



# EEAC

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1995

## EEAC IS PROUD TO DEDICATE THIS ISSUE TO HARRY BETROS



Every so often I pick up my copy of *Schoolyard Ecology* by Harry Betros and study the photograph of him and his daughter, Kim, on the back cover. I remember how we connected on a variety of levels, and how we enjoyed walks and talks together. There were never enough of either. I really liked that guy!

I met Harry at a National Science Foundation sponsored summer institute in Urban Ecology held at Pace University in downtown Manhattan in the seventies. He was the "Man from High Rock," and probably older than any of his classmates or faculty. Despite his encyclopedic knowledge about plants and his experience as an outdoor educator, he was an unassuming student and colleague.

He enjoyed a secret relationship with the weeds and wildflowers that we encountered on our parkland expeditions. He'd pounce on a clump of mint, crush the leaves and square stems between his fingers, sniff and snort the fragrant oils and encourage us to share this simple, sensual moment. He fought off his stuttering to tell us about the folklore and medicinal qualities of this and other specimens. He persuaded us to use the scientific as well as the common names of plants. He introduced us to fascinating etymological discoveries - the stories behind the Latin names. This he did with his personal blend of unpretentious authority and childlike exhilaration. He punctuated these moments with a toothy grin and a twinkling eye. He loved to share his nature discoveries with anyone who would take the time to look, listen and learn. He himself was an avid learner and internally processed all that he heard, read and otherwise sensed.

Personally, I felt that he was at his lovable, nerdy best when he carefully injected himself into a clutch of "urban ecologists" studying a vest pocket park under the Brooklyn Bridge. Displaying his latest botanical trophy in his extended hand like a sheepish blind date, he offered a healthy green bouquet, its stems carefully emersed in a sandwich bag of fire hydrant water. "*Cannabis sativa*," he almost whispered as if the Great Bridge was bugged or the lamppost had ears. "Huh?"... "What's that?" replied the students. "Pot...Marijuana", Harry explained. The "Man from High Rock" had scored in the shadow of City Hall and we all expected to get busted!

On another occasion Harry was introducing a group to some Morning Glories that twined their way up a chain link fence. As he pointed to a Heavenly Blue blossom a dragonfly alighted on his extended index finger. I hastily took a photo with my old rangefinder camera, not certain that the insect would be in close up focus. When the slides came back from the lab I was a little disappointed. The dragonfly and Harry's hand were in focus, not as large as I had hoped (I didn't have a close up lens), but Harry and the background were softly out of focus. However, I used that slide in many of my talks.

Now I know that Harry and experiences with him will always be softly focused in the background of my life and the lives of all the teachers, students, neighbors, friends and family to whom he extended his hand, his wisdom and his sensitivity.

John Kominski

*EEAC is a voluntary organization in support of Environmental Education for New York*

## UPCOMING EEAC EVENTS.....

### Steering Committee Meetings

EEAC Steering Committee meetings are held from 4-6pm on the third Wednesday of every month. Please arrive promptly at 4pm!

All EEAC members are invited to attend and participate in the discussion. For information on the location of the meetings, contact Millard Clements at (212) 998-5495.

### Upcoming meeting information:

Steering committee meetings are held at New York University, Press Building, 32 Washington Square Park East. Upcoming dates are: March 15, April 19, May 17 and June 21.

### Newsletter Deadlines

Material should be submitted to the Editor on the first Monday of May, August, November and February. If possible, please submit on a floppy disc in WordPerfect 5.1 format.

### Newsletter Committee

Kenneth Kowald  
Mary Leou

Therese Braddick, Newsletter Editor  
City Parks Foundation  
The Arsenal, 830 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021  
(212) 360-8292

### Correction

The article "High School Spearheads Recycling Effort in Schools" in the Winter 1995 issue should have credited the New York State Department of Economic Development and the New York City Department of Sanitation for their generous funding of the Waste Audit and other work at Lafayette High School by the Waste Prevention and Recycling Service of the Council on the Environment of New York City.

