

Residential Schools:

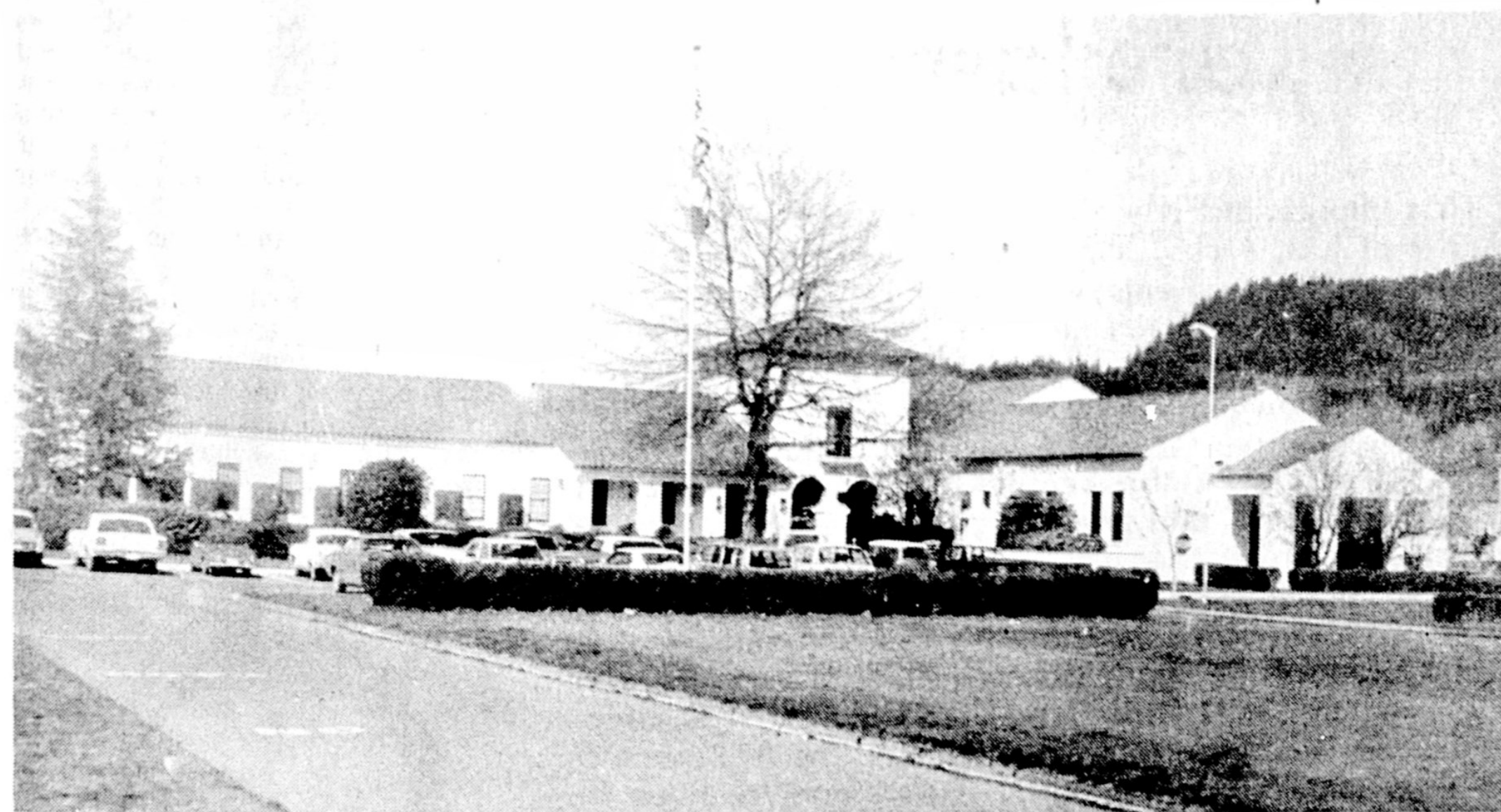
Washington State

In April 1973, the *Catholic Northwest Progress* newspaper published a full-page article highlighting the successes of the Rainier School and its new superintendent Albert Reichert.



Lisa is an avid student. Her instructor is George Sherman.

Attempting to provide the retarded with a 'quality of life' Rainier's superintendent battles diminishing state funds and decreasing volunteers.



This is the main entrance to Rainier School of Buckley.

