

opinion

Austistic children need help, patience

By Children's Express

PRINCETON, N.J.—Autistic kids are detached from reality, living in their own little world. It's very difficult for other people to get through to them. Some of them don't like to be touched. They take toys and don't use them as ordinary toys. They do something like put them in lines and they keep on doing the same thing over and over again, or they stare at one thing for hours. Some of them can't talk. They don't like to pay attention when someone is trying to teach them something. They'll just look away.

Patricia Krantz, co-director of the Princeton Child Development Institute, says that, "if I were to characterize them in any single word, it's 'closed.'"

The Institute is a school for autistic children. They have 21 kids at the Institute. It was founded in 1971 by a grandmother named Peggy Pulley whose daughter had an autistic child.

We visited the Institute and talked with Ms. Krantz. Then we went around and saw some children. With some of them we were trying to say, "Hi," but they wouldn't look up. But a lot of them you could barely tell were any different from us — if we passed them on the street we wouldn't know they were autistic.

We talked with one child who was about to graduate and go into a regular school. His name was Brandon.

"Brandon has been with us three years, and when I first saw him, he did not talk," Ms. Krantz recalled. "Yet he was about 3 and a half years old. He was very withdrawn and would cry a lot. He didn't play with other kids. He would spend hours just standing and staring out the window. But he's learned about all of these things while he's been here."

Ms. Krantz also told us about a child named Bunkie. "The things that kids normally can do at age four, Bunkie couldn't do," she said. "He couldn't use his fingers to pick up objects and he had only eaten three things in his life: baby food, orange pudding and yogurt. He couldn't talk, he couldn't chew, and he wasn't toilet-trained. He was very withdrawn and he didn't communicate."

"In five weeks we taught Bunkie to accept most foods, but it took us a year to teach him to chew," Ms. Krantz continued. "Yet while we were teaching him to chew he was able to learn to read. Doesn't that seem incredible — that he could read but couldn't chew? He had a

lot of trouble knowing what to do with his tongue and mouth. In order to have him communicate with us, he carried a portable memo writer so he could type messages. He's coming along very well now — he's doing math, he's doing reading — yet speech is still hard for him. But someday maybe he'll go to public school, too."

At the Institute, they put the kids in classes and treat them nicely. They try to get their attention and they reward them if they get something right. They have a lot of teachers so they can give individual attention.

Teaching these kids requires a lot of patience. "Initially, it may literally take 10,000 trials to teach a child something," Ms. Krantz said. "But what's interesting is that while some things are so hard for our kids, in other things they're very smart. Some kids learn to read the Wall Street Journal at age two and some kids learn to read before they can talk. One of the children absolutely floored his parents because they'd never heard him talk and suddenly he was reading the signs in a shoe store. These are the mysteries of our kids."

Five out of every 10,000 kids is autistic. Mostly boys get autism. There is no known cause.

Autistic people used to be thought of as hopeless. They put them into institutions and their problems just kept on getting worse. "You can't learn to be normal in an institution," Ms. Krantz said. "You never get to decide anything so you never learn how to live. One of our students had been in an institution for two years before coming to us and he was pretty sick. A lot of times in institutions they use behavior control drugs. They're very powerful and make you so you can't do anything. But none of our children takes any kind of medication or drugs."

We were wondering how many kids are cured at the Institute. "We tend to look at it by saying, 'How many kids have left us and are functioning completely normally?'" Ms. Krantz pointed out. "Some kids only get a little better and they have to keep being in treatment. But right now we have also got nine kids in public school and who look perfectly normal. That's a very high percentage to be totally okay."

Then we asked Ms. Krantz if there are any children who they just give up on and call hopeless.

"We never say that a child is hopeless," she replied. "We say that we have to develop better techniques. We have children with whom we wish we could make more progress, but we keep working so that each child can move to his or her own fullest potential."

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"THIS BIZARRE SKYJACKING ENDED WHEN CUBAN AUTHORITIES TOOK THE MOUSE INTO CUSTODY AND CLEARED THE ELEPHANT FOR ITS DISNEYWORLD FLIGHT."

Dodososaurs take over classes

by Dick West

WASHINGTON—The National Science Foundation has warned that the United States is in danger of becoming "an industrial dinosaur" because of declining educational standards.

