

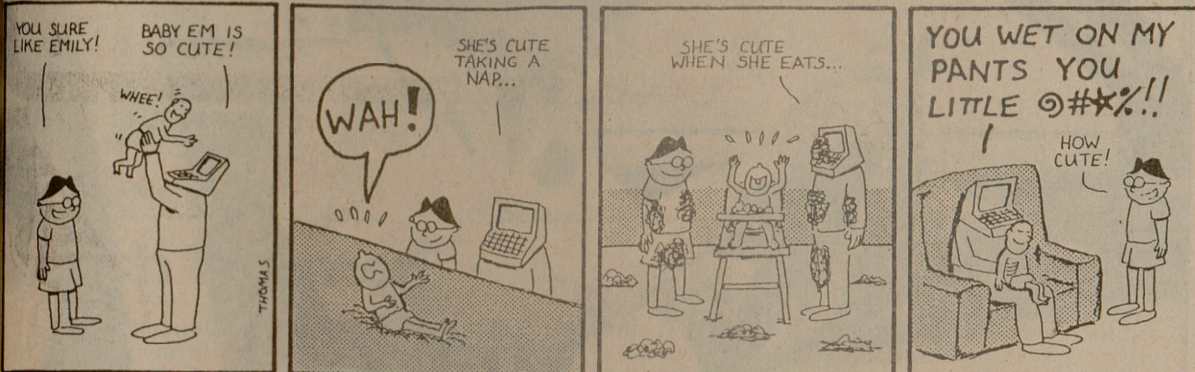
Warped

by Scott McCullar



Waldo

by Kevin Thomas



Rehabilitation community retrains head injury victims

Homelike environment helps injured learn to live independently, recover functions

SAN MARCOS (AP) — Amy Zitelske can barely remember the April day in 1978 when a head-on collision on a rural Michigan road changed her life.

She was a high-school student, 17, planning to go to college, but instead spent several years in a hospital, and then at home, trying to regain her strength and the motor functions she lost when her head was injured.

Today, Zitelske is at the Tangram Rehabilitation Network, a rehabilitation community where people with head injuries are retrained in a homelike environment.

"I've had a rough life ever since my accident, but I'm learning how to take care of myself," says Zitelske, now 26, who came to the center in November 1983 and plans to go to nursing school someday.

Several hundred people with head injuries have passed through the doors of Tangram since it was opened by Dr. Stanley Seaton in 1978.

Since then, it has grown to seven programs at four facilities that challenge people injured in accidents to take on more responsibility in managing their lives independently.

David Seaton, the administrator of the center founded by his father, said Tangram was the first center of its kind to treat people with head injuries.

Before Tangram, most people with head injuries were sent home from the hospital, but did not progress because relatives often were unable to stimulate their recovery, Seaton said.

He said the center's 100 staff members work hard to get those people to learn to fend for themselves.

"We're not a hospital, and it's very important that we keep that in mind when we treat our clients," Seaton said. "It's great to be a pioneer. It's

"The majority of the people (with head injuries) will need help for the rest of their lives to some degree."

— David Seaton, administrator of the Tangram Rehabilitation Network

exciting to be on the forefront of what is going on. There are no boundaries."

This year, about 90 people will be involved in the programs at Tangram.

Some will progress enough to live independently, but most will stay, Seaton said.

"You don't overcome a head injury," he said. "You learn to compensate for it."

"The majority of the people will need help for the rest of their lives, to some degree."

Most of the people being treated at Tangram suffered brain injuries in car accidents and have to relearn to walk or talk, Seaton said.

They are divided into different programs based on their needs. They live together and are responsible for certain jobs in the home.

They also are required to keep a daily journal about each day's activities.

Their progress is discussed every two weeks with some of the 100 staff members, who include physical therapists, speech pathologists, horticulturists and nurses.

Clients grow some of the vegetables used in the center's kitchens and also run a greenhouse-nursery as a business.

Seaton said the treatment program costs about \$65,000 per year, and that most of his clients' expenses are paid by insurance companies, or through workmen's compensation or lawsuit settlements.

Seaton said his staff members — some of whom were clients — are at the heart of the recuperation process.

"They are energetic, enthusiastic and they care for people," he said. "We pick people for their personality, rather than their background."

"There's a lot of satisfaction working with the clients, especially when you watch someone new go through the system. The majority of the staff can see a whole lot of themselves in those clients."

Patti Thomas, director of the camping program, said the people who come to Tangram work hard, despite knowing their lives will never be the same.

"Most people, when they come here, have a low self-esteem," Thomas said. "The first thing they have to learn to do is to begin feeling better about themselves."

"They're going to have trouble leading the lifestyle they had before they had a head injury. After working with these clients for four years, I have tremendous respect for the courage that they have."

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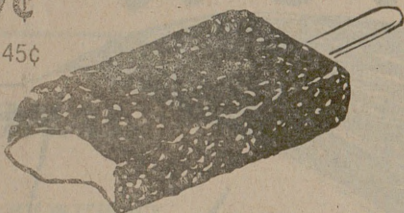


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