

Infant victim of 6-year-old assault won't recover

By Mary Curtius=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

RICHMOND, Calif.- At an age when toddlers normally walk, talk and play with toys, 19-month-old Ignacio Bermudez rocks in an infant swing.

Sturdy and round faced, Ignacio is a handsome, healthy looking boy. But his only sounds are a baby's coos, and his tightly clenched fists reach out for nothing.

Eighteen months ago, Ignacio, called Nachito by his family, became front-page news as the tiny victim of a vicious beating by a most unlikely attacker - a 6-year-old neighbor boy.

The assault sparked passionate debate about how society should respond to very young children who commit heinous crimes. Some were horrified when a Contra Costa County deputy district attorney, insisting the young attacker knew the difference between right and wrong, filed an attempted murder charge against him. Others applauded the move.

The case faded from public view only after a juvenile court referee ruled the child could not understand his offense and sent him to a group home for deeply disturbed children.

But the violent two-minute

assault. He focused on the youngest boy, whose mother brought him to the police station after he told her what he had done.

The prosecutor was convinced the boy knew what he was doing when he beat Nachito. And so, at six years old, the child became the youngest American ever charged with attempted murder. He also became the youngest ever housed in Contra Costa's Juvenile Hall, where he wore uniforms several sizes too large and slept with a stuffed animal.

After court-appointed psychiatrists said the boy suffered from multiple personality and learning disorders and did not understand the consequences of his act, Jewett reduced the charge to assault with intent to commit bodily harm. The juvenile court referee then declared the boy a victim of parental neglect and sent him to the group home. His transition into the home was rough. He sometimes shoved or hit other children.

But his attorney, John Burris, says his client, now 7, is doing well. He is undergoing intensive psychotherapy and is being tutored. His mother, Lisa Toliver, visits regularly and hopes to one day be reunited with her son.

"I still consider him to be a threat to the community," say Jewett, who receives periodic reports on the boy's progress but is barred by law from discussing details.

What he sees troubles him enough, Jewett said, that "if he were to be released from the facility, if someone were to attempt to return him to his mother as though nothing had happened, I would definitely bring charges again."

Ignacio Bermudez says he wishes nothing but the best for the boy who beat his son.

"He is in the right place now, with doctors who will take care of him," the Spanish-speaking Bermudez says, with the help of an interpreter. "I hope that someday, he will forget what he's done and lead a normal life."

Bermudez, who works at a fiberglass plant, moved to a night shift to be able to help his wife with Ignacio and the other children. He sleeps only a few hours when he comes home before rising to begin the ritual of care. The family has moved to a housing project about two miles from the apartment where Ignacio was beaten. They have a burglar alarm and a small fenced yard where they watch their children play.

Nachito suffers from frequent brain seizures and takes daily medication to control them. He catches cold easily and often has ear infections. He is restless and seems calm only when rocking in his swing or strapped into a car seat in a moving car.

Four days a week, a driver from the county's mental health regional center picks him up for four hours of therapy and care. Once a week, the county school district sends a therapist to the home. She places musical toys close to Ignacio's face in an effort to train him to see. She encourages the family to stimulate him by calling to him, placing objects in front of him, stroking him.

When out of his swing, Ignacio usually lies where he is placed, although he recently learned to roll over. Pulled to a sitting position, he can hold himself upright for brief moments.

His eyes gaze blankly at the world, oblivious to the children playing around him, but then he starts and appears to respond when his father or mother call loudly to him. These tiny triumphs encourage his parents.

Maria Carmen says she has little time to think of the future. Her days are filled with the mundane tasks of caring for Ignacio, 4-year-old Elias, 3-year-old Javier and 2-year-old Carmelita.

As Ignacio grows - he is normalized for his age - it gets harder for her to cope, Maria Carmen says.

"He's getting very heavy," she says. "The day is going to arrive when I won't be able to carry him. Some days, when he just cries and cries and we don't know what is hurting him, I just sit down beside him, and I cry too."

"His brain is at rest. It just doesn't grow like we would like for it to."

-Dr Robert Haining
Neurologist

encounter between the two boys forever has altered their lives and the lives of their families.

