

# Jacob Needed an Angel

by Sharon Johnson O'Donnell

**M**y father and I were standing together at the back of our church near Raleigh, NC, as we waited to take the traditional walk down the aisle. It was my wedding day, and I started to get misty-eyed as I thought of how life had brought me to this point.

Ahead of us was my 3-year-old nephew and ring bearer, Jacob, pacing carefully toward the altar. People smiled as they caught a glimpse of the serious-looking toddler, balancing a ring on his satin pillow. There is a photo of Jacob in my wedding album that always brings back this wonderful memory. He is dressed in a white suit, and his sky-blue eyes have never been bluer. He looks so innocent, and his face is the essence of childhood.

EAST-FORWARD FIVE YEARS to a dreary night in April 1993. The University of North Carolina had just won the national basketball championship, but I wasn't celebrating; I was sitting outside my house in the pouring rain, screaming and crying because I had just been told that Jacob might die.

The phone call came while I was watching the game on TV. "They say it's definitely leukemia," my mother said.

"Oh, God, Mama, no," I moaned. Then I asked about my sister Gail and her husband, Butch—Jacob's parents. "They're devastated," Mama said.

I handed the phone to my husband, Kevin, and ran into the yard. As I sat in the rain, I realized I had used the word

Earlier this year, my nephew Jacob celebrated his fifteenth birthday—an amazing milestone, if you know how close we came to losing him



The author with Jacob: She pitched in when his life was on the line.

*devastated* much too casually over the years. I could remember saying things like "I'm devastated that I don't have a date" or "I'm devastated about not getting that job." That night, I learned what the word truly means.

Images of my nephew rushed into my mind: Jacob playing Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in his preschool Christmas pageant; Jacob as a Little Leaguer, waving to us in the stands; and Jacob at the recent church Easter egg hunt, helping his brothers, Sam, 5, and Matthew, 3, look for

eggs. As I looked back on it, I realized he'd been a little pale, but it was hard to believe he was now fighting for his life.

Back in the house, I went to sit by my 2-year-old son, Billy, as he slept. I thought about how fragile we all are, and my feelings of helplessness were overwhelming.

THE NEXT DAY, MY PARENTS WERE ALLOWED to see Jacob at the hospital. Afterward they stopped by our house, and I peppered them with questions. "How is he?" I asked. Daddy's eyes teared up—something I'd never seen. Mama told us that Jacob had the most common type of childhood leukemia, which has a cure rate of about 90 percent; but he also had an extremely high white-cell count, meaning the cancer was very much in command of his body.

My parents have always been very strong people, and I'd grown used to looking to them for comfort. So I wasn't ready when Mama asked, "Do you think he'll be all right?"

I felt my throat get tight. This time, Mama was asking *me* for reassurance, and I struggled for words that would make her feel better. Finding none, I just put my arm around her shoulder and hugged her.

Within a few days, we received another blow: Jacob's doctors found that his cancer cells had a mutation called the Philadelphia Chromosome, which meant the disease would be unusually resistant to chemotherapy and radiation. His best shot, they said, was a bone-marrow transplant. And even that would carry major risks; the

procedure can trigger a war between the donor's marrow and the patient's body. And sometimes transplants work initially, only to fail later. But we had to take the chance; without a transplant, the doctors said, Jacob would die in six months. The clock was ticking.

JUST AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS, JACOB HAD surgery to insert a catheter in his chest. When we came to visit, doctors and nurses were running in and out of his room—he was coughing violently, and we



## JACOB'S ANGEL

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weren't sure he'd make it. "He'll be all right," I told Gail. "He's a strong boy." Crying, she answered, "Not anymore he's not." It was a wrenching night for us both.

Now, though, we had to throw ourselves into the search for a bone-marrow donor. Because there are more than 10,000 types of bone-marrow tissue, finding a perfect match was unlikely—but we had to try. Jacob's brothers were tested to determine their type, and we waited a week for the results. I will never forget the morning Gail called, her voice crackling. "They didn't match," she said.

No one else in our family had Jacob's marrow type, so we turned to the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) registry. While the registry searched its files for the right donor, Jacob would begin chemotherapy.

Knowing that Gail had all she could handle, the family (including my brother, Sam, and sister Mary) pitched in. Together with Butch's relatives, we took turns driving Gail's younger boys to school, picking them up, and caring for them. But I wanted to do more.

I knew that community groups held

blood and marrow drives for critically ill children. Why couldn't we do the same? Even if it was a one-in-a-million chance that we'd find a match for Jacob, we could help expand the donor registry and, we hoped, save other lives.

In May 1993, I joined 15 friends to form a group we christened Jacob's Ladder, organizing drives through schools and churches. I'd worked in media relations, so I used my contacts to get on TV and radio to talk about the need for donors and to persuade newspapers in our area to do stories about transplants. When he was feeling up to it, Jacob helped us out—pitching in at drives or doing radio interviews.

Pregnant with my second son, David, now 5, I became obsessed with our campaign—so much so that my husband began to worry about me. I couldn't explain why Jacob's Ladder was so important until the Sunday when we held a drive at a local Catholic church. I spoke during the service, then returned to my seat as an unfamiliar hymn began. I became captivated by the lyrics: *Here I am, Lord/Is it I, Lord?/I have heard you calling in the night/I will go, Lord, if you lead me/I will hold God's people in my heart.* The words vividly expressed something I had sensed but had not been able to articulate. I felt literally pulled

toward my work; at that moment, I realized it was God who'd given me the call.

ONE MONTH AFTER STARTING CHEMOTHERAPY, Jacob surprised us by going into remission. But the chemo and steroids had taken a toll: Jacob's curly blond hair was gone, and his face became swollen. The bald head and puffiness never seemed to bother him—he just wore a baseball cap and big shirts. The catheter box in his chest, though, made him feel self-conscious.

Every Wednesday, Gail and Jacob spent the day at the hospital while he got needle sticks from all directions. Marrow aspirations, blood tests—I knew she flinched each time he held out his arm. Sometimes I went with them, and I always came away with a fresh perspective on what was important in life: In the cancer ward, one of the most wrenching scenes I saw was a mother lying in bed beside her sick child, holding her, gazing at her, as if she were drinking in her child but unable to quench her thirst.

In October, we heard the most beautiful words in the English language: "We've got a match." Somewhere, there was a man who decided to join the NMDP registry, and who ended up being Jacob's miracle. (To our disappointment,

we were never able to learn who he was.)

Our prayers were with Jacob when he entered the Pediatric Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, a part of the Children's Health Center at Duke University Hospital in Durham. For two weeks, he underwent radiation treatments to rid him of as many cancer cells as possible. The transplant was performed on the night before Thanksgiving. Then another wait began, to see if Jacob's body would accept the life-giving graft.

Jacob got pretty sick during the next ten days—mostly with stomach problems. He had to be very careful not to get any infections, because his immune system was nonexistent. After about two weeks, new white cells began to appear in his blood—meaning that his body seemed to be accepting the donor marrow. We were thrilled, but we knew it was still very much a day-to-day thing.

One month after the transplant, doctors told Butch and Gail that Jacob could come home. On Christmas Eve, we gathered outside their house. A TV crew was on hand, and a WELCOME HOME, JACOB banner was tied between two trees. Jacob stepped out of their van wearing his familiar baseball cap; he walked stiffly, his steps a bit unsure. His brother Sam gave him an awk-

ward hug—a rare show of all-boy affection—and we knew we'd just been given the greatest Christmas gift we'd ever receive.

DURING CHEMO TREATMENTS, JACOB FOUND a friend in Johnny—an 11-year-old who had aplastic anemia and also needed a marrow transplant. The boys had a lot in common—especially a playful sense of humor. They went to the movies together and slept at each other's houses, and Gail became close to his mom.

After his procedure in November 1994, Johnny did great—for awhile. In January, though, his speech became slurred. The doctors couldn't pinpoint the problem, but they thought a virus or a fungus was involved. Back at Duke, Johnny slid into a coma; in early February, he died. It was so hard to believe that the transplant that began with such hope had ended with such sorrow.

Jacob didn't say much, but we knew he was grieving. For me, Johnny's death was a real blow: I was still spending about 30 hours a week on Jacob's Ladder, and I was getting burned out. I began to feel powerless again; Johnny was gone, and there was nothing I could do.

I almost skipped church that Sunday, but I went anyway. At the end of the

service, I stood, waiting impatiently for the choir to sing the regular benediction. Instead, they closed with "Here I Am, Lord," the song that had spoken to me so powerfully before. Tears instantly filled my eyes. As others began to file out, I stood motionless, my body tingling. I knew there was still work to be done.

LAST NOVEMBER, JACOB PASSED THE FIVE-year post-transplant mark, which his doctors consider a cure. Because of the radiation therapy, he's still on medications to regulate his growth. But he's a happy, healthy 15-year-old—a high school sophomore who sometimes picks on his brothers and has a passion for computers. He visits children who need marrow transplants, and he works at our annual "Marrowthon" drives. Basically, though, he just wants to be one of the guys.

