

Christmas from page 1C

had made for them, then rinsed out their stockings, hanging them by the chimney to dry. When they were done, they gathered around Papa and he told his story.

"'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house," Sharp said, waving her hands in an all encompassing motion. "Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

Her presentation of Moore's poem was a memorable one, but it wasn't until she finished with the "Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night," did she let on why she chose to use it for Papa's story.

"That was written by my great-grandfather, Clement Moore, in 1822," she said. "Actually, written is probably the wrong word. I think he must have put down some couplets on the back of an envelope, but it was never written down."

Moore's poem was such a hit that even more relatives came the next year to hear him tell it.

"A cousin came from Yonkers and wrote it down on the back of the envelope," Sharp said. "She went home and had it published in the Troy Sentinel. She was so excited she hurried back to show Papa. He was so furious because

■ A former Farmington special education teacher who has been recognized as a pioneer in remedial education, Sharp works as a consultant with school systems across the country and as a speaker for educational groups. She also performs storytelling programs for organizations and schools as well as libraries and hospitals.

she had given away his Christmas present that she was banished from the house for many years."

Parts of the published poem reflect the cousin's lack of knowledge of the Danish language. According to Sharp, Donner and Blitzen should have been "dunder and blitzen," meaning thunder and lightning.

The poem became part of public domain because of its appearance in the newspaper, but in 1848 Moore did an anthology of children's stories and the last one in the book was his beloved "A Visit from St. Nick," Sharp said.

Moore willed his estate to Columbia, which maintained it as a children's museum. "It was kept going by the pennies of New York school children," Sharp noted. Today, what's left of it can be found "on Ninth Avenue between

21st and 22nd Street by the Big Boy and the Gap."

Up in years, Sharp has had to curtail her travels, although she said her holidays will take her to Charlotte, N.C., and San Diego, Calif., with a stop in Chicago — "If you care to come along, just hop on my sleigh."

So, with the help of Visual Specialties of Farmington Hills, Sharp has come up with video presentation about Papa and his poem. The cassettes cost \$20 each, plus 4-percent sales tax, payable by check, Visa or MasterCard, and are available in a regular version and signed for the hearing-impaired.

To order, write to Visual Specialties, 26105 Orchard Lake Road, Suite 100, Farmington Hills 48334. For more information, call 476-5400.



Tale to tell: Dinghy Sharp, a former Farmington special education teacher, loves to tell a good story to an attentive audience.

Alzheimer's involves more than memory loss

Memory loss. Disorientation. Night wandering. Tantrums. These have become the all-too-familiar signs of someone suffering from the degenerative effects of Alzheimer's disease. Recently, however, several other characteristics have been added to the list.

According to research conducted at the University of Michigan School of Nursing, people with Alzheimer's who live at home — even those who are still relatively young and physically fit — are far more susceptible to falling than elderly people who do not have the disease. In many cases, all it takes is one serious injury from a fall to start the downward spiral toward death.

There are two large contributors to the increase in falling in the Alzheimer's population, said Dorothy Booth, assistant professor of nursing. "The cognitive impairment caused by the disease has something to do with it, but home safety may also play a critical role."

In a yearlong study, Booth and

two graduate nursing students followed 11 people with Alzheimer's who were living at home with a full-time caregiver. The median age of the patients and the caregivers was 68, although some patients were as young as 59. In that year, 36 percent of the Alzheimer's patients fell at least once, while none of the caregivers fell. One patient even fell 10 times in a month.

"These patients don't know where their body is in space," Booth said. "When you ask them to grasp an object, they may come in way below or above it. That's why pathways clutter, stairways and poorly lighted areas are particularly hazardous for them."

To protect those with Alzheimer's from dangerous tumbles, and in the process keep them living at home as long as possible, Booth urges caregivers to have a health professional skilled in this area conduct a home safety evaluation.

Often, the suggestions will be as simple as switching to a cord-

■ 'It behooves us to preserve the dignity of people afflicted with Alzheimer's by keeping them active and preventing injury.'

Dorothy Booth
researcher

less phone or improving the lighting. But in other cases, pieces of furniture that emerge as obstacles may have to be removed or relocated.

"It behooves us to preserve the dignity of people afflicted with Alzheimer's by keeping them active and preventing injury," Booth said. "And safety-proofing the home is a big step caregivers can take in that direction."

A significant but sometimes overlooked reason behind the falling is that Alzheimer's creates havoc with visual-spatial perception. According to Dr. Jonathan Trobe, professor of ophthalmology and associate professor of neurology at the U-M Medical Cen-

ter, poor visual judgment is an early warning sign of the disease.

Common symptoms include difficulty recognizing people, interpreting pictures and distinguishing between objects, especially when their borders are obscured or overlap. For example, someone with Alzheimer's may have difficulty identifying a bottle of beer in a crowded refrigerator or a particular article of clothing in a full drawer.

Yet when such people get their eyes checked, the results are normal. This is because the vision problems associated with Alzheimer's have nothing to do with the eye itself, but with the way the brain interprets the eye's signals.

"It seems as if their problems are visual, but they aren't; they're spatial," Trobe said.

After years of research, Trobe and collaborator Charles Butter, a U-M professor of psychology, have come up with a simple screening test for the visual-spatial impairment typical of Alzheimer's, a test that may lead to earlier diagnosis of the disease.

It is a user-friendly screening designed to help optometrists and ophthalmologists easily distinguish between a visual-spatial impairment and a merely visual one.

"Often these patients are told they are crazy, that there's nothing wrong with their eyes," Trobe said. "This test allows us to make the diagnosis early and keep them from circling around trying to figure out what the problem is."

Trobe emphasized, however, that the test itself cannot make a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. Rather, it is designed as a screening tool that tells eye-care providers when a patient should be sent for a full neurological evaluation.

Trobe's screening test, described in a recent issue of "Archives of Ophthalmology," consists of four exercises. Patients must identify a simple line drawing, a drawing embedded in a grid of lines, drawings that overlap each other, and images that are fragmented and have deleted parts.

Currently, Trobe is sending the test to selected eye-care providers around the country who will use it on their patients and report back on its effectiveness. He eventually hopes to distribute the test to optometrists and ophthalmologists nationwide.

NEW VOICES

DR. STEPHEN T. BERNARD and DOROTHY J. BERNARD of Farmington Hills announce the birth of STEPHEN MICHAEL BERNARD Nov. 29 in William Beaumont Hospital. Grandparents are Michael and Jacquelyn Czereda of Ohio and Stephen T. Bernard also of Ohio.

JAMES and PAM COLE of Farmington Hills announce the

birth of their son AUSTIN JAMES COLE Nov. 2 in St. Joseph Hospital. Grandparents are Germaine and Jerry Toffen of Farmington Hills and Bob and Charmaine Cole of Dearborn Heights. Great-grandparents are Verna Beauchamp of Novi; Peter Toffen of Detroit; Helen Sipes of Dearborn Heights; Mary Cole of Southgate and Florence Kietur of Detroit.

STEVEN and DAWN KNOWLES of Westland announce the birth of ASHLEY ELIZABETH Nov. 6. Grandparents are Joyce Ann Kapp of Canton, Dennis R. Kapp of West Bloomfield and the late Darlene E. Knowles. Great-grandparents are Elizabeth Johnson of Lyons and Elmer and Mable Kapp of Plymouth.



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