

Paper Cutting Ignites Creativity

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SOMERSET (Somerset Co.)—Recently, spouses of delegates to the Pennsylvania Young Farmers Association convention spent the morning snipping paper with scissors.

This was no senseless activity, but one to ignite the potential for creativity that was hiding somewhere inside each of them.

Their hosts, wives of PYFA members in Somerset County's three chapters — Berlin-Brothersvalley, Rockwood and Meyersdale — had invited local artist, Paul Beal, to demonstrate scherenschnitt (the Pennsylvania Dutch term for paper cutting) since it's his area of expertise.

They couldn't have asked a more enthusiastic teacher. Beal thinks no cause is more worthy than that of inspiring newcomers in the art of scherenschnitt. Especially when their concept of scissors is geared to only mundane and practical usage.

Beal's intricate creations were displayed in their various farms. He's done scenes depicting homesteads and deer springing over a hillside and Valentine hearts trailed by patterns surely woven by love itself.

The 30 participants began with the simple, doily-like snowflake that kids often do in school art classes. Valentines came next with Beal urging his pupils to think creatively. He suggested pencil-sketching the design on the paper before making any cuts. A dove, for instance, is a nice touch.

"You are relating this to your experience," he told them. "This is you. You have to relate it to your experience to make it personal."

In other words, they were to look afresh at old things they usually took for granted and dredge up a fresh mental image. For instance, lace or fabric, a favorite

sweater, trees, plants or animals are good places to look for patterns. Sources of inspiration are found everywhere, Beal told them.

Antique glassware has long been a wellspring of influence for Beal. "It's really beautiful. There are so many possibilities for shapes," Beal told the attentive group.

Straight edges are boring. Even scalloped edges, if they aren't snipped here and there, will also be dull and boring after awhile. But these are minor nuisances for the amateur paper cutter whose determination leads to innovation. She will remember her pinking shears, or perhaps, her paper punch, when inventing her decoration.

The group learned that paper cutting began in ancient China, probably around 200 B.C. Somehow, in the intervening years, paper cutting caught on with the Amish in Europe. Later, the Pennsylvania Dutch were instrumental in promoting it, Beal said. To them it had utilitarian value.

They used it as a stencil for designs on their doors, chairs, chests and other furnishings. Paper cuttings became an accepted method for designing any needed pattern. Another use was that of protecting furniture from dripping wax. They put a paper doily under the lighted candle.

Beal explained the difference between "negative" and "positive" cuts. Simply stated, pieces that are cut out are negative and whatever remains is positive.

Rose Dillman from Shippensburg, Cumberland County, had a super time learning paper cutting. She said later, that each activity got better as the day progressed. She couldn't decide which of them was her favorite — the paper cutting, lunch at "G. Whillikers" (an old historic landmark that was restored by Jeff and Pam Moore),



Paper cutting (scherenschnitt) fun was an activity spouses of the Pennsylvania Young Farmers got to do while in Somerset for the 1996 state convention.



Two of Paul Beal's paper cutting creations — fleeing deer and a farm with cows — are displayed at the Pennsylvania Young Farmers Convention held in Somerset.

touring the Inn at Georgian Place of browsing in the shops of the Horizon Outlet Mall.

Dillman said the women who planned the day included superb

experiences for their guests, although time was at a premium.

Dillman said, "It would have been fun if there would have been more time."

"Don't let this be your last attempt at paper cutting," were Beal's final words of advice.

He belongs to the Mid-Atlantic Guild of Paper Cutters.

Research Finds Vitamin E, Other Drugs May Help In ALS

TUCSON, Ariz. — When Lou Gehrig, baseball's "iron horse" was discovered to have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 1939, little was known about the progressive disease. Some authorities thought vitamin E might offer some benefit in slowing the disease, although there was no direct evidence. Since little else was even considered a "potential" therapy, Gehrig ate a daily salad of garden grass, a plant thought to contain high amounts of the vitamin.

Some 30,000 Americans are affected by ALS. Many continue to supplement their diets with nutrients including vitamin E, and a team of investigators supported by the Muscular Dystrophy Association is reporting the first evidence that the antioxidant slows muscle wasting in the early stages of the disorder in mice with a genetic defect for a familial form of ALS. Their study, reported today in *Annals of Neurology*, also noted some benefit from the antioxidant selenium, and found that two other drugs, riluzole and gabapentin, prolong survival in a later stage of ALS.