No one in our family will forget what he went through, but my dreams for Jacob focus on his growing up and leaving his illness behind. I want to see him graduate from college; I want him to fall in love with a special girl. And I hope that, one day, I'll be at Jacob's wedding, fighting tears as I watch him at the altar, waiting for his own ring bearer to take that slow walk down the aisle. ★



# Tech schools turn 20 Many have reason for celebrating the founding of system

by Sharon Johnson

He made his living catching crabs in the Pamlico Sound.

Sometimes, as the sun beat down on his head, he would look across the blue-green water and dream—dream of a better life for his wife and their seven children.

But for a crab picker, whose livelihood was sparse and seasonable, the opportunities to better himself were rare.

Then a friend suggested that he go across the sound and take a job-training course at Pamlico Technical College.

The man was skeptical. He thought he was too old. He didn't think any educational institution could be for him. It just seemed too good to be true.

But he went, took a course in welding and got a job making more than \$200 a week—a hefty increase over what he had earned picking and selling crabs.

The man was so overwhelmed that he returned to Pamlico Tech to talk to the president of the college. "I feel like I've got to thank somebody," he said.

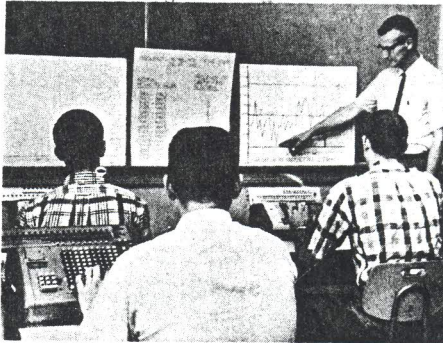


The man's story has been told many times during the short history of North Carolina's community college system. It is sure to be told many times in the future.

There are many, like the former crab picker, who had reason to celebrate the recent 20th anniversary of North Carolina's community college system. Since 1963, when the N.C. General Assembly passed a higher education bill that created the community college system, enrollment has grown to the point where today

more than 600,000 students enroll each year to take courses in the diverse programs offered by the system's 58 institutions. The colleges offer technical and vocational training, academic college transfer programs and adult basic education instruction.

The cost is only about \$120 a year for a full-time student. More than 77 percent of the funds for the system come from the state, while tuition and local and federal funds pay the rest. Nearly 100 percent of the state's population is within a 30-mile radius of a community college.



The low cost and easy access have made the system popular among the state's residents. The demand for such an economical educational system is what started the community college movement back in the late 1950s and 1960s.

One of the leaders of the movement was Dr. W. Dallas Herring, chairman of the State Board of Education for 20 years and known as the "father" of the community college system. In fact, when the Pamlico crab picker wanted to thank someone for his training at Pamlico Tech, the school's president suggested he thank Herring.

Herring was one of the people who worked closely with Gov. Terry Sanford, whose administration in 1961 stressed the importance of a brighter day in education for North Carolina.

Herring and several others asked Sanford to appoint a committee to study post-secondary education in the state. The result was the Carlyle Commission, named after Irving E. Carlyle, a well-known educator from Winston-Salem.

Carlyle served as chairman of the commission, which consisted of 25 members, including Herring; Major L.P. McLendon, chairman of the State Board of Higher Education (now the University of North Carolina Board of Governors); William C. Friday, president of the

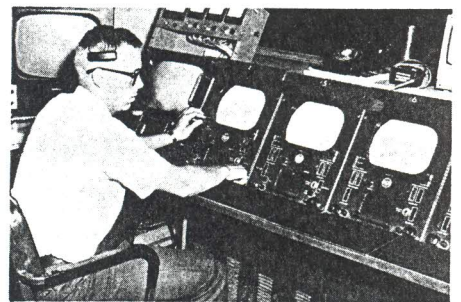
University of North Carolina; and H. Clifton Blue, then speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives.

Russell Clay, a reporter who covered the General Assembly in the early 1960s for the Durham Morning Herald, recalls that "Somebody did a good job in creating that commission." Clay said that many members of the commission were influential legislators who did all they could to gain support for a bill that they themselves had recommended.

The commission made several far-reaching recommendations, among them the development of a comprehensive community college system.

The 1963 General Assembly studied the commission's report, and a bill was introduced which called for: (1) Making the names of the three state universities The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina at Raleigh and The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (2) The colleges in Asheville, Charlotte and Wilmington would become liberal arts and sciences public senior colleges. (3) A system of educational institutions would be developed throughout the state, offering two-year college parallel, technical, vocational and adult education programs.

The Legislature voted the three recommendations, with a few changes, into law on May 17, 1963. The law was officially enacted on July 1, 1963 and established a Department of Community Colleges under the State Board of Education.



Clay, the Durham Morning Herald reporter, said there was some opposition to the bill. He recalled that one legislator said a community college system would "carry us down the road to socialism" as the state got more control of the education system.

Some legislators were concerned that the system would cost too much. Others feared a statewide



community college system would take away funds and students from private institutions. Private college supporters saw the system as a major threat to the survival of private colleges in the state.



But another section of the bill drew attention away from the community college proposal. That section called for what was then N.C. State College to be renamed the University of North Carolina at Raleigh.

"The name change portion of the bill created a terrific furor in the Legislature when that came out," recalled Ed Wilson, at that time a state representative from Caswell County.

Most N.C. State College alumni opposed the idea of changing the school's name, fearing it would become known as UNC-Raleigh.

Clay said, "The name change really grabbed the headlines and the attention. There were very intense, emotional arguments made."

A compromise was reached and the name was changed to N.C. State of the University of North Carolina at Raleigh.

In all the hoopla, nobody noticed the community college proposal, Wilson said.

After the bill was passed, then Governor Sanford said: "We have established this system of comprehensive community colleges in North Carolina because we are keenly aware of the fact that brain power has replaced back power as the chief need of our state and of our nation."

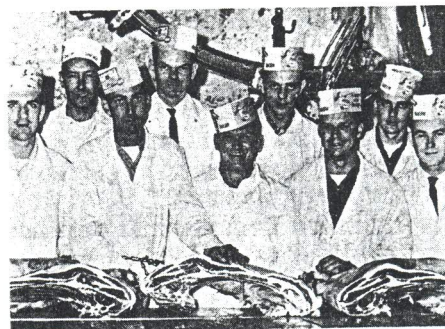
The Carlyle Commission study included a report by Dr. Horace Hamilton, a professor of rural sociology at N.C. State College. The report named areas in the state best suited for a community college.

Hamilton chose the proposed sites because they were within easy access of the residents.

But just because a community was named as a suitable site, it didn't assure the area of a college. A community had to prove its need, desire and support for a community college. As commission chairman Carlyle said, "No community will be presented a college on a silver platter."

Dr. I.E. Ready, director of curriculum study for the State Board of Education, was named the first director of the Department of Community Colleges in 1963. He served for eight years and saw the number of institutions in the system grow from 24 to 54 and enrollment increase from more than 52,000 students to more than 358,000 students.

A lot has changed since the Ready years. Today, the position draws national attention, with applicants coming from the north, south, east and west. When Ready was named director, he didn't even apply for the job. He received a phone call telling him he had been chosen.



Ready was succeeded in 1971 by Dr. Ben E. Fountain Jr., now president of Isothermal Community College in Spindale. The title also was changed from director to state president. During Fountain's tenure all the institutions, many of which were in makeshift facilities, such as abandoned prisons and motels, saw the start of permanent campuses.

Dr. Larry J. Blake took the helm in 1979, a year that signaled some major changes for the system.

Legislation was passed in the 1979 session of the General Assembly, establishing a separate governing board for the state's community and technical colleges and technical institutes. Also, the General Assembly said that the board of trustees of a technical institute could change its name to a technical college if the county board of commissioners agreed.

It was in 1980 that state control of the community college system changed hands from the State Board of Education to a newly formed State Board of Community Colleges. The board assumed full responsibility in January 1981, following a five-month planning and transition period. Carl Horn, chief executive officer of Duke Power Co., of Charlotte was named chairman.



During the nearly four years Blake served as state president the system gained a national reputation for its emphasis on vocational and technical training and for its role in the state's economic development efforts.

In March of this year, former North Carolina Gov. Robert W. Scott became the Department's fourth president. Scott has followed the development of the system closely through the years. He was a member of the State Board of Education while he was lieutenant governor and served on the board's community college committee that formulated policy for the community college system.

Today, the North Carolina community college system is the third largest in the country and is still growing. "I think we have reached the age of maturity," Scott said. "We've grown up."

But Scott cautions against "falling into a rut."

"Somehow, I would hope that during my years as state president we will be able to retain that spirit of excitement, vitality, flexibility and adaptability that have made the system so great. We must adapt to changes in society and in the economy or we will lose sight of the great opportunity that we have."

