

Dangerous curve

'Stand up Straight' may be first book published on scoliosis

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

Sages admonish that those who are dealt lemons must make lemonade.

Author Iris Halberstam Mickel has made the anguish of her own experience with scoliosis and that of her daughters the basis for her book

"Stand Up Straight."

Mickel's book which took 12 years to emerge, may be the first published book on scoliosis, a condition defined as a side-to-side curve of the spine. It affects from 7 to 10 percent of adolescents.

In the case of Mickel, she didn't find scoliosis, for which there is no known cause or cure, the disorder

found her. In 1957 she had a spinal fusion. "Bone was grafted from my left leg and placed along the major curve on my spine, fusing approximately six vertebrae to a solid mass of bone," she writes.

"This was done to stop the progression of the curve in the major curve area."

Mickel recalls some 30 years of being poked, researched, exercised, and examined. "And I still live with a severe spinal deformity."

LEARNING TO live with her scoliosis, Mickel adjusted pretty well. That is, until her own daughter, Shari, began to show the telltale signs. She had one shoulder higher than the other, a protruding right shoulder blade, and right rib rota-

tion," said Mickel.

Mickel who had repressed her own childhood feelings, the pain, the body cast, the braces, reacted in anger that her own child should suffer as she had. Eventually, a second daughter, Jodi, also was found to have scoliosis.

For Mickel, making lemonade meant reaching out to gather other scoliosis patients and their families for mutual support, for information, and to expose them to the best medical minds available.

Mickel wrote to the Southfield Eccentric, asking that a notice be published telling scoliosis families they should meet and support each other. Along the way, the Scoliosis Association of Michigan (SAM) was formed and later affiliated with a national

group in New York.

DR. L. CARL SAMBERG, affiliated with Beaumont Hospital, became the medical adviser and mentor of the group and contributed a medical introduction to the book that eventually grew out of Mickel's experience.

SAM members met at Providence and then Beaumont Hospitals with the purpose of finding expert speakers to address the group, to gather a library that could be shared, and just to know and comfort one another.

Mickel was employed in Southfield where the family lived. The work of SAM was carried on by her from her home with help from a typewriter and a telephone. "We had no phone, no equipment, no staff to copy or mail material," she said. Nevertheless, SAM did good work.

A vital offshoot of the support group was the passage of the Scoliosis Screening Bill No. 849 in the Michigan Senate as sponsored by Senator Jack Faxon. "Our goal was always public awareness," Mickel said.

The very first mass scoliosis screening was held in Southfield as a result of the lobbying of SAM members.

GRADUALLY, Mickel realized she couldn't be SAM all by herself. Although she had assumed the title of executive director, it was a heavy responsibility with few volunteers to call on and practically no funds with

which to function.

Now a resident of Farmington Hills, last fall Mickel relinquished her executive director title for SAM, but the idea of writing a book about "that nasty curve" was by then a must.

"I wrote this book for people who have endured scoliosis in silence," said Mickel, "and for their families who have no place to turn with their questions."

Mickel's book includes interviews with scoliosis patients about their experiences and special thoughts. It was written and re-written, submitted and rejected to the near despair of the author.

"It's a very personal book to me, bitter-sweet," she explained.

Dedicated to her three daughters, Shari, Jodi, and Amy with acknowledgments to her husband, Harold, and others, "Stand Up Straight" was published in 1989 by the Kendall-Hunt Publishing Co. of Dubuque, Iowa.

"I have the book in several book stores so far," said Mickel. "It's at Borders, Book People in West Bloomfield, New Horizons Book Store in St. Clair Shores, and in Metro News Center in Birmingham and Canton."

"It can also be purchased by calling toll free 1-800-338-5578 Association for \$19.95. It's on the Publisher's List of Book in Print and bears the Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 88-84108."

Tot wins state title

Alecia Diedo did not spend her Memorial Weekend the way most 3-year-olds did.

As Miss Michigan Tiny Tot, the former Livonian now living in Farmington Hills had the opportunity to be "visiting royalty" at the Miss Michigan Coed and Pre-Teen pageant in Lansing. Present were her mother and grandparents, Vera Diedo, Carol and Anthony DeBrincat.

Miss Michigan Tiny Tot is the youngest of the four age divisions in the American Coed Pageant system. Alecia was judged on her beauty, poise, personality, and friendliness. Her personality shone through when she did a song and dance to "I'm a Little Teapot."

After she captured the title in November 1988, Alecia and her family began raising money for their trip to the national pageant in Florida. Johnny Catala helped to initiate the fund raising by advertising on the Maltese American Benevolent Club radio station. The club also helped to sell 50 dozen roses that were donated by Bob Carr's Florists Ltd. With this and other support, Alecia and her mother were off to Florida.

Earlier in June she was a guest in the Bavarian Festival Parade in Frankenmuth and is looking forward to making similar appearances during the balance of her reign.



Alecia Diedo

Homecoming

Rev. Walter Ballagh and his wife Ida will be among the approximately 200 former members and friends who will be celebrating homecoming Sunday July 9 in First Baptist Church of Farmington, 33400 Shilwassee.

Rev. Ballagh was pastor at the church from 1962-74 and returns as the special speaker for the morning and afternoon services.

Sunday School begins at 9:45 a.m. Morning service begins at 11 a.m. and an afternoon service at 3 p.m. replaces the regular evening service.



Rev. and Mrs. Walter Ballagh

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