

## SAVE PROGER POINT

by Gabi Mathews and Marisa Rafal

A young girl named Jess Rawdon was extremely excited to assist her aunt at work one day. And though at the time she might not have known precisely what to expect, she was still amazed at what she saw. Her aunt, (an occupational therapist) worked with people who could not write, people who had severe speech impediments, and even those who couldn't talk. From that day on, Jess had pretty much decided what she wanted to do: She, like her aunt, wanted to become an occupational therapist.

Years later Jess Rawdon attended the University of New Hampshire. It was there that she underwent a five-year masters program, and so far she was fulfilling her dream of leading a career like her aunt's. But, everyone has their own path to take and hers differed a little from her aunt's. Instead of working with patients who have severe, hands-on, physical problems, she now helps children work through the emotional problems they are facing. We all face emotional struggles at some point in our lives, but sometimes the children Jess works with have been abused or ne-

glected and she is someone they can talk to.

She currently works at Tufts Medical Center, Boston, in the inpatient pediatric psychiatry unit. In the 7-10 days that children generally reside there, she is not only someone they can talk to, but also someone that they can get things like stress balls from. On top of that she does projects with them. These projects



*Marisa, Gabi, and Jess: Mario Bros. pinball, Aoe's Place, Floating Hospital for Children, Boston, MA*

not only help to build self-esteem and gain independence but also provide them with tactics for them to use in life, even after they leave. But sometimes it is merely an opportunity to create

beauty; one of Jess's favorite projects is a *papier-mâché* volcano. While they create this volcano, they discuss anger, and how if anger is kept inside too long it can erupt from within, just like a volcano erupts lava.

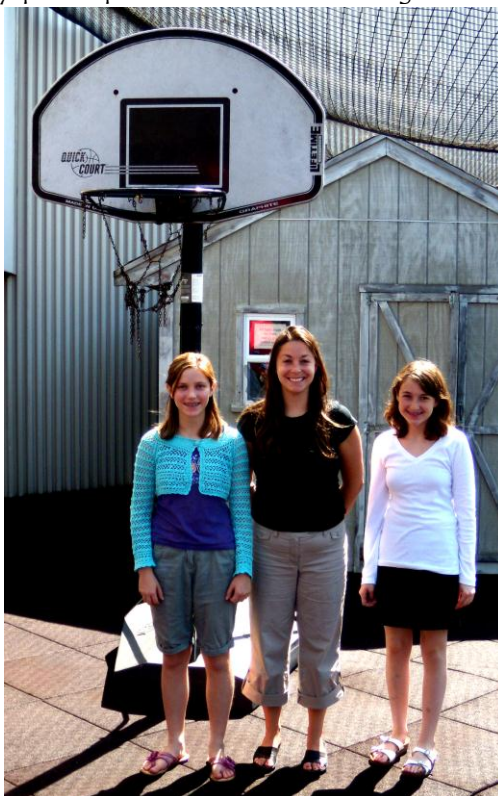
Yet another project the children did was a beach scene, to which each child added their own building. They formed a boardwalk of Popsicle sticks, a hut out of a paper bag and every participant added their own unique building and/or shop.

Along with inventing fun projects for them to do, Jess also provides entertaining courses for them to take. For example, they can do culinary arts, yoga, painting, and sewing. One girl, with slight guidance from Jess produced a quilt. The quilt that this child made probably would have been warm in and of itself, but she also put some rice inside the layers of the quilt to

provide it with some heft. Just enough heft, that when she draped it over her shoulders, it felt like she was being hugged. Because sometimes all we need is a warm and re-assuring embrace to let us know that everything is going to be okay.

Every day in the afternoon the children who are permitted to leave the unit go up onto the highest floor of the hospital (the eighth floor, which gets priority

on the elevator, meaning it goes directly to that floor, regardless of any other buttons that had been pressed). On the eighth floor is a gigantic room, donated by the family of Garnet "Ace" Bailey, a hockey player who died on September 11th, 2001. The room (called "Ace's Place") is filled with board games (lining a whole wall), a big foosball table, a vintage looking jukebox (which still is in working condi-



*Gabi, Jess and Marisa: rooftop basketball court of the Floating Hospital for Children, Boston, MA*



tion), coloring books for the younger kids, a computer, and more.

Then, when you walk outside two double doors, it is as if you are suddenly transported to another world. Really though, you are in an enormous fenced in roof. You are almost level to the surrounding buildings, and far below you is the busy Washington Street. Even though you are high above everything (and on a roof) you feel completely safe. Around you are climbing structures and basketball hoops. To us, just

the thought of playing basketball on a roof was exhilarating.

This though is a place for healing, not just play and some of the children with whom Jess works have faced serious trauma. When we inquired what advice Jess would give to the children of the world, her reply was basically this. "Hold on, don't give up, soon you will be an adult and have even better ways to get yourself out of horrible situations."

The organization that Jess works with does an exponential amount of good for the children of our community and beyond. When we were there Jess informed us of something very sad; she said that because her organization wasn't receiving enough funding they might be closing. Through this article we hope we can inform you of many things, but we also hope that we were able help you see the importance of the work of Jess and her profession.

*Proger Point on display the summer of 2009. The model beach and boardwalk resort village built by the kids of Proger 6 is a great example of art therapy.*