*Editor's note: This feature story was written by Sharon Johnson, a junior journalism major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an intern in the Public Affairs Office of the Department of Community Colleges. Photographs: Training For Industry, 1966*



## System's beginnings date back to 1920s

It's been 20 years since the General Assembly created the state Department of Community Colleges. But the community college system in this state can trace its roots further back.

It was in 1927 — in the midst of the Great Depression — when the state's first community college opened its doors in Asheville. The Buncombe County college had little resemblance to today's year-round, full curriculum community colleges. It was located in the Lee Edwards High School and held classes in the late afternoon and at night, after the high school students had left for the day.

The small college had successful occupational training programs, especially in business. And, it was tuition-free at a time when the private junior colleges were charging fees. Despite hard times, the school grew. Today it is better known as the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

It took World War II to bring about the next major development in community colleges in North Carolina.

At the war's end, veterans returned to North Carolina in droves, hungry for the education they had to leave behind, and looking for opportunities.

Their numbers swelled the enrollments at the public and private schools and to meet the demand, the state developed several educational centers that served as temporary extensions of area colleges and universities. The city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County each established junior colleges as extension activities of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Wilmington established two junior colleges, one to serve white students and another to serve black students.

In the early 1950s, Dr. Clyde A. Erwin, state superintendent of public instruction, appointed a commission to survey the need for state-supported community colleges. Dr. Allan S. Hurlburt was selected to direct the study.

The commission's recommendations on standards and criteria for such colleges were sent to the

General Assembly in 1953 and again in 1955. However, most legislators thought the proposal was too expensive and it was twice defeated.

Two years later, in 1957, Gov. Luther H. Hodges wanted to increase the state's industrial education and training and the Legislature passed the Community College Act, giving official approval to initiate a statewide system of industrial education centers. Operated as part of the public school system and under the State Board of Education, the centers trained skilled craftsmen and technicians to work in trade, industrial and technical jobs.

Approximately 20 such centers were established during 1957-1963.

The same legislation also provided for public community colleges. The state's five existing public junior colleges, which were under the State Board of Higher Education, were limited to offering liberal arts programs for college transfer.

By the early 1960s it was apparent that North Carolina was developing two parallel, post-high school educational systems. These two-year systems had different objectives, but educators increasingly were beginning to recognize that the course offerings of both should be more comprehensive.

In 1961, Gov. Terry Sanford appointed a commission to study post-secondary education in North Carolina. That commission, chaired by Irving E. Carlyle, a state educator from Winston-Salem, made a number of recommendations, including that a comprehensive community college system, offering college parallel, technical-vocational and adult education tailored to area needs, be created.

That recommendation was approved by the General Assembly in 1963, just 20 years ago, and forms the basis for the state's community college system as it is known today.



# Alcohol gets a deadly free ride

BY SHARON J. O'DONNELL

**CARY** — Smoking or nonsmoking?

Every time that question is directed to me, at restaurants or other places, I answer "nonsmoking." I have an allergy to cigarette smoke and, of course, detest the role it plays in causing cancer. Yet I don't understand why society criticizes the tobacco business while the alcohol industry continues unscathed.

Last month, President Clinton announced that the federal government will sue tobacco companies to recover the Medicare costs of treating sick smokers. I have to wonder why America's

## POINT OF VIEW

collective anger is channeled only toward tobacco companies, while beer, wine and liquor companies are overlooked.

I realize tobacco companies tried to cover up studies that years ago proved nicotine is addictive, while alcohol-related companies have not been involved in coverups. However, if we are upset about what the use of tobacco does to our nation, we should also be concerned about what alcohol does. I'm not suggesting another federal lawsuit is the answer — simply a public outcry.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 16,189 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 1997, accounting for 38.6 percent of all traffic deaths. Hundreds of thousands of people were injured. And alcohol abuse does much more damage than just what's done on the roads.

At college, alcohol is implicated in more than 40 percent of all academic problems and 28 percent of all dropouts, as documented in a 1992 report.

It is painfully clear that something is wrong when the words "partying" and "having a good time" have become synonymous with drinking. Taking a drink or two is nothing to get upset about, but it is not responsible drinking that I am talking about. The media and society perpetuate the idea that drinking to excess is the way to celebrate.

In my college days in the '60s, all I had to do to see the evidence was to look around at the keg parties, the packed bars and the empty beer cans in the dorm rooms. I will never forget the sight of students vomiting after drinking too much — all in the name of having a "good time" — all in the name of fitting in.

Students going out for a night of binge drinking would say, "Let's get wasted." It's chilling what an appropriate word "wasted" is for getting drunk.

Alcohol's powerful effect is evidenced in other areas too. In a 1997 Parade magazine survey of 720 girls aged 12 to 19, 85 percent identified drinking as a major factor leading to sex. Alcohol plays a major part in social problems that have a direct and profound impact: domestic violence, crimes, destruction of families and other relationships, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, broken homes, unemployment and fetal alcohol syndrome that can result in low-birth-weight babies with severe disabilities. Imagine the economic costs of all the problems caused by overindulgence in alcohol . . .

I worry that society's acceptance and glamorization of drinking will have a very detrimental effect on youth and our world. I don't like to be watching a football game with my family when a beer commercial comes on featuring cute frogs and an alligator, prompting my 4-year-old son to say "Those frogs are funny, Mom!"

These commercials are broadcast on television, the medium most influential on children and teens. Still, most of the criticism is leveled at smoking's Joe Camel, even though cigarette commercials haven't been aired on television in years.

I don't like it when someone lights up a cigarette near me or my children, but I can see that haze of smoke coming, and as inconvenient as it is I can move or ask the smoker to put out the cigarette. But what are my choices if a drunken driver is speeding toward my family's car on a dark, winding two-lane road?

In studies, many people cite "stress" and "boredom" as major reasons for getting drunk. This is a sad comment on our lifestyles today, an indication that something desperately needs to change. Groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving are speaking out in a very successful effort that has reduced drunken driving deaths. But America as a whole must be more concerned about alcohol use in general. The public has to speak out. Our young people need to hear the message loud and clear that there are better ways to deal with life — better ways to have fun — than getting drunk. They are waiting to hear the message, but the silence is deafening.

*Sharon J. O'Donnell, a free-lance writer and public relations consultant, writes a family life column for The Cary News.*



# N.C. can act against birth defects

BY SHARON J. O'DONNELL

CARY — I've read with interest lately about couples planning the conception of their child so the birth will take place at the start of the new millennium. While I admire their enthusiasm, I'm hoping they haven't rushed into anything — and have given top priority to the health of their child.

For example, do they know that if women take a daily vitamin with folic acid for one to three months prior to conception, their baby's chances of being born with a neural tube defect will be reduced by up to 70 percent?

Neural tube defects (NTDs) are central nervous system closure defects.

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They are the second-most-common type of birth defect (after congenital heart defects). They include spina bifida, in which the spine doesn't close and some-

times develops into brain abnormalities. Though most people with spina bifida can lead productive lives, it is the leading cause of childhood paralysis.

Anencephaly, another NTD, is a fatal condition in which a baby is born with a severely underdeveloped brain and skull.

These defects originate in the first month of pregnancy — before many women even realize they are pregnant. Folic acid, a B vitamin contained in most multivitamins, is very effective in preventing NTDs, as well as cleft palate and lip, but it must be taken before conception and during pregnancy.

It is very difficult to obtain enough folic acid from diet alone, and the synthetic form found in vitamins is more easily absorbed by the body. Yet a 1997 March of Dimes survey showed that only 30 percent of women take a multivitamin containing folic acid before pregnancy.

Sadly, North and South Carolina lead the nation in occurrence of neural tube defects, according to Dr. Godfrey Oakley of the Centers for Disease Control. A state Department of Health Statistics report says one in 500 live births in North Carolina is affected by NTDs each year.

And each year between 3,000 and 5,000 babies are born in the state with birth defects serious enough to affect survival or the long-term health of the child. To prevent NTDs and other birth defects, more in-depth information is needed about the occurrence of certain types of defects. Valuable information is lacking.

The March of Dimes and other agencies are planning a Folic Acid Awareness Campaign to help reduce NTDs. But first these groups need to know where to target prevention efforts — which demographic groups, geographic regions and environmental factors.

A bill in the current session of the General Assembly, setting up a Birth Defect Monitoring Program, could provide the missing puzzle piece. It seeks an appropriation of \$325,600 for the state Department of Health and Human Services to establish a timely program to record the occurrence of birth defects in each region; to analyze birth defect data; and to use the information in the development of prevention programs. State Sen. William Purcell of Laurinburg and Rep. Mia Morris of Fayetteville are sponsoring this bill; it has been introduced in the Senate as Senate Bill 834. May 11 will be Lobby Day for the bill, a day on which the March of Dimes, the Perinatal Association and other supportive groups will talk to legislators about its importance and profound impact.

