

Readers page

Thanks to a dedicated hospital staff

I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to everyone associated with my recent stay in Mississauga Hospital.

The following groups of people have been noted in alphabetical sequence because, regardless of the differences in status and salary, they are in my mind at the same level of dedication.

I therefore thank the administration staff, ambulance attendants, dieticians, doctors, intensive care team, janitorial staff, laundry staff, nursing staff, orderlies, specialists, students, voluntary workers and x-ray staff.

If I have omitted any person or group it is for no other reason than pure oversight and I apologize.

Both Tina and I, through individual experiences, firmly believe that the people who have cared for us at the Mississauga Hospital represent the finest standards of — and dedication to — medical aid throughout the world and we hope you are as proud of yourselves as we are of you.

STAN BRADSHAW,
Agnes St.

Protect our seniors

This letter was sent to Keith Norton, minister of community and social services. A copy was filed with *The Times*.

The members of CODA, a group of older lesbians and gays, write this letter to express our dismay and concern over the tragic deaths of 24 senior citizens in a recent fire.

With each year, the proportion of senior citizens in our society grows. It is therefore an urgent matter that every aspect of the care required by older citizens be continuously under review.

It is especially urgent that the safety of our senior citizens be in the hands of authorities sensitive to the special infirmities that burden older people.

The death of 24 older citizens demonstrates that a thoroughgoing review of the conditions un-

der which seniors are housed must be undertaken immediately; that more stringent regulations respecting the safety of older people living in institutions must be quickly enacted and that, most important of all, government must remain watchful that its regulations are at all times and all hours observed to the full.

ELGIN BLAIR,
Co-ordinator.

Coffee break appreciated

Once again Mississauga residents have proved themselves fine citizens! During the disastrous fire at Extencicare it was great to see so many pitching in to help. Personally and on behalf of the many who so appreciated the coffee after this disaster, I would like to thank Albert at the Rod & Gun Club for the coffee

urn and John at the Villa Restaurant for supplying all the coffee.

Rose Anne Didur
Park Towers

Mayor's clinic a success

Many thanks to the Mississauga Times for your co-operation in assisting the Red Cross in a most successful Mayor's Blood Donor Clinic on July 25. We had many, many comments about the super color photo on your front page prior to the clinic, and I'm certain that the coverage you did for us contributed to the turnout of 495 donors enabling us to collect 406 units of blood.

Only with the continued support from local newspapers, media etc. can we here at the Red Cross hope to meet our objectives. Together we can serve our community. Together we can make good things happen.

Ann Serotiuik (Mrs.)
Director

Blood Donor Recruitment
Mississauga Branch
The Canadian Red Cross Society

Friendship on the mountain

I guessed that she was five, sitting hunched in evident sadness beside her mother on a bench at the foot of the "Mountain" in Sheridan Mall. She had placed a sympathy-seeking hand on my wheelchair and glanced up into my face from time to time as if to assure herself that my smile was not a laugh at her, but an invitation to receive comfort. I decided to take a chance on her unspoken request and speak to her at a time of intimate private grief, though I knew from childhood how gauche were adult probings into the emotions of the young.

"You look so sad, sweetheart. What makes you sad?"

She looked at her mother and

noting that she had smiled at me, took it as assurance that I was acceptable and replied very slowly and quietly, "My very bestest friend has moved away!"

Her mother nodded to me and added the explanation, "Julie's daddy was transferred to Montreal, so she went with him and her mummy."

Then she smiled brightly into the sad little face and said, "Julie will be back again at Thanksgiving and she'll come over, honey, to tell you all about her new house."

"I don't want to hear about her new house! I want her to come and live in her old house!"

So always cries the grief of parting and the loneliness of bereavement. Julie's friend's eyes were dark with angry sorrow when she directed them to mine, quite misted with compassion and helplessness, even as my whole being yearned to wave a magic wand and bring Julie back to her sorrowing, tearful little friend. But an all-wise Providence has decreed that we must allow our beloved children to learn to cope with the changes and chances of human experience and in all common griefs to find the worth of love and to grow strong in the development of human relationships.

I recalled the small boy who had shaken my hand as he passed out through the door of one of my churches at the conclusion of a service and whom I had greeted with the words, "Good morning, my friend" and had seen him turn to his escorting Grandmother with a big smile and the proud boast, "He called me 'My friend'!" I remembered him and his happiness, and I looked down into the sorrowful little face so close to my knees and I asked, "May I be your friend?"

Her face brightened into evident delight. She grasped her Mother's hand and pulled her away as a torrent of words related her story. Just as they both passed out of sight they turned to wave, and, yes, there was no sorrow on my new friend's smiling face.

Rev. Owen G. Barrow
Park St.

Limits to behavior, yes — strap, no

The following letter was addressed to Peel Board of Education director John Fraser. A copy was filed with *The Times*:

We are writing with regard to the Peel Board of Education Discipline Policy. The Council has several concerns about the Policy and would like to bring them to the attention of your Board. Specifically, while we recognize the need for discipline in the school system, we question the necessity of the use of the strap.

