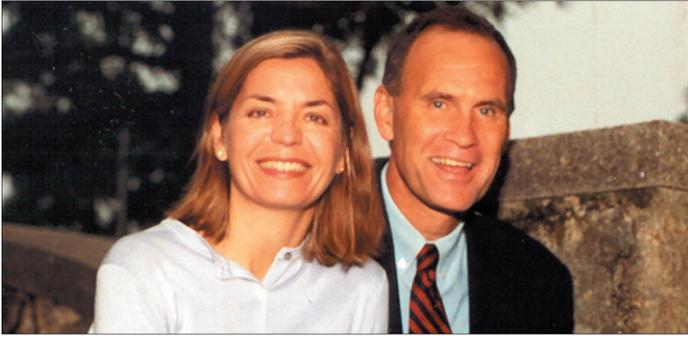


# The Biggest Job Offers New Slant to Family Vacation



When Laura and Malcolm Gauld of Hyde School began presenting The Biggest Job parenting workshops across the country more than four years ago, they never imagined it would evolve into a book, teacher training workshops, character-building workshops for kids ages 8 through 18, workshops for corporations, and even family workshops in the wilderness, but it did. In fact, right now, after more than a year of promoting their book, *The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have* (Scribner 2002), and traveling around the country delivering workshops to a wide range of audiences, their gearing up for wilderness expeditions that will take them, two of their three children, and other adventurous families to the Hyde organization's Black Wilderness Preserve. Scheduled for August 14 and August 21, the three-day experience attracts families from far off places, such as California, Chicago, and Florida because, according to Laura Gauld, it has all of the elements of a well-planned, adventurous outdoor vacation coupled with a "more unique" component that strengthens family relationships.

Located in Eustis, Maine, the Black Wilderness Preserve stretches along the shores of Flagstaff Lake to the Bigelow Mountain Range, where hikers, campers, and other outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy spectacular views, and regularly



Families experience the thrill of canoeing on Flagstaff Lake during The Biggest Job Family Workshops in the Wilderness.

catch glimpses of the abundant wildlife, such as moose, deer, eagles, and bears. Families attending the wilderness vacations will receive wilderness survival instruction and together explore the region by canoe and on foot. But many families say that the most extraordinary experiences occur around the campfire, or during walks along the shore of the lake, where family members honestly talk about their perceived roles in the family, their personal strengths and challenges, and how they contribute and hinder the family. The objective in getting each individual in the family to recognize individual roles and take responsibility for them, rather than blame, is to begin the process of establishing "real" honesty as the foundation of the family.

"This gets everyone on the same page so that members can start building upon higher expectations of themselves and one another," says Laura. "You work toward getting all of the pieces and parts together and eventually the result can be an enhanced whole."

Laura is quick to say that the wilderness experience is different for every family because every family dynamic is different. When families are removed from their everyday environments and routines, and members are encouraged to focus on the way they interact with each other on a day-to-day basis, it can lead to some important discoveries, discoveries that may later on prevent tension and ultimately improve upon an already loving and emotionally healthy family.

One significant ingredient in the trip format is that all family members are present and involved, and introduced to challenges that involve some level of risk-taking. At various points in the weekend, individuals will experience both angst and yearning for what they will be asked to tackle—whether it be a physical exercise or a reflective exercise. The idea is to give everyone the opportunity to experience a new role. Family members who usually take control or assume much of the responsibility in the home may find themselves learning from family members who are often more passive. This exchange in roles alters the dynamic, allowing all family members to learn something about themselves and each other, an experience, Laura says, that has a powerful impact on the way the family operates.

“Sometimes the kids get to be the leaders and see their parents in positions where they may not feel as capable and need help,” says Laura. “It’s very empowering for a child when an opportunity to express concern for her parent presents itself in the form of ‘Mom, let me give you a hand,’ or when a father and mother can witness the potential of their children by stepping back and allowing them to struggle and eventually overcome.”

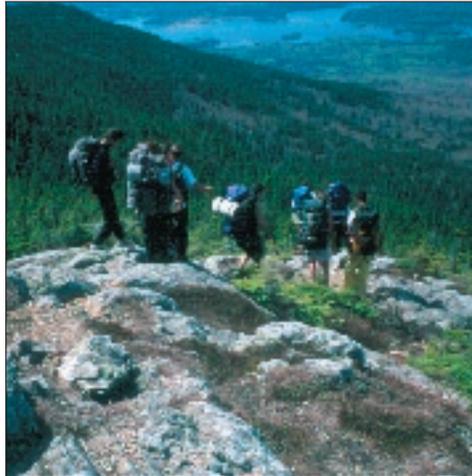
Historically, Laura has seen families that at the onset are looking for a different kind of vacation and in the end are pleasantly surprised by the experience. As a teacher at the Hyde School in Bath, Maine, she sees a lot of parents of teens who are eager to recapture the positive aspects of parenting their children. Many parents she sees express concern that they feel a disconnection with their teens who normally, in order to assert the independence they desire, drift apart from their parents to avoid the

authority that prevents them from doing so. Parents often sign on for the wilderness vacations because they have hope that the experience will somehow change their child. What they frequently learn is that they too need to shift their parenting practices to promote positive growth in their child. Laura sees this as a struggle for most parents, a difficult transition, because most are fixed in their role as protector and nurturer. They can forget that their good intentions to protect can later be stifling and impede emotional maturation. Her goal is to help parents see how their roles can be more effective when they recognize themselves as supporters and guiders as their children approach adulthood. When this happens, change begins to take place in their children. Because their children have more control over making decisions that will impact their lives, they naturally assume more responsibility for themselves.

“This doesn’t prevent the kids from making mistakes,” says Laura. “But deep down every adult knows that their mistakes are what taught them the most about what they did and didn’t want to do with their own lives. How can we expect our kids to take care of themselves when we’re gone, to have emotional resilience, if the messages we send them imply that we don’t have faith in their ability to take

responsibility for their lives?”

As parents and teachers, both Laura and Malcolm Gauld have learned firsthand the importance of modeling what they say is important to their children and students. In all of their workshops, they explain that the best way to realize positive change in any relationship is to begin by example, saying that parents can’t possibly expect to control the behavior of their children or anyone else if they are not willing



Adventure hikes in the Bigelow Mountains

to take a look at the way they are living their lives, but they do. By beginning with their own self-growth, parents provide a model for their children to emulate, which in turn motivates and inspires their children to do the same. According to Laura, this approach is not a “crash plan” and therefore parents looking for a quick and easy fix will be disappointed. For many families, however, the three-day wilderness experience is often an uplifting “awakening,” and can set the stage for further exploration of ways to

reconnect.

Both graduates of Hyde School, the Gauld’s workshops and book are based on the school’s character philosophy, which was first introduced by Hyde founder Joseph Gauld in 1966 when he opened the first boarding school in Bath, Maine. Malcolm, the son of Joseph, has served as teacher, coach, head of school on the Hyde-Bath campus and currently serves as the president of the Hyde organization. Laura, also a teacher, currently co-directs The Biggest Job family and teacher workshops. They reside in Bath, Maine, with their three children. For more information about The Biggest Job and the wilderness trips, log on to its Web site at [www.thebiggestjob.org](http://www.thebiggestjob.org). For more information about the wilderness trips, contact Laura at [lgauld@hyde.edu](mailto:lgauld@hyde.edu), or 207-443-7369.

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