



Katie Pflueger was 2 when she was involved in an accident in 1987 and one day hopes to not rely on a wheelchair. PABLO BALANCIO/Photograph

Katie's 14-year battle for hope

By **MICHELLE HATFIELD**
Staff Writer

Head-on accident left Katie Pflueger confined to a wheelchair and unable to communicate

Doman, founder of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Wyndmoor, Penn.

Fourteen years. Fourteen years of fighting, of challenging doctors, of researching, of crying.

Fourteen years of praying to have your daughter back.

For 14 years, Katie Pflueger has been confined to a wheelchair, unable to communicate because of a severe head trauma she suffered at the age of 2.

Since her injury, Katie's parents have jumped on planes, chasing any possible treatment or therapy at prestigious institutions across America. Chasing these therapies costs money, most of which is raised by donations and at benefit barbecues like one at Bolado Park on July

29. In April 1987, Tena Pflueger was driving her Chevy Malibu along a two-lane junction in Lodi. Within seconds, she found herself in a head-on collision that left her with a limp and Katie with a blunt head trauma from when her head hit the driver's seat upon impact. Katie was in a coma for six days, Tena said. The doctors gave no hope for a recovery by the 2-year-old.

"They (Katie's doctors) told me 'Your daughter will be in a vegetable state for the rest of her life,'" Tena said. "They

told us to get on with our lives. They told us she'd never walk, talk or feed herself. She feeds herself. She listens to country music."

For eight years, the Pfluegers listened to the conventional doctors and did everything "the school way," Tena said.

"During these years, nothing happened," she said. "They didn't strive to get her well. Our goal is to get her well."

Around 1996, Tena and Tim discovered the book, "What to Do About Your Brain-Injured Child" by Glen

The book discusses many new ways to treat brain injury in children. One alternative is patterning, which regears the relationship between sensory input and motor output to help injured children remember how to do such things as crawling.

With the aid of five to six volunteers, Katie underwent patterning from 1996 to the recent present. Tena said Katie hasn't done patterning for a few months because it takes a number of people to hold her limbs and go through the motions of crawl

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ing - volunteers that Tena doesn't have right now. When Tena is using patterning on Katie, she and the volunteers move Katie's limbs for five minutes nine times a day.

"Patterning is inputting to the brain all the senses," Tena said. "It's teaching her how to crawl all over again."

In 1998, the Pfluegers took Katie to the Chico Hyperbaric Center where she underwent Hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

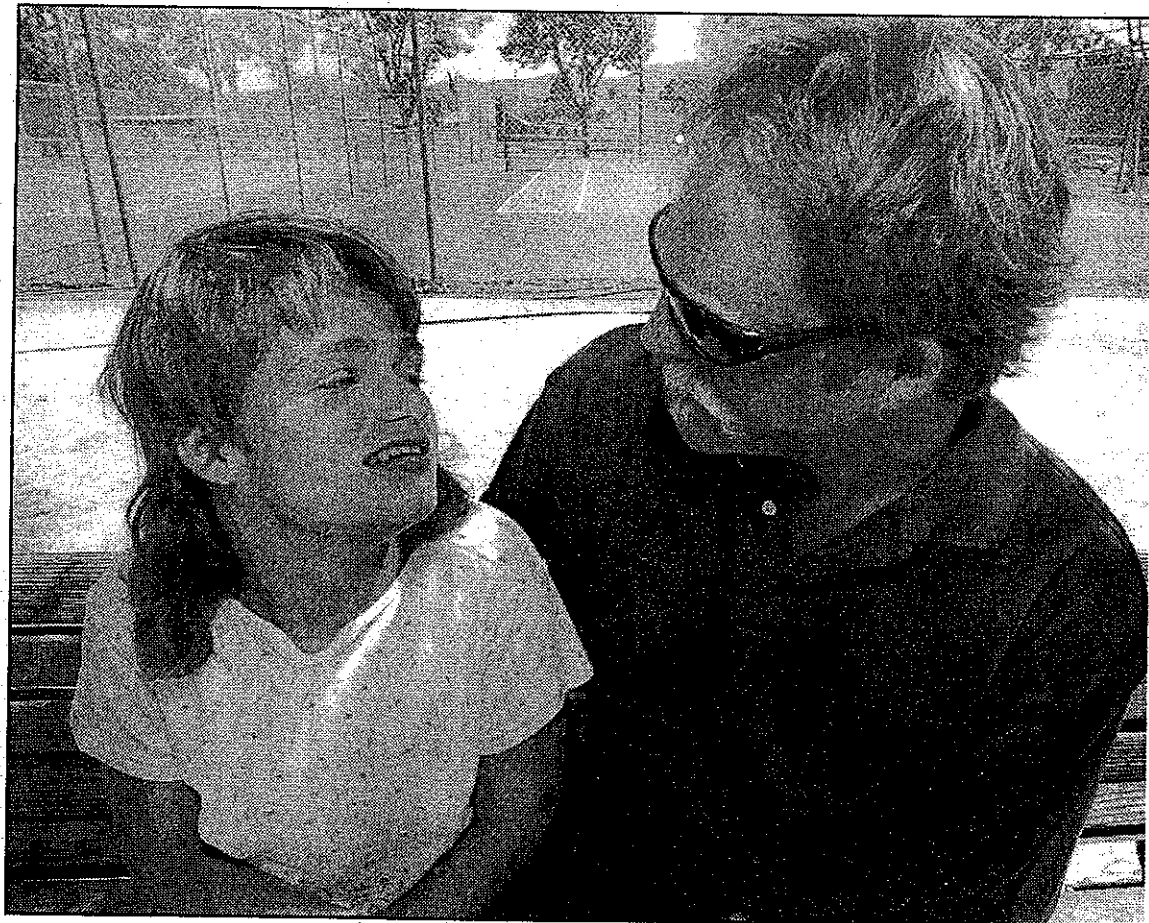
According to the center's Web site, "Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is a medical treatment that uses the administration of 100 percent oxygen at a controlled pressure (greater than sea level) for a prescribed amount of time (usually 60 to 90 minutes)."