"It's very sad for me to see him in the state he's in," Maria Carmen Bermudez says, sitting in the cramped living room of their two-bedroom house. Ignacio's two brothers and sister play near his swing.

Doctors say nothing less than a miracle will restore Ignacio to health. Indeed, it may take a miracle for the boy to ever see, walk or talk. He may never eat food more solid than the Gerber baby fare he now gobbles at a rate of 12 jars a day.

"His is a brain at rest. It just doesn't grow like we would like for it to," says Dr. Robert Haining, the neurologist who supervises Ignacio's care and measures his development every six months.

Damage to the boy's brain, Haining says, "was global," meaning large parts on all sides have died and will not rejuvenate.

Such a verdict, Haining said, is hard for any parent to accept.

"Everything in our lives has changed," says the baby's father, also named Ignacio. "I worry all the time: What is going to be with my boy?"

On that April evening in 1996, the Bermudezes had left Ignacio with his 18-year-old stepsister, Maria, while they went to the grocery store with their older children.

When the family returned 30 minutes later, their home was surrounded by police cars. Their son, they were told, had been hurt badly and was on his way to Children's Hospital in nearby Oakland.

As the infant fought for his life, attached to a respirator, the stunned parents were told his assailant was a 6-year-old, who apparently had entered the family's home, with two 8-year-old buddies, to steal a plastic tricycle.

Before the trio made off with the toy, the 6-year-old spied the baby in his bassinet. As he later demonstrated using a doll in a videotaped interview with police, he pulled Ignacio from the bassinet, dropped him on the floor, then repeatedly punched him in the face, kicked his head and whacked him with a stick.

Asked by the police officer why he beat the baby, the boy's reply was chilling: "Cause I decided to."

Prosecutor Harold Jewett, head of Contra Costa County's juvenile crimes division, concluded the 8-year-olds had not participated in the

U.N. to send delegation to Iraq

Saddam Hussein again refuses Americans entry

By John M. Goshko and Thomas W. Lippman=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

WASHINGTON -

The United Nations decided Sunday to send a three-man delegation to Iraq after President Saddam Hussein again defied the world body by refusing entry to three American arms inspectors and warning that continued U.S. U-2 reconnaissance flights could be fired on by Iraqi anti-aircraft guns.

Secretary General Kofi Annan said Sunday night that the team will leave for Baghdad Monday. U.N. sources said the decision to send a high-level diplomatic mission to Iraq came after the United States dropped its objections to the move. The sources said the United States went along on the understanding that the team's mandate will be to remind Saddam of his obligation to comply with council resolutions and not make any concessions or negotiate in any way.

"We support the secretary general's mission," said Bill Richardson, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "We strongly believe their mandate should be exclusively to underscore the Security Council's resolutions to

enforce Iraqi compliance, and we don't think that these envoys should negotiate anything except Iraqi compliance."

The sentiment among U.N. members is to seek a diplomatic resolution of Saddam's latest attempt to challenge the Security Council and break free of the stringent economic sanctions it has imposed on Iraq.

But senior Clinton administration officials have refused to rule out a resort to military force if necessary, and Sunday top congressional leaders - among them Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., and House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga. - said that the United States must respond to Iraq in whatever manner is required.

Members of the U.N. delegation will be Lakhdar Brahimi, a Pakistani diplomat who has served as a special U.N. envoy in Haiti and Afghanistan; Emilio Cardenas, a former Argentine ambassador to the United Nations; and Jan Eliasson, a Swedish deputy foreign minister and a former U.N. undersecretary general.

The impending dispatch of the mission comes as the United Nations seeks ways to deter Saddam from making good on his threat to expel by Wednesday the American members of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) that was established by the Security Council following the 1991 Persian Gulf War to search out Iraq's hidden weapons of mass destruction.

A big test of Saddam's determination will come Monday when the UNSCOM team follows orders given Friday by its head, Richard Butler, an Australian diplomat, to resume working with all its members, including the eight to 10 American team members currently inside Iraq. U.S. officials said they expect Saddam to block UNSCOM from conducting operations Monday because the U.S. members are part of the team.

