

Child improves through patterning

By Annegret Lamure
STOUFFVILLE — Five times each day, six days a week, wide elastic straps are fastened to a little boy's ankles and he is hung by his heels from a hook.

Five times a day a plastic bag is fitted over his face and he is forced to breathe through a straw.

Five times a day three adults grab his arms and legs and head and push and pull in endless sequence.

It sounds like a grim sort of treatment, but the little victim, Danny Carrick of Church Street, not only thrives on it, but enjoys the procedures as well.

Danny, an elfin six year old, is suffering from brain damage, and

the process he undergoes each day is patterning, a series of exercises designed by Dr. Glenn Doman to help rehabilitate the injured brain. This involves placing the arms and legs and head in prescribed positions and moving them rhythmically through certain patterns. It is estimated that the average person only uses about one-tenth of his brain cells, so the object is to train some of the unused healthy brain cells to take over functions usually carried out by the injured parts, and this is done by the exercises. The theory behind patterning is that since the brain initiates movement, movement can also educate the brain.

It is suspected that Danny, who had been born a month premature and weighed three pounds at birth, suffered an oxygen shortage, and subsequent brain damage, before or during birth.

When he was eighteen months old his mother took him to a renowned pediatric neurologist for assessment and was told, "take him home and love him." The doctor pronounced the child extremely retarded and said nothing could be done for him.

Mrs. Carrick did what she could to stimulate Danny but it wasn't until she heard other mothers of handicapped children discuss patterning at a swimming

class that she learned there was anything definite that could be done for the brain injured child.

"A whole new world opened up," recalls Mrs. Carrick. She read all the data available on brain injured kids and arranged to have Danny assessed by Dr. Margaret George, director of the Canadian Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential.

Dr. George, who has been trained in the rehabilitative techniques by Dr. Doman in Philadelphia, pronounced Danny a good candidate for the patterning treatment.

A program was worked out and after exhaustive briefings and demonstrations the burden of carrying out the treatment fell squarely on Cathy and John Carrick.

At first patterning had to be done six times a day, seven days a week, and speech therapy, reading training, and tactile stimulation are also part of the rehabilitative program.

"I was petrified at first," said Mrs. Carrick. "I guess I was afraid that Danny might not let us work on him, or that the treatment might prove ineffective for him." (About one third of the children treated recover completely, one third improve enough to become self-sufficient and one third do not respond to the therapy at all.)

Another difficulty was finding 40 volunteers to help put Danny through the exercises. It takes three people to pattern, and it is good for Danny to have a lot of different people coming in. Mrs. Carrick appealed to every organization and service club in town for women who would be willing to spend one morning or afternoon a week on patterning.

She was very nervous about demonstrating the techniques to a group of strangers. "I didn't feel qualified to teach all these women," recalls Mrs. Carrick.

Confronted with the immense commitment of time and effort required, Cathy Carrick also

wondered whether she was up to the rigors ahead and worried about how the rest of the family would be affected when so much attention would have to be lavished on Danny.

As it turned out it brought the family much closer together as they all shared in Danny's treatment and progress.

"Kelly could hardly get his nose up over the table when he started patterning," said Mrs. Carrick. Both Kelly, now 10, and Johnnie, 12, help their father pattern Danny every morning before school, and take turns looking after him in the afternoon.

"Danny really means something to them," says Mrs. Carrick.

"He's an extraordinarily pleasant child. He wakes up smiling and goes to bed smiling. He's very loving."

Prior to patterning this was certainly not the case. "Two years ago, his responses were nil," said Mrs. Carrick. She added that Danny not only didn't smile, he wouldn't even cry.

"He just whimpered," confirmed Clara White, one of the volunteers that has worked with the little boy from the beginning. "No laughter, no anger, no response, we could just do anything with him."

The women agree that one of the most welcome signs of progress was seeing Danny protest against some of the treatment, when he got bored just as a normal child would.

Since the start of the program Danny has come a long way. Two years ago, when Danny was going on four years old, at the beginning of patterning, he had the neurological development of a 12 month old, spent a lot of time in the fetal position, suffered from poor balance and took little interest in what went on around him.