Special THANKS to Con Edison for supporting the publication of this newsletter.

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

c/o Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment  
The Tennis House  
Prospect Park  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215-9992  
(718) 788-8500

This newsletter is a publication of the Environmental Education Advisory Council (EEAC), a voluntary organization of educators, classroom teachers, administrators and other professionals in active support of environmental education. It is available free upon request.

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Dorothy Siminski, Vice-Chair for Programs  
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Ruth Eilenberg, Treasurer

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Michael Zamm, Council on the Environment of NYC

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Talbert Spence, American Museum of Natural History  
Nancy A. Wolf, Environmental Action Coalition

\*Affiliations for identification purposes only.

## Chairman's Message



We dedicate this issue to Harry Betros, long time ee'er who passed away last year. I didn't know Harry well so I'll leave his overall commemoration to others. But I do know that in my meetings with him I found Harry to be a kind, gentle, sensitive, and knowledgeable person and educator.

Persons who leave their mark on others in a significant way, are often remembered for the small but miraculous acts they perform. I was fortunate enough to be the benefactor of one such miracle that Harry made happen.

In the mid 1970's Harry founded the conservation course at Martin Van Buren High School. A few years later the course was taken over and further developed by Howard Gottehrer, whose outstanding work was eventually recognized through an award from the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation. In 1988 the environmental education program I coordinate at the Council on the Environment-Training Student Organizers (TSO)-became a regular part of the course.

Well the course was very much a hands-on, get-into-the-field sort of enterprise. First Harry, and then Howard, took many field trips with their students. How did they manage to travel away from the school so often? Well somehow Harry had arranged for a NYC Board of Education school bus to show up at Van Buren to take the students on a variety of trips. The bus arrived in front of the school virtually every school day for almost 20 years! Now you all know how difficult it is to get a NYC school bus to come even once what with the one month notice required, the paper work, the frequent cancellations, the byzantine communication structure surrounding the application process, etc., etc.

When TSO appeared on the scene in 1988 we were of course delighted while at the same time flabbergasted at the possibility of having a bus at our disposal. When I asked Howard how and why this bus appeared every day he said he really didn't know, except that Harry Betros had arranged for it when the course first started back in 1975 or '76 and it just kept coming every day. This happened school year after school year. Well, someone must have been renewing the arrangement each year but we were never able to identify who that person was.

We all benefitted from this arrangement and indeed TSO, Van Buren, Howard and P.S. 213 did a marvelous award winning project in which high school students

worked with elementary school kids under the supervision of Judy Intraub and the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation to design and build a nature trail in Alley Pond Park (eventually named the Ralph Sloman Nature Trail, after another late environmental educator). This project couldn't have been accomplished without the Harry Betros special - the bus from the twilight zone that transported the Van Buren students over to P.S. 213 and the park on a frequent basis.

Well even the spirit of Harry Betros couldn't ultimately stop the bureaucracy. The Conservation course was finally cancelled due to budget cuts in 1994; yes, the bus did stop coming but a generation of Van Buren students were involved in environmental conservation work through the course, and its bus.

*Mike Zamm*



Every nature educator eventually finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. We want to teach principles and concepts; our public wants to know "What kind of moss is that?" People are fascinated with names.

They pay lip service to accounts of ecological succession, or alternate photosynthetic pathways, or ballistic seed dispersal, but ultimately they want to know the names of things. Harry knew the names of a great many things and went into field trips bound and determined to teach principles instead. At the Watson Homestead Ecology Workshops where we first met, and at their successor Sierra Club workshops at Donner Pass, California, 25 years later, Harry always set out to orient his listeners to processes and patterns and ideas—and always ended up yielding by the end to the pressure to start naming things. It comes with the territory. Of the nature educators I've known, he addressed the problem as firmly and as valiantly as any—and in the end had no more success overcoming human nature. But he did get a lot of the ideas in before starting to demonstrate how to recognize a member of the mint family. And I have a suspicion the ideas actually stayed longer in people's heads than the names did.

