

SPECIAL REPORT THE SECOND OF A THREE-PART SERIES

Just One Pill - Part 2

Forget dealers—new generation of addicts go straight for the medicine cabinets

By RONALD SCAGLIA
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The Deadly Cabinet

According to the experts, there are several reasons behind the increase in prescription drug abuse among Long Island's youth. One extremely significant factor is the ease of accessibility. According to the experts, most teenagers have access to these narcotics right in the medicine cabinet of their own homes. And since most people do not keep count of the number of pills in their medicine chests, one or two missing pills that are used to gain admission to a pill party will likely go unnoticed.

"In this day and age, no one should have abuseable medications in the bathroom medicine cabinet," says Bruce Goldman, director of Substance Abuse Services at Zucker Hillside Hospital of the North Shore-LIJ Health System.

Both Detective Pamela Stark of the Nassau County Police Department, who met with reporters from Anton Community Newspapers, and Dr. Stephen Dewey, director of molecular imaging at North Shore-LIJ, who lectures students in virtually all of the Island's school districts, agree that the medicine cabinet is the new "pusher." They commented that the bathroom is the one place in a home where

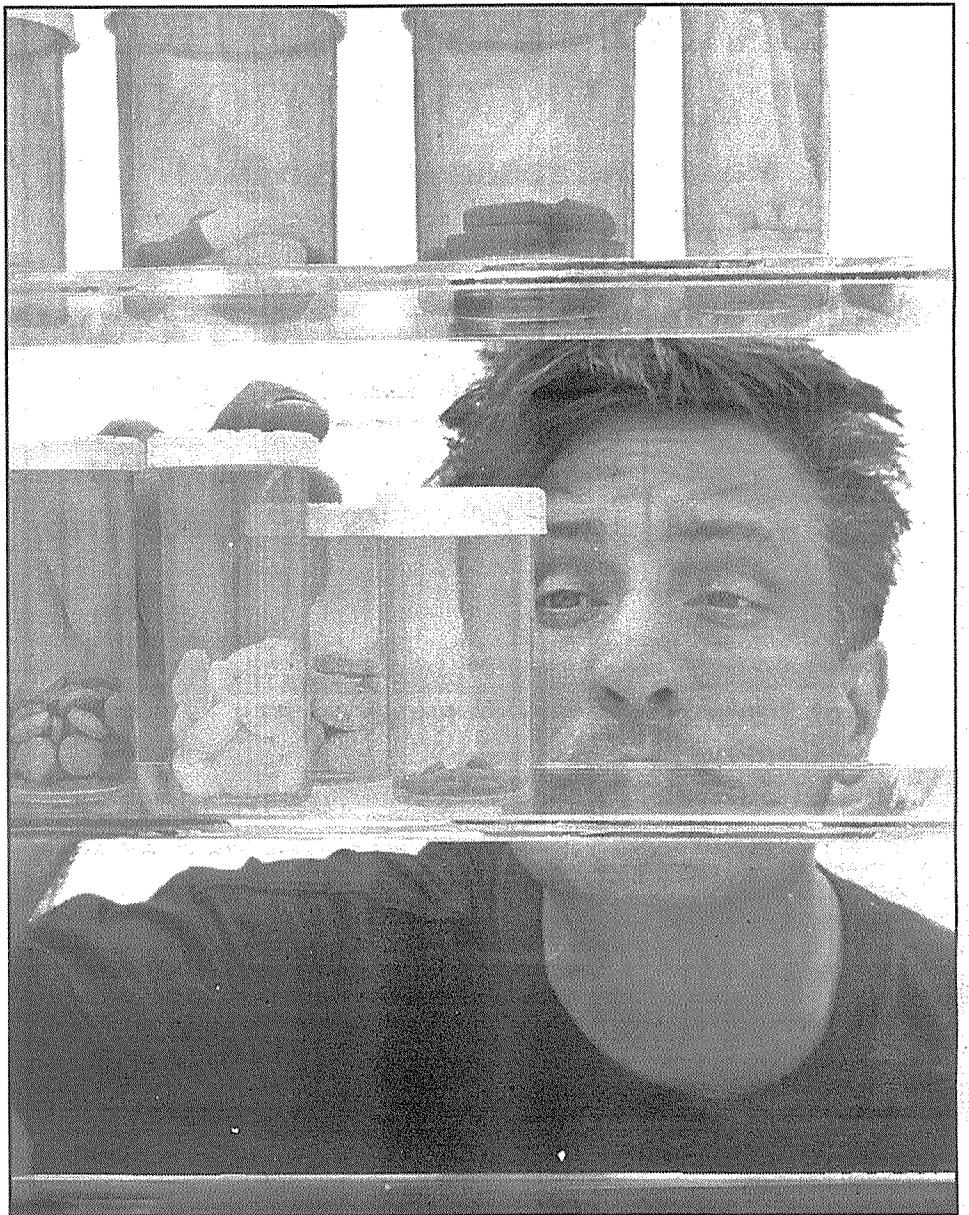
someone is completely unchecked. So, if a teenager uses a bathroom, he or she could have access to any unsecured medication kept in there. And if it is not someone who lives in the house, it could be a friend or a neighbor who takes advantage of the situation and steals the medication.