Sunday, for the second time in four days, the Iraqis turned away three American members of the team, who tried to fly into Iraq after an absence in Bahrain. And, in another escalation of Baghdad's defiance, Iraq's U.N. ambassador, Nizar Hamdoun, Sunday sent letters to Butler and to Richardson, warning them to cancel U-2 flights that had been scheduled over Iraq from this coming Wednesday to Friday.

U.S. officials refused to comment on the letter. But Western sources, who saw it, quoted Hamdoun as saying that because "Iraq expects a military aggression against it by the United States... entry of the U.S. spy plane into Iraq's air space cannot be accepted." The sources said Hamdoun added, "I hope it would be clear that you assume the responsibility for results of your decision to send the spy plane to Iraq, especially in these circumstances in which our anti-aircraft artillery is open everywhere in anticipation of a

possible aggression."

U.S. officials, while keeping the military option open, have said their first emphasis would be in cooperating with other Security Council members on diplomatic approaches.

But the comments Sunday by key congressional leaders - including top Democrats - appeared to increase the political pressure on the administration to act decisively. That is especially the case because the last time Saddam challenged U.N. rules, by sending troops last year into the Kurdish-controlled city of Irbil in a strike that rolled up a major CIA operation, the administration's response was widely criticized as weak and ineffectual.

"They need to abide by the rules, and we should be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to enforce those rules," Gingrich said on NBC's "Meet the Press." Asked if that included military action, he replied, "Absolutely."

However, the bellicose tone of congressional leaders is, at least for the moment, at odds with the thinking of many key Security Council members. France, Russia and China, while all asserting that Iraq must bow to the council's dictates, have said they oppose military action. Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, a longtime advocate of a more flexible line toward Iraq, said on Friday that his government also is against imposing new sanctions.

Pope condemns anti-semitism in speech

By Richard Boudreaux=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

VATICAN CITY -

In the Vatican's strongest condemnation of moral passivity during the Holocaust, Pope John Paul II said Friday that anti-Semitic prejudices based on "wrong and unjust interpretations" of the New Testament had deadened the "spiritual resistance" of many Christians to the Nazi persecution of Jews.

But the pope, in a speech to the theologians, sidestepped the question of whether such criticism applies to the Roman Catholic Church as an institution.

No pope has done as much as John Paul to improve relations between Catholics and Jews. His own quest for an end-of-the-millennium atonement for past errors and sins has put the church under pressure to address its record in World War II, when millions of Jews and others labeled undesirable by Nazi Germany were sent to death camps in regions where the church had influence.

Keeping a decade-old promise to American Jewish leaders, John Paul gathered 60 Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christian theologians for a three-day symposium on the "Roots of Anti-Judaism" in 2,000 years of Christian teachings.

Many Jews had expected an institutional "mea culpa." Instead, the pope said:

"In the Christian world I am not saying on the part of the church as such - the wrong and unjust interpretations of the New Testament relating to the Jewish people and their presumed guilt circulated for too long, engendering sentiments of hostility toward these people."

"This helped to deaden consciences," he added, "so that when Europe fell under a wave of persecutions inspired by a pagan anti-Semitism... the spiritual resistance of many was not that which humanity had a right to expect from the disciples of Christ."

John Paul, who survived the Nazi occupation of his native Poland, noted that some Christians risked their lives to save Jews from death camps. But he spoke of actions by individuals, not of the church as a whole.

The question of the church's role during the war arose a month ago when Catholic bishops in France issued a detailed apology to the Jewish people for not having done more to oppose the Holocaust. "Today we confess that silence was a

mistake," said Olivier de Barranger, who is the archbishop in the Paris suburb where tens of thousands of French Jews were deported to Nazi camps.

German and Polish bishops previously had apologized for their silence during the war, and speculation rose that the Vatican would follow suit.

But this week's Vatican symposium focused on theology, not politics.

Some Vatican watchers said the pope, having apologized for centuries of Catholic mistreatment of Protestants and Christian involvement in the slave trade, was under pressure from church conservatives to tone down the self-criticism.

"No other pontiff has apologized for moral failure among Catholics the way this one has," said the Rev. John Navone, an American Jesuit priest and professor of biblical theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. "If he's not apologizing today,

"No other pontiff has apologized for moral failure among Catholics the way this one has."