Birth defects are a leading cause of death in babies under 1 year of age. Unfortunately, North Carolina ranks 47th in infant mortality, and more babies die before their first birthday in our state than in almost any other. In 1997, 982 babies here died before their first birthday. In an average week, 18 babies under a year old die. This is nothing to celebrate.

In addition to the families' personal tragedies, there are huge financial costs. According to the 1998 state Center for Health Statistics report, hospital costs for children with birth defects total \$35 million each year in North Carolina, exceeding the costs for childhood injuries, infectious disease and cancer combined.

The real tragedy, though, is the many birth defects that could be prevented, the many lives that could be changed, if only there was a way to take full advantage of the prevention information we have.

It would be great to welcome one's child into the world as a new millennium is celebrated, but the most important thing to celebrate is the birth of a healthy baby. With the Birth Defect Monitoring Program and subsequent prevention programs like the March of Dimes' Folic Acid Awareness Campaign, there can be many more first birthday celebrations all over North Carolina. Saving North Carolina's babies is a fight we have to win.

*Sharon J. O'Donnell writes a family life column for The Cary News and is co-chair of the local March of Dimes Public Affairs committee.*



A STEP BACK IN TIME



# Soaring for education

*(Editor's Note: Henry Adams Elementary School was dedicated after a major renovation project on Sunday, Dec. 12. More than 400 students, staff and family members attended to kick off a new era at the school, named for the late Henry R. Adams, a former Wake board of education member from Cary. Local writer Sharon O'Donnell, whose children attend the school, prepared this article on Adams and his contributions.)*

By SHARON O'DONNELL  
CORRESPONDENT

Aviators are known for their determination and leadership, for reaching for the sky, and trying to attain dreams and goals. That's why it's appropriate that Adams Elementary School in Cary chose the aviators as its mascot. The late Henry Reavis Adams, for whom the school was named, worked hard to see dreams and goals come true, too - to see education in Cary take flight.

Adams was born 100 years ago - on March 21, 1899 - and grew up in a home near the railroad tracks in downtown Cary. Ella A. Williams-Vinson, a former teacher in various Cary elementary schools, remembers stories her father told about playing with Adams when they were boys.

"They were very good friends," she said. "My father loved Henry Adams to death, and he loved my father."

The friendship was even more special because it crossed racial lines at a time when such friendships between African-Americans and Caucasians were rare.

Adams graduated from Cary High School and later went to Trinity Park School in Durham, which is now Duke University. He decided he wanted to become a pharmacist and went to the Bay State School of Pharmacy in Maryland, then to Kings Business College in Raleigh so that he could open his own pharmacy.

Adams opened his pharmacy in what is now Ashworth Drugs, where people often called him Doc.

Cary resident Herb Young grew up in Cary and remembers fondly the times when he and his friends would gather at the fountain counter at the corner drugstore.

"It was the place to be in Cary," said Young. "Even though some people called him Doc, I never did that. I had a lot of respect for him and always called him Mr. Adams".

In all those years of hanging out at the drugstore, Young observed, he never saw anybody needing medi-

Henry Adams was a civic leader in Cary who made great strides in improving education here. An elementary school bears his name.

cine turned away because they couldn't pay.

"I know there were many times people needed a prescription filled but couldn't afford it. But Mr. Adams always filled them anyway," Young said. "He was a caring, concerned man. I even remember him paying for some of the poorer kids to go to basketball camp in the mountains."

Adam's wife, Ethel, was an elementary school teacher and taught for over 30 years. They lived in a brick house on Academy Street near what is now Cary Elementary. Adams himself developed a deep interest in education and saw that good schools were essential, not only in building people, but in building a community. He became very active in improving education in Cary. His son, Charles, attended Cary schools and was a star basketball player at Cary High in the early 50s, going on to play at UNC-Chapel Hill.

In the 1940s and 50s, Henry Adams served on the Cary Advisory Council, which was a board that oversaw Cary schools. Before the establishment of the Wake County school board in the 1960s, each individual town had such councils to run its educational system.

Adams was a leader on the advisory council, despite being a quiet man by nature. The council was very successful in working with Cary schools and the community to obtain better facilities and other amenities.

In a June interview conducted by the Page Walker Historical Committee, a former Cary Elementary principal, the late Carl Mills, spoke of his admiration for the council: "I'll tell you, things operated so smoothly in Cary, you wouldn't believe it. You would have to experience it. The key to me was the advisory

SEE ADAMS, PAGE 3B



## ADAMS

FROM 1B

council. {It} was very important. Whatever we got into, if there was a vocational program, a new athletic program, what-have-you, they'd raise the money to get it started."

Henry Adams was one of the council's driving forces. Williams-Vinson, the former teacher, remembers Adams working side-by-side with African-American school leaders E.B. Ferrell and Clyde Evans, in trying to improve schools for all children.

"They made a good team," Williams-Vinson said. "I know Henry Adams did a lot for the schools in the area."

Adams' drugstore was very successful, and by the mid-1950s, Adams planned to turn the business over to his only child, Charles (Charlie), who at that time was on a basketball scholarship at UNC. However, young Adams had other plans. He wanted to be teacher and a coach, not a pharmacist.

Adams understood when his son decided he didn't want to follow his father's career path. The younger Adams, now 63 and the executive director of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association, says his father understood his career choice and supported him in it. He knew his son loved athletics. Adams had instilled a love for sports in his son by taking him to all the Cary High games from the time Charlie was a boy.

"Dad had sort of a reserved spot on the bleachers," Charlie said. "He was there at every game."

It was only natural that his son also develop a strong love for athletics and coaching. Adams was known for his belief that athletics makes a person stronger in many ways, just as a classroom educa-

tion does.

Simon Terrell of Chapel Hill, was Charlie Adam's high school basketball coach and recalls his star player's father very well.

"Henry Adams was dedicated to Cary," Terrell said. "He contributed to the area through his business, his church, civic groups, and his work in education just his general support of the town. He was a strong leader in a quiet way.

Charlie Adams agrees.

"Dad had a passion for Cary," he said. "Being so entrenched in the town was a labor of love for him. He never saw it as work."

Ironically, a few days after Charlie told his dad he didn't want to be a pharmacist, a couple from Fuquay came into Adams Drugstore, asking if anyone knew of a drugstore for sale. Henry Adams surprised and pleased them by saying, "This one is." That couple, of course, was Ralph and Daphne Ashworth.

Adams decided to pursue other business ventures. He sold the landmark drugstore to the Ashworths, and it re-opened as Ashworth Drugs in 1957. The Ashworths often say that if Charlie Adams had chosen to be a pharmacist, then they would not be in Cary today.

"Henry Adams was a leader in the community," Ralph Ashworth said. "He wanted to make sure Cary had the best educational plan and school facilities possible, and he was willing to work hard to achieve those goals."

Many people can remember specific school buildings, baseball fields, lighting systems and other items that can be directly attributed to Adam's foresight and persistence.

After Adams sold the drugstore, he opened the Adams Appliance Company, which is now Wolfes Appliance. He also stayed busy in other groups in the community. He was a member of the First Methodist Church and was a Mason and a Shriner.

In the late 1950s, the Wake County Board of Education was established, and Adams was elected to the board.

One issue that caught Adams attention was the problem of segregated schools and the quality of the overall education provided to the students. He felt that schools were separate but definitely not equal. He fought for integration of the county system so that all children could have a good education. This was not a popular stance, but Adams would not back down.

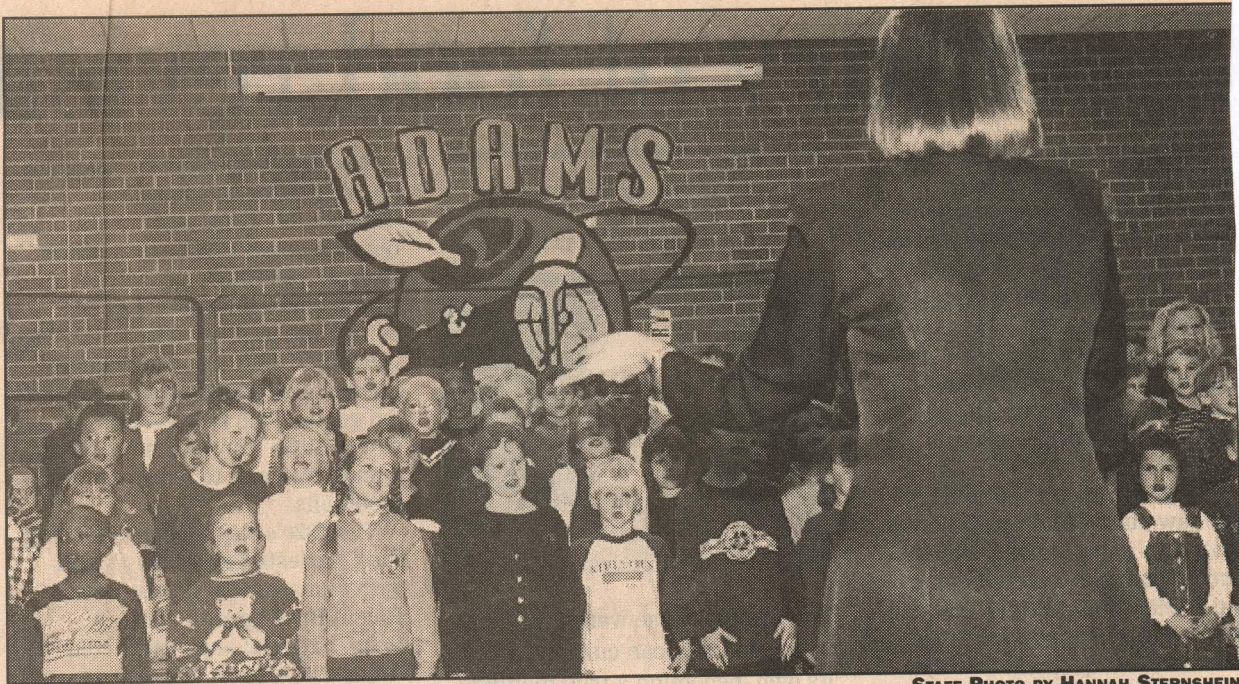
"It became his mission," said son Charlie.