"That would be like putting a dangerous instrument in your bathroom and leaving it there for whomever," says Stark. "If you're going to leave things in your bathroom, those children are now offered everything in that room. If they only took one or two, who's to know?"

She also points out that those who are intent on stealing pills will be persistent about doing so. The detective says that some will ask to use a neighbor's bathroom in a ruse for sneaking into the medicine cabinet, knowing that an unsuspecting and kind-hearted neighbor would not turn them away. Stark said there are adults who are resorting to these underhanded measures as well.

At 15, Jenny*, who started her life of addiction with just one pill at her high school homecoming, got so caught up in the lifestyle she began to steal her mother's pills from the family's medicine cabinet, and literally scouted the neighborhood for more.

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Drug abusers often turn to bathroom medicine cabinets to pilfer prescription medication from unsuspecting friends and relatives.

Justin Abrams To Climb Mount Kilimanjaro For Autism

Island Rock will host 'Climb for a Cause' for Spectrum Designs May 19

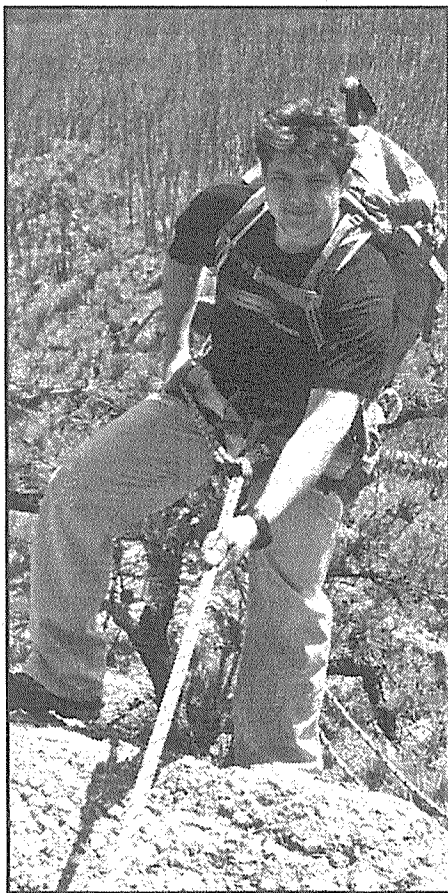
By KAREN GELLENDER
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When Justin Abrams first visited Island Rock Indoor Rock Climbing in Plainview, it looked like his introduction to the sport was going to have to wait; it was 9 p.m., and the place was shut down tight. However, the 7-year-old from Dix Hills wasn't in the mood to take no for an answer. He wanted to climb, and he wanted to climb now.

"As a little kid does, I ran up to the front door and started banging on the door, and the manager actually came out and saw that I was...literally in my pajamas," remembered Abrams. Impressed by such enthusiasm, the manager put the pajama-clad Abrams in a harness and let the child climb, free of charge, all over the rock walls in the empty gym late into the night.

