

When love moves mountains

By Kathryn Hall Bogle

Frankly, this is a story about love in one man's family. It is also a story of the determination and imagination of a special pair of young parents who took charge of their lives and molded them into the shape they wanted.

It all blossomed with the birth of two infants, the couple's twin boys, 25 years ago.

The twins, Keith and Keary, were born to Rose Marie and Earl Johnson who anticipated the birth with happiness and high expectations. The babies were carried to full term and all seemed well.

At the hospital Keith came first, healthy and strong and demanding. Six minutes later his brother Keary was born, small and frail and needing the benign enclosure of an incubator after his traumatic breech birth.

In due time Keary was released from the hospital nursery to join his eager parents at home.

"Earl and I were anxious to have both our boys with us at home," related Mrs. Johnson as she thought of the early weeks at home with the twins. "Their father was a big help right from the start," she said. "Earl would bathe the babies, change diapers or feed them - whatever was needed.

"We watched them grow and develop, but we saw that Keith was strong and able to lift his head and turn over long before Keary could manage. It was weeks before the pediatrician would confirm my suspicions about Keary's muscular development. Finally we were told the diagnosis. Keary, they said, was a cerebral palsy patient.

"Our baby would never be able to sit up alone, would never run and play with his brother, and, quite possibly, would never have normal speech. He would always need specialized care just to live, they told us.

"Counselors suggested, after a while, that we look for a place for Keary to live apart from the family. We took a look at some of the places available twenty years ago for a child with Cerebral Palsy, and we shrank from making a choice.

"We knew that we could give our child much more than any of these places could offer. We were his family and if his life were to be difficult, we wanted to fortify him with our love.

"A social worker asked us if we had thought of Keith. We had. We were Keith's parents, too. We wanted, with all our hearts, to give both our children a happy normal childhood."

Continuing her account, Mrs. Johnson said, "We enrolled Keary in a recommended program at Crippled Children's Division up on Marquam Hill, and decided to settle in at making ourselves into a real family - working together for the best benefit for each of us."

Periodically the young couple looked at the reality of the family situation adding the assessment of their own personal hopes for the future.

At age four, Keary could neither walk nor sit up without propping. He could not feed himself and had to have small quantities of food fed to him by spoon six times a day. Sight in one eye was seriously affected. Speech remained beyond Keary's ability and he could make himself understood only by approximate sounds.

On the plus side Keary showed a high quotient of intelligence and his big ready smile showed his joy in participating in life around him. Instant communication came through his eyes or a shake of his head.

Keith, the balance wheel, led the normal life of a happy four-year old. With parental encouragement, Keith brought much of his world to his brother. Soon, of course, Keith would enter school where Keary could not go.

How to learn, earn, and indulge in pursuits that meant enjoying life and yet give Keary what he needed became of paramount consideration for the Johnsons.

Rose Marie, beyond performing her role as a housewife and mother, yearned to use her training and background as a pianist. She also harbored an ambition to teach school someday.

Earl, the father and essential breadwinner for his family, loved the out of doors and active sports. To hike and to camp were Earl's favorite ways to spend holidays from his work as a Portland policeman.

Both husband and wife enjoyed an active church life. Rather than to be engulfed by anguish and inaction, the Johnsons agreed to set their sights on attainment and accomplishment.

The family began to camp in the many beautiful spots of Oregon and Idaho. They back-packed with Earl carrying Keary in a special pack on his own back - once for 20 miles to a campsite in the Wallowa mountains and out again on the return trip.

On these trips Keary has learned as well as Keith, what it means to be trapped inside a tent while the rain pours down in buckets outside. They know the thrill of a tug on a fishing line cast in a mountain stream and they have felt the nip of frost bite in a mountain camp in the middle of August. They have sat together in a rubber float happily bouncing on the icy waters of Lake Okanagan in British Columbia. Keary's wheelchair went along with him on a trip the family took through the Canadian Rockies.

Both boys have ridden horseback with Keary held in the saddle in front of his dad, and they have traveled by train to visit paternal grandparents in Pittsburgh. Each summer for 20 years since they were five years old, the boys have enrolled at the Lakeside camp of the Easter Seal Summer Camp in Oregon.



EARL & ROSE MARIE JOHNSON

As the boys grew older Rose Marie grew anxious to complete her studies for a college degree in Music and Education. Earl worked nights to leave his days free to care for Keary and the extended family pitched in for unscheduled hours when they might help.

Applying herself, Rose Marie was graduated by Portland State University in 1969. Immediately she began teaching school at Forest Hills elementary school in Lake Oswego. Currently she is rounding out her 11th year there.