Knowing that integration would be a difficult concept, Adams wanted to prove it would work in his hometown. He went to the Cary High principal, Paul Cooper, and asked if he would consider integrating Cary High to set an example for Wake County. Cooper agreed, and in 1963, Cary High School was the first integrated school in the county.

"My father took a lot of criticism for his view on desegregation," said Charlie, "but he was willing to bite the bullet and proceed with it anyway because he knew in his heart it was the right thing to do."

The six African-Americans who attended Cary High in the autumn of 1963 faced many challenges, but they blazed a trail for all of those coming behind them. Adams was thrilled to see a vision made into a reality.





STAFF PHOTO BY HANNAH STERNSHEIN

Students at Henry Adams Elementary School perform during the dedication ceremony on Sunday, Dec. 12 for the renovated campus. The school is located behind Cary Towne Center.

Young remembers Adams meeting with Principal Cooper about integration and says no one knew then just how important that was.

"It was history in the making," he reflected.

Adams was also a proponent of reading. He knew that reading was essential in motivating students.

In the late 1960s, people in the educational field kept telling Adams they thought a school should be named for him. Adams, however, felt that schools should not be named after living people so he always said no. In August 1968 at the age of 69, just as he was elected to another term on the school board, Adams died of a heart attack. Only months after his death, the Wake County Board of Education voted to name a new elementary school to be con-

structed in Cary in memory of him. Fittingly, it was initially Adams himself who pushed for this new school to be built in Cary.

Henry Adams Elementary opened in 1969. Those that knew him know there's no tribute that could be more special than the pursuit of excellence in education.

The opening of the newly-renovated school comes in the year of

the 100th anniversary of Adams birth. Throughout his life, he wanted and dreamed of the best for Cary and more importantly, the children of Cary.

Simon Terrell, the former Cary High coach, said, "Henry Adams was one of the people, one of the movers and shakers, in making Cary what it is today. He knew how to make things happen."







Henry R. Adams was an advocate for education in Cary. Above, he is pictured as a young boy in his best clothes. At right, Adams is shown in the drug store he owned in downtown Cary. The store is the current Ashworth drug store.



# Prison: Sentenced to 10 Years of Poetry

By Sharon Johnson

Nancy Sims is an inmate at North Carolina Correctional Center for Women in Raleigh. Nancy said she writes when she needs to release tension because of emotionally charged situations in the prison. She most often writes when she is angry.

Many people express individual dreams in creative writing. But when someone is behind bars, secluded from the rest of society, it becomes even more important to hold on to dreams and to express feelings and wishes on paper.

## Dreams

They can be imaginary  
They can be real  
Depending on your point of view  
Don't forget to face the facts  
Deciding if they're old or new.

They can scare you while you're  
sleeping  
They can materialize when you awake  
They'll stay with you forever  
If you're careful to avoid mistakes.

Some of them can die  
As fast as they are born  
Wanting them desperately enough  
They'll never become worn.

People will try to plot  
Others will try to scheme  
To take away the wants and needs  
That make up all your dreams.

—Nancy Sims

Joan Munger, full-time arts administrator at the prison, recognizes the intensity of Sims's

creative outlet. "Nancy can hurt with words. You can see the anger coming out in her poetry. I feel very honored that Nancy trusts me enough to let me read her poetry. That kind of trust is beautiful. I tell her what we can and can't print in our newspaper. After all, we're not in a free environment here."

Prison poets need a place to publish, and *Inside Outlook*, the prison's monthly newspaper produced by and for inmates, provides that.

Munger said that many prison poets write what she calls "verbal vomit." "This is the roses are red, June-spoon type of poetry, just a random outpouring of thoughts," Munger explained. "They write about Jesus this and love that, but those things are too abstract for them to define without some hard thinking."

But even "verbal vomit" serves a purpose, according to Munger. "It still helps to clarify thoughts, to help the writer see what is big and what is little," she said. "Anything original that comes out of a mind is wonderful. If incessant thoughts of hate stay inside, they fester and that leads to destruction of self and others. Punctuation and style aren't emphasized. Just getting it out in an acceptable way is enough."

Patricia Green, a young poet at the prison, has been writing for three years. Before that she wrote only "once in a blue moon." She wrote poems for her children. Many of the women's writing is about their children. More than 80 percent of the inmates at CCW have children they had to leave behind.

"Writing is an important part of my life," Patricia said. "I even encourage my friends to write. There was a woman in my dorm that was lonely and confused. I told her to write down what she felt, go back and read it after a week, and then see about changing it. At one

opportunities given to prisoners. "What do I say to someone on the outside to let them know how important writing is to me? Help me to be free to express myself. Writing is so damn personal."

We walked back across the prison grounds. Sybil laughed and said, "Take me out with you. I promise I'll be good."

Sybil said she didn't know if she would continue writing after her release. "I can't say right now. Needs change. I just don't know. I need to write here though."

We reached the gate and waited for it to open. "Hey, are you gonna let her out of here?" Sybil yelled over to the guard by the gate. "Yeah," he answered, "but you have to step back." Sybil glanced at me and quickly looked down at the ground. "O.K.," she said, as she moved back several feet.

"Good-bye, Sybil," I mumbled. The electric gate opened with a grating noise, and I stepped through.

Visiting a prison even for a short while does something to you, makes you think about things you've never felt before. As I walked to the sign-out book, I couldn't help thinking, "What if they don't let me out?" A guard asked for my ID card. I reached into my pocket for my driver's license and wrapped my fingers tightly around it. I leaned over and signed my name in the book. As Sybil watched me go through the gate I wished that I could somehow capture the look on her face and show it to the world in a poem.

## POEM #28

Life sometimes  
Becomes like stagnant water  
Just there  
Still  
Gathering dust  
Trapping spiders  
Slowly changing leaves into fertilizer.

That cycle ends  
A leeway or a reason for moving  
Is found  
Then water undamable!  
Life, like the water  
Flows—  
freely.

—Sybil Gaynor, CCW

time or another everybody here writes, maybe if it is just a line or two."

At the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women (NCCCW or CCW), Munger is trying to raise funds to get a functioning poet to supervise a poetry workshop. In the past at CCW, Dr. Robin Davis taught an autobiographical writing class, retired editor Herb O'Keef taught a journalism class, and Agnes McDonald supervised a poetry class as "the Poetry Doctor."

McDonald's classes were handled on a personal basis; inmates become bored with a rigid class taught in a formal setting. Instead, the inmates wrote poetry and gave it to McDonald in advance. She took the poetry home to evaluate it and then met with each writer on a one-to-one basis. Agnes McDonald was "the Poetry Doctor" for 18 months until funds ran out.

At Butner Federal Correctional Institute, Eddie Smith, special programs coordinator, organized a poetry/prose workshop that was held this past winter. Smith had previously taught a fiction course at the prison in 1981. "I know writing is therapeutic for me," Smith said. "I'm quite sure it is for prisoners, too. They're very excited about taking writing courses. The problem is most of them think they are going to become writers overnight. After the course begins, they realize that's not going to happen."

"I've worked with a lot of prisoners," said author Virginia Love Long, who instructed the Butner poetry/prose workshop. "I've found it to be a very enlightening experience. Sometimes at the beginning, the writing starts off on a depressing note. Once they work through that, it becomes more of a liberation process."

Writers in prison do find a certain kind of freedom in their writing. As Whitaker of TDC said, it helps prisoners to gain an insight into life itself, and better enables them to cope with life in prison.

When inmates first come into prison, they go through a process of "prisonization," a time of getting used to a new way of life, a new identity.

