

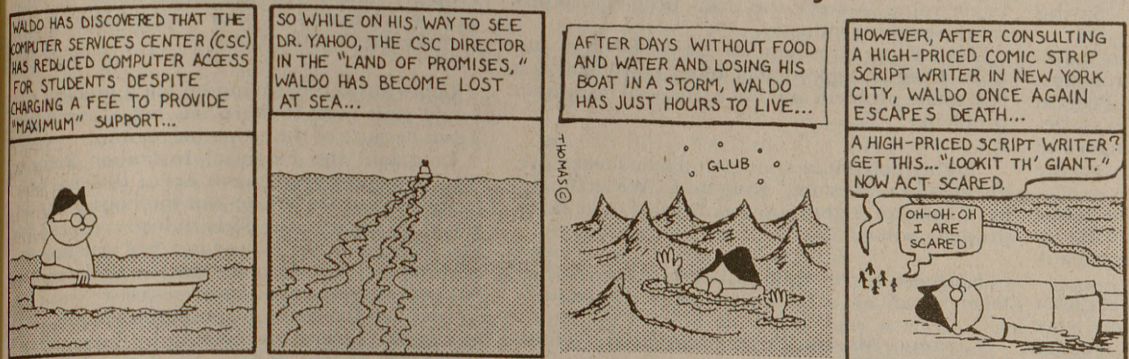
Warped

by Scott McCullar



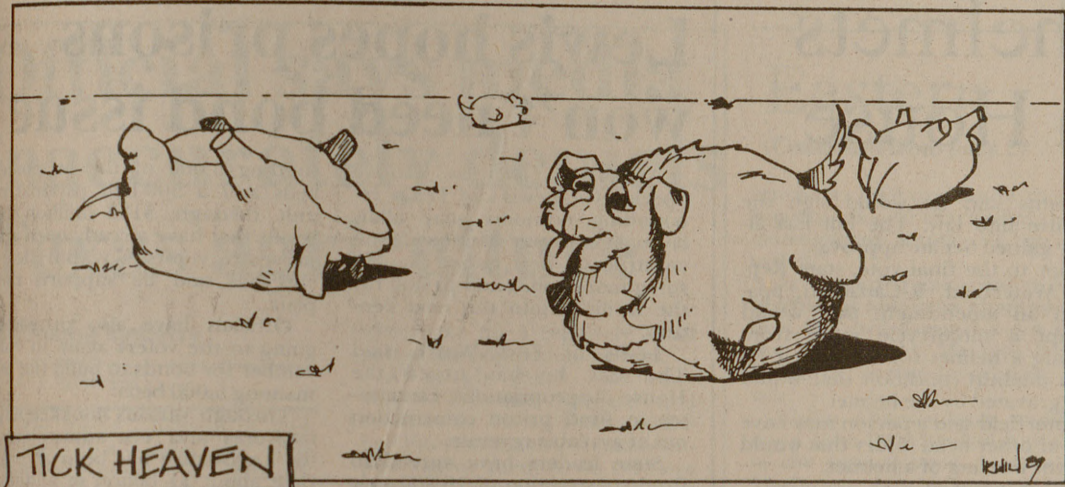
Waldo

by Kevin Thomas



Proboscis

by Paul Irwin



Dallas girl goes back to school after having 8th brain operation

DALLAS (AP) — Petrea Hayes went back to school Tuesday for the first time in nearly four months. And although the grin was the same as before, and her eyes were bright and darting, her teachers and friends could tell something was different. Something wasn't right.

She still wore her favorite straw hat, one that hides a network of scars left by surgeons who, over the past eight years, took turns attacking the spot in her brain where a malignant tumor sat like a time bomb. Eight times now, they have cut into her brain.

And she still walked with a limp, of course, because a stroke several years ago had paralyzed her right side.

But she talked less and moved about more tentatively now, after the latest round of medical assaults that kept her hospitalized for almost three months. And she said she was a little afraid of being run over by the mobs of students packing the halls at Highland Park High School. Never in her 16 years had she ever been afraid of anything. Even death.

Doctors have pointed out that undergoing three major brain operations and several related surgical procedures within a 30-day period, as Petrea has just done, can do strange, unexplainable things to anyone. And though she has become something of an expert patient who has defied the odds of survival, Petrea is no exception.

"She's more shy, and she's a little slower," Kathy Kelchner, the ninth-grader's special-education teacher, said. "She says the computer keyboard looks blurred." She then smiled a big smile and added, "But she's such a neat, neat little girl. We're all so happy she's back."

Indeed, her mother, whose name also is Petrea, points out, "We're just thankful she's still with us."

After all, eight years ago, surgeons in California, who performed the first five brain operations, at one point gave up hope. She had neurofibromatosis, a genetic disorder that causes fibrous tumors to form along the nervous system. In most cases, the tumors are benign. But Petrea's was malignant. When efforts to remove the tumor failed, doctors gave their prognosis: She would live no more than 90 days.

Today she is known as the family miracle. She shrugs off the distinction. "I just want to be treated like everyone else," she has said.

On Monday, for instance, she joined her classmates for a trip to the Rameses the Great exhibit at Fair Park.

"I asked her if she would like to have a wheelchair along just in case, and she said no," Kelchner said. "We found out we were going to have to park a couple of blocks from the exhibit and walk, and the bus driver said he could let the two of us off closer to the door if she'd like. But she said no, she wanted to do what the other kids were doing."

And she did, too, completing the day without a wheelchair.

Petrea has been surprising people in Dallas for two years, since she and her mother moved here from California and she enrolled at Highland Park's McCullough Middle School. In the eighth grade, she ran for vice president of her class. And although she was defeated, her classmates elected her to the Student Council.

At a walkathon last summer, her paralyzed right leg in a brace, she made five laps around the quarter-mile course.

This year, her first in high school, was interrupted in a frightening way. The time bomb apparently was still ticking.

On New Year's Day, she was diagnosed as having meningitis, an inflammation of the brain. Subsequent tests revealed a disturbing growth on the left side of her brain — the site of the tumor. Surgeons at Humana Hospital Medical City Dallas performed three operations, the longest lasting seven hours.

"We removed an abscess about like that," said Dr. Kenneth Shapiro, his hands illustrating a mass the size of a grapefruit. "If we hadn't operated, she probably would have died."

Since being released from the hospital last month, Petrea has been receiving physical, occupational and speech therapy daily at home. She's more tentative now than she was four months ago, her mother says, and sometimes she struggles for words that used to come easily. Her recovery has been psychologically painful, if not physically so.

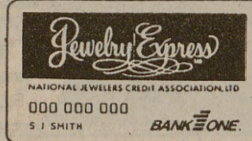
But whatever additional brain damage she might have suffered during these past few months, there was good news, too. Surgeons said the tumor had disappeared.

"What happened to it?" Petrea's mother asked.

At least this time, Dr. Derek Bruce, one of the surgeons, found it easy to admit he didn't know.

"Who cares?" he said. "It's gone."

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