

Alfred Baber Fonds

Correspondence - General

Abraham's, Jim
1995

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ALFRED BADER FINE ARTS

DR. ALFRED BADER

ESTABLISHED 1961

May 26, 1995

Mr. Jim Abrahams
315 Palisades
Santa Monica, CA 90402

Dear Jim:

It probably happens to most older people that they are faced with something that gives them both great pleasure and a bit of shame. This happened to me yesterday evening when I chatted with your mother at a UW-M teachers' award dinner.

Your mother gave me the article in the April 17th issue of *People*, a magazine I had never seen before. But the article on page 54 not only gives a very good picture of you and Charlie, but also describes your ordeal and how wonderfully well you and Nancy coped with this.

It made me feel good all over, and Isabel and I would appreciate your sending me some details about the Charlie Foundation to help cure pediatric epilepsy.

But then I felt terribly ashamed. You know that I have known your father and mother since the early 1950's. In fact, your father was the only man we asked for advice about the only home we ever looked at with the consideration to purchase, and we're still in that home, following your father's advice.

And yet - blow me down - I misspelled your name in my autobiography enclosed. How could I be so stupid? I seem to remember checking a newspaper article relating your UW-M award to me and there having your name spelled "Abrams". But obviously, I should have known better and checked. Jim, please forgive me.

You will not have the time to read much of this book, but perhaps you could glance at Chapters 6 and 13. Neither will suggest a plot for a comedy, but perhaps you will sometime consider a more serious scenario.

With all good wishes to you and your family and a special hug to Charlie, I remain,

Your old friend and teacher,

AB/cw

By Appointment Only
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924 EAST JUNEAU AVENUE
MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN USA 53202
TEL 414 277-0730 FAX 414 277-0709



Dr. Alfred Bader
2961 North Shepard Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

September 30, 1992

Mr. James Abrahams
309 Ninth Street
Santa Monica, California 90402

Dear Jim:

One of the happiest evenings of my life was thanks to you on May 17, 1988, when I received the UWM teaching award proposed by you, and when I heard your truly kind comments.

People who know me will speak of the ABC of my life, art, Bible and chemistry. During our time together at Temple Emanuel, I shared by thinking about the Bible with you.