Charles Hanna, a visiting sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said that he is interested in prisoners' writings and written works. "My own observations suggest that inmates are motivated to write for many different reasons — some normative and some as an emotional outlet and others as a means of releasing tension," Hanna said. "The activity of writing takes time and eases doing time. The process also allows the inmate to expand his world, making it more than what the other inmates are experiencing. Writing also does considerable 'identity work' for inmates whose identities are assaulted in the prisonization process."

Munger said that there are "a lot of powerful things written when they first come in." "It proves humans can get used to anything," she said. "What seems ordinary to us, things taken for granted on the outside, takes on a new meaning to the inmate. When they first come in here, some things seem ridiculous. But the body and mind can accommodate themselves. It's sad, but you can accept anything to survive."

Many prisoners turn to writing for help in that survival. They dream dreams. They write poetry. They "fight for every word," as Munger puts it. Thurgood Marshall was quoted in *Southern Exposure* (vol. VI, #4), a southern cultural magazine, as saying:

When the prison gates slam behind an inmate, he does not lose his human quality; his mind is not closed to ideas; his intellect does not cease to feed on a free and open interchange of opinion; his yearning for self-respect does not end; nor his quest for self-realization concluded. If anything, the needs for identity and self-respect are more compelling in the dehumanizing prison environment.

Robert Whitaker is an inmate at the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) in Huntsville. He is also co-editor of *Wynot* magazine at TDC. Besides printing articles about alcohol and

drug problems, the magazine also prints poetry by prisoners.

Several months ago, a creative writing workshop was begun at TDC. The program, co-funded by TDC and the Texas Commission on the Arts, has been extremely popular. Marcus Cox, a TDC inmate expressed his feelings about the workshop in *Prison Writing Review* (published by the COSMEP/Prison Project): "It's (the creative writing workshop) like receiving a breakfast of steak and eggs in solitary confinement. It's a new life in a decadent archaic environment."

"Writing helps me to know myself better," Mabel S., one of the CCW poets, said. "I move with my feelings. If there is a feeling, then there is a word for it." Mabel said she loves poetry because whenever she expresses something, she feels a joy inside. "I like to finish a poem and know that I really got my point across, that I really communicated," she added.

Mabel said that prison gives inmates the time to write that they never had before. "Writers here always had it in them but hadn't had a chance to express it," she said. "It's a way to deal with anger, rejection and hurt. It's a way to know who you are."

Smith, the special programs coordinator at Butner, said that reading is a popular prison pastime that often inspires writing. Munger agreed that reading is popular. "The writers here share their own work with other inmates," she said. "We have a library and books are passed around between inmates. Five times more prisoners read than people on the outside. I want inmates to read. If they want to read ketchup labels, fine. I'll buy ketchup."

Although it is easy for prisoners to get reading material, there are not many outlets for prisoner-written material. Both CCW and Butner inmates participate in the PEN America Poetry Contest based in New York City. Kathy Jones of CCW won an honorable mention certificate in the national penal press contest for her poem, "Both Die." Other literary markets for prisoners are *Inside/Out*, *Kite*, *Prison and Sentences* (broadsides of prison poetry).

Munger said, "There is a lot of red tape for prison writers to go through. No stamps to enter contests, no envelopes, no access to typewriters." She said money is needed to keep prison writing programs going. Munger is the only full-time prison arts administrator in North Carolina. The state pays her salary, but usually church and other private groups provide funds for writing instructors. The arts program at CCW began with Project Culture in 1977, a plan 32 states participated in. But the project died when Congress cut Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) funds.

Raleigh's Central Prison has maximum security measures that make it impossible to establish structured writing programs there; but, CCW inmate Sims said that "those men need to express themselves, too, because they live under the same conditions we do."

For both men and women prisoners, it is an uphill struggle to become writers. Munger spread her hands and said, "I'm pedaling as fast as I can."

## Just A Place

Stripped of my last shred of dignity  
standing naked and alone;  
I passed through those gates of iniquity  
into this travesty of a home.

They may take away my freedom.  
They may even steal my name.  
When my time here is over  
the woman I am will be the same.

They may whip me with slashing  
tongues,  
And browbeat me day after day;  
They can only hold me as the law allows.

They can make me change the way I  
dress,  
and even the look on my face  
But they'll never change the woman I am  
because prison is just a place.

—Dale Smyth, CCW



their bets on the projects would happen. For Cox in particular, the projects offer the chance for the renewal of a neighborhood that she says once betrayed her. It's been almost a year since Cox was jolted awake late one July night by the sound of someone trying to break into her home.

A police investigation of the in-  
SEE **DOWNTOWN**, 7A

## This week on carynews.com



Columnist Sharon O'Donnell is getting ready to send her son off to college. Read her bittersweet musings on how time flies when you're raising children.

## INSIDE

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# Mother knows best, eventually

When my oldest son, Billy, moved into his N.C. State University dorm room a few weeks ago, his roommate's mom and I found ourselves in the odd role of being a visitor in our son's room.

## THE HOME FRONT



SHARON O'DONNELL

We wanted to stay and help organize things, but it became clear that the guys wanted us to leave. This was their turf now.

No matter how cool you ever were before at home, no parents — nor their advice — are cool at college.

One mistake I made was buying an erasable memo board for Billy to hang outside his door.

He pulled it out of the bag and asked, "What's this for?"

"When I was in college," I explained, my voice filled with the wisdom of experience, "everybody had memo boards on their door so if someone came by and you weren't there, then they could write a message that they had stopped by."

I looked over at Billy and realized he was trying to politely suppress his laughter.

I was obviously a source of amusement for my child. "What?" I asked, defensively.

"Mom," he said, smiling broadly, "now we just text each other."

"Yeah, but," I started to reply and then stopped, knowing I had no response.

Yep, there had been some

advances in technology since I was in school.

"Well, it was always exciting to come back and see if you had a message on your door," I told him, defiantly. "You're missing out."

"Do you still have the receipt?" he asked.

While doing my back-to-school shopping, it was so obvious which moms had daughters leaving for college and which ones had sons.

The ones with daughters were discussing towel colors and room décor.

The ones with sons were by themselves, wearing forlorn faces, buying the bare necessities.

I made another merchandise drop from Bed Bath & Beyond and Target.

Billy was impatient. I went to the laundry room to see if the washer only took quarters or if it would accept his ATM card.

I discovered it would only take quarters or the special campus card, but not ATM cards.

I attempted to share this with him, but he cut me off.

"OK, Mom," he said with an exasperated glance.

I offered him some quarters, but the look got more exasperated.

It was time for me to leave.

A few days later, my husband called Billy.

Billy was walking to Hillsborough Street to get quarters because his dorm office and the student store turned up quarterless.

To his credit, he apologized for not listening to me.

Ah, sweet validation.

carynews@nando.com



# Losing a role model

**M**y 9-year-old son David fell asleep on the couch after the N.C. State-Maryland football game Nov. 22, which Maryland won 26-24 with a last-minute field goal. We had attended the game and came away extremely

## THE HOME FRONT



**SHARON  
O'DONNELL**

disappointed, playing a perpetual game of "What if." What if NCSU had been able to hold on to its lead against Maryland instead of fumbling and allowing the Terps to complete a comeback? What if State hadn't missed an earlier field goal? What if the Pack had won that big early season game at Ohio State instead of losing in triple overtime? What if the double-overtime Florida State game had turned out differently, instead of another heartbreaking loss?

State's season would have been more successful and the Pack would be going to a bigger bowl if some of these "what ifs" had gone its way. The season that started with such high hopes ended with disappointment, leaving nagging questions in the minds of fans and players.

We were all tired that night after the Maryland game, and such questions probably made us feel even more worn out. When David finally drifted off to sleep on the couch, I took a long look at him, this son of mine who is growing up way too quickly: brown bangs fanning out across his forehead, long eyelashes against his face, freckles sprinkled across his

nose. Then my eyes fell on his red football jersey, No. 17 — the jersey number of the Wolfpack's talented and popular senior quarterback, Philip Rivers.

Both David and his older brother Billy, 12, have No. 17 jerseys that they wear a lot. Now that the football season was over and so was Rivers' career at State (except for the Tangerine Bowl), the jersey took on a new meaning for me. Rivers had just had his number retired by NCSU after setting all kinds of ACC and school records, and climbing high in national statistics as well. If State had won a few more games, many people think Rivers would have won the Heisman Trophy, one of the most prestigious awards in college sports.

Yet, all the records and spectacular plays aren't what made me pause that night and look at my middle son sleeping innocently in his adored No. 17 jersey; I paused because I suddenly realized what an excellent role model my sons were losing.

