

# Fish can regenerate spinal cords

What can goldfish do that we humans can't? Well, they can live underwater, lay eggs and regenerate a new spinal cord if theirs is severed.

The mystery of why fish, amphibians and lower animals can do this while mammals cannot is being studied at Texas A&M University's College of Medicine.

Anatomy researcher John Gelder is looking at this phenomenon in hopes that his basic research may one day help humans who have been paralyzed by spinal cord injuries.

Gelder says finding out why the goldfish have this characteristic may tell him why mammals don't. That information could lead to methods of returning nerve function to paralyzed humans.

He also wants to learn if this regeneration power is restricted to specific areas of the brain or is general to all brain cells.

In the study, fish with transected spinal cords have regenerated cut sections that lead from the brain within 30 to 45 days and have a full return of function. Observers may have difficulty telling the research subject from his tankmates, Gelder said.

Yet medium-sized sharks that he studied in Florida don't seem to have the recuperative ability.



Goldfish and other animals can regenerate a severed spinal cord, but mammals cannot. Texas A&M medical researcher John Gelder is using his fish to try to find out why. He hopes to benefit paralyzed humans through his studies.

# This trip the best, students say

## Tour leaves children spellbound

United Press International  
GREELEY, Colo. — "There's nothing here to frighten you in any way," the undertaker told the children.

It was a sunny spring morning and the sixth and seventh graders of Chappelow Middle School were in the Adamson Mortuary on a field trip.

They filed into the wooden pews of the mortuary's chapel: fidgeting, chewing gum and whispering among themselves.

"I'm a licensed funeral director," Bob Hansberry was saying at the podium. "The casket is placed on this bier between the lamps." The rustling continued in the pews, and a girl in the second row fooled with her hair.

Hansberry was explaining the practical details of death: "The hospital calls us, gives us the ward and floor — we immediately send a man to pick up the body. It's brought back here and embalmed."

"Embalming is a process of disinfection, preservation and restoration," Hansberry said. "Decomposition starts immediately after death. In restoration, we try to make the body as lifelike as possible. We try to give the family — in an old mortuary term — a good memory picture."

"Any questions?" he asked. Very few at this point.

Off they went to the mortuary's business office for some talk of death certificates and burial permits.

"There's quite a bit of government paperwork involved," the undertaker said. Still no questions from the kids.

Up a flight of stairs, and the kids were at the door of the casket display room. "If there's anybody who doesn't want to go in there, that's fine," said Hansberry. Not a sound from the students. "There are basically four types of caskets: cloth-covered wood, hardwood, and the sealing and non-sealing metals," the mortician said amidst the coffins.

The kids spread out among the coffins like adults in a used car lot.

Hansberry kept talking: "The prices you see on the caskets are not just for the casket. They include all service charges." The questions came quickly now.

"Why do you put pillows and blankets in here?" asked one small boy.

"Humm, nobody ever asked that before," said Hansberry. "They're made to look similar to a bed."

"Do they make caskets for babies?" said a tiny voice from the group.

"Yes, they're upstairs," answered Hansberry. "Would you like to see them?"

"Yeah," came the collective response, the first sign of intense interest.

"What is this about?" said an adult in the crowd.

"Well, a lot of them have little brothers and sisters," said Gary Colley, a health teacher who coordi-

nates the school's field trips.

Up another flight of stairs, the kids squeezed into a small room filled with tiny, white, cloth-covered coffins.

"We stock baby caskets from two feet to three feet," Hansberry said. "And we have one 3½ feet long."

"Follow me downstairs to the embalming room," Hansberry said.

"I'm not going in there," said a boy with glasses.

"Chicken," said his friend.

In front of another door, Hansberry again offered the kids a chance to sit it out. No takers.

"This is our preparation room," he said. "We can embalm two bodies at the same time. The tables are stainless steel. This is our embalming machine; it's a stainless steel tank and a pump. The blocks are for holding the head in position. After death, there is no muscle tone. The body is limp, and it has to be held in position."

