

Morgan's Wonderland

By Clifford Fry, Chairman, Family Advisory Board

The hands! They are so similar in spirit to the hands that are such a part of Rett syndrome. They are not clasped, for they are reaching to the sky for a nearby butterfly -- hands of hope and beauty. This is what one sees when entering Morgan's Wonderland, which is the first amusement park in the USA, and I suppose the world, designed for the handicapped.

Judy and I took Ashley (31) and our oldest daughter and our four grandchildren to Morgan's Wonderland a few weeks ago during spring break. I was curious as to how the grandchildren would find the experience, and I also wondered what a park for the handicapped would really mean.

To provide an example of an accessible ride for the handicapped, I mention the car track. There are cars that go around a large track. A child can sit in the front and turn the steering wheel, which has nothing to do with where the car actually goes, but that does not seem to bother any child that I saw. The back of the car opens and reveals a flat platform inside. A child in a wheelchair is put on a moving ramp from the line area. The ramp is moved to the back of a car – the back of which is now opened flat – and the child is wheeled onto the car. The wheelchair is secured, the back closed, and away they go. It is as if the wheelchair bound child is in the back seat.

On the merry-go-round I always sit with Ashley on the bench - we can never get on the horses. In the Morgan's Wonderland merry go round we also had to sit on the bench. The difference is that the bench had a larger base and rocked in harmony with the horses. The rides, in other words, are capable of being enjoyed by the non-handicapped, and the rides are modified so the handicapped child can experience the sensations. There are no "wild" rides. The rides are pretty tame as amusement parks go. In addition to rides there was an interesting water play area where children could do all kinds of things with water – such as diverting the streams - without getting wet.

A large sign at the park indicated that it had been visited from people from 47 states and 12 countries. It has been open roughly a year. It is on the north side of San Antonio, easily accessible from the main Interstate, and it adds a very special dimension to the fun offerings (Riverwalk, Sea World, Fiesta Texas) of that historical city (The Alamo, for starters) that are already in place.

In the picture from left to right at Morgan's Wonderland: Gabe, Kristin, Nicholas, Bella, Alex (standing) Babineaux, Ashley (in stroller) and Clifford Fry.

Ashley and Clifford Fry and Bella Babineaux giving the weather report on TV in Morgan's Wonderland.

