



## *Right to Risk: A Journey Through the Grand Canyon*

by Judith Birnbaum

Imagine my surprise when I was selected by the National MS Society to go on a white water rafting trip through the Grand Canyon!

Although I am limited by MS, I could not pass up this great opportunity. Initially, I was very nervous about doing anything like this, but I found that the sponsors would provide everything we needed.

On May 10, we arrived in Phoenix, Arizona for orientation. There, I met Kathleen Jo Ryan and the staff of her film production company, KJR Media. We were all to be part of a television documentary. Her staff, plus a doctor, nurse, experienced river guides, and the support team from Adaptive Recreation Services would make this trip possible for me. I was then introduced to my companions on this adventure. We all face obstacles in our lives: MS, paraplegia, blindness, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, and quadriplegia.

Our adventure began at Lee's Ferry. I was fitted with an orange life preserver and

shown how to get in the raft. At last, we were in the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River. I had no idea what I was in for, but I started to relax as I began to appreciate the beauty surrounding me. The sights, sounds, and smells filled my soul with peace. The first day was to teach us the daily routine. We were encouraged to do as much for ourselves as we could, but there was plenty of help when we needed it.

Along the way, we hiked to caves, waterfalls, and archeology sites, swam in the river and got close to nature. We were encouraged to write, color, and paint in the group journal. One of the best parts of the trip was going through the rapids, sitting up front, and being pounded by the cold, 55 degree water. Wow! What a rush! Every rapid was unpredictable. The explanation the guides gave was, "The river makes the rules."

In the evening, after dinner, it was time to tell bedtime stories, sing along with the guitars, or participate in a "Not-So-Talent" show. The nights were so beautiful with the sky lit up by the twinkling stars. The moonlight made its way down the sides of the canyon, lighting first one part then another, sparkling on waves in the water. Chirping insects serenaded us while the Colorado River rushing by added its song. What a wonderful way to fall asleep.

We bonded and became a community existing for a short time away from the hectic modern world. All too soon our trip was over. The memories from this rewarding and exciting adventure will be cherished forever.