Psychological research over the past decade indicates that the behavioural consequences of punishment are the most difficult to predict and control. Punishment can certainly be effective in producing results, but not necessarily the results intended. The effects of positive and negative schedules of reinforcement can be better predicted and should therefore form

the focus of school discipline. Similarly, the actual administration of physical punishment is much more difficult to regulate than non-violent consequences to behaviour.

The Council recommends that the education system take a leadership role in the development of programs for teaching non-violent methods of child discipline. We would like to point out that such training is important for child rearing both in and out of the school system.

The Discipline Policy states that the strap be used for students "in Grades Four to Eight inclusive" and therefore raises more questions. If we assume that the strap is not appropriate for students in Grades below Four and above Eight, why then is it seen as appropriate for the grades in between? Presumably, the discipline methods used for younger and older children could also be

adopted for this middle range. The choice of this range as appropriate for the use of the strap is especially suspect when we consider the variance of development levels of children in these grades.

The Council feels that clear, firm limits to behaviour are important, but questions the necessity to incorporate violence as an option. If we teach our youth that the ultimate resolution of a problem is that of violence, how can we expect them to explore alternate ways of resolving their own conflicts?

In closing, the Council feels that an important step toward addressing the above concerns would be a reappraisal of the Discipline Policy by your Board.

Ettore Cardarelli
President,
Social Planning
Council of Peel

Easing the retarded into society

By NADINE J. MAYERS

For years, mentally retarded people have been the objects of pity and fear. They have been devalued, called "vegetables" and sent away from home to live in large, austere institutions totally segregated from the rest of society.

Increasingly, however, society is becoming more accepting of these individuals. Parents are choosing to keep their retarded children at home, raising them as normally as possible. Recreation services at the municipal level are being expanded to include retarded people. Group homes are being opened within ordinary residential neighborhoods of Toronto. It is now much more common to see retarded people on the streets, at the movies, at your local park. In short, they are participating in all the usual activities open to any member of our society.

Who are the mentally retarded? The term "mentally retarded" is a confusing one for many people. It conjures up many images, some of them grossly inaccurate.

Mental retardation is a condition which refers to an individual's problems in learning. Labelling a person "mentally retarded" does not really tell you very much about him because there is a tremendous range in the degrees of retardation. People vary greatly in intelligence, and this is true for the retarded as well. Someone may be a "slow learner", i.e. just below average in intelligence or may be so severely retarded that he is unable to even

recognize objects. Of course, there are also all the varying levels of retardation between these two extremes.

Even at the same level, retarded individuals are vastly different. One person may have good verbal skills and be poor in arithmetic. Another may be able to learn factory work but have a speech impediment.

There is another type of problem which often accompanies the retardation. This is the area of physical defects. For example, it is very common for retarded people to have epilepsy, poor motor coordination, hearing or visual problems. Sometimes they may have an odd appearance, perhaps an uneven gait.

At any rate, there is a whole constellation of qualities which may occur together under the label of "mental retardation." It is important to understand that each retarded person is an individual, with a unique set of abilities and limitations.

Let us try to visualize the problems encountered by a family in raising a retarded child. Firstly, there is the shock of discovering the retardation. Often, it is not apparent until the child has been in school for some time that there are any problems in learning. Once this is discovered, the parents have to go through the lengthy process of determining the appropriate school setting for their child. Is it a special education class in the normal school system or a school for the retarded? This first step is often a very painful one; parents must confront the fact that their child will not live up to

their expectations. Gone are the visions of a nursing career, or a life as a lawyer defending criminals. This is a shattering experience for many families and often, they require considerable support in adjusting to these new expectations of their child.

Secondly, there is the whole area of social acceptance. What do you tell your neighbor when she wants to know why your seven-year-old child does not read? What do you tell the children in the neighborhood when they poke fun at your son because of his clumsiness at sports? How do you find a babysitter who will understand your child's problems and not tease him when he is unable to comprehend something.

Many families manage to accept the limited intellectual abilities of the retarded child and find workable solutions to the questions just posed. These solutions may work very well until puberty, the teenage years. The teenage retarded person presents a whole new range of perplexing problems for his parents. What do you tell him about his job prospects? Will he be able to support himself financially as an adult? Can he get married? Should he? What about children and birth control? Who will look after and protect my retarded adult after I die?

There is also the broad issue of independence. The question constantly nagging every parent of a retarded person is how much independence to allow the person. How much independence can the retarded person really

develop? Am I, as a parent, realistically viewing his capacity to learn independence skills? Am I overprotecting needlessly, or am I hopelessly optimistic about his capabilities to function without support?

All the questions which have been posed in this article are those which the families of a retarded person must confront every day. They are the issues which must be addressed in order to make the daily decisions which are necessary in running a family. There are no easy or absolute answers.

It is apparent, then, that there are stages through which each family of a retarded person must pass, in accepting and adjusting to the person's limitations. Each stage is accompanied by confusion, questioning and sometimes even real emotional stress. Some stages may be more difficult than others for a particular family.

The image of the mentally retarded and the support services open to them have changed drastically in the last few years. It is hoped that, increasingly, retarded people will be allowed to participate in society to the limits of their potential.

Nadine Mayers is a marriage and family counsellor in private practice in Mississauga. Although her main interests centre around individual and marital therapy, she also specializes in counselling families with a retarded member.