The name "Outward Bound" generally evokes the sort of bucolic images that appear in catalogues of stylish but rough-and-ready outdoors gear. One pictures white-water-rapid navigators being skillfully guided by a group of wholesome college kids in a raft. Rocky hillsides where people clad in orange Gore-Tex(a) are pulling one another by rope. Virgin forests where the only evening sound might be a nightingale's song. The aisles of a Sloan's supermarket, a subway station in New York's financial district, and a hospital cafeteria in Harlem seem a million miles away. But these are the setting of a New York City Outward Bound weekend course. And to those who take such a journey, neither those locales, nor Outward Bound, ever look the same again.

After the personal orientation courses, I wondered, periodically, what on earth I was doing there and how I might get out of it. The first such flash came right at the beginning. I had shown up, as instructed, at 8 a.m. on Saturday morning. The instructions had told us to take the subway to Fulton Street and then walk east away from the World Trade Center until we reached our meeting point under the prow of the clipper ship Peking. I didn't know a soul, and, standing there in my old clothes, small duffle in hand, on an unusually raw and cold mid-November evening, I didn't relish, at age forty-four, being instructed to join in a circle and play a game at which my children would have laughed.

"Here is that South Street Seaport," run to the other side," the instructor shouted.

After each command, the circle would reform, but with one person not having squeeze in and hence become the new caller in the center. "Everyone watching red, run to the other side." "Everyone who's seen Malcolm X, run to the other side." (The movie had only been out for a week, and half the participants charged across.) "Everyone who's hungry and wonders where the bathroom will be tonight, run across." That time we all crossed. It had seemed silly, but it worked. Right away, I knew that I had more in common than I had realized with this group of total strangers, half of whom were high school kids from the south Bronx and Brooklyn whose background and experience had seemed to have little in common with that of a New England-bred, Ivy League-educated art historian.

Names were then called out, and we formed into three groups of ten, each with two instructors. Five of the ten were youth—almost all African American or Latino—and in our group all from different schools in east Brooklyn. And though this group was diverse in color, we all had paid double tuition, to cover the cost of ourselves and our youth partners.

Everyone was issued aluminum-frame backpacks, sleeping bags, eating utensils, and a few other bare-bones necessities. The instructors checked out what we had brought along, encouraging people to get rid of anything unnecessary or of extra food, and we loaded our packs. Additionally, we handed over our watches and wallets, any money, and in some cases beepers. These items would all be returned at the end of the weekend, but for 48 hours we would live without our usual props. We were, however, each given an emergency kit in a sealed envelope, with $5 in it and instructions on how to reach the trip lead-broader Chinatown suppers in college. But the discussion, quite programmed, was unusual; we each had been asked on our walk to interview our partners about their sense of community, and now we reported on what we had heard from one another, and took it from there. "Community" was the theme of this journey.

The Friday night sleeping accommodations were unlike any I had ever dreamed of. At a temperature of about 30 degrees, we slept on the tilting deck of one of the ships moored at the seaport. The landscape we saw from our sleeping bags was extraordinary—with the lights of the Financial District skyscrapers in one direction and of Brooklyn Heights across the water. Gulls flew overhead, and there was a good chance of fish past the point when you would want to eat it. I had known New York from many angles, but never before from this one. I did, however, have to lower my head well inside the sleeping bag to be warm enough to sleep.

Outward Bound courses generally start with a bit of "Basic Training" and of "sustenance". We were woken after about two hours of broken sleep, and told that we had to be ready to get off the boat by a quarter of six. This meant rolling our sleeping bags and packing up in the dark. By 6 a.m. I was serving breakfast on the subway, working my way up and down the front section of a shaking car as I handed out bananas and pita pockets with jam and cream cheese. Jay poured orange juice. The riders who were not part of our group all stared, but we ate happily, doing our best to fortify ourselves for the morning's activities even if we were not very hungry. Food on this trip took on the role of being a necessary fuel more than a diversion or luxury.