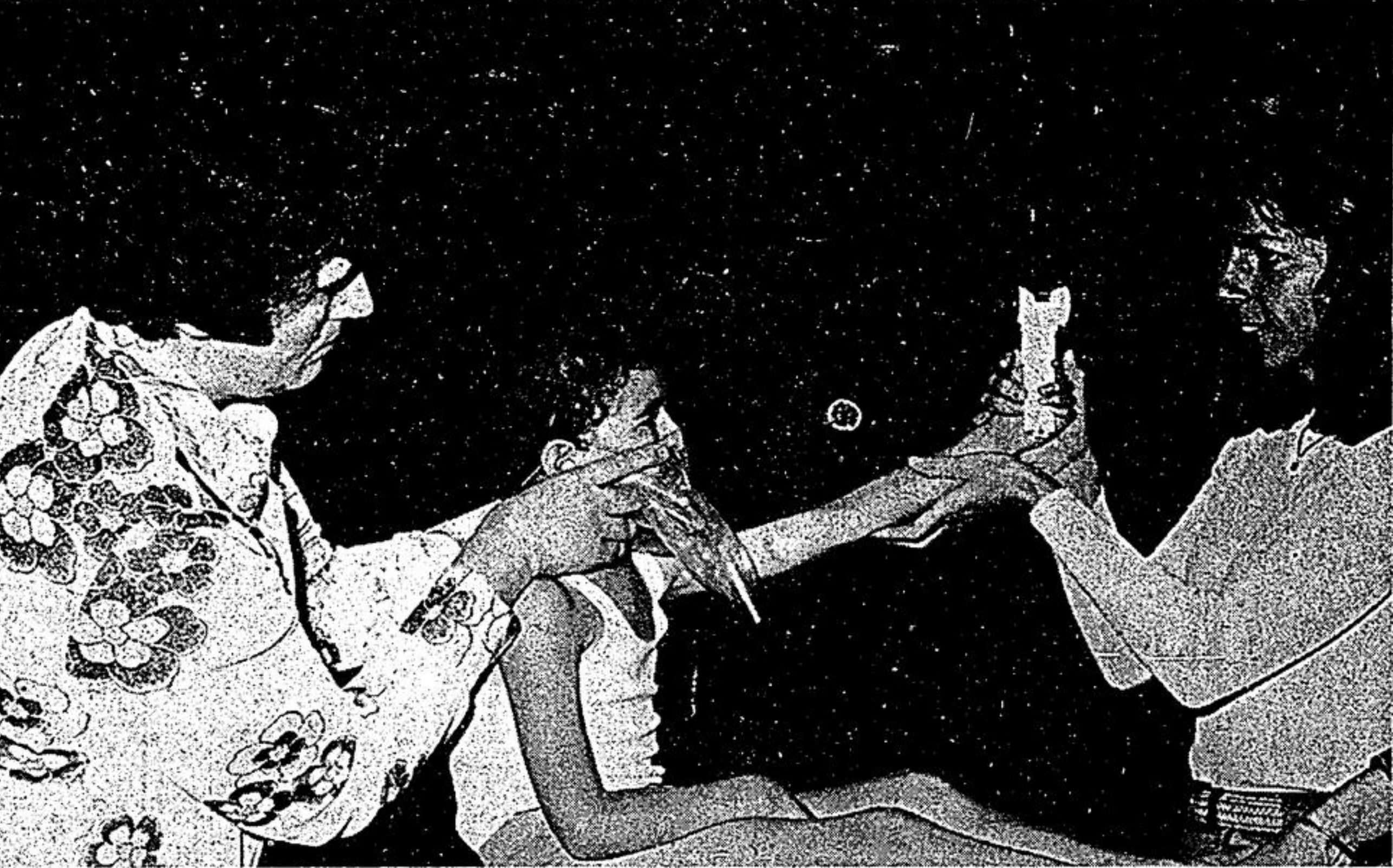
Now, after two years on the program, he has the neurological development of a 51 month old, is bright and



It takes three people to put Danny Carrick, the six year old on the table, through his patterning exercises. Clara White moves his head rhythmically from side to side while Lillian MacAloney and Cathy Carrick, his mother, manipulate his arms and legs through the sequences. To establish a rhythm and make it more fun for Danny, the women often chant nursery rhymes as they work. In the background, Lorraine, a potential volunteer seems to be watching the proceedings with mixed feelings.



The appealing six-year-old above is Danny Carrick. His mother terms him 'a terrific source of joy', and the numerous volunteers who participate in his therapy, couldn't agree more. Danny is brain injured and about thirty volunteers take turns working with him on exercises to stimulate the brain in the proper pattern.



Lillian MacAloney holds a mask to Danny's face while Clara White moves a small flashlight from side to side in front of him. The mask, which has only a small opening at the bottom, forces the little boy to breathe more deeply and also makes him more aware of his breathing. The light is used for eye stimulation, especially valuable since Danny, like many brain injured children, suffers from astigmatism. The eye patterning has already improved his sight considerably.

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