'Miracles' are an every-day wonder here

By Lillian S. Beloin

Are these the "hopeless" members of society? In one corner a young man squats, head bowed, eyes fixed on the floor. A short distance away another young man is seated in a rocking chair, rocking aimlessly. A handsome, dark-haired man in his late twenties, wields a strand of ribbon, using it as a whip at those close to him.

Just outside the door in the dining hall, an attendant assists a youth of 18 as he eats his dinner, explaining, "He eats too fast. I have to slow him down."

These are some of the residents of Fir Hall at Rainier School for the mentally retarded in Buckley. Fir Hall is the residential location for the most severely and profoundly retarded. But their situation is far from hopeless. Only the night previous, some of these young men had attended a dance at another hall on the campus. In addition to observing social amenities, they also were able to purchase items at the coffee shop.

Only a few of the residents require assistance with their meals now. Just a few short months ago a majority of Fir Hall's residents consumed their food by putting their faces down into their plates. Today, many of these same residents dine, family style, at long tables. They have learned to use the proper utensils, and rotate duties of serving food.

A miracle? To many of the employees at Rainier School it is just that. Just a few short years ago, Fir Hall was off limits to all visitors. Its residents sat around in the nude, and many were chained to keep them quiet.

The "miracle-worker" is Dr. Albert Reichert, the school's superintendent. A native of France with an intimate knowledge of life in an institution since he grew up in an orphanage, Dr. Reichert is devoted to the goal of "humanizing" Rainier School for its 1,185 residents.

Rainier School currently is assigned the responsibility for the mentally retarded in 11½ counties of the state of Washington, serving an area with a population of roughly 14 million. A staff of 700, which includes administrators, teachers, counselors, psychiatrists, and just plain assistants serves the residents on a 24-hours around the clock basis. This staff, which Dr. Reichert labels as an inadequate number, is augmented by volunteers who donate approximately 1,500 hours of work during each month. The number of volunteers, too, he adds, could be doubled or tripled.

Fighting what seems to be a never-ending battle with the state legislature, Dr. Reichert, never-



Dr. Albert Reichert, superintendent



Laurie Zapf, assistant superintendent

theless, insists that the mentally retarded deserve a quality of life and his goal is to provide them with the best that can be offered.

He explains, "We are understaffed and overcrowded, operating on a combined philosophy of the work ethic and basic care. Close to 900 or more of our residents are working. We've trained them for various jobs around the school and many become extremely capable."

"If there were no work here for them," he added, "they would be sitting around idly. But we must be careful to provide some assurance that the work a resident does is truly therapeutic and meets his needs rather than the needs of the institution."

According to Dr. Reichert's assistant, Laurie A. Zapf, the school must meet the standards for mentally retarded established by the Joint Committee for Hospital Accreditation. A promotional program to provide an incentive for the residents may result in better living accommodations for

the resident who proves proficient in a job.

One gets the impression that with a sufficient staff and budget, Dr. Reichert could make tremendous leaps with his efforts to provide that "quality of life." On a tour through Fir Hall, he displayed two rooms, each containing two beds. "This is a goal," he stated. Then he walked down the hall and threw open the doors revealing a large hall-like area with approximately 30 beds in it.

"What we really need," Dr. Reichert comments "are volunteers of a consistent nature. We need individuals of all ages who are willing to commit themselves for a definite period. We need volunteers with whom our residents can identify."

Since there are no funds budgeted for furniture, he also hopes to obtain donations of furniture from other sources. Here, too, there are restrictions to which one must adhere. Furniture must have metal framing. Drapes must be factory treated to make them fire retardant, and only fiberglass curtains will be accepted. Donated rugs must carry a certificate from the vendor that the rug meets flame spread tests established by the state of Washington.

Individuals who wish to donate their time or furniture may do so by contacting Mrs. Audrey Folsom at Buckley, 829-1111.

Rainier School is also attempting to involve the parents of its residents in working at the school. Dr. Reichert explained that about 40 percent of the parents currently assist in some volunteer functions.

Despite the fact that mental retardation is one of the greatest afflictions of society, the population at Rainier School has been on a consistent decline. Much of this is attributable to placement of residents in group homes, intermediate care facilities, and foster homes.

Both academic and vocational training programs have met with exceptional results. Utilizing skills learned in such programs, many residents have gone out into society and are now self-supporting.