The O.B. van met us at the 125th Street subway station, and we headed to Randall's Island. There we divided up into two large canoes. J azy, holding a canoe paddle was as novel an experience as being at the 125th Street subway station had been for me. For both of us, this was really a day of traveling into another person's world.

Canoing up the East River, past Hell's Gate to the northern tip of Manhattan, was spectacular. It was drizzling out, and the gray mist lent drama to the urban vistas. We tried to identify bridges from which we had previously thought to be a uniquely East Side phenomenon. Jay told me that he and his friends call them "Timbs" and that they were replacing jazzsy jumpers as the footwear of the moment. I got a sense of what it would be like to be a very fast river, not far from a Randall's Island, and the two officers began cheering us on through their speak-
soap” and several other products of which I had never previously heard.

I knew I had a story, a story that was inherently
friendly and helpful to this pair of a black teenager and middle-aged white man, both rather disheveled and wearing the clothes we had slept in. We had a fine time shopping at the Studio Museum, where I was able to interest Jay in Jacob Lawrence and Romaine Beardon. He, in return, explained his passion for video games—a subject I had no prior knowledge of, as to me as modern painting had been to him.

Our conversation at lunch—“chicken
short pieces” (fried thighs) and rice and beans at Lenox Avenue and 127th Street—was quite in keeping with his interest in music and his curiosity about my experience of New York’s white neighborhoods. He imitated the way that women clutch their pocketbooks at the sight of him, and that men like me put our hands over our wallets. He confessed that nothing tempts him so to commit a crime—although he resists. He also described the way that cops, both black and white, hassle him when he is, for example, in Times Square. They invariably stop him and ask what he is doing there, as if he needs a passport.

The group reconvened at 1:30 p.m. As on any hike, I was hot, weary, and truthfully, a bit unsure of how to act. They invariably stop me, my legs feeling as they generally do on the incline of a mountain. Only now, rather than heading through woods, we made our way through a trail of open space and trash. The afternoon washing windows, helping to prepare a new gift shop run by volunteers, and selling candy to the patients, we were all tremendously impressed by the handsome, benevolent, and loving personal care given patients. Even on the floors assigned to psychiatric, I climbed and rappelling. I was on my way north by subway toward Fort Tryon Park. There, equipped with climbing ropes and harnesses, we took turns rock climbing and rappelling. I was on my way down a cliff. The woman to my right, was on her way up. She was miserable, struggling to find handholds and foot holds in the slippery rocks. Her great- est fear was that her back-ups would let go of her. She was so far up the rope that her back-ups would have to climb and rappel. I did my best to encourage her, as did others from above and below. Eventually she reached the summit, but not without a fair share of terror and tears.

That afternoon, when we had our final group discussion and farewell meal in Central Park at about 100th Street, Monica talked about the anguish of that late night than Monica should have made everyone else roar. I was not thrilled. For the doctors who might want some­thing from the vending machines in the canteen. One of those people who liked to sleep in total darkness, I was not thrilled.

My solution made everyone else roar. I placed a stacking chair in such a way that I could put my head under it. And then, we discussed uniforms and work problems that had been plaguing me for years. It was no surprise, really; I had learned that I could do more than I expected, and go places I had never been.

Our evening was all preparing our beds by 9 p.m. This meant putting our sleeping bags on the linoleum floor, and asking what he is doing there, each of those people who liked to sleep in total darkness, I was not thrilled.

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On Sunday morning we again back-
packed, collecting from 120th Street a head- ned north by subway toward Fort Tryon Park. There, equipped with climbing ropes and harnesses, we took turns roc k climbing and rappelling. I was on my way down a cliff. The woman to my right, was on her way up. She was miserable, struggling to find handholds and foot holds in the slippery rocks. Her great- est fear was that her back-ups would let go of her. She was so far up the rope that her back-ups would have to climb and rappel. I did my best to encourage her, as did others from above and below. Eventually she reached the summit, but not without a fair share of terror and tears.

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