The kids stared, and several girls clutched their large plastic combs with both hands. Someone accidentally kicked a trash container, and the children started.

Hansberry held up a brown plastic container.

"This is 15 percent formaldehyde. We dilute it with eight ounces to a gallon of water. That makes it 1½ percent formaldehyde solution. We use the same circulation system the body normally uses."

He pointed to his neck. "We inject into the carotid the embalming

fluid. This goes around the body and comes out the jugular vein. There are six points where we shoot into the body. A good embalmer hopes he won't have to shoot more than one point, but sometimes you do."

A blonde girl, Tammy Warehime, 14, noticed a block and tackle affixed to the ceiling. "What's that for?" she asked.

"That's for very heavy bodies," answered Hansberry.

"What if somebody got cut up real bad in a car accident?" asked a boy.

Hansberry reached in a cabinet for a tin of flesh-colored, soft wax.

"We can build ears, noses — in mortuary school we had to build complete faces," he said.

In time, he led them through a door opening into the garage, where parked was a hearse of unexpected brightness, a strange mixture of gleaming tan and gold.

"I thought they were black," said one child.

"The trouble with black is they're hard to keep clean," said the undertaker.

"Why do they drive slow?" asked a girl in a green sweater.

"It's a matter of respect," Hansberry said. "Years ago, when they used horse-drawn coaches, the family would walk behind, and that's where it started."

At the door, one small boy looked back at the hearse. "I thought they used black because they were sad," he said to his friend.

# Housing law could influence upgrading of urban dwellings

A federal housing law passed last year could have a sweeping influence in gutting the squalor of urban housing through use of modular or mobile housing.

Its effect on American housing problems will be dramatic, if building codes can be changed and decades of stigmas, as attached to living in a mobile home can be lifted, a Texas A&M University researcher said.

In 1949, Congress passed a bill known as the Housing Act. The law promised "a decent home for every American family."

Dr. Alice Stubbs, who heads the Texas Consumer Research Center at Texas A&M, observes that not until 1977 was one of the most sweeping pieces of legislation in recent years a clear Congress.

The legislation is the Housing and Community Development Act of 1977 and, among its provisions, it raises the loan limit for FHA insured mobile homes.

Before 1977, it was not possible for buyers to receive long-term loans for a mobile home. A mobile home in the past was set up much like an auto installment loan.

The new law raised the loan rate allowing for larger homes that families with children often need and more time to pay the note.

Mobile homes are considered one of the most economically effective housing alternatives in the market today for the lower middle income consumer, Stubbs said. Rapid inflation has in effect moved conventional homes right out of the reach of many people.

Walter L. Benning, president of the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) in Virginia, indicates the average retail for a mobile home was \$12,750 in 1976. That same year the average sales price for a residential home was \$44,200. The gap is increasing.

Also, most of the new mobile homes are sold fully equipped, including major appliances, furniture, draperies and carpeting. It aids those who cannot afford the added cost initially.

The capability exists for fixed site townhouses, rowhouses and duplexes—even highrise buildings—to be built from manufactured units or modules," Benning said. "But days of the mobile units being a part of the urban housing system are

well off.

"While modules are currently used to some degree, the full potential of the production and speed possible with modular construction will not be realized until local building codes and union restrictions are modified to recognize its inevitability," the MHI spokesman said.

With the 1949 Housing Act, and later the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, a goal was set to construct or rehabilitate 26 million housing units. Six million of which would provide housing for low and moderate income families, Stubbs said. Still the shelter problem has never reversed itself.

When earlier solutions were

posed, it was presumed they would provide not only adequate housing, but a solution to social problems," said Stubbs, who has been involved in consumer research since graduation from the University of Texas in 1938.

"They wanted answers for better health, a more stable family structure, improved self concept, higher achievement, greater job security and even greater life satisfaction," she said.

It just didn't turn out that way.

"The solutions to the problems of low income housing have centered on the symptoms rather than the causes of the condition," Stubbs said.

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