Now, 16 years later, Abrams is still climbing. In fact, he has set his sights on ascending one of the world's most impressive peaks, Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the tallest mountain in Africa and the largest free-standing mountain in the world. Presumably, he won't be in his pajamas, but he will be raising money for Spectrum Design, a nonprofit enterprise located in Port Washington that employs people with autistic spectrum disorders to create custom-made decorated T-shirts and apparel.

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JUSTIN ABRAMS

CACF: 2012-13 School Budget

Submitted by the
Citizens Advisory Committee
on Finance

The Citizens Advisory Committee on Finance (CACF) unanimously supports the adopted Manhasset School District Budget of \$87,069,424 for the year 2012-2013. The CACF would like to address some longer-term issues confronting the district. In recent years the district has strictly controlled spending in a difficult economic period and further reduced the tax burden by partially funding current expenses with the district's reserves. This was done while maintaining school programs, but an austerity program can result in postponing needed investments. New tax cap rules will limit the ability of the district to spend beyond the most critical current needs and replenish reserves to historical levels. Approval of tax levy increases beyond the state-mandated cap will require a super majority vote of the community. Communication of the district's long-term needs must be of the highest priority of the board in order to achieve that level of community support.

The budget represents an increase of \$1,477,326 (or 1.73 percent) over the prior year. The largest factors in the increased expenses were a \$558,504 increase in mandated pension contributions to the New York State Retirement System, a \$417,047 increase in health care expenses and a \$337,579 increase in compensation (increment only), which by themselves would have increased the year-over-year budget by \$1,337,992 (or 91 percent of the total increase). The net impact of all other budget line-items was an

increase of \$139,334 (or 9 percent of the total increase). Over the past four years, the average annual increase in the budget has been 2.02 percent.

The adopted budget increase in expenses is expected to be paid for by a \$1,752,398 (or 2.30 percent) increase in the property tax levy. Over the past four years, the average annual increase in the property tax levy has been 1.69 percent. The property tax levy covers 89 percent of the proposed budget. The difference between the increase in the tax levy and the budget increase offsets reductions in other sources of revenue, primarily reimbursements for the intermediate care facility and the MTA payroll tax.

Manhasset's School Tax Compared To Other Districts

Thanks to the high level of retail and commercial activity in our town and tight control of tax level increases, Manhasset has the lowest school tax rate of the 62 public school districts in Nassau County as of the 2011-2012 school year, which is the most recent, comparative data available.

Expense Per Student Compared To Other Districts

For the 2010-2011 school year, Manhasset spent \$26,452 per student which ranked 16th among 39 K-12 public school districts in Nassau County that spent more than \$20,000 per student. Over the last five years (2008-2009 to 2012-2013), spending per student has increased a cumulative total of 2 percent.

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She and a Girl Scout friend went door-to-door selling cookies. The pretty, dark-haired Jenny, with her innocent, young appearance would ask each homeowner if she could use their bathroom. Once inside, she raided their medicine cabinets.

Stark also identifies grandparents as frequent targets. She explains that grandparents are targeted because they are more likely to be taking prescription drugs, aren't as suspecting of the sinister motives and are less likely to secure their medications.

The day after her grandfather died, and her grandmother was out on errands, Jenny came to their house and stole her grandfather's bottle of OxyContin—120 30 mg pills, which she finished off in three days! That dangerous incident led to one of her many rehab and detox visits, which have always been voluntary—a good sign.

"Not only is it essential for parents to keep track of prescription medication in their own home, to be safe, they must also do this in the homes of grandparents or anywhere their children frequent," says New York State Assemblyman Joseph Saladino, who launched a heroin and prescription drug abuse task force and considers it a priority to educate Long Island parents about this issue.

The experts are also in agreement that too many pills are being prescribed by some physicians. Dewey is emphatic that the medications are safe and effective when used properly. He said the problem lies with physicians who often prescribe more pills than are needed. As an example, he said that a patient with a simple tooth extraction might need prescription medication for two or three days before switching to an over-the-counter pain remedy. However, he says that some physicians will prescribe a supply for two weeks or more.

