

An Offer She Couldn't Refuse

AN UNEXPECTED phone call from her son's therapist snapped Claire Scovell LaZebnik '85 out of her "second novel syndrome." Dr. Lynn Kern Koegel was writing a book about autism and asked if LaZebnik would join her as coauthor. "I was so happy, I was jumping around the living room," the writer recalls.

The two set out to fill a void: there were no books on the market that explained in lay language how to help a child overcome the symptoms of autism. LaZebnik, who says she was "completely oblivious to the world of autism until my husband and I [had] to deal with it," helped tune the overall presentation of *Overcoming Autism* and contributed an account of her own experiences for the end of each themed chapter. "Family-friendly" is how she describes the new book, because the intervention methods for dealing with specific problems don't require "[setting] your kid at a table for five hours a day with a trained professional." Instead, "You gradually teach all those skills while going about your normal day."

For example, many children with autism display "stim" (self-stimulating behaviors). LaZebnik's first son, "Andrew" (she uses a pseudonym in the book), was formally diagnosed with autism when he was two and a half. He played constantly with small objects like loose strings or leaves, and made hand puppets with his fingers. These activities were isolating and worried his parents. In her passage on "stim," LaZebnik remembers that Koegel's instructions were simple: to tell Andrew he looked odd making puppets, to find an alternative activity for him, and to encourage more interaction with other children.

"I was slightly shocked to hear her say we could tell Andrew



Autism elucidators Lynn Kern Koegel (left) and Claire LaZebnik

to his face that something made him look silly," LaZebnik writes. "It had never occurred to me before that I could enlist Andrew's aid in his own behavioral interventions." With hard work, patience, and lots of reminders and encouragement, Andrew stopped "stimming" and started playing. LaZebnik calls the doctor and her methods "extraordinary" and says her son's progress was remarkable: he is now a happy, healthy 12-year-old, "a little quirky," but with no visible signs of a disability.

LaZebnik says Andrew's original diagnosis and the challenges that followed forced her and her husband, Robert LaZebnik '84, to reexamine their ideas about parenting. "I'm a far better mother for having a kid with special needs first," she says now, because what she learned about patience and being a parent helped her raise and nurture her three younger children better. "I've learned it's about creating a warm, happy, family life that's a refuge from everything else out there, where you learn about relationships and love."

Human relationships are an important theme in her writing. Her first novel, *Same as It Never Was*, published last year, describes the experience of a highly independent college student who must come to terms with becoming a caretaker when her estranged father and stepmother die in a car crash, leaving their four-year-old daughter alone. LaZebnik's wit comes through clearly in the heroine's frank, blunt manner.

"I only ever intended to be a fiction writer and a humorous one at that," the author says. "I have very little interest in writing non-fiction. But when Lynn asked me to write the book with her, it was the classic offer you can't refuse—it meant I got to write a book with my hero. How often in life do you get to work with your hero?"

—LAURA L. KRUG

their second daughter, Phoebe Elyse, on Sept. 15. "Phoebe joins her big sister Jordan (2½)—they are two bona fide San Francisco natives! Visits, e-mails, or calls from friends old and new always welcome." Contact them at kurso@post.harvard.edu.

Born: to **Emma Teng** and Stephen Chung, a son, Jonathan Aalto Chung, on July 5, 2003.

1990

Secretary: **Mark C. Solakian**, 15 Sargent Rd., Belmont, Mass. 02478; mark.solakian@verizon.net. Class website: www.harvard90.org.

Born: to **Charlie Ball** and Christine (Tribble) Ball '89, their first son, James Sullivan Ball. "Jimmy rarely has a moment's peace from older sisters Alexan-

dra (4) and Mariana (2). Chris has interrupted her school psychology career to start a child psychology career at home." Charlie is the broker/owner of Century 21 Legacy Properties in Somerville, Mass., and spends free time "on tour defending his 'Ultimate Fighting' championship belt."

Sarah Highland, her partner, Cat Berry, and many friends raised the timber frame of their house "on a cold November day, after months of work with mallet, chisel, and saw. In the spring we will infill the walls with a mixture of straw and clay (helpers welcome). Don't ask when the house will be finished unless you have built your own home!"

Born: to **Eugene Lee** and Sally Park '92, J.D. '96, a son, Nicholas Jae Lee, on April 23, 2003, in New York City. "We moved in 2001 to Chappaqua after five years in the city, and love the green grass and

quiet of the suburbs (as well as the fact that the city is still only 45 minutes away). Eugene is a managing director at Evercore Partners, where he focuses on the restructuring advisory business, and Sally has left a position at Pfizer as corporate counsel to stay at home full time with Nicholas."

1991

Secretary: **Dianne Borges**, 1812 Kenwood Ave., Austin, Tex. 78704; borgesd@aol.com. Class website: <http://expet.gps.caltech.edu/harvard91>.

Born: to **Kelly Eckel** and Greg Ott, a daughter, Madeleine Fetten Ott, on September 26.

David Eggar's FLUX quartet performed Morton Feldman's six-hour String Quartet No. 2 at Carnegie Hall last October. FLUX was featured in the