*Arthur M. Shapiro  
Professor, Evolution & Ecology  
University of California, Davis*



# Environmental Resources

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by *Kenneth Kowald*

## Learning Sessions

**EEAC Steering Committee** meetings are open to all EEAC members and friends and are a real learning experience for all of us. In recent months, these are some of the information "pieces" you would have heard about, if you were there:

Steering Committee member Jack Padalino, who runs the **Pocono Environmental Education Center**, brought us up to date on who is giving what grants for environmental education. PEEC's address is RD 2 Box 1010, Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania 18328, or call Jack at (717) 828-2319.

Gary Wartels described the work of the **Youth Development Programs** which he directs for the YMCA of Greater New York. You may reach him at 333 Seventh Avenue, New York 10001, or call (212) 630-9690.

Jenny Taylor talked about the work of the **American Forum for Global Education**. To find out about it, write to Suite 2600, 120 Wall Street, New York 10005, or call (212) 742-8232. Ask about "Silver and Gold Bridges to the Future," an international conference on global education and the United Nations, co-sponsored by the Forum and the United Nations Association of the United States, April 6-8.

William Sharp told us about the hands-on environmental education project of the **Roger Tory Peterson Institute**. He may be reached at 311 Curtis Street, Jamestown, New York 14701, or call (716) 665-2473.

Linda Orfield of the **New York City Board of Education** and Sheila Schwartz of the Humane Education Committee of the United Federation of Teachers told us about their joint efforts to promote healthy diets. To learn more, write to the Committee at 260 Park Avenue South, New York 10010. They also told us about EarthSave New York, which has good information. Call (212) 978-4338, or write to PO Box 2779, Rockefeller Center Station, New York 10185-0024.

Finally, among many things learned during the past few months, we heard about a new fundraising mechanism for non-profit groups, launched by **Con Edison**. Compact fluorescent light bulbs are being offered for \$3 each, a fraction of their wholesale price, for resale by the group to

Con Edison customers, with the group keeping the difference. Telephone the following for information: Bronx, (718) 817-7603; Brooklyn, (718) 802-5076; Manhattan, (212) 338-4927; Queens, (718) 830-6824; Staten Island, (718) 390-6369; Westchester, (914) 925-6353.

See what you've been missing? The Steering Committee meets at 4 pm on the third Wednesday of the month. For details, call Chairman Mike Zamm at (212) 788-7932.

## Matters of Time

To find out about **1995 Audubon Ecology Camps and Workshops for adults**, write to the National Audubon Society, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, Connecticut 06831.

**Soundsfun** is an interactive installation about musical instruments, which is scheduled to open in mid-April at the Children's Museum of Manhattan, 212 West 83rd Street. A smaller exhibition on the same theme will be on view through March 31 in the Citicorp Center, at the Northeast corner of East 53rd Street and Third Avenue.

The **7th National Urban Forest Conference** will be held September 13-15 in the Marriott Marquis Hotel, Manhattan. For information, write to Urban Forestry Department, American Forests, PO Box 2000, Washington, D.C. 20013, or call (202) 667-3300.

"**Magic School Bus Inside the Earth**" is on exhibition through April 23 at the New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th Street, Flushing Meadows Corona Park 11368. To learn more, call (718) 699-0005.

The **United States Environmental Protection Administration** is working with the **American Indian Science and Engineering Society** to award scholarships to students in colleges and universities. To find out about the next round, call Sonya Sandoval or Roberta Manuelito at (303) 492-8658.

To learn about the **Seiko Youth Challenge** in environmental education, call (800) 323-1550.

The **Toyota Tapestry grant program** is open to middle and high school science teachers. Inquiries should be sent to NSTA/TAPESTRY, 1840 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22201-3000.



**Earthwatch** is awarding scholarships and fellowships. Find out by calling Daniel Truesdale at (617) 926-8200, ext. 203.

To learn about the **American Greenways DuPont Awards Program**, administered by the Conservation Fund, call Jody Tick at (703) 525-6300.