He states that some physicians tend to overprescribe rather than underprescribe. Dewey says this is done so patients who might need more medication will not have to return to the physician for the refill and be inconvenienced. He also says that some physicians are trying to save their patients from having to make two co-payments as some health insurance plans make it cheaper for patients to receive larger amounts of pills in one transaction instead of separating a prescription in multiple ones. However, this leads to the dangerous occurrence of unused prescription medication being left in medicine cabinets and available for users to pilfer.

"One, I paid for them and two, you never know when you're going to get hurt again," relayed Dewey as to why patients keep unused prescription medication instead of properly disposing of it.

"If you're not aware, you're just going to leave everything in there," concurred Stark.

Stuart*, another abuser who spoke with Anton Community Newspapers proudly recalls his adeptness at securing prescriptions for all sorts of pills. He researched medical conditions and pretended to have a variety of ailments including anxiety disorder and slipped discs. To further his act, he cleaned up and wore a shirt and tie for his doctor visits. When questioned for documentation of MRIs that he claimed to have which would support his claims, he even faked a Southern accent and blatantly lied, saying that he would get the records from his home in North Carolina.

"Once I was successful, I couldn't believe it, so I kept doing it," Stuart says with a hint of defiance in his voice.

He claims to have visited between seven to 10 doctors, meeting very little resistance when trying to obtain prescriptions. He



Dr. Stan Xuhui Li, was arrested in November for allegedly selling prescription medication to a patient who overdosed and is alleged to have treated David Laffer, who perpetrated the Medford Pharmacy massacre.

credit: Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York

says that on the infrequent occasion when a doctor would attempt to avoid writing a prescription, he would be able to connive his way into getting what he wanted.

"I told them it was my God-given right not to be in pain," he asserts. "I told them I'd get the scripts somewhere else and they all complied."

Stuart also claims to have met very little resistance from pharmacists, as he says he visited about six different pharmacies to obtain his drugs. He says that one pharmacist caught on to his act and ripped up a prescription, but he simply returned to the physician, told him what happened, and was given another one.

However, as smart as he was at gaining the drugs, Stuart was not smart enough to see his life spin out of control. Along the way, he lost everything, spent time in jail and was even homeless. He also saw his dream of being a firefighter, one which was obtainable because of a good score on the application exam, be dashed by the felony conviction, although he is still hopeful of pursuing this goal. After losing everything, and being exiled from his family, he did get clean for a bit and just as his life started to turn around, he fell back into his bad habits. An attempted intervention by his family persuaded him to try to cure himself of his demons and he says he has been clean for six months.

Law enforcement is catching up though, with these unscrupulous doctors. Dr. Stan Xuhui Li was arrested in November for allegedly selling prescription medication to a patient who overdosed. Li, who worked as an anesthesiologist in New Jersey, would work out of a clinic in Flushing during weekends. He is alleged to have treated David Laffer, who perpetrated the Medford Pharmacy massacre while in a desperate drug-fueled search for drugs and money, although the charges are not related to that. Dr. Saji Francis was arrested and later deported for selling prescriptions—his office was located about one block from Massapequa High School. Dr. Leonard Stambler of Baldwin Harbor was also arrested late last year for allegedly selling prescriptions for pain medication. On April 19, Dr. Martin Roginsky, an 83-year-old physician from Cold Spring Harbor and former medical director at the Nassau County jail, was sentenced to three years probation for selling prescriptions.

