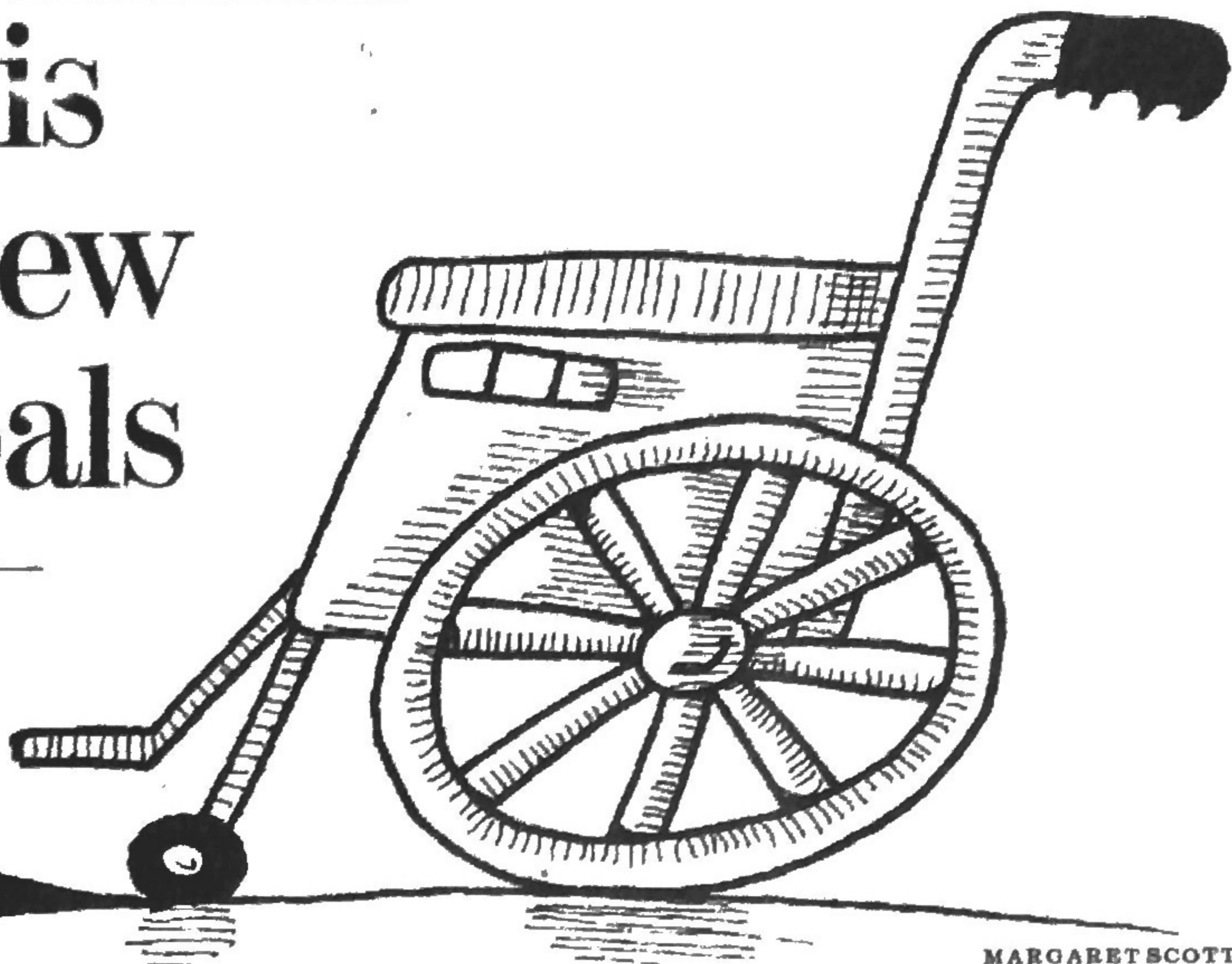


# Paralysis can renew life's goals



MARGARET SCOTT

By REBECCA FAYE SMITH GALLI

**I**T'S BEEN THREE years since I have danced. Three years since I have broken a sweat at the gym. Three years since I have run and jumped with my kids. Fact is, it's been three years since I have walked.

On Feb. 12, 1997, I awakened in the early morning with strange shooting sensations in my legs. I had had the flu for about week but had no idea that this seemingly ordinary bug would put me in a wheelchair, possibly for the rest of my life.

Six hours later, knife-like bolts of pain shot their way up my legs to my waist, permanently relaxing my muscles as the paralysis stopped short of the need for a ventilator. With this life-altering event, I joined the journey of the rare one in 1.34 million people who go to bed with a flu-like illness and wake up with Transverse Myelitis, the cause of my paralysis.

The past three years have been filled with adjustments. Ironically, the great immobilizer launched unprecedented growth in creativity as well.

I've boogied with the best of them from the confines of my chair. I break a sweat three times weekly with free weights and dynabands as I build my upper body strength.

I've also learned how to play with my kids, again.

Peter, 5, started T-ball games in the spring. I learned I could pitch to him if I angled my wheelchair slightly to the left and leaned way over to the right, steadying my body with my left hand on my right armrest as I threw.

Brittany, 11, a blonde bombshell, excelled in softball as a pitcher. I learned I could still swing a mean bat so long as my brakes were solidly locked.

I can still spiral a football and dribble a basketball. It's not pretty, but I do it.

But then came soccer season.

My sensation level begins about an inch above my navel, T-8, to be specific. I've had some return below that level, but my hips and legs remain basically immobile and numb. So my thoughts of soccer were as a spectator.

But Peter had other ideas.

"Mom, I have a soccer game on Saturday. I need to be the best. I need to practice," he said emphatically.

"Sure, Pete. Let's go!" I spoke before I thought. About half way down my ramp leading outside, I began to wonder how I could possibly play with him. I can only use my arms and hands, the very things that are illegal to use in soccer. My mind was churning. Figuring. I checked his attire. "Pete, you

forgot your shin guards." Right, like I am going to kick him in the shins! I laughed out loud at the thought, but Pete nevertheless obediently put them on.

As I rolled into the driveway, it hit me. I could be a goalie.

"Pete, I'm the goalie and you try to kick the ball past me into the garage door." I directed. "And, the other garage door will be my goal," I knew I'd never score, but the idea sounded good. We had to be fair about this.

So we played.

He'd kick and I'd roll. He'd shoot and I'd block. He'd shoot and he'd score. He'd shoot and I'd block ... and it ricocheted into my goal.

What great fun. I even won a few games. He sharpened his shooting skills, and I got the best workout I've had in a long time. My whole trunk is sore and my thumbs have tread marks on them!

But it was worth it. During Saturday's game, he scored the first goal.

Yes, soccer, wheelchair style.

One never knows when exclusive terms can become inclusive if we decide to live in the present and apply our minds to the moment we have.

*Rebecca Faye Smith Galli is a freelance writer who lives in Phoenix, Md.*