## Material Sources

**"Plant-A-Lot News"** is a publication of the Council on the Environment of New York City and is appearing in a new format. To obtain a copy, write or call 51 Chambers Street, New York 10007, (212) 788-7900. At the same time, ask about **"Stepping Lightly on the Earth,"** a free guide to safe and dangerous products used around the home.

The **Children's Science Material Center** at Brooklyn College has a wide range of courses and materials. Write or call Dr. Paul Jablon, Director, 1102 Plaza Building, Brooklyn 11210, (718) 951-5061.

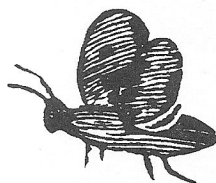
**"Shepherd Speaks"** is a newsletter by and for students, about the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary. Teachers receive reproducible copies of the quarterly newsletter and teacher's guide free. Write to Project Shepherd/Shepherd Speaks, c/o The Renaissance School, 36-41 Long Island City 11106, or call (718) 472-0549.

Mothers and Others publishes **"The Green Guide for Every day Life."** To learn more about the organization, write to 40 West 20th Street, New York 10011, or call (212) 242-0010.

To learn about school programs of the **Wildlife Conservation Society**, at the Central Park, Prospect Park and Queens Wildlife Centers, write to the Education Department Registrar, New York Zoological Society, 450 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn 11225.

**"Look Around New York"** is an information series published by the New York City Audubon Society, 71 West 23rd Street, New York 10010, (212) 691-7483.

The New York State Bar Association has published a free guide, **"The Threat of Global Climate Change: What Can New Yorkers Do?"** Write or call 1 Elk Street, Albany 12207, (518) 463-3200.



Those chance occurrences, those casual encounters, those unplanned consequences, how did I ever get into the environmental business? It was the early 1960's and Harry Betros and I were teaching at New Dorp High

School on Staten Island. I was to teach there for 30 years, Harry was to move on to environmental education teaching at the new High Rock Conservation Park where so many other teachers were to encounter Harry.

Harry learned that I was interested in the natural history of Staten Island. He recommended I attend the Study Group of the Nature Section of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. That was Harry's first major impact on my life. That eventually led to the writing of the *Comparative Flora of Staten Island*, a major accomplishment of my life. Harry, a most knowledgeable Staten Island botanist, was a major contributor to that flora.

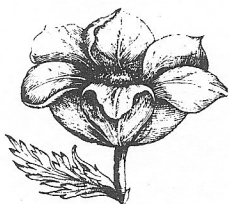
Then in early 1969, Harry asked if I would like to teach a summer environmental education workshop for NYC educators. No pay, but a week away in the Finger Lakes area. Harry introduced me to Joan Rosner, who interviewed me and accepted me as that year's geology expert at Watson Homestead Summer Ecology Workshops.

That led to 25 years of Watson Workshops. For one or two weeks a year I had Harry, along with so many other wonderful naturalists and ecologists, as a field colleague. Often our families shared the experience. Jo and Toni, our wives, found solace in each other while Harry and I immersed ourselves in the environment to the abandonment of all else. Our daughters became good friends.

In 1975, Harry and I and the workshop moved to PEEC, then Cape Cod, Southampton, Boston Harbor Islands, the campus of Douglass College, St. John in the Virgin Islands and finally the High Sierra in California where Harry's traditions are still carried on. We also found time together to camp and explore the Rocky Mountains, the Everglades and the Florida Keys.

My own environmental activism came from the deep concerns, interests and values imparted so gently by a man I miss dearly. My greatest desire still is to impart to others as much as Harry has to me. And that I impact their lives in direct and subtle ways. That is what being human is all about. Harry, this is a belated thanks for all you taught and did for me.