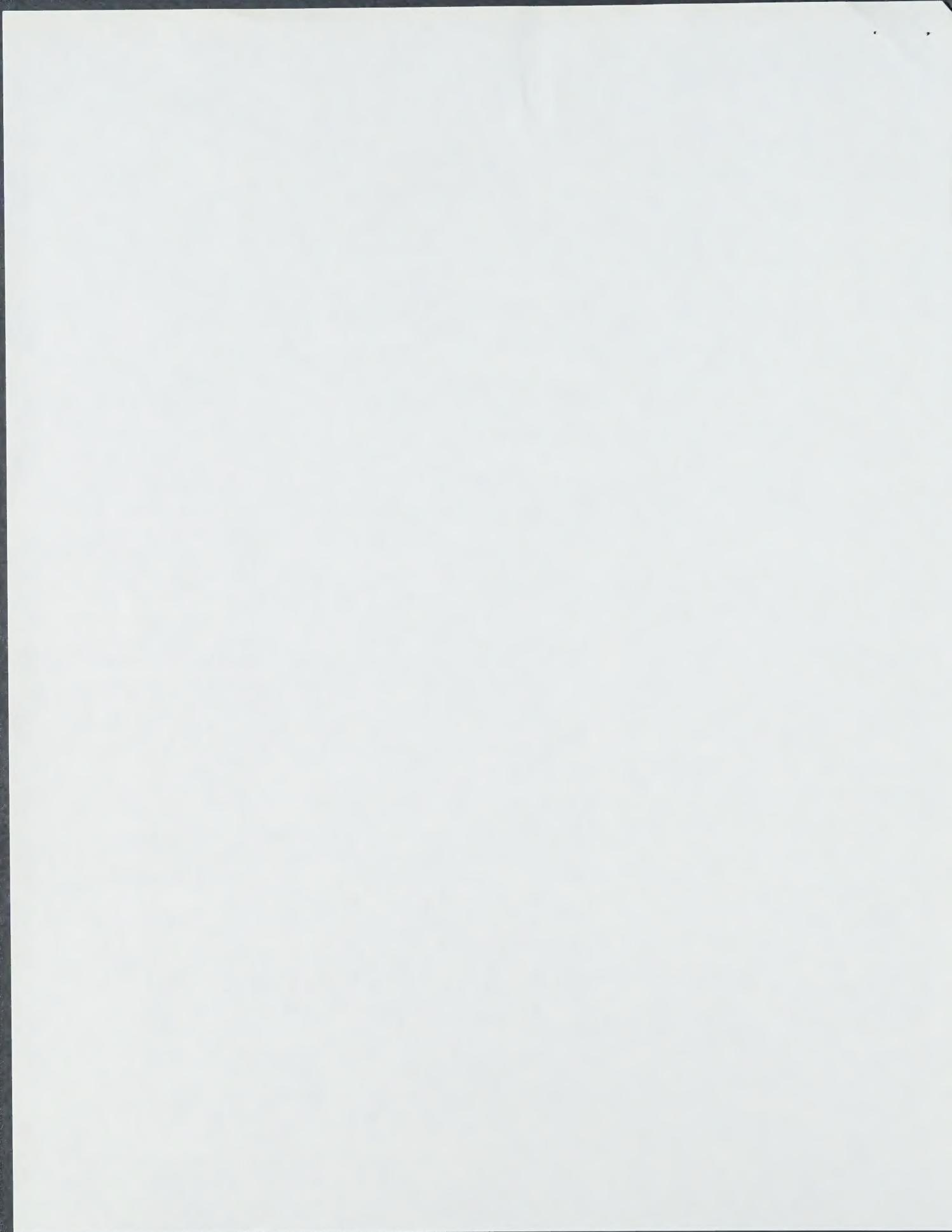
Sadly, some of my life in chemistry ended in what writers have called the Sigma-Aldrich affair, and it is in connection with it that I would like to ask for your help.

When you have a little time, read the enclosed articles and letters and you will understand what happened--probably one of many examples of megalomania in business in America.

In time, the story might make a good film, but probably not yet. But perhaps you know some very good writers, and one of them might be interested in investigating the affair and then writing a detailed story. Several possible magazines come to mind--The New Yorker, for instance--but first things first--the choice of the writer. Please help if you can. I can supply much more material.

None of the material enclosed is confidential; share it as you like.

You may have forgotten some of my teaching of the Bible, but surely not the commandment in Leviticus XIX--you shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor. I don't think you will.



- 2-

Next time you speak to your sister here, thank her for me for giving me your address. And next time you visit Milwaukee, I would love to be able to spend an evening with you.

Best wishes for the New Year to you and your family.

As always,

Enclosures

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

1960

1961

$\frac{345}{690} \times 2 \checkmark$
 $\frac{690}{7590} : 292 = \checkmark$

Burt Zucker 962 0174

Abraham

Cong. Emanuel

Michael Jefferson 964 4100

Lillian Fredman

Peterson
Eyes

Eugene Breukhoff - sister
 John 6640 N Elm Tree Rd
 ✓ 351 0872 Glendale
 53217

309 9th St

Santa Monica
90402

Jim Abraham

3 children

Nancy

~~351 6137~~



212-210

212-210

Blue ink on paper

A. H. H.

Orange ink on paper

RECIPE FOR HOPE

Director Jim Abrahams says a controversial diet saved his epileptic son



COURTESY ABRAHAMS FAMILY

▲ The disease, says Abrahams, was causing the “slow disintegration” of Charlie (in '92).

