

# A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

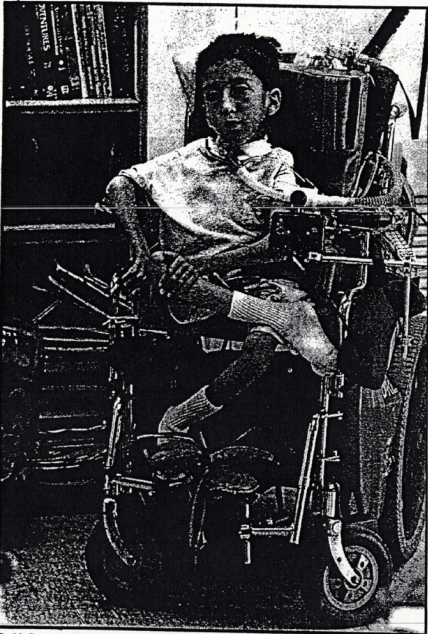
disabilities are and how limited their lives are. He knows which ones live at hospitals, which ones live at home, and how seldom any of them leave the room they sleep in. He knows that despite their parents' dedication, it is next to impossible to get these kids out and about. And he knows

what a big difference small changes make in their lives. He also knows how the demands of the disabilities trap the rest of the family.

That's why he and his staff decided that they had to give these kids and their families a typical camp experience: cabins in the woods, critters and bugs, swimming, sailing, outings, sing-alongs, trail trips and all the rest.

The first year of camp, 1965, six kids on ventilators—five local and one from Gainesville— and their families slept over in cabins rented in A.D. Barnes Park.

Simpser and staff stayed at the camp 24 hours a day.



Buddy Bryan, 11, from Brouard Children's Center, where he lives. His stay at camp was short. All campers need to be accompanied by someone to operate their equipment, and the children's center could only spare staff for one day.

When it was over, he says, they felt like they needed a month's vacation. They had to get more help, they decided, and try again the next year.

## "I Did It!"

Barry Kelleher, 11, who was in a motorcycle accident when he was 3, got out from Grand Junction, Colo., with his dad and brother. The shipping company has lost his slip-and-puff wheelchair, which it charged his dad \$2,300 to ship, and Simpser and staff are helping Tom, Barry's dad, put together a mobil wheelchair for Barry. Minus the automatic rocking mechanism on Barry's wheelchair that helps keep his lungs clear, his dad and Simpser have had to fashion a kind of chair-bed for Barry with ropes and pillows, which Barry accepts good-naturedly.

But forget the wheelchair souls — Barry himself almost didn't make it. A few days before he was to leave on the plane for camp, Continental Airlines canceled his ticket, explaining that it was against their policy to take people who might require prescribed oxygen in flight. Delta took Barry at the last minute.

Now that Barry's here, he has one thing on his mind: to be a camper. His ventilator, oxygen supply, pressure monitors, suction machine and cath bags are all propped on the rear of his chair as his dad wheels him to swimming. It takes five adults to lift him into the pool. Not because he is so heavy — he's only 80 pounds — but because he is so totally paralyzed that he can do nothing to make the lifting easier, not even hold up his head.

Simpser, who is overseeing the effort, holds Barry's shoulders and squeezes a plastic bottle called an ambu bag to force air into his lungs. Surrounded by people, coils, and bags, Barry is carried across the aquamarine pool, gliding along on his back.

He has never been in water before. This may not seem like a big deal — the transfer from one kind of matter to another — but to Barry, it is. Gravity is always pressing him against some hard surface; it is always pressing back. For the past eight years, he has not had a moment of freedom from the pressure of his own weight. Now the tender molecules lap around him, swaying his body back and forth. It feels nothing like life in a chair. It feels nothing like life in a bed. It feels like a whole new life, being so light in this wading, teasing thickness. In fact, you can see the change. He looks up at the sky. He closes his eyes. He whispers something to his dad.

Suddenly his dad is shouting. Barry needs a spoon, he yells, pointing to a bag near the pool. Faces tense. A seizure? Someone grabs a large plastic ladle out of a bag and throws it across the pool to his dad, who pokes the spoon's handle into Barry's mouth, while he leans over Barry's face and whispers something to him. Everyone watches nervously as Barry loosens his jaw-lock on the ladle and it dips limply into the water. Then, Barry chomps down on the handle again, hard enough to force the full ladle of water flying into Simpser's face.

The doctor splutters and shouts, which sends Barry into gales of laughter. Then, together, Barry and his dad plot against their next victim. Around the pool, Barry and his entourage go, with Barry flicking water in everyone's faces, with Barry so disabled a major airline would not carry him, laughing so hard the tears are streaming down his face.

Oscar, who has decided to go swimming, is floating in a corner of the pool while his mother, Dolores, holds his shoulders and head and someone on the camp staff uses an ambu bag to pump air into the tube connected to a surgically created opening in his trachea. Near Oscar, William from North Carolina has ventured into a deeper part of the pool with a group of counselors and camper Whitney Foster, 8, who lives in Miami Beach at The Baby House with other disabled children. Both Whitney and William are temporarily off their ventilators and are being swished in circles through the water by the counselors.

William announced earlier, as the campers got off the bus from a visit to Parrot Jungle, that, on this day, he would try to go under water — something that would normally be out of the question for a child on a ventilator. But, said William, he would be sure to cap the hole in his neck and try really hard to blow out of his nose and mouth to keep the water out. William's mother is very nervous about the whole project because she knows the danger of infection and pneumonia if water gets in his trachea, but the camp staff has persuaded her to let him try it.

This is a first for both Whitney and William. Neither has ever been under water before. A simple thing, but for these kids anything beyond the routine of computer games and cable TV is an indescribably big deal. Everything that gives them a choice, a different view, a new environment is something they talk about, dream