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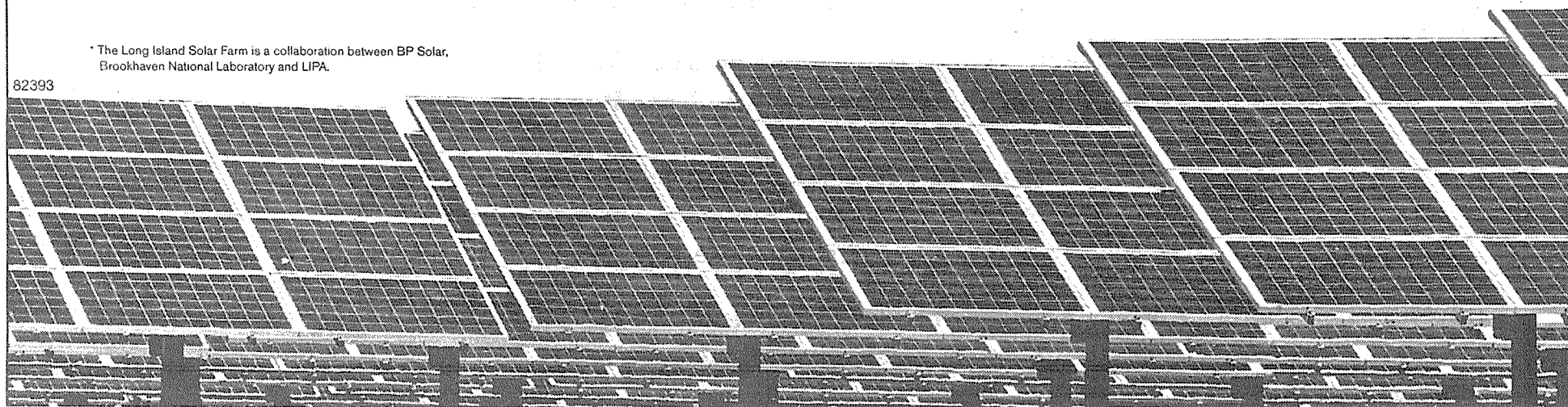
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The Modern Junkie

Another contributing factor to the epidemic of prescription drug abuse is the false sense of security that prescription drugs are safe. The experts say that some abusers have stated that they took prescription drugs because they were not concerned that the drugs had been laced with other substances. In an even more misguided belief, some teenagers have even said that the prescription pills must be safe or physicians would not prescribe them. One teenager went so far as to ask Dewey why drinking Nyquil was a problem, since that's what you're supposed to do with it.

"They do try to keep it on the pharmaceutical side because they feel it's a safer way," adds Stark, on why teenagers turn to prescription drugs.

"Absolutely," responded Thomas*, another Long Island teen who became addicted to prescription drugs while attending a Long Island high school. "No question. One thing I never did, regardless of what my financial state was, I never felt comfortable buying something on the street, something that could have been cut or stomped on, something such as heroin in a bag that I just didn't know what's in it. You never knew and I never cared to take that risk. I still had value for my life and my well-being. I was just OK as long as I recognized that the drug of choice that I was taking had come from a pharmaceutical company, had come from a doctor."

Unfortunately, in his youth, Thomas did not recognize that it's not OK to abuse a prescription drug, no matter where it comes from. He identifies himself as a former straight-A student who succumbed to peer pressure and first tried alcohol around age 13, in order to fit in socially. He soon tried marijuana and then, eventually, prescription pills, including painkillers and anti-anxiety medication.

After having his grades tumble through his junior and senior year of high school, he enrolled in college, doing barely enough work to get by as he recalls that he was often high. He attended three different colleges before graduating.

Thomas eventually did recognize where his life was heading and sought help. In order to transition him off of his addiction, a psychiatrist prescribed Paxil. However, he was not alerted to the side effects and was not aware that he should not operate heavy machinery and crashed his car into a median, resulting in a broken neck.

He has recovered from that injury and has been off drugs for two years as he gets his life back on track. Yet, he is concerned for today's young people. He knows firsthand of teenagers who are quite cunning and successful in their attempts to procure prescription pills.

"Kids are smarter than we give them credit for," he cautions. "Basically, go on the computer, read about the various symptoms one would exhibit when suffering an anxiety disorder and [they] can easily fake those symptoms in an office [to] get a prescription."

Thomas knows of those who have done this and feigned painful injuries as well. He also knows of some peers who have pilfered medications right out of the medicine cabinets of their parents, grandparents, neighbors and friends,

"If you didn't have something to give me, I had no reason to talk to you...and I talked to a lot of people."

- Jenny, 20, a recovering drug addict

which he would occasionally do as well.

"You didn't have to pay money," he says of why teenagers resort to these measures. "Generally you don't have a ton of money to spend. [Also], you don't have to go out and meet with people. There are no legal implications."

