

## STEPHENS

(Continued from Page 1)

them a book on death and dying to help them cope with the disease. Even close friends moved on with their lives not quite grasping the impact of their retreat. Financially, the family had some rough times, because:

"I was at my job for almost 8 years, when they got diagnosed," said Vicki, 29. "I had to resign. (Taking care of the two girls) is a full-time job."

And then some...

"Candace can get up any time

from 2 and 4 a.m.," explained Vicki.

She demands to hear her Xuxa tape. John and Vicki are used to the routine. Sometimes John will stay up and watch television along with Candace. Sometimes he just sleeps at her feet. When he's too tired to do that, Vicki may put in the tape, sit Candace on the couch and go back to bed. The Stephens don't worry that Candace will get into something, because "once she sits down, (Candace) can't get up. She'll just sit and rock back and forth," said Vicki.

If she's lucky, Vicki might get to sleep in until 6 a.m., but she's quick to say each day is different. There are a few constants. Vicki will have to change Candace's diapers, put Camille on the potty, comb the girls hair, and feed them.

Each activity has a story. Camille, for example, isn't potty trained, but her mother knows to put her on the potty when she strains. Neither girl likes getting their hair combed, and they make quite a fuss. Meaning Vicki may need help to comb. Candace, though 4, still drinks from a bottle, because she lost the ability to swallow.

"They were going to g-tube her, but she's still drinking from the bottle," said Vicki.

When Candace drinks from a cup liquid pours "out of the sides of her mouth," and she can't suck from a straw. The typical day is filled with such moments, but the Stephens are not bitter. Part of the reason is that the Stephens feel that God was preparing to care for the girls.

"From the time I was in the



Vicki Stephens looks on as her daughter, Camille, sitting on her dad, John's lap, rubs her oldest daughter, Candace, on the chin. Photo by Savoy/LVS-Voice

8th grade, I was volunteering in a sanatorium," said Vicki. "A lot of people put their kids in homes, I couldn't."

Vicki and John both recognize that the girls will

probably not "get better."

"I don't anticipate that Candace will ever do more than she's doing right now," said John.

"They will never be able to talk." While many parents might

find that difficult to accept, the Stephens don't. They were blessed with four children, and their two sons, Eric, 9, and Jonathon, 11, are great with the girls. Their sons' response has been outstanding. They play with the girls and much more.

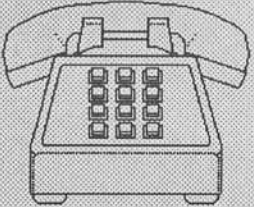
"The girls enjoy watching them play SEGA, because of the music" said Vicki. "The boys have been so wonderful, and we don't want them to feel neglected."

Vicki and John recently surprised the boys with a trip to Disneyland as a reward for being so understanding.

While life may not be perfect, the Stephens have found neutral ground. They are happy to have their "little angels."

Vicki summed up the situation when she said, "This is my life."

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## MARIJUANA USE

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Of the 13 million Americans, or 6.2 percent of the population, who use illicit drugs, the survey found that 10 million used marijuana, making it by far the most commonly used illegal drug.

Cocaine was used by 1.4 million Americans, 0.7 percent of the population, a number that has remained unchanged since 1985. But the survey found that the number of occasional cocaine users has declined dramatically.

It also found that 11 million between 12 and 20 drink alcohol and two million were defined as heavy drinkers, having five or more drinks at least five times a month.

Secretary of Health Donna Shalala released the survey results at a press conference at Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington and used the numbers to lambaste Republican attempts to slash government spending on anti-drug programs.

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