Dick Buegler



Harry Betros, at the human level, was the kindest, gentlest, most accommodating giver of himself that any of us, as educators, friends, students or partners could hope to or might ever find. As researcher, teacher, administrator,

staff member, and colleague, he was the most professional and objective seeker of knowledge and truth he could be. Harry was a scholar, inexhaustibly and voraciously determined to explore and acquire an ultimate knowledge base and understanding of the botanical world. His range and his intensity of appreciation were eclectic. He loved not only the breathtakingly beautiful, rare orchid, but also found and celebrated those fortunate enough to be listening, the arresting qualities and attractions of the simplest type of wildflower. And this was a characteristic, a level of perception which he brought to his human relations. Reasonableness, caring, perceptiveness, sensitivity and acceptance characterized his interpersonal approach in staff conferences, dealing with friends and family, and in the field.

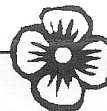
This quiet, loving man was a consistent and lifelong giver, always ready to share his vast store of information and understanding of both the plant world and the human condition. Many of those whose lives he touched recognized, appreciated, learned and profited from his compulsion to seek out and call attention to the wild and beautiful in the places he, and we as Watsonites, visited. He delighted in arriving beforehand at our annual Watson Ecology Encampments to explore nearby habitats, collect varieties of wildflowers and create individually designed centerpieces to delight and surprise us. His ability to find salad makings in the most unlikely places became not entirely unexpected treats at dinner time. His commitment to sharing his expertise prompted him to offer a first day brief workshop - a thumbnail overview of the local botanical scene - enabling even the least initiated to enjoy an in-depth appreciation of the beautiful plants they would encounter in the field.

Harry left many specific memories. He was a born and passionate teacher and his students learned to share his thirst for a level of understanding and appreciation which transcended mere factual knowledge. He sought out beauty and celebrated interrelationships in many settings. He spent hours searching for written and other materials to reinforce his ability to enlighten and excite. In fact, it would be safe to say that when Harry was not in the field with his hand lens and field guide, he could be found in a

library, bent over a book. His belief that nature's learnings and delight did not require travel to distant places made him a leading crusader for use of school environs as a living laboratory. It ultimately led him to write *Understanding Schoolyard Ecology*, a book for children and teachers which made their own school building and grounds an informative, exciting excursion.

Harry joined our team in 1968 as our first Watson staff member. We last saw him in July 1993, at our 26th Watson, this time in California's Sierra Nevadas. He was the first member of the fine, unmatched dedicated staff we have lost. He inspired growth in others, and never stopped growing himself. We will always be influenced by his mild and gentle manner, his deeply caring approach, the genuineness of his commitment. Those who knew him will never forget that his eyes, heart and mind were always open to, seeking for, the true and beautiful. That's the enriching legacy he's left for all of us.

Joan and Hy Rosner



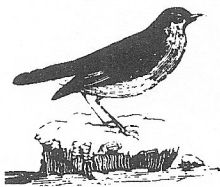
## Environmental Resources

Whatever your skills, make use of them and hone them as a **VOLUNTEER for the Alley Pond Environmental Center**. From helping with our extensive offerings to classes of NYC school children to soil testing and water quality monitoring; from researching low maintenance plants that will make our flower beds spring to life to organizing an intensive work day in April, volunteers will learn and teach how individuals can contribute to ecological health while enhancing their own quality of life and that of your community. If interested, please call APEC at 718-229-4000 and leave your name and telephone number for Peg Kocher or Gretchen Gaudilli.

### Wave Hill Education Programs

Wave Hill offers free teacher enhancement workshops on environmental studies. Meetings are on selected Wednesdays that do not conflict with EEAC monthly meetings. Each session is led by an expert in the field and highlights content information along with methods of teaching a variety of environmental topics.

To receive a detailed listing of activities and dates, call Isabel Weisinger at 718-549-3200 ext. 230 and leave your name and address.



I remember clearly the day I met Harry Betros. It was in the Spring of 1969. I was a recent arrival to Staten Island, having moved here in June, 1968. A lovely day beckoned me out-of-doors for a picnic with my two little boys, ages 3 and 6, in the beauty of a wooded place I had heard about...High Rock Park. I didn't realize at the time that the day's excursion would change my life forever because it was there that I met Harry.