Or just take the train. Jenny says that when she takes the LIRR into Manhattan, while changing at Jamaica, she is consistently solicited for drugs.

The problem for addicts like herself, Jenny says, is that she can obtain drugs "anywhere, any time" she wants. During a brief period of attempted sobriety several years ago, Jenny moved in with relatives in the Midwest farm country. It didn't take long before she found the junkies and dealers there. According to the study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 81.4 percent of those teens in a national sample reported that they had the opportunity to use illicit drugs.

Betty*, a former junkie who grew up in rural New Jersey and who moved to Long Island during her high school years, says that, like Jenny, she had no problem finding dealers and other users in her new hometown. She looks like the perfectly innocent girl-next-door, but there's a

radar that junkies have, and the addict and dealers soon met up. Jenny, too, is a beautiful young woman, who looks like she should be sitting in a school cafeteria reading *Elle* magazine, instead of trolling for drugs. Unfortunately, this is the new face of the American junkie.

Jenny warns that drug use is rampant among youth. She believes that in her high school, in Suffolk County, 70 to 80 percent of the students experimented with drugs. While far from a scientific statistic (although, close enough to *General Psychiatry's*), it is eerily similar to the same number that at least a dozen other young addicts interviewed by Anton editors, from all parts of the Island, have suggested.

As for Jenny, "If you didn't have something to give me, I had no reason to talk to you...and I talked to a lot of people."

Watch Out For Grandma, Too

Scott Skrynecki, director of the Office of Investigations for the Nassau County Department of Social Services, says that there has been an unprecedented increase in Medicaid claims for prescription pain pills that does not parallel the increase in Medicaid enrollment. There is serious concern that some are abusing the system

and getting these pain pills for free and thus, the taxpayers are actually paying for some to abuse prescription pills.

There is also concern that the problem is not limited to youth, but is actually a growing issue for seniors as well. According to the 2007 to 2009 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs), an estimated 4.8 million adults aged 50 or older, or 5.2 percent of adults in that age range, had used an illicit drug in the past year. And while marijuana use was more common than the nonmedical use of prescription-type drugs among adults aged 50 to 59 (5.9 vs. 3.6 percent), nonmedical use of prescription-type drugs was as common as use of marijuana among adults aged 60 or older (1.2 vs. 1.1 percent).

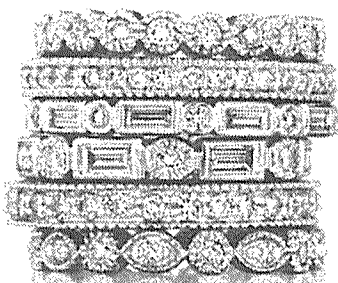
"It's impacting everybody from a public safety and health concern and it's impacting us financially too because Medicaid pays for a lot of these drugs," says Skrynecki.

** We have changed the names of some of the young addicts interviewed for this story.*

Look for Part 3 with advice for parents in next week's edition

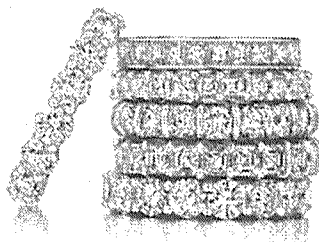
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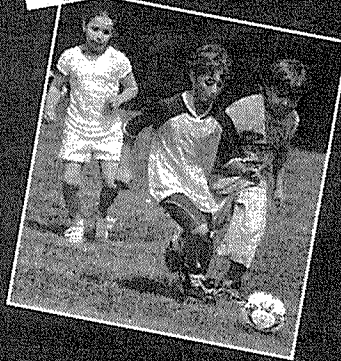
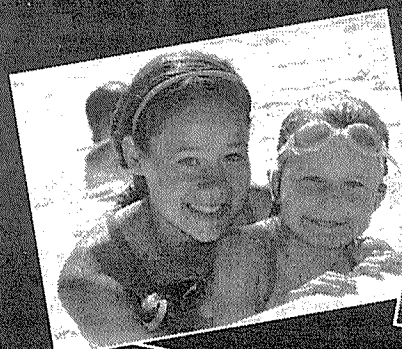
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