If the foundation is worried now, wait till it sees a book about "dodososaurs" being published next month.

Dodososaurs are described as "dinosaurs that didn't make it." Not making it to the dinosaur level may be close to the ultimate in non-achievement, although anyone with school-age children might be tempted to dispute that assessment.

The evidence that dodososaurs once lived on Earth seems more circumstantial than real. You have heard it said that if certain creatures didn't exist, somebody would have invented them, so perfectly did they meet the needs of the times?

Well, dodososaurs were invented by Rick Meyerowitz and Henry Beard, who are identified in a book blurb as "armchair paleontologists." There is no documenta-

tion that either excelled in science or math while in school.

"An examination of how life forces develop over countless eons of time has taught us that ancient traits of long-dead creatures never completely disappear," they write.

"So the next time you stub your toe or dial the wrong number or step on a cat, don't be too hard on yourself—it's probably just an example of a small part of the dodosaurus inheritance at work."

That theory also may explain much of what goes on in the classrooms of today. At least it provides a good enough reason for studying science and math.

Meyerowitz and Beard address the question of how any creature as inept as a dodosaurus managed to chalk up such a long life span — up to 28 minutes in some cases.

"If survival of the fittest is the law of nature, the dodososaurs must have had very, very good lawyers," they reason.

"Anyone who studies the dodososaurs quickly notices that they tend to be separated into three main groups: the dumb,

the silly and the unbelievable," say the authors.

Any resemblance between that classification and the way some teachers categorize their students may be only coincidental.

In any event, many of the traditions started by dodososaurs in prehistoric times apparently are being preserved in modern schools. Certainly the book's conclusion that dodososaurs "were their own natural disasters" has a parallel that is unmistakable.

A reconstruction of the first dodosaurus fossil, according to the authors, is now on display in the Hall of Heavy Things of the Museum of Big Objects in Tirana, Albania.

The exhibit, we are told, appears next to "a mass of decaying dough purported to be the world's largest muffin."

Continued neglect of math and science courses could produce "an industrial dodosaurus." Then where would we be?

How politicians got to be cowboys

Cowboys aren't what you think

by Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer

WASHINGTON—A political ritual of no small significance is scheduled to take place this weekend in nearby Landover, Md.: The president, his Cabinet and much of official Washington will attend a rodeo.

On Saturday afternoon, courtesy of the Pro-Rodeo Cowboy Association, the president and friends will witness a special exhibition of bull-riding, steer-wrestling and barrel-racing no often seen in these parts. For kicks, Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige, A pro-Rodeo Cowboy himself, will even mount up for a special team-roping event.

While a few hours of rough-and-ready recreation may seem an innocent diversion, it brings to mind an important lesson for students of political culture: One can't go too far in electoral politics without a bit of that 'ol cowboy spirit.

This theory rests not on our most recent president's habit of donning toled boots and a crusty denim jacket. Instead, it derives from a hunch that, more than a century after the cowboy's passing, the cowboy myth all but defines our notion of leadership.

Time was when cowboys held a place in society only slightly higher than that accorded to blacks and women. First sighted in South Texas around 1860, cowpunchers shepherded cattle north to railheads in Kansas for about \$1 a day. They never carried guns, and rarely owned horses. They performed monotonous tasks on the trail and usually worked as dishwashers or bartenders in the off seasons. Nearly half of all cowboys were black or Mexican; many had to retire prematurely because of malnutrition-related illnesses.

These disillusioning truths are the discoveries of two Library of Congress historians, Lonn Taylor and Ingrid Maar. Authors of a new book, "The American Cowboy," Taylor and Maar say that cowboys were really just pawns in a latter-day multinational game of beef and profit. Hired to rustle other firms' cattle, many ere abandoned upon arrest.

How then, did a distinctly questionable character become a national hero of epic proportion? Maar and Taylor say that urbanization, industrialization and immigration of the late 19th century led many Americans to yearn for a simpler America (sound familiar?) Not surprisingly, plenty of myth-makers were happy to oblige.

Owen Wister of Philadelphia was a big help. His 1902 book "The Virginian" was an immediate hit and eventually was transposed for stage, screen and televi-

sion. The book's nameless hero was "a slim, young giant, more beautiful than pictures," whose sense of honor and many daring feats in the name of God, country and Woman were unsurpassed.