"We've entered a watershed period of progress in the battle against ALS," said Donald S. Wood, MDA's director of science technology. "The first prescription drug for treating the disease became available earlier this month, and last week the journal *Science* presented strong biochemical evi-

dence that genetic defects in familial ALS cause an enzyme known as SOD1 to become toxic and damage nerve cells, instead of performing its normal function."

ALS is a paralyzing disease in which cells in the brain and spinal cord that control voluntary muscles gradually die. The disease leads to total paralysis and is usually fatal within five years. It usually strikes between ages 40 and 60.

Led by MDA grantee Mark Gurney, the study reported today, using the first mouse model for a neurodegenerative disease, was conducted mostly at Northwestern University in Chicago and Pharmacia Upjohn in Kalamazoo, Mich. Gurney created the model in 1994 with MDA funding, after MDA-supported researchers isolated disease-causing defects in the human SOD1 gene.

"Evidence that these drugs may slow progression of ALS underscores the real potential of this first-of-its kind mouse model that can yield reliable data on possible ALS treatments in as little as six months," added Wood. "Some 20 additional compounds are being tested singularly or as combinations, and these studies will help accelerate delivery of major health benefits to people affected by ALS."

Today's findings are compatible with the biochemical insights into the cause of ALS reported last week by chemist, Joan Valentine of

the University of California, Los Angeles and Dale Bredesen of the La Jolla (Calif.) Cancer Research Foundation. By analyzing the biochemistry of two SOD1 mutations that cause a familial form of ALS, this team found a "toxic gain of function" that may improve understanding of both genetic ALS and the much greater number of noninherited, or sporadic, cases.

Gurney said his study underscores the value of using transgenic mice to speed the search for drugs to treat ALS. "It also shows that ALS has two distinct phases, each of which might be treatable by a specific type of drug."

According to Gurney, nerve cells are "silently" damaged by the renegade SOD1 enzyme, made vulnerable to lethal damage from normal nervous system chemicals, such as glutamate, in phase one of the disease. In phase two, chemicals such as glutamate affect cells differently from the way they normally would, leading to cell death.

Gurney said he thinks today's results probably apply to all ALS, not just this genetic type, which affects only a small percentage of patients. Gurney also cautioned that selenium can be neurotoxic, so patients shouldn't take the antioxidant without close supervision from a doctor.

In December, the FDA for the first time ever approved a drug (riluzole, brand name Rilutek) for prescription use in ALS. The ap-

proval was based on human studies showing slightly increased survival times for those who took the drug versus those who took a placebo, or dummy pill.

Riluzole partially blocks release of the chemical glutamate from nerve cells. It was developed by Rhone-Poulenc Rorer with the aid of MDA research on glutamate. Doctors and patients at several of MDA's 230 hospital-affiliated clinics across the country helped test the drug, which slows progression of the disease.

Gabapentin (brand name Neurontin) is approved for use in epilepsy and is being tested for use in ALS. It seems to partially block the body's manufacture of glutamate.

Vitamin E and other antioxidants are being tested in clinical trials by MDA-supported investigators and results are expected this

spring. Meanwhile, many doctors continue to recommend vitamin E to their ALS patients.

MDA is the nation's leading nongovernment source of medical services and worldwide research seeking treatments and cures for ALS. The Association allocates more than \$5 million each year to its ALS program (about \$2.5 million each to research and patient care), or some \$100 million in the past four and a half decades. MDA maintains seven ALS research and clinical care centers, and some 230 clinics where people can get expert diagnosis and follow-up care from the country's top specialists in neuromuscular diseases. For more information about ALS, the latest research into neuromuscular diseases, or referrals to an MDA clinic, people should call 1-800-572-1717.

Smile!

One of the most important things you can give your child is a good sense of self-esteem. There are many things you can do to enhance your child's view of themselves: smile at them, encourage them, help make good decisions, and occasionally, take their picture or have it taken

professionally.

Photography gives your child a special feeling. "Someone wants to remember me today."

So, even if you're not a great photographer, say "smile" to your child, and that feeling will help give your child self esteem.



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