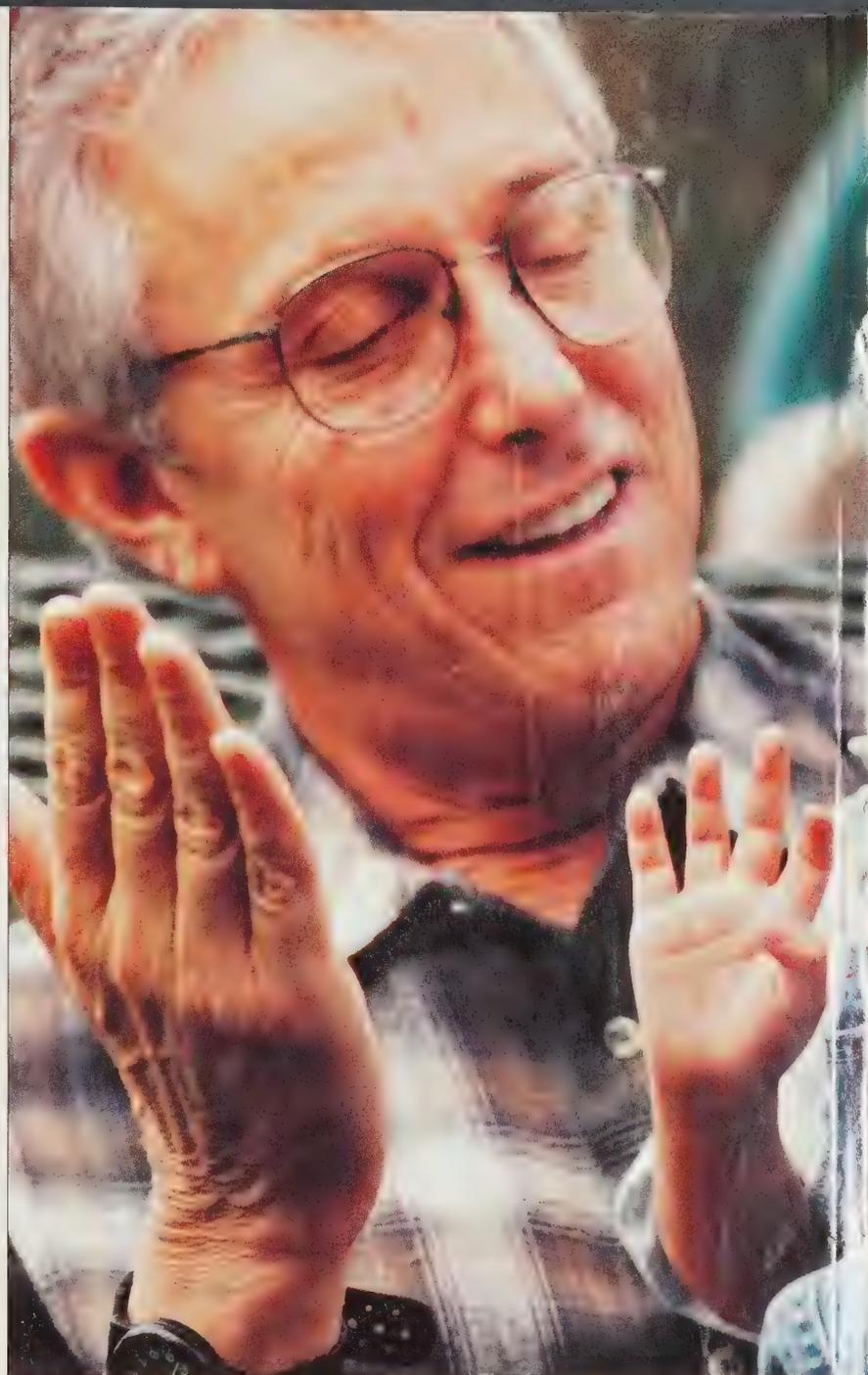
► “You have to go with hope,” says Abrahams (at home in Santa Monica with Charlie).

BABIES, NANCY ABRAHAMS WELL knows, are inexplicable creatures, one minute engaging you in a round of peek-a-boo, the next minute lost in some deep trance. So when her son Charlie went limp in her arms a few days before his first birthday in March 1993, Nancy, 39, didn't think much of it. Moments later, after all, he was back playing hide-and-seek amidst the pillows on her bed. “I didn't even mention it to my husband,” she says.

Days later, it was her husband, 50-year-old producer-director Jim Abrahams—co-creator of the *Airplane!*, *Naked Gun* and *Hot Shots!* movies—who noted a disturbing bit of behavior. He had been playing with Charlie in the backyard of the family's million-dollar Spanish-style home in Santa Monica when suddenly the boy's arms jerked up oddly in the air. Jim went to find Nancy.

“Have you ever seen him do this thing with his arms?” he asked her.

Nancy's throat tightened. She had not—but this, combined with the limp spell, did not seem like normal kid stuff. The Abrahamses immediately took Charlie to a local pediatrician, Dr. Wil-



liam Gurfield. After witnessing a brief seizure in his office, Gurfield sent the Abrahamses to a pediatric neurologist, who conducted various tests and delivered the devastating news: Charlie had Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, a severe form of epilepsy, which, if unchecked, would cause mental retardation. Worse, it was soon surmised, Charlie was part of the 15 percent of the nation's 375,000 children with epilepsy who do not respond to drugs. Months later, after

\$100,000 worth of tests, drugs and surgery, Jim and Nancy still had found nothing to stop the convulsions—lasting from a few seconds to 45 minutes—that gripped their child up to 100 times a day.

“I remember thinking it was clear that none of us would ever smile again,” says Jim, recalling his son's almost constant state of seizure. “We actually believed our child had been given a fate worse than death.”

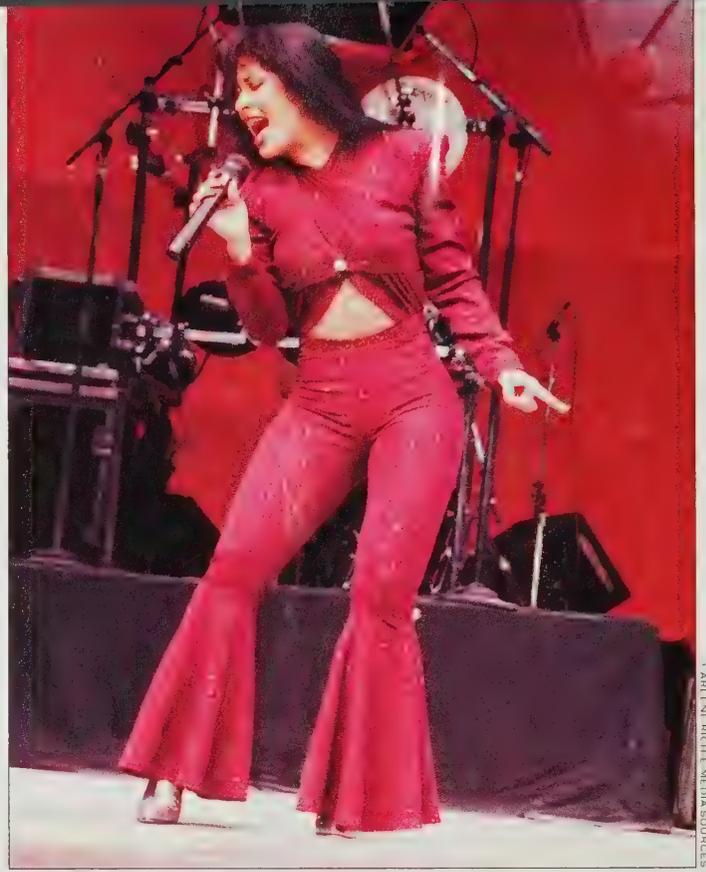
Stooping today to pick up his little



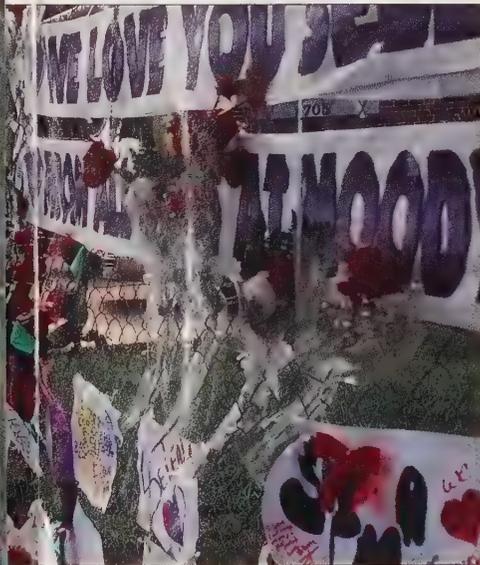
◀ At Selena's funeral last week, father Abraham Jr. (left), mother Marcela, husband Chris and sister Suzette joined 700 other mourners in tearful goodbyes.