Strolling around the grounds and peeking into the nature classrooms, I found Harry teaching a group of youngsters. I asked if I could watch and was invited to tag along with my sons.

When Harry finished with his class, he escorted the three of us on the trails of High Rock, pointing out the wonders of the natural world. We were enthralled and I guess he felt my total attention to his teaching because as we spoke, my enthusiasm for his subject was apparent. I told him that I had been a former teacher but was now full-time mother. At that time, Harry was the Director of Education at the park.

I left my phone number with him and was surprised when he called me the next day to offer me a job as a teacher and guide at the Park. When I expressed my lack of knowledge as a naturalist, Harry assured me that I would be trained by the High Rock staff. And what an outstanding group they were...Rudolph Lindenfeld, Olivia Hansen, Marie Burke, Cynthia Jacobson...all experts and all willing to share their knowledge with this novice.

That is how my involvement with nature teaching began, with the recognition by Harry Betros that curiosity and love can be nurtured and developed. I went to work at this wonderful place for two summers and the year between, before financial necessity sent me back to the regular classroom. But even after I left, the lessons I learned with Harry and the staff left a deep impression on me. Nature and teaching about it became my specialty and it has enriched my life immeasurably.

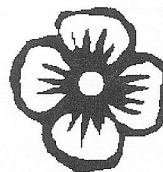
But it was more than the "facts" about nature that Harry shared. His gentle ways, his soft demeanor, even his shyness were all a part of his influence. He inspired this approach in others.

Recently, while sending a fax to the publishers of the soon-to-be released revised edition of my book *Using the Outdoors to Enrich Learning*, the owner of the pharmacy, who'd been my student more than 20 years ago, and I got

to talking. I asked him if he recalled any outdoor walks we might have taken. He replied, "Of course! And I remember the spittle bugs we found on the plants!" I can trace this directly back to my walks on the trail with Harry. I passed Harry's teachings to children, campers, other teachers and camp counselors and am still doing it.

Henry Adams expressed it best when he said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." The legacy of Harry Betros' life just keeps moving in ever-larger circles, like the ripples in the ponds of High Rock Park. It was a privilege to have known and learned from him.

*Lenore Miller*



Harry Betros was a gentle and nurturing man, eager to share his knowledge and love of the outdoors with all he met, students and teachers alike.

I met Harry in 1968 when I attended my first Watson Ecology Workshop. I remember vividly a walk through a field of wildflowers with Harry leading us into his world, encouraging us to understand and appreciate the beauty and order around us. During that week Harry and the other Watson staff members (such pioneers of environmental education as Joan and Hy Rosner, John Kominski, Dick Buegler and Ray Pfortner) generously shared their knowledge, each in his or her own way. Harry's style was that of a quiet, patient friend. You knew that he would answer every question with respect for the questioner and with encyclopedic precision.

As my involvement in environmental education grew I was welcomed into that wonderful network of educators that is the foundation of our present day EEAC. Cooperation is a hallmark of our professional lives and that cooperation was typified by Harry Betros. In the early days of Gateway Environmental Study Center, I turned to Harry often and he was always there as a valuable resource, graciously agreeing to do a workshop, lead a walk or offer information or good advice.

We miss this kind, giving scholar and gentle man. All of us who were taught by Harry are far richer for the experience.

*Ruth Eilenberg, Retired Coordinator  
Gateway Environmental Study Center*



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

\_\_\_\_\_ New Member      \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (       ) \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (       ) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Select either a \$15 dues payment to cover the cost of membership in EEAC for a calendar year, OR, a \$150 Life Membership. A membership entitles you to receive EEAC newsletters, program information mailings, and conference announcements.

Membership dues are tax deductible. Make all checks payable to EEAC.

Please complete the application and mail it, with your payment, to:

Ruth Eilenberg  
Treasurer  
196-32 53rd Avenue  
Flushing, New York 11365

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