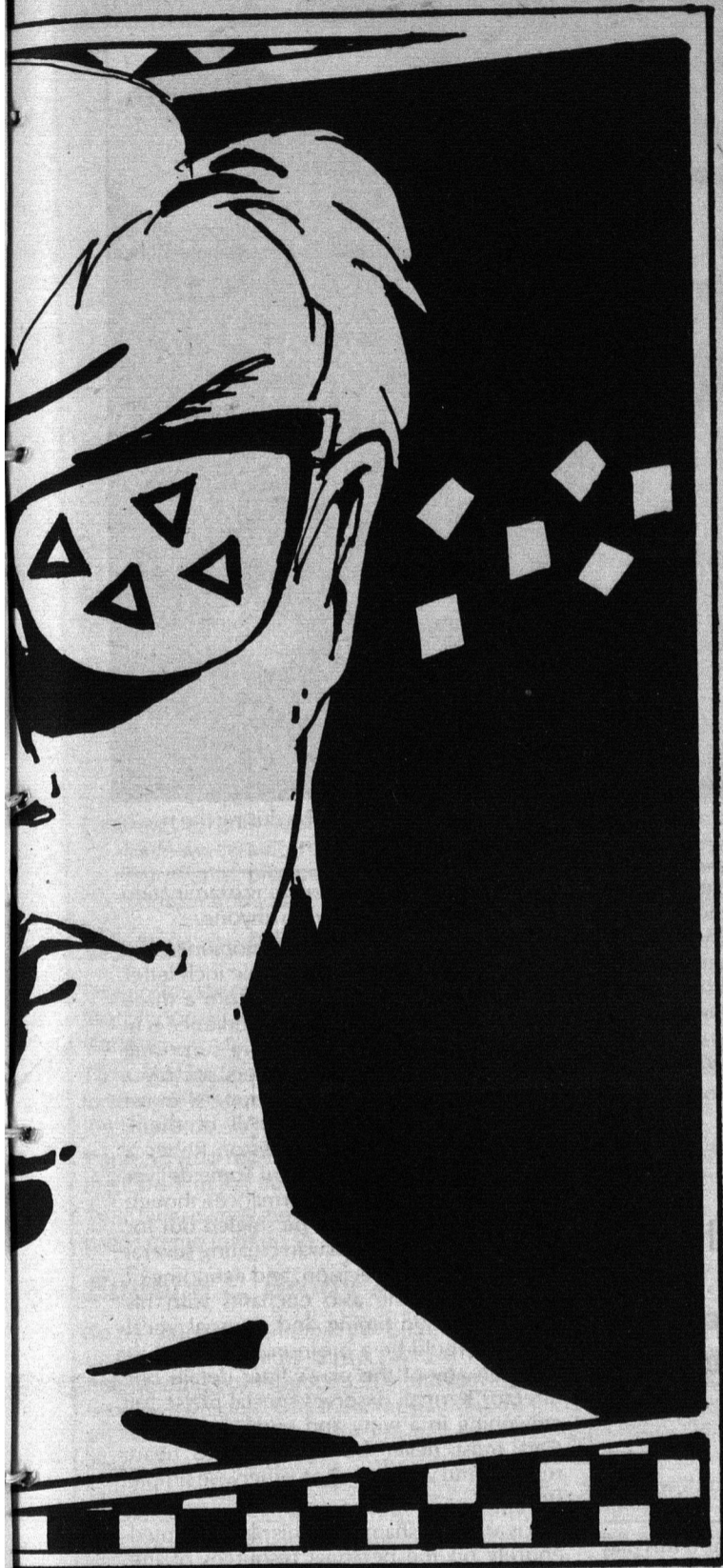


# ...ning world of schizophrenia



Now, Hunter's son has been released from Alberta Hospital and placed in an Approved Home. These homes provide a family environment for mentally ill clients. "He lives with a young couple who have a two year old son and three clients... He's likely as close to his potential as he's going to be... We see him a minimum of twice a week."

"He continues to do very well. I know he's being fed, I know he's taking his medications, I know he's with people who care about him and I feel more at ease with him."

During the time when Hunter's son was becoming ill, Hunter had a series of heart attacks. He says he now deals with his unhappiness about his son's illness by maintaining a sense of humour. "Sometimes I'm very intense. I try to counteract that by being goofy."

Hunter joined the Friends of Schizophrenics, a support group for family members of schizophrenics, in 1985, and has been Vice-President of the Edmonton Chapter ever since. He participates in monthly meetings with other members and has become an outspoken advocate for the chronically mentally ill. "To get involved with other people with similar concerns, problems, fears, and guilt has been useful," he says.

If you should notice what appear to be symptoms of schizophrenia in a family member or friend, Hunter recommends that you "seek out your family physician and try to get the appropriate assistance as quickly as possible." He also says to "keep caring," difficult as that may be. "A lot of them [family members] try to stop caring and run away."

Above all, it is important to realize that schizophrenia is not hopeless. Schizophrenics go through stages during which the symptoms are acute, called "relapses," but these are followed by periods during which the symptoms ease off. Many of the symptoms can be controlled by medication. About one third of patients have only one or two episodes and recover.

More research needs to be done into the causes of and treatments for schizophrenia. At present, the disease is believed to be hereditary, and has no known cure. The cost of schizophrenia for hospital care alone is about \$2 billion per year in Canada; it is this country's most expensive mental illness.

Whether or not someone you know suffers from schizophrenia, you can help schizophrenics by educating yourself about the disease and showing understanding and compassion for its victims and their family members.

Because his condition was left untreated, he became progressively worse. He maintained an apartment on his own downtown and during this time he became very sick. One night, he assaulted a city policeman. He was put in jail, then let out on bail.

"He was living in the river valley when they [the police] picked him up and sent him out to Alberta Hospital, to the Forensic Unit, for assessment. Then diagnosed him as a paranoid schizophrenic. Then they put him on probation for two years on condition he take his medication and report to the probation officer."

After leaving Alberta Hospital, he lived in boarding houses and halfway houses for the next few years. At one point he moved in with a friend who "after two weeks, realized how sick he was and threw him out."

"About one year ago he came into the office. He was beginning to accept the notion that something was wrong. He told me, 'I'm ready to go [into the hospital], but I won't go unless you know the doctor'... We went over and got him admitted."