Buffalo Bill Cody (and proprietors of some 50 other imitation Wild West shows) transformed the cowboy from laborer to entertainer and gave way to such cool hands as Tom Mix and Will Rogers. (Later, Hollywood would come of age via this simple formula, as would Ronald Reagan in such films as "The Santa Fe Trail.") Dime novels and illustrated magazines further chronicled the cowboy's lifestyle and gave young Americans something to dream about. Wrote Larry Chittenden, "the prairie poet":

He is loyal as steel, but demands a square deal

And he hates and despises a coward

Yet the cowboy you'll find unto woman is kind

Though he'll fight till by death overpowered.

It was only a matter of time before politicians cashed in on the cowboy's political currency. Despite his swank Louisiana roots, Theodore Roosevelt positioned himself as an outdoorsman's politician, and regularly ventured West for trail rides and hunting trips. He organized the cowboy cavalry, known as the Rough Riders, and was later called the Cowboy President.

The image has plagued us ever since. Calvin Coolidge filled his closet with Western-style duds; Eisenhower and LBJ each preferred his farm or ranch to the White House.

And everybody knows that John Glenn is a space cowboy.

Perhaps that's why Saturday's pilgrimage to the rodeo strikes us as a matter of political necessity. If voters believe that anyone who wears jeans deserves Wrangler's label of "one tough customer," we may be seeing a lot more denim before the long campaign is finished.

Spare parts sale at Pentagon garage

by Art Buchwald

The Pentagon was having a spare parts garage sale the other day, and I went over to see if I could pick up any bargains. There were spare parts spread all over the parking lot.

I picked up a Phillips screwdriver, and a colonel came over and warned me, "If you break it you pay for it."

"How much is it?"

The colonel looked in a book. "I'll let you have it for \$760."

"Seven hundred and sixty dollars for a screwdriver?"

"We paid \$990 for it. It's a heckuva bargain. This is not an ordinary screwdriver. It was made to screw bolts in F-16s."

"Let me think it over. What else have you got?"

"Here's a chief petty officer's flashlight that you can't pass up. It's yours for \$230, without batteries."

"How much are the batteries?"

The colonel referred to his book. "We paid \$140 for two. I'll throw in the batteries for \$50 if you take the flashlight for \$220."

"You'll be losing a lot of money on the deal."

"This is a garage sale, and we've been told to get rid of our spare parts before Congress finds out how much we've been paying for them," the colonel said.

"What are these little black squares?"

"They're silicon chips for our night fighters. The aviation company who made the fighters sold them to us for \$1,500 apiece. But you can have a dozen for \$999."

"You can buy these chips in any Radio Shack for \$4.95," I said.

"We just found that out," he replied. "That's why we're selling them so cheap."

"What are these tires over here?"

"They're for mobile missile launchers.

They're a steal. The defense contractor charged us \$1,200 for each tire, but we've reduced them to \$600."

"How can you afford a 50 percent markdown?"

"We're suing the contractor for overcharging us \$900 a tire, and if we win we'll come out ahead."

"And if you lose?"

"It doesn't matter because every time we fire a missile all the tires on the launcher blow out."

"I really don't need any tires."

"If you want a good buy you ought to take one of these M-1 tank transmissions. We paid \$400,000 for each one, but we're letting them go for \$50,000."

"Do they work?"

"If they worked do you think we'd be selling them for \$50,000?"

"Are those Army pup tents over there?"

"You better believe it. They've never been used. The list price was \$6,000 for each one, but because it's General Patton's Birthday, we're giving them away for \$4,000 today. You'll never get to buy a pup tent for that price again."

"I've been to garage sales before," I said, "but this one beats them all."

The colonel said, "The way we look at it is the taxpayer paid for these things, so he should get first crack at buying them at a discount. It's our way of thanking him for supporting the military buildup."

"There are so many bargains, I'd like to buy everything in the parking lot."

"I wish you would. It would get me off the hook."

"Why?"

"I was the chief purchasing officer for the Pentagon until they found out this \$5,000 walkie-talkie could be bought at Sears Roebuck for \$18.95."

The Battalion

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

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Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (409) 845-2611.

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