

No Bars Hold

While visiting the United States of America this year, I attended an Elderhostel Study Course on the Campus of St. Andrew's Presbyterian College at Laurinburg in the County of Scotland, North Carolina, where the majority of practising Christians are Presbyterian.

Living for a week on campus, we had the opportunity to observe what is surely a unique programme conducted by the College.

The Founding Fathers, when the College was planned in the early 60's, had decreed that it be "barrier free"—that is; with full access to all areas by wheelchair students.

About 50 students in wheelchairs attend the College. While no quarter is given academically, their physical needs are catered for by a Rehabilitation Centre.

One evening, a very articulate accident victim of 22 years, spoke to the Elderhostellers about the programme and about his ambitions for the future. His course was Computer Studies, and since he lacked the use of his hands, a small hook strapped to his wrists enables him to work the keyboard. This lad glowed with intelligence and we felt that if Computer Studies did not work out, he might try for the Presidency of the United States!

Of course the cost of such a programme is enormous. It costs approximately \$100,000 to put such a student through four years of college. Parents pay what they can and Government Agencies and St. Andrew's Presbyterian College make up the shortfall.

The Co-ordinator of Studies looked hopefully at the Elderhostel group as he explained that the College is desperately under-endowed.

During our stay, a group of young handicapped people was "living in" at the College on probation for a month, "to discover," the Director told us, "whether the College can cope with these students and whether they can cope with us."

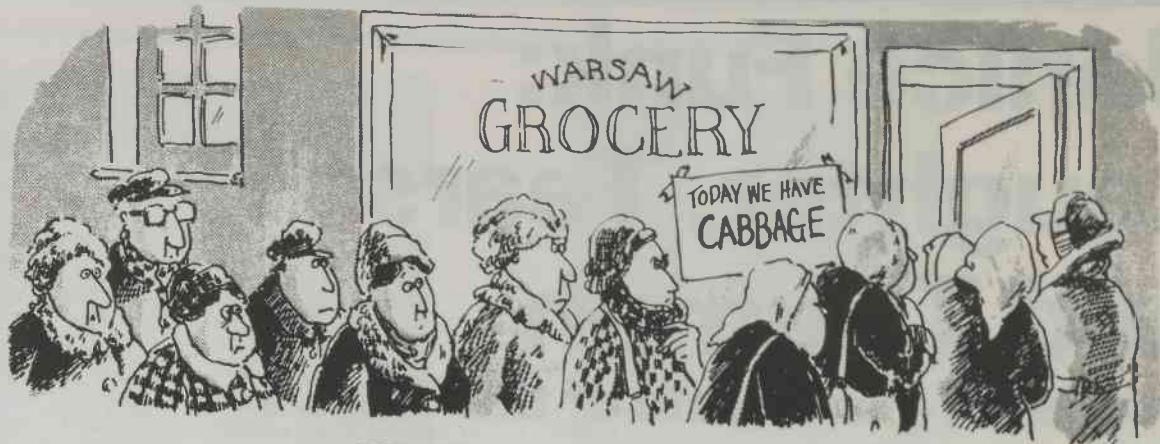
We all ate in the cafeteria. The "Wheelies" as they are known, lined up in their electric wheelchairs. An attendant took their meal orders and delivered trays to the tables of their choice. Many could not feed themselves. These were fed by some of the students nicknamed "TABS" by the Wheelies. TABS are "temporary ablebodied students." This seemed a somewhat cynical approach to the accident rate!

We Elderhostellers admired the proceedings as unobtrusively as possible. Then one day, a new lad was wheeled in, hanging over the side of his wheelchair like a wet cloth.

"Surely he'll never make it," someone murmured sympathetically.

A couple of days he appeared, braced upright, his head high and a proud smile on his face. Before we left, he arrived for a meal under his own power, manoeuvring the wheelchair by means of a "joystick" which he operated tentatively with his chin. Without doubt, he was on his way.

— Stella Houstein,
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ALUMNI WEEKEND