► Selena (onstage in her last performance on Feb. 26 in Houston) once said of her burgeoning career, "I'll never come to the point where I can stop and kick back."

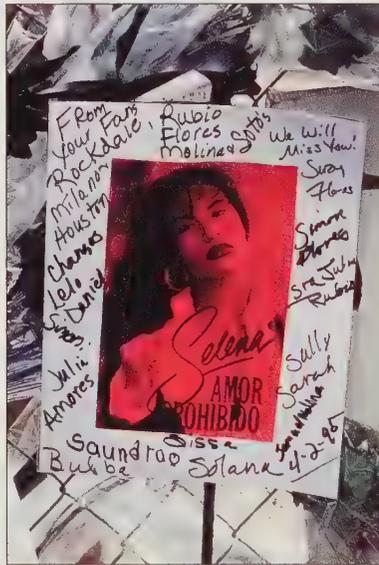
Thousands of fans festooned Selena's family compound in Corpus Christi with flowers (below, left) as well as personal tributes (right).



ARLENE RICHTER/MEDIA SOURCES



was asked to produce them. Finally, at the end of March, she called Selena to say she had the papers. On Thurs., March 30, Saldívar phoned Selena to tell her she was staying in a Days Inn. She wanted the singer to come to the motel—alone—to discuss the matter. Instead, Selena went with her husband, Chris; they returned home several hours later, apparently after Saldívar



ívar claimed she didn't have the needed documents after all.

What happened the next day is unclear. Selena left home at 9 a.m. that Fri., March 31, and at some point dropped by the Days Inn again. At 11:50 police received a 911 call reporting a shooting at the motel. Selena was rushed to the hospital, which alerted her father. Doctors reportedly

gave her five pints of blood over the objections of Quintanilla, who insisted that such procedures violated the principles of his daughter's religion. Selena died an hour later.

Quintanilla is convinced that Saldívar deliberately plotted to kill Selena. According to the Bexar County sheriff's office, Saldívar, who is being held on \$100,000 bond, bought the murder weapon in San Antonio on March 13, just as the Quintanillas were raising questions about her activities. "I know Selena was set up. This was premeditated," says Selena's father, Abraham Jr. "Saldívar got caught with her hand in the cookie jar."

But others aren't so sure that Saldívar was worried about losing her job or her income. Esmeralda Garza and her husband, Ernest, are convinced that Saldívar's motive was less obvious—and perhaps more pathetic. "Saldívar could have been fired by Selena and gone and gotten her old job back. She was doing well as a nurse," says Esmeralda. "She probably couldn't accept the fact that she wasn't going to be around Selena anymore."

- BILL HEWITT
- JOSEPH HARMES in Corpus Christi and BOB STEWART in San Antonio



boy, who has been seizure-free for 17 months, Jim lets out a sigh of relief. He was wrong—as were all the doctors who believed that drugs, if anything, could help Charlie. “I was raised to believe doctors are healers and that the answers to an illness come in prescriptions,” says Abrahams. “And that just isn’t true.”

After trying nearly all modern medicine had to offer, Jim and Nancy ultimately found an unorthodox—and low-tech—answer: a high-fat, no-sugar diet.

But their path to that remedy tested them severely.

The failure of Charlie’s anticonvulsant drugs was one of the family’s lows. At one point, Charlie’s tiny body (he weighed 21 pounds, at the time) was absorbing four drugs at once—and was still racked by seizures. “We would just hold him and wait for something to happen,” says Nancy. “It was a vicious cycle of sleepless nights, drugs and worry.”

The couple became virtual recluses.

Jim stopped working to help his wife at home. “We were lucky,” he says. “We didn’t have to worry about finances.” For months they did little more than take their older children, Joseph, 10, and Jamie, 9, to school and shuttle Charlie to one of the eight doctors they consulted at various times. They tried to give Charlie as normal—or at least as safe—a life as possible. “We padded a room so he wouldn’t hurt himself when he would try to walk,” says Nancy. “We

► "The ketogenic diet got lost," says Dr. John M. Freeman (at the Johns Hopkins Outpatient Center in Baltimore, with dietitian Millicent Kelly and a child with epilepsy), "because modern technology believes the next drug will work."