Probably the greatest strides have been made educationally with residents over 21 years of age through the adult education programs conducted with support from community colleges which



Early spring sunshine provides the incentive for a brief nap for Jimmie.

furnish teaching personnel and resources.

Dr. Reichert stated, "We have many of our older residents who have never learned to read. After they've enrolled in an adult education program they acquire reading skills much faster than a normal child just beginning to read. It's quite an accomplishment."

In addition to teaching the residents to acquire skills which can help them to support themselves, the school also provides instruction for recreational hours. Even the most severely retarded are enrolled in swimming classes. The bowling alley has a constant stream of students and even the retarded who are confined to wheelchairs have devised a board which will permit them to roll the bowling ball down the board and onto the lanes.

Mrs. Modesta Hatch, recreation director, remarked, "They do so well with that board that sometimes I'm tempted to try it myself."

To develop physical coordination there are also classes on the balance board and the trampoline.

For the girls there are special 4-H programs which concentrate on cooking and sewing classes. One resident of Kerr Hall for girls is extremely proud of the fact that she has already passed the written test for a driver's license and is currently taking driving instruction.

Kerr Hall, at first glance, resembles a college sorority house. A spacious, well-furnished reception room contains a television set, lounge chairs, and reading racks. The girls attend school classes during the daytime and have special parties on the weekends.

Mrs. Dorine Cadle who directs Kerr Hall, says that the highlights of the social week for the girls are slumber parties and dances.

"They love to bring their blankets down to the lounge and spend the night here, probably enjoying a special snack around midnight."

Although many of the girls go home on weekends or during the summers, many times their parents bring them back early with the explanation that "My daughter wanted to return here where all her friends are."

The girls also take trips to the ocean for the weekend. Formal schooling occupies most of the daylight hours for many of the residents. But the visitor is cautioned not to make any comparison between the Buckley campus school and the normal school concept.

Mrs. Pat Swift, program evaluation assistant, explains,

"Before we began this program," she stated, "these people didn't keep their clothes on. They were withdrawn and it seemed almost impossible to reach them. In just two weeks time the results have been beyond belief. They carry out work assignments. They are functioning, productive and their health is better because they are participating in outdoor activities."

Dr. Reichert is also proud of the progress made in Mission Hope. "You hear a lot of comment," he said, "that the mentally retarded contribute nothing to society. Who is to say what contribution any of us makes to society?"

On one subject, the Rainier School superintendent is highly vocal... euthanasia for the retarded.