In addition to being a magnificent athlete, Rivers came across as an intelligent, articulate, humble person with a good head on his shoulders. He was never in trouble off the field — a refreshing change when so many of today's sports headlines seem to be about athletes involved in altercations in bars, domestic violence, or drugs and alcohol. Demonstrating a maturity beyond his years, Rivers displayed good sportsmanship and a calm demeanor that endeared him to everyone lucky enough to see him play. His impeccable manners and easygoing personality impressed the media from day one of his freshman year, often prompting on-air com-

+ SEE O'DONNELL, 3B

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# O'DONNELL

FROM PAGE 1B

pliments from sports commentators.

Married to his Alabama high school sweetheart, Rivers has proven on and off the field what dedication and devotion are all about. He seems to have his priorities in order, seeing life from a perspective most people his age cannot comprehend: He knows that football is important

but there are many things in life more important. Rivers and his wife have a young daughter, and he has often remarked that spending time with her makes him realize life is not all about touchdowns. During his years at State, Rivers has taught many lessons to adults and youth about the importance of sportsmanship, the way one presents oneself, leadership, hard work, humility and dedication to family.

It is clear to me that our

young people need role models more than ever, especially with society more accepting of four-letter words and jokes based on nothing but sex or alcohol. Movies that would have received an "R" rating 10 years ago are prominently displayed on "Family Films" shelves in stores. Some athletes, movie stars and recording artists care nothing about their reputations, and even less about the young people looking up to them.

Like it or not, sports and

entertainment are where many children and teens pick up values and attitudes.

At every football game at Carter-Finley Stadium the last four years, there have been tons of children wearing No. 17 jerseys. What Philip Rivers has given to the young people who've followed his career is worth far more than a Heisman Trophy ever could be.

Contact columnist Sharon O'Donnell at [sjo@intrex.net](mailto:sjo@intrex.net).



# We have to dream it first

I remember where I was 15 years ago when I learned that Jim Valvano had finally lost his fight with cancer. I was on Interstate 40 in between Chapel Hill and Raleigh, coming back from UNC Children's Hospital after visiting my 9-year-old nephew Jacob who was waging his own fight against a rare leukemia. So when I heard on the radio the sad news about Valvano, I cried for him and for so many others who had to battle this horrendous disease.

## THE HOME FRONT



SHARON O'DONNELL

As a lifelong N.C. State fan (despite graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill), I'd also been a Jimmy V fan — I loved his humor and his passion, two things I feel are so important in life. The 1983 championship that underdog N.C. State won has gone down as a classic game in the history of the NCAA tournament, as has the image of Jim Valvano running around the court after the last second victory looking for someone to hug.

He was such an inspiration to so many people when he stood at center court at N.C. State's Reynolds Coliseum in 1993, just a few months before his death, and spoke as part of the 10-year anniversary of that championship season. A touching part of this for me was when he hummed the Wolfpack fight song, encouraging the emotional fans filling the place to shout at the appropriate place in the song "Go State!" His famous words were first heard there — about not ever giving up and how cancer might take away his physical abilities but could never touch his mind, his heart or his soul. He expressed similar thoughts a month later when he accepted the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at ESPN's ESPY awards in March 1993, so frail he had to be helped to the podium. It was that night that he announced the establishment of the Jimmy V Foundation for Cancer Research, with the support of ESPN.

Since then, the V Foundation — headquartered in Cary — has raised more than \$70 million dollars to fund grants in medical research with \$13 million of that coming from the V Celebrity Golf Classic. The 15th annual tournament will be held on Sunday, Aug. 10 at the Pinehurst Resort and provides a way for each of us to get involved, from volunteering to donating to going to Pinehurst to watch the event itself. Major sponsors are GlaxoSmithKline, Leith BMW, Nortel, Gregory Poole, Blue Cross & Blue Shield, Executive Staffing Group and Kroger.

Beginning at 9:30 a.m., the celebrities will be playing on the Pinehurst Resort's courses Nos. 1, 2 and 4, and the public can move around all three courses to meet the stars. Trick shot artist Dennis Walters will also perform a golf demonstration show at 10 a.m. Classic tickets are only \$5 and are available at the gate, at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com) or by calling 834-4000. For driving and parking directions or to volunteer, go to [golfclassic.org](http://golfclassic.org).

Other events related to the Classic include a reverse raffle in Cary on Aug. 6 with a BMW as a grand prize and a Kroger shopping spree.

Jim Valvano's speeches are now legendary, as they should be. DVDs of his ESPY awards speech are available through the Jimmy V Foundation ([jimmyv.org](http://jimmyv.org)), and I bought three of them — one for each of my sons — because I felt it's important for them to hear the wise words of this successful sports figure as he puts life into perspective in such a beautiful way.

Something else that Jim Valvano said in his speeches sticks in my mind: he said that nothing can happen without first having a dream and that you have to have enthusiasm to keep that dream alive, in spite of problems and obstacles you might face. When my oldest son Billy was in first grade, he entered a county arts contest called Reflections, and the theme was, "It could happen." For his entry, Billy made the front page of a newspaper with the headline, "Cure for Cancer Finally Discovered!" Under the headline were pictures he drew of two things: children running out of the hospital because they were cured and fireworks at famous places like Big Ben, the pyramid, and the Empire State Building as the whole world celebrated. Thanks to the Jimmy V Foundation and Golf Classic, it really could happen. We have to dream it first.

Contact Sharon O'Donnell at [sjo@nc.rr.com](mailto:sjo@nc.rr.com).



# Dinners at the table are just not a reality in our house

**W**hen I was growing up, my mother, who is a wonderful cook, would have a sit-down dinner for our whole family every night.

Unfortunately, family meals like these are becoming a thing of the past. My husband, three sons,

## THE HOME FRONT



**SHARON  
O'DONNELL**

and I are on the go just about every night, making it a logistical nightmare to try to make and eat a "real" homemade meal at the table.

In our house when we do have time to eat together, I'm ashamed to say that it's usually while we are watching a Red Sox or Carolina Hurricanes game on TV, not sitting around a table sharing our days and bonding like we're supposed to do. Imagine my delight and guilt relief when I read about a

recent study that determined eating together in front of the TV is still beneficial to the family members.

A few weeks ago, one of those rare nights occurred when we had no place we had to be. So I decided to take full advantage of this and make a home-cooked meal of country style cube steak, potatoes, green beans and rolls (well, the rolls weren't homemade like my mother's and the beans were from a can, but it was all cooked at home so officially it qualifies for home-cooked). Then I called my sons to come eat, and they came downstairs staring at the table, blinking and rubbing their eyes like they'd been wandering in the desert and were trying to figure out if what they saw before them was a mirage or if it was real.

After the blessing, one of the boys asked if they could turn on the TV, which is conveniently visible in the family room from the kitchen. I explained to him that we needed quality time together to reconnect as a family, and that no, we weren't going to turn on the TV. Dr. Phil would

have been so proud of me.

"There's a 'Canes game on," my husband Kevin said, sounding innocent but secretly trying to sabotage my good intentions for the sake of a hockey game. Our sons all looked at me with hope showing on their faces. I remained steadfast in my plans and went on asking bonding questions that were answered with "I don't know," "Sort of" and "Yeah." After five minutes of their silent chewing, exaggerated sighs and forlorn glances at the television, I gave in.

"OK, OK," I relented. "I'll turn it on, but ..." I paused seeking some type of compromise so I wouldn't be seen as totally caving. "But we'll mute it." Of course, since they couldn't hear anything, all of them kept their eyes glued to the TV.

Pretty soon, two of the boys started an argument about some silly thing, the dog started barking and the noise level grew. Kevin clicked the mute button on the remote so the volume came back on. When I found myself yelling, "Don't eat

the potatoes with your hands," I surrendered and retreated to my room.

And through all this, I really think I've come up with something home builders should offer that guilt-ridden, overworked women will love. You know how all these mega-communities now have their own gyms, their own pools, their own playgrounds, their own everything? My idea is to offer an on-site cafeteria that serves nutritious meals, has a prepaid meal plan and is accessible for kids. Don't have time to cook or to go to the grocery store? No problem.

"Mom, what's for dinner?"

"Honey, we don't have time for that today. Why don't you just hop on your Big Wheel and ride on down to the cafeteria?"

I'm telling ya, it's the next big thing in real estate.

Contact Sharon O'Donnell at [sjo@nc.rr.com](mailto:sjo@nc.rr.com).



# Lady of the House

By Sharon O'Donnell



Carolina Parent welcomes columnist Sharon O'Donnell, who will share her humorous insights on being a mom and wife. The title "Lady of the House" refers to the moms in every house who experience the challenges and rewards of motherhood, as well as of being a woman. Since O'Donnell is the mom of three sons — ages 20, 17 and 11 — the column and blog name also reflects the fact that she is the only female in her home, surrounded by her husband, sons and male long-haired dachshund.

You will find her blog monthly at [www.carolinaparent.com](http://www.carolinaparent.com) and can read more about her at [www.momsofboys.org](http://www.momsofboys.org).