ROBERT TRIPPETT/SIPA PRESS

even put a helmet on his head."

In the late fall, Charlie's primary physician, Dr. Donald Shields, head of pediatric neurology at the UCLA Medical Center, found two cysts in Charlie's brain. Though he could find no direct connection to the seizures, Shields wanted to remove them just in case they were the cause. But the delicate 2½-hour operation proved fruitless. Shields told the Abrahamses that after months of exploring medical and surgical remedies, he saw no ready cure for Charlie. Desperate, the Abrahamses brought a faith healer into their home. "He prayed some sort of gibberish over Charlie, and we just cried," say Jim. Then they took Charlie to a herbalist in Texas, who recommended exorcising modern technology. "He told us to unplug our microwave," says Nancy.

Finally, Jim took the matter into his own hands, doing research in the UCLA Medical Center library. There, reading a 1990 book called *Seizures and Epilepsy in Childhood: A Guide for Parents*, co-authored by Dr. John M. Freeman, he discovered the ketogenic diet. A folk remedy for epilepsy first given serious medical consideration at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., in the 1920s, the diet is based on ketosis, a change in the body's metabolic state in which the body burns primarily fat, not sugar, for energy.

In his book, Freeman, who since 1969 has used the diet to treat hundreds of children with epilepsy at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, claimed a 30 percent success rate in stopping seizures. Jim immediately contacted Charlie's physician, Dr. Shields, who was unenthusiastic. "A lot of people had tried the diet and not had much success," says Shields. "Myself included."

Undeterred, Abrahams called Dr.

Freeman at Johns Hopkins, then one of a few institutions besides the Mayo Clinic to administer the diet. A few weeks later Jim, Nancy and Charlie were sitting in Freeman's waiting room. After undergoing a two-day fast to cleanse his system of sugar, Charlie began a meticulously regulated regimen of fish, poultry, vegetables and fruit enriched with hearty

portions of red meat, heavy cream, butter, olive oil and other high-fat foods. On day three, Charlie's seizures stopped. As with all patients who successfully use the diet, no one knows exactly why. "It's witchcraft," says Dr. Freeman, half in jest.

What experts, including Dr. Freeman and Dr. Shields, do know is that the prescribed quantities and combinations of food must be strictly followed or the diet won't work. That's one reason why the diet is a last resort. "It requires an almost overwhelming time commitment to do it right," says Shields.

"Even a change of toothpaste can throw it off track," says Jim.

"At first I'd measure everything and then Jim would remeasure it," says Nancy. "But now it takes only 5 minutes to prepare a meal. It's much easier than giving him drugs six times a day."

Despite his initial skepticism, Shields has been inspired by Charlie's success. "I said I would reassess what I think

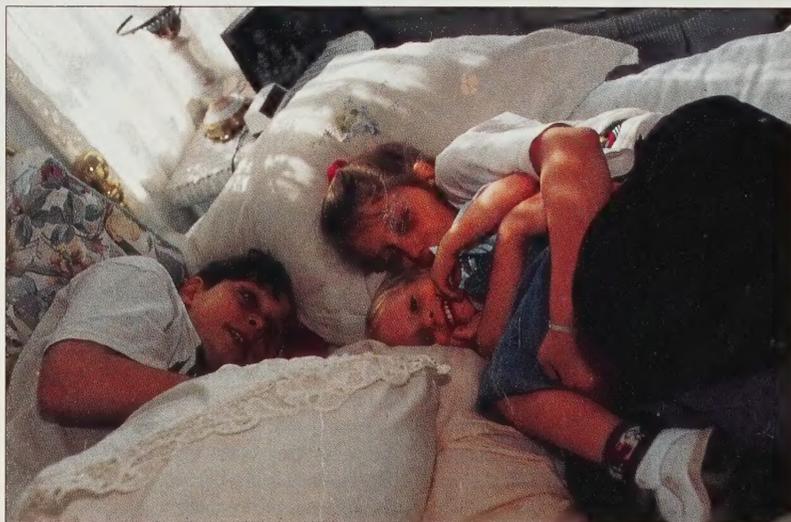


PHOTO FEST

◀ After wrapping *Hot Shots! Part Deux* in '93, Jim (with Charlie Sheen) stopped working.