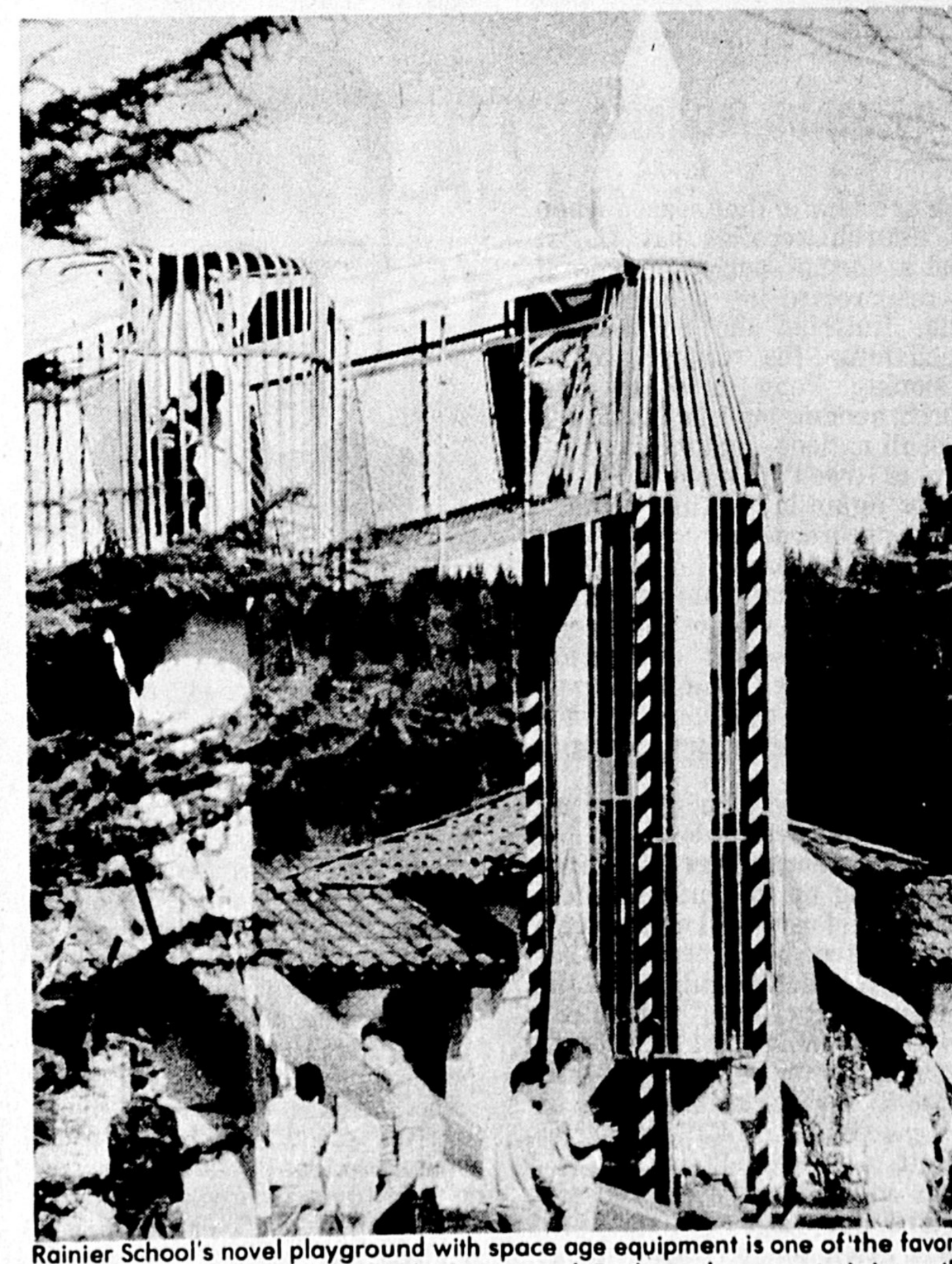
"What individual dares set



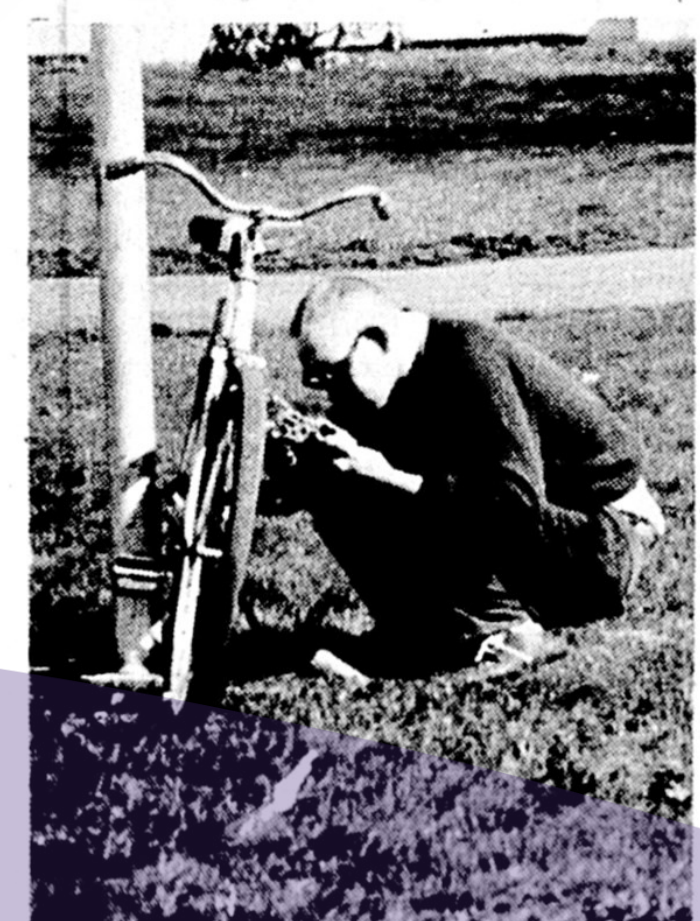
Tying her shoelaces is a sunny day's pastime for Sharon.

himself up as a judge to determine who shall live and who shall die? I don't think there is anyone qualified to do that. When they begin to institute positive euthanasia, then I'm quitting this business. I will have nothing to do with it."