Keary grew to understand the valuable use of books. Keith read to him daily and together they visited the public libraries. Keary learned to use a pointer strapped to his hand to indicate his needs and his preferences by pointing to pictures on a small chart constructed for this purpose.

Rose Marie could count on Keary's cooperation when next she decided to work toward a masters degree. He sat patiently in his wheelchair beside his mother in the college classrooms when "they" went to Oregon College of Education in Monmouth. Class



KEITH AND KEARY JOHNSON

work at Monmouth was a nightly routine after Mrs. Johnson's daytime duties as a teacher. Later Mrs. Johnson transferred to Lewis and Clark college.

Odd moments were used for study. "I studied while I ironed," Mrs. Johnson said. "I had notes and books everywhere - in my purse, on the TV, at lunchtime, certainly on weekends and even at the hospital when my husband became ill. I received my masters degree in education from Lewis and Clark in 1979.

As a teenager Keith was graduated from Clackamas high school and later attended a local college, and kept being best friends with Keary. Keith taught Keary how to play Scrabble and how to get sound out of a guitar. The brothers developed their own private "in" jokes that only they could appreciate.

Keith is now 6' tall, weighs 170 lbs - a size to match his father and, like his father, Keith enjoys active sports - especially cross country running.

During Earl's recuperation from pericarditis, he enrolled at Portland Community College as a nursing student. He successfully completed his courses, passed the state board examination for his profession. He is now a graduate R.N., but he has rejoined the Portland Police Department as a sergeant since his health has returned.

In their mid-twenties, the twins have decided to leave the family nest. Keith is working as a machine operator at a manufacturing plant and he has found an apartment near his work to his liking.

Keary? All the family approved of his selection of a group home that will provide permanent care for him in case his parents cannot be available to maintain the level of care Keary will require the rest of his life.

Keary's new living quarters, at an Oregon beach resort, allow him to live in an environment he loves and the program provides skilled medical and nursing care. There is freedom to visit in Portland with family and friends and they in turn may visit Keary as often as they like. With his new friends Keary has already made a plane trip to Disneyland.

Truly fortified with the love of a close knit family since their birth, the twins are free to develop their own potential as they see fit. And, as with any other parents, the doors of the Johnson home are always open for their children.

Love can move mountains. One man's family believes this.

(Photos by: Richard Brown)

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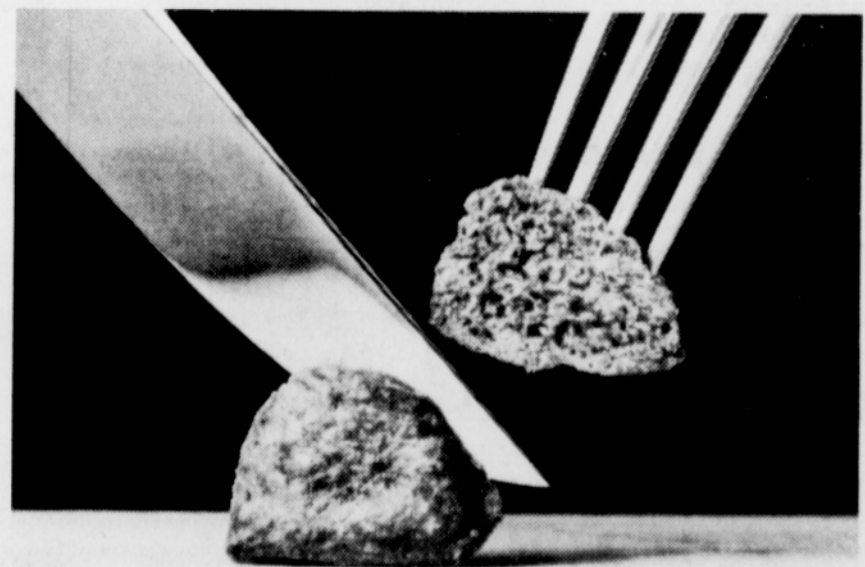
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City youth jobs available

Portland Mayor Frank Ivancie has announced the creation of a summer youth clean up program operated by the City of Portland in cooperation with the Portland Public Schools.

Mayor Ivancie first suggested the program in early April. It is designed to hire 500 high school students, age 14 or older, for up to two weeks each to help clean up Portland neighborhoods.

On the City level, the program will be supervised by the Department of Public Works, under

Commissioner Mike Lindberg. Portland Public Schools announced the creation of this program and the application procedure to its high school students last week.

"This program will help our unemployed young people and Portlanders all across the city," Mayor Ivancie said. "It shows how different government can work together to maintain Portland's livability."

Work begins on June 15th and the program will run for ten weeks. Workers will be paid \$3.50 an hour.

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