

# Chat room

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time for my presentation. It was one of the most important presentations of my life. I realized that I was the sixth person in the line. It would take me a minute to copy. So, I must make it to the machine within the next two minutes if I were to be on time for the presentation. I realized that it would be impossible to reach the machine within the next two minutes. I was cursing myself for being late even though I have a very valid reason. My 3-year-old was down with a fever. I gathered some courage and walked up to the first person on the line and said, "Excuse me, would you mind if I copied before you? I am really late for my presentation."

The lady never answered but looked at me with disbelief. The look suggested "Get a life! We have things to do, too!" I started walking back to the end of the line, feeling sheepish, frustrated and angry. The fact is that she was only following a social norm. She was following a standard of conduct. How was she to know that my child was ill and that I didn't intend to cut the line?

My little one and I were at the playground on a beautiful summer day. There was a little boy who wanted to play on the same swing that my daughter was on. My daughter, of course, was not too pleased at the prospect of losing her swing to another child. The boy was crying. I explained to my daughter that it

was important to take turns and that it was only fair that the little boy gets a chance to play on the swing as well. After some hives and cries, very reluctantly with tears in her eyes she got off the swing. The boy's mother immediately asked him to "thank" my daughter for giving him a turn. My daughter continued to be upset. A few minutes went by, now it was the little boy's mom's turn to lecture on the subject of taking turns. She made him get off the swing despite his protests so that my daughter could have another turn. With still some tears left in her eyes my daughter shook her head vehemently and refused to go back to the swing. The little boy didn't want the swing anymore either. He was upset for the same reason as my daughter, for making him get off the swing when he did not want to. I felt guilty for ruining my daughter's evening. I am sure that the little boy's mother felt the same with regards to her son. Now all the four of us were unhappy for following a social norm.

Damn the social norm! Damn the social decorum! Why can't we be ourselves? Why do we have to follow rules at all times? I hate the lines and the waiting wherever I go. We must be free to do whatever we want whenever we please. Who decided that we must be polite to each other? Let the words "please" and

"thank you" be banished from our dictionaries. I am sure that I have already wasted a quarter of my life smiling, thanking and nodding my head in appreciation. Still worse, on many occasions if I had had a chance I would not have done so.

I picture myself walking into McDonald's. No need to wait in the line. I extend my hand with money and yell out my order as loudly as I could so that I could be heard above the 10 other people who were trying to do the same thing. I jump the line everywhere. I try to get wherever I need to as early as possible for then I would have less number of people to compete with. Everyday life becomes a battle. The society becomes unkind. I find everyone obnoxious, including myself! Then, one day we get together for a family meeting and decide to move to the jungle to live with Tarzan (my daughter was elated with the idea) for we couldn't stand the chaotic society anymore. We begin to live primitively. We kick ourselves for not being able to watch TV. We hate our lives and we have nowhere to go. Shoot! I guess we can't do without the social norms. Like Oscar Wilde said, "To be in a society is morally a bore but to be out of it is a tragedy."

Siva Shan has been a Farmington Hills resident for 11 years.



Spell It Out: Bradley Ross works with his therapists to improve communication skills.

## Computer

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as the Detroit Orthopedic Clinic when it began as a charity, DIC cares for the entire range of disabilities in children with cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy usually occurs at or around the time of birth when the oxygen supply is cut off to the baby's brain and involves a range of disabilities from mild to severe. Cerebral palsy is the primary diagnosis of most of the children they see at DIC.

A United Way-funded agency, Cheick adds that DIC "is the only facility of this kind in Michigan and incorporates 'one-stop' services for disabled children such as physical and social work services, customized orthotics, vision and dentistry (which is also available to siblings); and the ordering of specialized equipment."

Ross says about DIC, "When Bradley was evaluated they saw a lot of potential. They really believe in children." A mere twenty minute jaunt to downtown Detroit via the Lodge freeway, Bradley has been going there for five years.

Dana Ross adds, "We are trying to encourage as much independence as possible with Bradley. He has an electric wheel chair he operates with a joystick. Bradley loves cars and loves to drive. He likes computers and uses a tracking ball or joystick. He's good in math - he

can do things I would need a calculator for. He's very smart, a very nice boy. He loves cars and together with Dad, Steve, and younger brother, Corey, 3, they own a 1972 Oldsmobile 442 convertible with which they enter car shows in the summer."

On Fridays, Bradley participates in therapeutic horseback riding at Wildwind Equestrian in South Lyon, sitting with a back rider though his mom says he is able to sit more independently than when he started four years ago.

Bradley likes to go on vacation and has twice participated in an innovative dolphin therapy program pioneered by Dr. David Nathanson at the Dolphin Research Center in the Florida Keys. "It is mainly used to improve speech," according to Dana. A 23-day long program, it operates on the concept of positive reinforcement. For example, when Bradley made the correct sound, he was able to go in the water or dance with the dolphins. His mom said that "he initially needed a lot of assistance to hold on to the dolphin's dorsal fins, but by the end he improved a lot."

Ross adds, "The biggest challenge (with raising a physically challenged child) is from outsiders. They don't know Bradley, and they make assumptions about him that aren't fair.

People talk about him instead of to him. There is so much ignorance out there I could write a book," says Dana Ross.

Bradley is a highly functioning child and not mentally disabled, but his mother laments the fact that all too often observers make erroneous assumptions based on Bradley's wheelchair. "Bradley knows what he wants... he doesn't miss a trick. Bradley likes to be challenged; he can do anything he wants to do. It might be difficult (for him) but the end result is the same. I like people who believe in him and his abilities."

Compuplay is made available to children through various fundraisers, including one sponsored by a church group in Troy that learned about the speech augmentation therapy program and now raises funds to purchase computers for those in need.

One can imagine that the costs for computer services such as Compuplay are exorbitant, but the difference such services make in a child's life are immeasurable when considering that without them, a child cannot communicate. Monica Cheick poses a good question to ponder: How would you communicate if you couldn't speak or point? Without a doubt, Compuplay has revolutionized life for the families of special needs children.

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