► Charlie and his parents cheered on Jamie at a basketball game in January.

▼ "They asked if Charlie would die," says Abrahams of son Joseph (left) and daughter Jamie.



about the diet if Charlie responded to it," he says. "And that's what I did." Indeed, Shields has started a ketogenic diet program—with about a 40 percent success rate so far—for patients who do not respond to drugs. "It's important to emphasize that this is not a first line of treatment," Shields says. "As old as it is, we still know more about drugs than we do about this diet."

The Abrahamases have made the diet a crusade; in February of 1994, they founded the Charlie Foundation to Help Cure Pediatric Epilepsy (1-800-FOR-KETO). One of the foundation's goals is

to teach doctors about the diet. With its help, 11 clinics around the country now offer ketogenic diet programs.

But the couple's most important mission remains looking after their own little patient. Charlie will remain on the diet for another year. After that, if all is well, he will start eating other foods. Amazingly, he suffered no brain damage. Nancy says he is a normal 3-year-old. "I read him a book and he finishes the sentences," she says. "And he's learned to climb on chairs and things."

Jim has returned to work—but not, for now, to comedy. Instead he is pro-

ducing a made-for-TV movie based on the true story of another epileptic child who was saved by the ketogenic diet. "It's about a woman taking the medical future of her son into her own hands," he says. "And that is certainly the moral of *our* story: You have to trust yourself." When the show airs late this year, the family will be gathered around the TV—an exception to the house rule. "At night we never watch TV," says Nancy with a smile. "We just watch Charlie."

■ KAREN S. SCHNEIDER

■ JOYCE WAGNER in Los Angeles



Survivor of a cocaine plot, Cokey stands up for

PAW AND ORDER

THE MOMENT LAST DECEMBER THAT veterinarian Steven Weinstein examined the emaciated animal with the oddly bulging abdomen, he knew he was dealing with something that shouldn't happen to a dog. "She looked terrible," he recalls. "She was sick." The female Old English sheepdog had arrived at New York City's John F. Kennedy airport on a flight from Bogotá, Colombia.

Suspicious Customs officials had taken her to Weinstein, who, after spotting the suspicious bulge, X-rayed her in his office. When he opened her up, he found 10 balloons, each stuffed with about half a pound of cocaine (street value \$250,000)—a drug smuggler's surgically implanted booty. "I almost fell over," says Weinstein, who later nicknamed the dog Cokey. "This dog was scheduled to die a horrible death."

Soon afterward, John Erik Roa, 22, of Paterson, N.J., was arrested as he tried to claim her. Offers poured in from outraged animal lovers eager to adopt her. But since Cokey was considered evidence against Roa (who pleaded guilty to federal drug smuggling charges and was scheduled to be sentenced April 7), the Customs Service relocated her to its Canine Enforcement Training Center in Front Royal, Va., where drug-sniffing canines are taught their trade. "Even though she was victimized," says the center's director, Carl Newcombe, "she doesn't hold any grudges. The first time she came here, she sat right in my chair."

Cokey didn't make it as a drug detective. ("She likes to play, but she doesn't like to retrieve," says Newcombe.) But now recovered and 20 pounds heavier, she has a job of her own: appearing at area schools as part of the service's drug education program. At the Stafford Elementary School in Stafford, Va., Cokey recently charmed 300 kids even as her story—related by Customs agent John Krob—left them appalled.

"I learned that criminals will do anything to get what they want," said Tom Gibson, 10, afterward. Megan Vrabel, 10, agreed. "I thought it was horrible that someone would do something like that to a living, breathing animal." Newcombe's Customs colleagues feel just the same way. "Cokey has energized the folks," he says. "They realize, 'Yeah, this is a good fight.'" ■



Drug dealers inserted almost five pounds of cocaine into her abdomen (inset), but after surgery the sheepdog (with Customs trainee Carlos Vega) is frisky again.



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