-Rev. John Navone

he is telling the Jews that he wants to start the new millennium with reconciliation and friendship."

John Paul, who once called Jews "our older brothers," is the first pope to visit the sites of Nazi concentration camps, the first to enter and preach in a synagogue. Two years ago he established relations between the Vatican and Israel.

His decision not to invite Jewish theologians to the symposium perplexed Jewish leaders. But he used the gathering to repeat his stand against anti-Semitism, calling it "totally unjustified and absolutely condemnable" as well as fundamentally anti-Christian.

The New York-based American Jewish Congress called the pope's position on anti-Semitism "wise and forthright" and urged other religious leaders to follow suit. It lamented his failure to address the church's own role "in the long and painful history of anti-Jewish hatred" but added: "What the pope was saying loud and clear is that what was acceptable in the past will not be acceptable in the future. By the nature of his audience, by the theme of the presentation, John

Paul made it clear the Roman Catholic Church will never again tolerate... the rank hatred of Jews."

Shimon Samuels, director for international liaison of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, said the pope's speech was "a deep disappointment." Samuels has been lobbying the Vatican to open its World War II archives.

Samuels said archives from Pius XII's wartime papacy could shed light

on how much the Vatican knew about the Holocaust and whether it helped Nazi war criminals escape justice. He and others fault Pius for not speaking out against roundup and persecutions of Jews, including those in Rome.

Defenders say Pius worked behind the scenes to avoid wider Nazi persecutions and thus saved millions of Catholics.

Ireland elects first N. Ireland Pres

By William D. Montalbano=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

DUBLIN, Ireland - Mary McAleese, a law professor raised in the warring heart of bloody Belfast, won easy election Friday as Ireland's first president to hail from British-ruled Northern Ireland.

The 46-year-old McAleese, a staunch Roman Catholic supported by Ireland's largest political party, comes to the mostly ceremonial post promising to build bridges between north and south in a divided island.

Raised as a minority Catholic in a Protestant section of Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, McAleese said Friday that she hopes to help revive the "sense of mutual affection and generosity" she knew as a child before violence sundered the two communities in the province.

"It would be nice to find our way back to a sense of one community," she said after an election that drew four women candidates and sent powerful signals of accelerating modernization in this nation of 3.5 million.

McAleese, who is vice chancellor of Queen's University in Belfast, received 45 percent of the vote in the first-round count to 29 percent for runner-up Mary Banotti, a liberal member of the European Parliament and the only political veteran in the five-candidate field.

The margin of difference reduced to a formality a second count required to ensure McAleese of an outright majority by redistributing the votes cast for the trailing candidates.

Among them, Rosemary Scallon, better known as a singer whose stage name is Dana and who also is a native of Northern Ireland, ran a surprisingly strong third with 14 percent. She had returned to campaign from Alabama, where she is the host of a conservative

Catholic television show.

Anti-nuclear campaigner Adi Roche, who received 7 percent, and retired police Sgt. Derek Nally, who won 4.7 percent, lagged badly.

In Thursday's vote, a brutish day of rain combined with a cab drivers' strike that snarled Dublin to reduce overall turnout to about 48 percent of 2.7 million voters. In 1990, 64 percent voted in the election that made Mary Robinson Ireland's first woman chief of state.

McAleese could not vote because she is not a resident of the Irish Republic that she will now serve in a seven-year term as president.

She will nominally need Parliament's permission to be with her dentist husband and their three children at their home in Northern Ireland because it means visiting a foreign country.

Under the republic's Constitution, everyone born on the island is Irish, but only those who live in the 26 southern counties are eligible to vote. The six northern counties, where Protestants are a majority, form the British province of Northern Ireland, and people born there vote in British elections.

It takes about two hours to drive from Dublin to Belfast.

McAleese, who has a reputation for being flinty and who once accused Britain of running a police state in Northern Ireland, refrained from raising contentious issues in her six-week campaign.

She preached reconciliation, insisting that her personal views - she opposes divorce and abortion but has lobbied for gay rights and objects to her church's ban on women priests - were irrelevant to the figurehead post. She vowed in victory Friday to throw open the presidential palace and make it "the hearth of Ireland."