

For the most part, people view summer as an opportunity for lots of fun in the sun.

However, such time is not always easy to find in homes where illnesses or other physical debilities force family members to set different priorities.

"All my friends have these things they can do whenever they want. My mom will say I can do them too, but then I'll feel bad," said Sarah McKinley, 17.

Eight years ago, Sarah's mother, Tina, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This chronic disease affects the nervous system, resulting in a loss of muscular coordination. Tina walks with a cane and is often too tired to carry on normal activities.

Sarah, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Bath, said she has assumed some of Tina's parental responsibilities with her brothers Sean, 13, and James, 9. When they need a car ride somewhere, she transports them; and when their mother needs to rest, Sarah attempts to "keep the boys away from her."

"I know that I kind of grew up fast. I take care of my brothers; they're almost like my kids. I tell them what to do and what not to do," said Sarah.

Meanwhile, Kim Deiter's responsibilities are centered on her sister Carrie, 14, who was born with spina bifida. This defect, characterized by imperfect closure of part of her spinal column, is expected to keep Carrie using a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

At home, according to Carrie, Kim "helps me get my pills and usually helps me transfer onto the bed. And when she goes somewhere, she puts the phone on the chair (near me) in case there's an emergency. I think it's



Kim (left) and Carrie Deiter share stories about their day while watching the rain fall outside their Wayland home.

years caring for a family member. Their father, Luke, has suffered periodical seizures and blackouts for nearly a decade.

Whenever Luke would pass out, Julie recalled, "We'd try to shake him and wake him up. A lot of times we'd call my mother (their parents are separated) and she'd stay on the phone with us."

"They've been going through this a long time," Luke said.

On July 2, Luke underwent brain surgery at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital to remove scar tissue that had brought about the seizures. Although the surgery was successful, Luke said it will be at least eight weeks before he can return to his construction job.

"When I overdo things, I get a severe headache," said Luke, who serves as parish council chairperson at St. Pius V Church in Cohocton.

Julie, 13, and Kristen, 12, have supported their father in a number of ways during his recovery.

"We get stuff to eat, we get laundry and we get groceries," Julie said. "I heard the doctor say he can't lift more than a gallon of milk, so we carry the laundry basket and heavy groceries."

Chuck Sullivan, also, is assisting a father who underwent brain surgery. His dad, Gerald, nearly lost his life following an operation in late 1995.

"For a while he didn't remember any of his kids' names or any of the family," recalled Chuck, 15, from St. Paul's Church in Webster.

Chuck said he has taken on many of his father's normal chores: cleaning the pool, mowing the lawn and assisting with indoor housework.

"I'm always here if he needs help with something," Chuck remarked.

However, Chuck noted that his father sometimes needs emotional assistance more than anything else.

Although Gerald is in excellent physical shape — he runs five miles every other day — Chuck said he still has trouble remembering people's names and becomes frustrated quickly.

"When he gets down, he gets real down. Often times I'll say, 'It's okay, you made a mistake this time. Try not to do it again,'" Chuck said. "I know he's trying to do his best."

Similarly, Kim provides emotional lifts for Carrie from time to time. She recalled the time Carrie "came home from school one day and was in a bad mood, and I put on a funny hat and made (her) laugh."

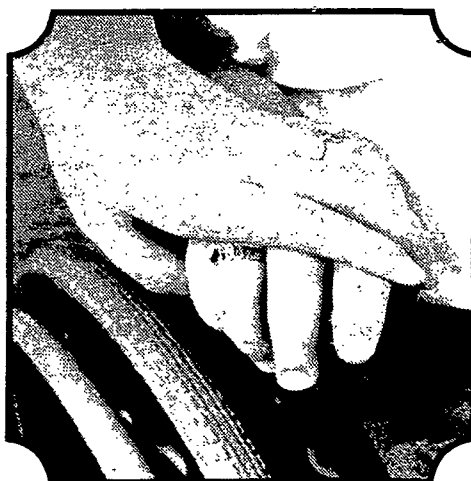
This special support by family members often goes unnoticed by the public at large, Goodrich noted. She said that Kim "doesn't seek praise at all" for the many hours she spends assisting her sister.

"But she helps Carrie an awful lot. Her being here is almost like a gift from God," Goodrich said.

Sarah in Bath agreed that these duties are usually performed quietly — and willingly — when loved ones are involved. She added that it's hard for others to comprehend what taking care of a relative involves unless they've been through a similar experience.

"My next-door neighbor, her mother had a brain tumor. She's my best friend. She understands," Sarah said.

*Coming Next Week:
Speaking out about sermons.*



nice. It's very helpful."

Kim, 20, and her sister are familiar sights around Wayland. Kim said she enjoys wheeling Carrie to Sunday Mass at St. Joseph's Church as well as to a number of social events in the village.

"I usually take Carrie to bingo," Kim said.

"But we never win!" Carrie complained with a grin.

Carrie's godmother, Nancy Goodrich, said Kim is an invaluable help. Due to both their parents having daytime jobs, Goodrich explained, Kim is often the only family member able to stay with Carrie in the mornings and afternoons.

"Because Carrie is disabled, there are more expenses — so the mother is working. Therefore, the sibling gets more responsibility. There are a lot of things Carrie wouldn't have been able to do without Kimmie," remarked Goodrich, who also serves as St. Joseph's religious-education coordinator.

Julie and Kristen Pelletier are two other youths who have spent several

Upcoming Supplements

EDUCATION

Publication Date: August 14 - Deadline: July 31

The Rochester Diocese has made lifelong Christian education its top priority. Thus, as schools and students gear up for the first day of school, the Courier will make its annual study of trends, developments and issues in education — from kindergarten to the continuing education of adults, from Catholic schools to religious education programs.

CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Publication Date: September 18 - Deadline: September 4

The Diocese of Rochester is home to numerous organizations for lay Catholics — from fraternal and service groups to spiritual and prayer leagues. This special section will provide an opportunity for such groups to inform Courier readers about their histories, purpose and membership opportunities.

TO LIFE

Publication Date: October 2 - Deadline: September 18

The Consistent Life Ethic, which promotes dignity of all human life from conception until natural death, is a key priority for the Diocese of Rochester. This special section, timed in conjunction with Respect Life Month, will deal with protecting and nurturing life through advocacy and direct action on such issues as abortion, militarism, capital punishment, euthanasia and aid to the poor.

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