## Simple kitchen remodeling

One recent evening, I was making a chicken enchilada casserole so we'd finally have a home-cooked meal instead of frozen dinners from the microwave. I was down to the next-to-the-last step of the recipe, which was "Sprinkle cheese on top." Done. Then I read the final step: "Refrigerate overnight." I groaned. Why didn't they warn me about that at the beginning of the recipe? Stouffer's tonight.

Just then, my 17-year-old son, David, came into the kitchen after basketball practice. "Wow," he exclaimed, "what did you do to the kitchen?" He was standing there looking around in awe like he was in one of those Parade of Homes houses — which our house is not.

"I didn't do anything to the kitchen." Perplexed, I looked in the direction of David's stare, then realized what he was talking about. Earlier that day in preparation for a visit from an appliance repairman, I'd taken everything off the front of our refrigerator: photos of the kids, game schedules, a list of phone numbers and trinkets my boys had made for me over the years. Yep, for the first time in decades, the refrigerator was totally clear of all the "stuff" that seems to accumulate on it. It looked new underneath it all, giving the illusion that the kitchen had undergone a mini-renovation.

During the 22 years we've lived in our house, we've had a few real renovations, including a master bathroom remodel last year. The problem with remodeling an upstairs master bath means visitors will never see it and, come on, isn't showing it off to visitors supposed to be half the point? It's not like adding on a sunroom and having people over for dinner. You can't say to dinner guests, "Why don't we have dessert up in our master bath?" Well, you can, but you would get some very strange looks.

The kitchen, however, is the center of the house, and even my boys notice changes there. Most people I know have cluttered refrigerator doors. I mean, isn't that the whole purpose of those little magnets? Yet I had to admit the kitchen looked a lot better without the clutter on the fridge. It stayed like that for a few days, as we relished the room's stylish new look. But the vacant refrigerator door began to bother me. I missed the photos, lists, homemade school crafts from days gone by — the things that made the kitchen our kitchen. Within a few days, the photos and schedules were up on the fridge once again. And that was OK with us — although the next time we have guests I'm going to throw all that stuff in a drawer until they're gone. ■

O'Donnell's humor book, *House of Testosterone*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2008. A columnist for *The Cary News* for 12 years, the life-long Triangle resident has also written for *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes & Gardens*.

Carolina Parent

[www.carolinaparent.com](http://www.carolinaparent.com)



# HOUSE <sup>of</sup> TESTOSTERONE

*One Mom's Survival in a Household of Males*



**SHARON  
O'DONNELL**

humor book published  
by Houghton-Mifflin, 2008





Barnes & Noble Events

Sharon O'Donnell

Tuesday, January 9th • 7:00 pm

collece or



# Bluebirds Fly

BY SHARON J. O'DONNELL

A black crow soared through the sky as Willow splashed cold water on her face at the side of the tobacco barn. She was mesmerized as she watched the bird glide above the treetops, cawing loudly. She wondered where it was flying to, what it would see of the world below. Pulling a wisp of brown hair back from her sweaty face, Willow looked at the tobacco fields surrounding her, engulfing her. As she squinted in the sunlight, she sighed loudly.



**SHARON J. O'DONNELL** was born in Raleigh in 1962. Her father, Samuel A. Johnson, owns a sewing machine sales and repair business and is a patented inventor. Her mother, Wiloree W. Johnson — the inspiration for this story — is a homemaker and doting grandmother. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, O'Donnell is a columnist for *The Cary News* and a freelance writer. She also leads writing workshops in schools as part of a United Arts Council Writer-in-Residence. She lives in Cary with her husband, Kevin, and their three sons, ages 11, 8 and 2.

Turning away from the barn, she walked back to the fields where she'd been priming tobacco all morning with the other workers. Willow started working the rows again. Pulling leaves, pulling leaves, making a rhythm in her head. Lately she'd been humming "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" under her breath. Willow loved that song. She went to "The Wizard of Oz" last month when it first came out. It was a strange name for a picture show, and the preacher down at the Baptist church — Rev. Thomas — told people to beware of anything about "wizards." But her daddy didn't like Rev. Thomas much, so he let her go into town to see the movie anyway. It cost all of her Co-cola money she'd been saving, but it was worth it. Picture shows were always in black and white, but "The Wizard of Oz" was mostly in color. Her eyes had lit up when the screen burst into such bright, beautiful colors, and she'd reached over excitedly and squeezed her younger sister's arm. How she wished she were Judy Garland!

The workers loaded the leaves on wooden trailers and took them to the barns where they put the leaves on stalks and hung them in the barns. God, she hated the smell of drying tobacco. She hated working in the fields, hated the heat, hated being so tired at night she couldn't even read before falling to sleep. But this was her daddy's farm so this is what she reckoned she would do the rest of her life. She'd worked tobacco every summer she could remember of her 14 years. Sometimes she wondered if she'd ever see any place other than Timber Creek, North Carolina. Willow wanted to see New York City someday, to walk down a city street with a pocketbook on her arm outside a theater. The thought of going there made her tingle.

"Hey," a boy's voice said. She glanced up to see Danny, who was 15, standing beside her. He had dimples when he grinned and the deepest brown eyes.

"Hey," Willow replied, and looked down at the tobacco row. Her face was turning red, and she didn't want him to see. Danny had only talked directly to her about three times in her life. Maybe four.

"Hot, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yeah. But it usually is in August." She saw Danny's face turn crimson. He looked at his feet, scuffed the toe of his shoe in the dirt. "Hotter than normal today, though," she added. He smiled.

"I — I — I saw you reading the other day on your porch," he stuttered. "I — um — I — like to read, too."

THE NEWS & OBSERVER  
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2002

Sunday Reader



Willow didn't know how to respond. She shrugged her shoulders. "Good, that's real good."

"What's your favorite book?"

Willow's heart did a little flip. "I like a lot of them. But I guess 'Red Badge of Courage' is my favorite." Danny's eyes brightened.

"Dinnertime!" Willow's daddy yelled, and the workers around her shouted with delight as they headed to the house.

"You hungry?" Danny asked, as he held his hand out to Willow. She grinned, embarrassed, but let him pull her to her feet.

"I'm starving," she said, releasing his hand. "I think Mama's having chicken today."

Danny started to go, but stopped and looked back at her. "I've read 'The Red Badge of Courage' three times. It's my favorite, too." He

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shoved his hands in his pockets and walked briskly away toward the group of young men he worked with in the barns. Willow joined her sister and cousin as all the workers walked up the hill to her house where her Mama awaited with a meal of cornbread, butter beans, and fried chicken. She could smell it, making her empty stomach rumble. Willow didn't know how her mama cooked so much food every day for all the workers. She'd go plumb crazy if she had to do cook like that every day.

As soon as Willow got to the house, she went into the hallway and stretched out on the linoleum floor, its coolness feeling good to her face. She wished she could lie there forever. She relaxed, then closed her eyes for a moment when she heard the door to the outhouse slam outside. In that place halfway between waking and dreaming, she suddenly remembered. Her eyes flew open.

"Who in the hell wrote all over the inside of the johnny house?" her daddy shouted. "Willow, you were the last one in there before we left for the fields this morning!" Willow jumped up from the floor, her heart pounding. She hadn't known he'd get so mad about it. "Willow! Come here!" her father commanded.

She ran outside, her lips quivering. "I'm sorry, Daddy," she mumbled, wishing all the workers would turn away and ignore the scene unfolding in the yard. "I just like to sing that song when I'm out there by myself thinking and I —"

"The johnny house ain't for singin'!" he interrupted, as the workers tried to contain their laughter. Her daddy handed her a bucket of water and some lye soap. "Wash those words off now!"

"What words?" Mama asked Willow quietly as she followed her daughter into the outhouse, propping open the door. Mama's eyes adjusted to the dimness. Then she saw the words scribbled on the outhouse walls: *Somewhere over the rainbow/skies are blue/and the dreams that you dare to dream /really do come true*

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"I didn't mean to hurt anything, Mama. I thought it made it a better place."

Willow's mother patted her shoulder. "I know, dear, I know." Her mama gazed at the walls and sung softly as she read the lyrics: "Somewhere over the rainbow/ bluebirds fly/Birds fly over the rainbow / why then . . ." Mama stopped, caught her breath as tears filled her eyes. "Oh why can't I?" she whispered. She reached up, wiped her eyes with her apron. "The peach cobbler's probably done now," she said suddenly, backing out the door. "I've got to go on in."

Willow watched her go, heard the screen door slam. Then she slowly picked up some rags, wet them and started scrubbing the walls with lye soap. With each letter she erased, she felt something inside her grow heavier. Hearing footsteps, she turned to see Danny standing at the outhouse door, silently reading the words. When he finished reading, he stared at the floor for a moment, his callused hands clenched into fists. He looked up, his eyes peering sadly into Willow's. He leaned over, picked up a rag, and helped Willow scrub away the words as a crow cawed somewhere in the distance.

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*"Bluebirds Fly" is an excerpt  
from a novel-in-progress.*

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of story