

Book Review Editor
Ruth Stewart



cruel to stop him and we would have had to found alternative activities for him."

His reaction to the dangling activity best sums up his ambivalence towards his son. The rare moments of pleasure are contrasted with the "clumsy, monotonous tedium" of his company.

We learn a lot about the tedium, about how he would try to sit as far away as possible from David at dinner, how he dreaded the clumsy tread of his son on the stairs, how he longed for the school bus to pick up David in the mornings and how he dreaded its return in the afternoons. He does admit that perhaps he may have been at fault, in part, for their poor relationship.

"A few evenings ago I was thinking again that I could not stand his stupid face; thank God he was going to hospital for three months — if only they would keep him for good. Then David held out his hand to me and we sat hand in hand and I realised that his face isn't stupid all the time, he can smile warmly and he only looks stupid when he's anxious, and I often make him anxious".

He admits that he was never able to forgive David for being disabled. After his son is admitted to a residential institution he says that he is probably happier than with his family with whom "he led a static life conscious no doubt of rejection and exclusion". I can admire Mr. Hannam's stark honesty and while I understand and recognise many of his feelings I don't admire them. As his younger son said "It's harder for mummy

and daddy; they don't understand David."

I wonder why he wrote the book, which paints such a negative picture of life with a disabled child. Perhaps he wanted to shock people into an awareness of how hard life can be; but by emphasising the problems, almost to the exclusion of the good points, he paints a distorted picture and implies that life with a retarded child must necessarily be very grim.

The remaining chapters discuss different aspects of life with a disabled child; the effect of family life, how to cope with other people, discipline, other children in the family, and when the child grows up. These chapters are composed of snippets of conversation with several parents interspersed with his own observations. Each chapter is followed by a list of recommendations. His story sets the tone of the book; all the families described "coping" with their disabled children, but none of them seem to have come to terms with their child's disability. One woman describes living with her son as like having a little dog around the place!

Most of what he says, however, does make sense. There is a great need for more and more appropriate support for the families of disabled children. If, as he suggests, there were parent support groups, appropriate child care, early education, adequate financial support, family relief schemes, home help and appropriately supported group homes for intellectually disabled adults, life with a disabled child would be much

easier.

The whole thrust of the book is that life would be much easier if parents could "liberate themselves from the burden" of having an intellectually disabled child. Perhaps a more positive approach would be that the community should take responsibility for those of us who are disabled, and, therefore, support families and parents of disabled people. Life with an intellectually disabled child isn't all bad, but it could be easier.

*Diana Bowman,
Board member of STAR Victorian
Association for Retarded Citizens.
Her two year old daughter Bridget is
multiply disabled.*

BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Many of these books will be reviewed in forthcoming issues.

- Furneaux, Barbara. *The Special Child*. Penguin, 1981. 3rd edition. 269 pp. \$6.95.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Lost in Care. Planning and Review in Out of Home Care*. 92 pp.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Voluntarism and Care*. 42 pp.
N.S.W. Association of Child Caring Agencies. *Who Pays for Care?* 44 pp.
Rutter, M. *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*. Penguin, 1981. 2nd edition. 285 pp. \$5.95.
Schrag, Peter and Divoky, Diane. *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child and Other Means of Child Control*. Penguin, 1981. 281 pp. \$7.95.