

# From our readers . . .

While the ARRI's major focus is on research, we receive many letters from parents containing helpful suggestions which we will, from time to time, pass on to our readers.

Your articles on the importance of physical exercise to autistic children (ARRI 2/4, 3/1) support our family's experience.

Last year my daughter Melody learned to ride a bicycle, but still needed a lot of help with starting and steering. Our family loves to cycle, so for her ninth birthday we got Melody a tandem bicycle. To our delight, she has adapted to riding on the back of the tandem very well, and even rode 50 miles one weekend last summer. Melody often smiles and signs or "talks" while riding, and is usually calmer and sleeps well.

I would highly recommend a tandem to any family that cycles and would like to share that experience with their child who is affected by autism or retardation.

Carolyn Wood

My five-year-old autistic child, like many autistic children, has always received great pleasure from music. We had difficulty with Tommy awakening in the middle of the night; he was usually happy and calm, but nevertheless would stay awake for several hours and be a wreck the next day.

Several months ago we obtained an "auto-reverse" cassette tape player, which plays two sides of a tape continuously until manually switched off. We began leaving it on for about three hours after Tommy went to bed, playing a soothing tape of songs.

We have seen the most remarkable change in Tommy's sleeping behavior since we began using this! He began waking only once a week for several months, and now wakes during the night perhaps once a month. We hope this idea may buy some peace for other families.

Allison Frizell

*Editor's Note: Some parents use special masking noise devices or radios set to produce only static.*

## Announcement

Families in Southern California with an autistic child at least three years of age are needed for a research study of biological and genetic markers in autism being conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles. The researchers are looking for families where both biological parents and at least one more child, in addition to the autistic child, can participate. Each family member will need to spend four to five hours being interviewed, taking cognitive tests, and having a small blood sample taken. Families will be compensated in the amount of \$20 per person for local travel expenses.

For more details, please call Dr. Susan Smalley at (213) 206-7528. At the present time, she is able to recruit English-speaking subjects only.

# Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

The recent article about blaming the mothers reminded me of something that happened to me. I felt just awful at the time.

Fourteen years ago a social worker brought us a little seven-year-old, telling me that his mother was the cause of his problems, and that if he got away from her he would get better.

My family and neighbors helped, but at the end of the week I was exhausted. With all I had done, he was still biting his hands, toe-walking, and overactive. I wondered how his mother had ever done it for seven years alone, without even a family to help or a fenced yard. I called the social worker back and she told me now he was doing these things because of me.

We later found out that he has Fragile X. I still get blamed for things he does, things other Fragile X kids across the country are doing. Only now I just have a good chuckle . . . and ask them to put it in writing.

Another mother,  
Elaine Welch

To the Editor:

Please add my voice to those who know that Dr. Bettelheim's destructive writings about 'refrigerator mothers' have done more harm to parents' hearts and minds than their hurt children could ever have inflicted. As one stricken parent put it to me not all that long ago: "The wounds slashed by professionals are those that never heal."

The fault-finding zealots are still in charge of a number of our schools and our social service programs—unfortunately! This is, I believe, because some universities are staffed by those who still remember Dr. Bettelheim's poison—if not his name.

Sincerely,  
Ingrid Rimland, Ed.D.

*Editor's Note: Despite our shared surname, Dr. Ingrid Rimland and I are not related. She is the author of "Furies and the Flame," a fascinating book about her struggle to help her brain-injured, autistic-like son.*

## Recently published . . .

*Extraordinary People*, by Darold A. Treffert, M.D., Harper & Row, 1989; hardback, 291 pages.

A fascinating and entertaining book by one of the world's leading authorities on savants. Treffert offers case histories of many of the most remarkable savants, and outlines theories about how savants are able to do the amazing things they do. Written for both professional and lay readers.

*The "A" Book: A Collection of Writings from the Advocate*, compiled by Beth Sposato. 93 pages.

Autistic people and their families share their experiences in this collection of personal stories published in the *Advocate* (the national publication of the Autism Society of America) between 1979 and 1989. Especially recommended for parents of newly diagnosed children, and for relatives and friends who want to learn more about

coping with autism. To order, send \$8 to Beth Sposato, 7155 S. 75th Street, Lincoln, NE 68516. Proceeds go to the Autism Society of Nebraska.

*Parent Idea Book*, compiled by the International Rett Syndrome Association.

For parents of girls with Rett Syndrome, and professionals dealing with this disorder. Contains 56 pages of helpful hints on dealing with irritability, seizure control, feeding problems, sleeping difficulties, therapy, adaptive equipment and toys. Cost is \$3 (\$5 outside the U.S.). Also available from IRSA: *Educational and Therapeutic Intervention in Rett Syndrome*, \$10. To order either, send check or money order to IRSA, 8511 Rose Marie Drive, Fort Washington, MD 20744.

*Nutrition Care Guidelines for Rett Syndrome*, by Marylynne Rice, University of California at San Diego.

15-page booklet designed for parents and caretakers. To purchase a copy, send \$2.00 (make checks payable to UC Regents) to Neurometabolic Clinic, Dept. of Pediatrics, M-009A, UCSD, La Jolla, CA 92093.

*Aspects of Autism: Biological Research*, edited by Lorna Wing, National Autistic Society of Great Britain.

Based on proceedings of a conference held at the University of Kent in September, 1987. Contains 10 chapters on many aspects of diagnosis, pathology, and treatment of autism. To order, contact the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1, England.