

POINTS OF VIEW

Mothers of special kids often become dream keepers

One of the most vivid memories I have from my mentally retarded daughter's youth has less to do with her mind than with my own. She was 5 at the time — and though I had parented her daily for the entirety of those five years, I still had not come to terms with her disabilities in that length of time.

During those first five years, despite her obvious limitations, a little gremlin lived within me, pushing me into the hope that "normal" existed just beyond the next doctor's visit, or the next operation, or the next year's worth of intensive schooling.

How I dreamed, as every mother does, of the day that she would get a job, have her own apartment, drive her own car — indeed, cook her own meals or even brush her own teeth.

My thinking was understandable, I guess, for the things that were "amiss" with her — and there were many — unraveled themselves over time, much like the layered skins of

an onion.

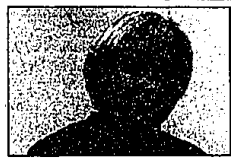
I would just get a handle on the fact that she had kidney problems when I would learn she had vision problems. Then I would come to terms with those only to find out that she was on route to losing her ability to walk, and so on through a long list of body functions.

Along with my husband and other family members, I dealt as best I could with each crisis as it presented itself and fell ever more in love with her as she conquered the obstacles and challenges that one-by-one befell her. Frequently, she inspired me with her courage.

But, I digress.

On the occasion of my vivid memory, she was but a little girl, nestled in a car seat beside me, the size of a 2-year-old toddler, unable to speak more than a few words and on her way to a hearing test.

As it happened, a special education bus, taking adult residents from a



CAROLYN WALKER

neighboring group home to their jobs, pulled in front of our vehicle that day. As we drove along, my daughter gazed out the window at the beautiful spring weather that surrounded us. And I, looking at the misshapen adult heads that bobbed aimlessly in the bus' window, gazed off into our future.

And then I went for what I realized she could never be. For what I could not know. For what I was powerless to do.

And time passed.

Before I knew it, she was a young woman with a young woman's body and even some of a young woman's yearnings. This year, come June, she will graduate — albeit late — from high school and the security that our school system has provided all these years.

Come July, she will turn 21. Recently, acting on the advice of doctors, I took her for her most recent in a lifetime of medical tests. A sleep study to determine whether she stops breathing in the night.

I walked her, arm-in-arm as we usually walk these days because of her leg problems, into the familiar setting of a hospital and she carried with her, under her arm as she almost always has, her beloved Cabbage Patch doll.

She learned a long time ago that a doll helps keep her fears at bay. And no amount of growing up is ever going to change that.

I sat on the bed that doubled as a

technician's lab and watched while yet another stranger hooked her up to a series of machines that would monitor her breathing, her brain waves, her heart beats, her pulse rhythms. And I sat with the technician into the wee hours of morning, watching with him as he observed her on a television screen — evaluating the signals that came from her body — cuddling her doll innocently in her sleep.

He told me, after observing her all night, that my daughter is a restless sleeper who awakens frequently; and that she spends very little time in the rapid eye movement stage of sleep. That means she spends very little time dreaming.

It is not surprising.

Somewhere along the line — and I couldn't tell you when that was — I took over the task of dreaming for her. That task has kept me up nights, too.

Carolyn Walker is a staff writer for the *Clarkston Eccentric*.

LETTERS

Cars put bodies at risk

I frequently see a serious problem when I drive our 1993 full-size Ford van. Because the windows on van rear doors are rather high, the rear vision mirror usually does not provide good views of the area directly behind the van near the rear bumper. To alleviate this difficulty, we have installed a fish-eye view lens in one rear door window, which enables us to see things VERY close to the rear bumper.

Many pedestrians do not seem to realize that vehicles of any sort are, in fact, lethal weapons. A pedestrian may have the "right of way," but it will not help that pedestrian to be "dead right"! Thanks to the fact that I am extremely cautious and proceed extremely slowly when backing, I have prevented injury to many people who have walked directly behind our van while it was in motion backing

up!

A woman pushed a child in a supermarket cart behind my moving vehicle, not more than 6-12 inches behind the rear bumper. Thanks to our fish-eye lens I was able to see the cart and child, both of which were below normal viewing level from a van window without a fish-eye lens. The mother had not yet moved into view behind the vehicle when I saw the child's danger. I slammed on the brake, turned off the engine, and with concern for the child's future, stepped out of the van, and in a shaking voice — told the woman she had placed her baby in mortal danger. Her response? — "Well, it's up to you to have your car in control!" I hope she hugs her child frequently, since she may not have long to do so if this is her normal attitude in traffic.

An elderly gentleman using a walker also walked directly behind my moving van. Being very bent, he was

short enough not to be visible through a standard van rear window not equipped with a fish-eye lens. When I looked up the van brakes, I did not see the man even flinch. He continued in his single-minded way with, apparently, not the slightest clue that he had just overworked his guardian angel.

During another trip to the supermarket, I exited the parking lot via the driving lane passing directly in front of a drugstore. Three women walked out of the drugstore, chatting busily. They walked directly in front of the van, without having looked either direction prior to stepping off the curb. Again, I slammed on the brake (luckily, traveling very slowly in the parking lot). I stepped so abruptly that all my grocery bags tipped over, straining boxes and containers all over the van. The women continued across the driving lane totally unaware.

If only people would recognize that ANY vehicle, even the smallest ones, weigh so much more than they that there is little chance of surviving a collision between human and vehicle without some injury or possible death! People act as if moving vehicles are totally harmless. Indeed, the driver should be responsible for the safe operation of his or her vehicle. But to err is human, so each person should also be responsible for the safe operation of his or her BODY. The body is far more at risk than the vehicle.

Beatrice F. Keeber
Farmington Hills

No safer for entrapment

So 20 area merchants have been ticketed and forced to appear in court for selling cigarettes to teenage police decoys. Despite police Chief Bill Dwyer's declaration that this was not

"entrapment," it appears to be exactly that.

Somehow I don't feel that the public safety or the quality of life in Farmington Hills has been made appreciably better by this. I would rather see our limited police and court resources used for more serious matters.

It may be worthwhile to discourage teenage smoking. Despite intensive propaganda ("education," if you prefer) to the contrary, I find it difficult to believe that once cigarettes are sampled, one is inevitably doomed to either a lifetime of addiction, or to illness and premature death. There is still freedom of choice. If tobacco were truly a lethal narcotic, it would have been banned long ago.

The teen years are a period of growth and experimentation and for some, smoking may be a part of that.

John M. Patrick
Farmington Hills

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