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Pabon Learns to 'Keep Greenwich on Left'

Day of Adventure Prepares Sixth-Graders for Trip Down Under

BY LYNN RUSSO

Last Thursday brought a day of outdoor adventure for 11-year-old Melody Pabon. The Greenwich Boys & Girls Club member was preparing for her 18-day trip to New Zealand and Australia by participating in activities similar to what she might experience while "down under."

Titled "Keep Greenwich on Your Left," the mini-triathlon of sorts was patterned after the book *Keep Australia On Your Left*, written by kayaking expert Eric Stiller, who once attempted to circle Australia by kayak.

The Day's events began with a two-mile kayaking stint from Indian Harbor toward Great Captain's Island and back. This was followed by a five-mile bicycle ride around Greenwich Point Beach and a

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VALERIE BOLLING
WESTERN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

hearty four-mile hike through Mianus Gorge Park.

Pabon was joined by the club's executive director, Bob DeAngelo, her mother, Luz Pabon, and Charlie Gumz, a club camp counselor.

The day of exercise wound up at the Boys & Girls Club's Camp Simmons property at 744 Lake Ave. "I liked the biking the best," Pabon said about the

experience. "We got to socialize and talk and enjoy the weather."

While a student at Hamilton Avenue School, Pabon wrote several poems and short stories. "I always submit students' poems to the *Anthology of Poetry by Young Americans* and to *Creation Communication*," said Valerie Bolling, her fourth- and fifth-grade teacher. "Melody was published in both those anthologies in fourth and fifth grade, and she also took second place in the Connecticut Literary Competition sponsored by the Ferguson Library in fourth grade." (Pabon recently completed the sixth grade at Western Middle School.)

In May 2003, Pabon received a certificate for outstanding writing from the Connecticut Writing Project sponsored by the University of Connecticut.

Soon after, her parents, Luz and Tony Pabon, received a letter from EDventures Down Under, a division of Logan, Utah-based International Students/Sports Specialists, Inc. specializing in youth trips. Their daughter had been nominated as a prospective student explorer and they were invited to a meeting to find out more information.

Bolling wrote a required letter of recommendation, in which the teacher is asked to address the student's character and maturity level. Students must maintain a C average or better to qualify for the educational tour.

Pabon was quickly accepted for the program. "Melody is extremely gifted in language arts—reading, writing and oral language," Bolling said. "She is also very poised, articulate and mature for her age."

In the Swim at the Club

Pabon is also an active member of the Greenwich Boys & Girls Club, where as a part of the swim team, she specializes in the backstroke and helps other kids per-



Melody Pabon (center) tackles the climbing wall at Camp Simmons.

fect theirs. The club is funding about \$1,800 of Pabon's roughly \$2,600 adventure.

"I was very touched when Melody came to me over the winter and gave me an envelope with a donation to the club," recalled DeAngelo. Pabon sold lollipops and other candies at school to raise the money. The donation totaled about \$20, according to Pabon, but to DeAngelo, it wasn't the amount that mattered—the effort and the thought were priceless.

"When she and her family asked me for help in making this trip possible...there was no way I'd say no to her," he said, noting that the club is known for helping all kids in the area achieve their goals.

In exchange for the assistance, Pabon has been asked to make a presentation to other club members when she gets back. She said she might read entries from a



Melody Pabon and her mother, Luz Pabon, in the water.

journal she will be keeping and show photographs she took on her trip.

"My hope is that she will become a role model for the younger kids, and perhaps eventually even become a camp counselor," DeAngelo added. Pabon is the only Greenwich student on the trip, but she will be accompanied by six other Connecticut youths, including students from Stamford, Darien and Hartford. There will be a total of 90 youths from across America participating.

LET THE G'DAYS BEGIN

On Wednesday, Pabon's group left for New Zealand, where they planned to spend a week exploring One Tree Hill, from which they could view all of Auckland (New Zealand's capital), swim in the Waiwera Thermal Pools, meet the local Maori people (similar to Australia's aborigines) and stay on a farm with a family of "Kiwis"—a local nickname for New Zealanders.

From there, the group will fly to

Australia to visit Sydney and Canberra, where scale-model battlefields at the war Museum, amazing scientific displays at the Quest Com science museum and a tour of the Parliament House await them. They will then take a tram through the Blue Mountains, considered the steepest cable ride in the world. The students return on July 25.

"I hope that I will learn about how different the children are and how different the United States is from the Australian and New Zealand culture," Pabon said. "I want to

learn about the kids' everyday life and how the geography and the government affects their life."

By keeping a daily journal and writing an evaluation of her trip when she returns, Pabon may be eligible for high school credit for her experience, according to Britta Benczson, a Monroe teacher who is chaperoning the seven Connecticut students, and who gave them their journals.

"I'm hoping that Melody's whole group can expand their thoughts on different cultures in the world and open up their horizons," said Benczson.

Pabon is also interested in applying for a student exchange program to Australia when she gets to high school.

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Melody Pabon (center), her mother and Charlie Gumz kayak on the Long Island Sound.