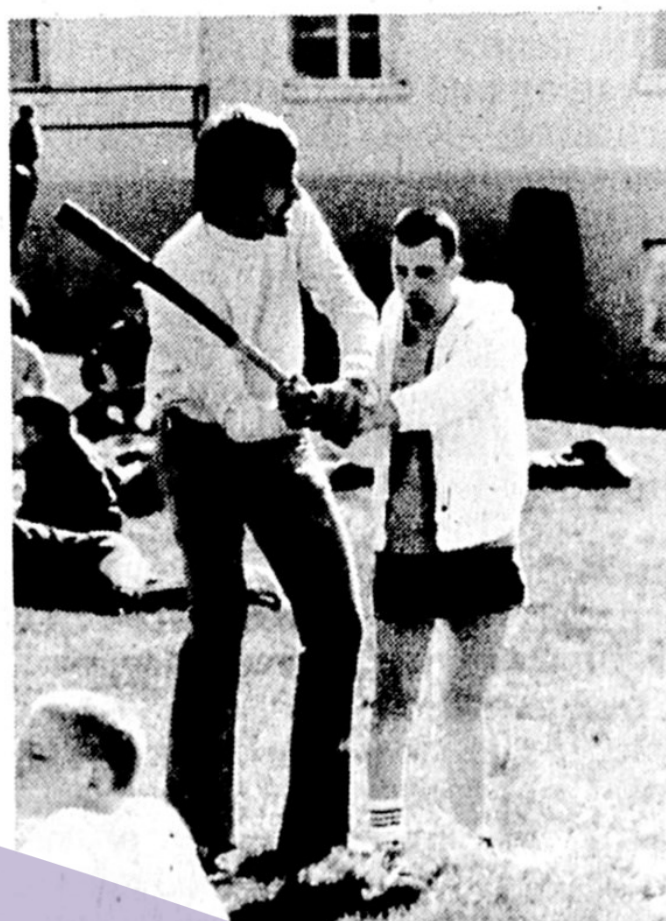
Someone remarked, "Dr. Reichert is a real Christian." Dr. Albert Reichert is a Jew.



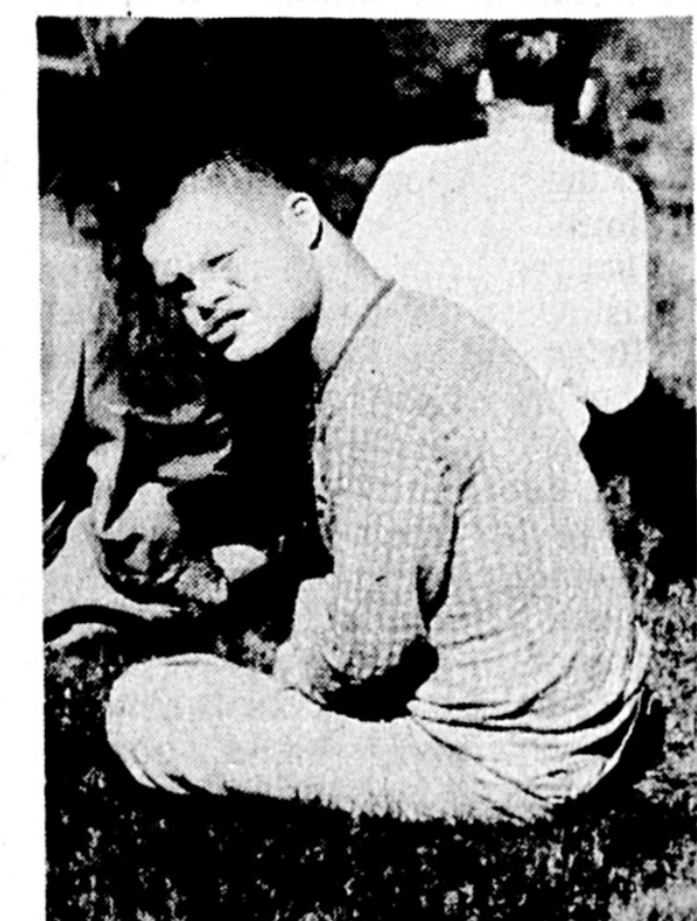
Rainier School's novel playground with space age equipment is one of the favorite recreation spots for students. In the foreground, Paul wanders over to join another group.



Robert's prize is his bicycle and he makes sure that the lock is in place.



Under the watchful eyes of instructor Dave Menard, Richard takes his turn.



Photography and the photographer provide interest for Steve.