The therapy has a positive effect on peripheral blood vessels and causes the formation of new capillaries which effectively increase blood flow to the body's extremities, according to the Web site. HBO therapy is also used for the treatment of many conditions including burns, diabetic ulcers and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Tena and Katie sit in a monoplace chamber for 60 to 90 minutes twice a day, Tena said. While in there, Tena stretches Katie's muscles, reads to her and they both listen to music, Tena said. Money people have donated paid for 140 "dives," 80 of which the Pfluegers have used. Tena said she plans to take Katie back to the center next year to finish the other 60.

While in Chico, Tena discovered another form of treatment that has been a big help in Katie's progression. Tena found CranioSacral Therapy when she saw a chiropractor about her injured back. After working on Tena's back, Dr. Russ Kalen, looked at Katie and began gently pushing on some of her cranial bones. On the fourth or fifth visit, Kalen adjusted the sphenoid bone, allowing Katie to see better than she has since the accident, Tena said.

The current goal is to raise money to go to Florida for a two-week CranioSacral Therapy session with Dr. John E. Upledger, founder of the Upledger Institute.



PABLO BALANCIO/Photogra

Katie Pflueger and her father Tim share a moment on a park bench.

uating and enhancing the function of the craniosacral system (the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord).

Once Katie's vision improved, Tena was inspired to become a CranioSacral therapist herself.

"When she could see, that's all I really wanted to do," she said.

Tena said the therapy in Florida costs \$7,000, not including hotel costs and airfare.

"She's come such a long way - she just can't talk," Tena said.

Because of Katie's head trauma, certain cranial bones are pushing in on the brain, affecting her functioning. This therapy could move the bones and stop the pressure, bringing the bright, active, 2-year-old Katie back to her family.

"She's been locked in there for 14 years," Tena said.

"There are lots of emotions in there. She's listened to us cry and plead for her to get well. She probably doesn't think anything is wrong."

Fourteen years is a long time to fight, but the Pfluegers said it's worth it.

"The saddest thing is when we meet another parent who's given up on their child," Tim said.

Tena remembers the instant she decided to fight until Katie was back to the way she was before the accident.

After Katie came home in August 1987, she was on Tena's lap. Tena was playing with Katie when the 2-year-old bit her thumb. Tena said "Don't bite me." Katie did it again, and Tena repeated "Don't bite me." Katie then opened her mouth to bite Tena again, but peered up at her mother, waiting for her to say "Don't bite me."

Katie then let out a little laugh.

"I promised her right then and there that I'd always fight for her," Tena said. "I knew she was inside there."

Today, Katie attends school at Orestimba High School in Newman, where the Pfluegers live, and Tena said she sees college in Katie's future.

Even though Katie has a brain injury, she still has likes and dislikes. Tena said Katie loves listening to country music and loves her dad.

Because the police were unable to find a cause for the

medical bills. The Pfluegers receive government aid, but mainly to help pay for Katie's wheelchair.

"We're trying to get her out of the wheelchair," Tim said. "We've noticed that she wiggles out the most when she's in the wheelchair."

Katie's Benefit Barbecue will be held July 29 at Bolivar Park from 11 a.m. to dusk. The Mojo Navigators will entertain guests who can enjoy surf vendor booths, participate in watermelon-eating contests and be amused by clowns. Food will be available for purchase and several sponsors are donating materials for the installation of a pond. Tickets are around \$8,000 for the winner of a raffle.

Tickets are \$10 each or three for \$25 and will be available at Johnny's Bar and Grill and Design Line Plus. Tickets will also be available the day of the barbecue.

Tena said volunteers and vendors are still needed. Anyone interested can call the Pfluegers at (831) 902-8612 or (209) 862-3490, or attend a meeting Sunday at 2 p.m. 50 Daffodil Dr., Hollister.

• On the net: