and shared the pride of family, teachers, mentors and friends as students shared their experiences and met the pressures of the final presentation. Good experience for their futures – following their dreams through highs and lows and being pleased to share with others their successes and difficulties."

Michael Mark, a member of the WISE Services Board of Directors, is a member of the Nyack Board of Education: "The WISE program asks students to find productive, meaningful uses for their time when they could easily be slowing into the wind-down of senior year. It's been a great program for our two children, with experiences that will serve them both well in the future."

## WISE FAMILY

About Jim Lemyre 7/22/48-5/19/07

By Andrew Lutz, Friend and Colleague

***"When people show you who they are, believe them"***

Maya Angelou

The quotation above is one of many that Jim suggested to our WISE students as they learned about writing with reflection in their journals. Certainly his WISE mentees were often shown who Jim Lemyre was: compassionate, passionate, strong, supportive, scholarly, loving. When Franny Hertz considered introducing the WISE program to Rondout Valley High School, one of the first people with whom she consulted was Jim. He served on the Rondout Valley WISE Task Force from its inception. Jim mentored eighteen students between the time that WISE began with the Class of 1999 and for at least two years after his retirement. He knew just the right balance of demanding and caring and his mentees and generations of Rondout Valley students responded with loyalty and academic achievement. After his retirement Jim worked with WISE Services to help introduce the program to other schools and provide workshops for teachers and students as they started their own WISE Programs.

Jim taught English to a wide variety of Rondout Valley students and he had an amazing impact upon those considered "at-risk". He showed them who he was and they believed him. In turn they showed him who they were and he motivated and supported them in many ways beyond what was learned about Shakespeare. The students with whom he worked on the Scholastic Matchup team and those he directed in All-School Musicals trusted him to lead them through many successful experiences, and he did. Years later, many of these students still included him in their family activities.

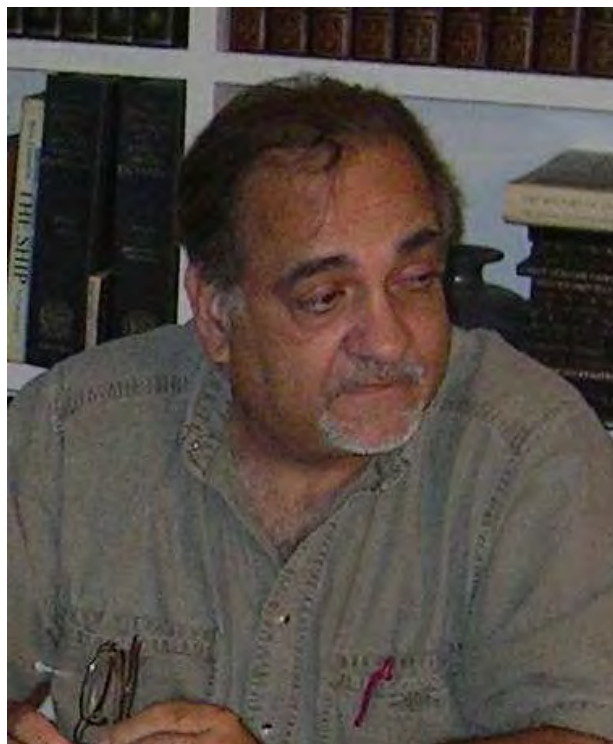
Whether as an actor with the Coach House Players, as President and Chief Negotiator for the Rondout Valley Federation, as President of the Kingston Umpires Association or speaker for the Renal Support Network and Diabetes Center in Kingston, Jim showed his many audiences who he was and what leadership was all about.

Most of all, Jim's family, who knew that he loved them most of all, were shown who he was. He was passionate about *Law and Order*, *The Sopranos*, his antique Chevrolet, the New York Yankees, and no dog was loved like his Boston Terrier, Spanky, but his family always came first.

Here is another quote supplied to WISE Students by our great friend, Jim Lemyre:

***"The journey, not the arrival, matters."***

Michel de Montaigne 1533-1592



*Jim Lemyre at a WISE staff meeting*

**Editor's Note:** Those of us who work with WISE Services miss Jim very much. He was a wonderful colleague – thoughtful, dedicated, and full of a dry and engaging humor which delighted students and their teachers. After his death, we received a note from his son, Daniel, who wished to pay tribute to his Dad. He wrote: "My father's untimely passing saddened us all. His commitment to your program has become an inspiration to me as it has for many of the people and kids my Dad came in touch with. In his passing I obtained his baseball card collection that was very dear to him. After many long hours deciding what to do with them, I have decided to sell them on Ebay and donate the proceeds to your program in his name." This gift means more to us than words can say. Thank you to Daniel Lemyre, and thanks to Jim Lemyre for his years of service to WISE and, most importantly, to WISE students.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

Winsome Gregory of the WISE Services Board of Directors recently was honored by the YAI/RCALD with its Educational Leadership Award for 2007. Dr. Gregory is the Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services and Personnel for the Nyack Public School District.

During the 2007-08 school year we have been working with The Brooklyn High School for Global Studies (Brooklyn, NY), Somers High School (Lincolndale, NY), Rockland Country Day School (Congers, NY), Tarbut V'Torah (Irvine, CA), and New Haven Academy (New Haven, CT). Students from these schools are currently working on WISE Projects. We have also been working with Northern Burlington HS (Burlington, NJ), and Lindenwold High School (Lindenwold, NJ) on WISE programs that will start next year.

This year all of the WISE students at Cypress Bay High School are publishing their own website for their journal entries. You can read what they have written by using this link: [http://www.freewebs.com/markim/wise\\_08\\_index.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/markim/wise_08_index.htm)

Matt Peel, former WISE Coordinator at Stonington High School, in Stonington, CT, has been appointed as Interdisciplinary Coordinator. The new WISE Coordinator is Angela Capalbo.

In graduate news, Dan Caglione, Nyack WISE, 2000, has started a new website which includes a link to the WISE Services website. The website, [www.lifsladder.com](http://www.lifsladder.com), is designed to assist teenagers with defining their interests, finding their passion, and then making college and career choices based on their interests.



2008 WISE Participants at Sleepy Hollow High School.