

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Bayside. Of the three outings the campers go on each year at camp — to the Parrot Jungle, the Seaquarium, and on this catamaran — this sail on the Pau Hana, owned by Bayside Cruises, is the only trip that is always free of charge. While the campers and their families never pay a cent, the camp does pay for the other outings — mostly with donations from Miami Children's Hospital, the American Lung Association and private donations. Of the 40 people who work at the camp — Simper, his office staff, van drivers, high school and college-age counselors, nurses, respiratory therapists, cooks, maintenance crew — all but two (the all-night nurses) get to go free.

It is time to lift the kids off the boat. Crew, camp staff and parents gather around to heave each child strapped in an equipment-laden wheelchair into the air. Barry's chair, which finally made its way to Miami, is especially heavy, and the lifters sweat, grunt and tremble under the weight. Barry is thrown from side to side as they hoist him skyward. He, too, breaks into a sweat as the chair slams into the side of the boat and tilts him backward. When they finally get the chair down on the deck, there is much face-wiping, groaning and gasping.

"Thank you," says Barry. So quietly but earnestly do the words echo out of his ventilated throat, that everyone is quiet. For a brief moment, there is a profound realization of what is tied up in that thank-you — what Barry has been through, and what he knows about how much the people around him want to make things better for him.

The campers leave the boat and head for lunch on the water. The wind blows through the outdoor restaurant and music plays. The kids, their brothers and sisters and their parents talk excitedly. Oscar is so into the camaraderie of it all, even though he can't eat, he gets his mom to order a burger plate, and sucks the salt off the fries.

A "Great Deal"

For this outing to Bayside, Delores has brought Oscar in her van, instead of riding on the camp bus. Oscar has trouble with the heat on the bus, explains Delores, as they head back to her air-conditioned car. But as she drives down Biscayne Boulevard, stopping at a red light, the car stalls, and she can't get it started. Over and over she tries, the battery growing weaker with each attempt. The motor won't turn over. It is a hot afternoon and the interior of the van heats up quickly. Cars honk at them. People scream at them. For anyone, this would be a miserable situation. But for Delores Gonzalez, it is a grave emergency. Oscar's oxygen supply is limited. He is stuck in the hot van.

Delores jumps out of the car and goes from car to car behind her.

"My son is on a respirator in the van," she says, enunciating each word carefully because she is deaf. "I've got to get it started. Do you have cable jumpers? Can you help me?"

But she is in downtown Miami, where people are often approached in their cars and are tired of being hounded. She is in a place where people are suspicious and distrustful of stories of misfortune. They know the scams. They've heard the sick child story before.

As Delores goes from car to car, windows go up, doors lock, people turn away.

"Please," she begs. "We're desperate." A few people answer her. They haven't got cables, they say. They haven't got time. Delores goes back to the van for her portable phone with the hearing attachment. Last year, when Delores was with Oscar downtown, the electric wheelchair ramp in the van broke. She called 911 and got connected with the fire department. Station six sent a truck to help her.

Sorry, the 911 operator tells her this time. Broken down cars are out of police jurisdiction. Even if the child is on a respirator, the police don't furnish jumper cables.

Then, says Delores, connect me with station six at the fire department.

Sorry, the voice repeats. He can't transfer a call to station six.

Delores tells Jackie, Oscar's nurse, to run to the Bayside information booth and ask them for help. Maybe they can send security people over. But at the Bayside booth, they say sorry they don't have anything to do with security on Biscayne Boulevard. Maybe she should try 911.

Back at the van, Jackie takes a turn on the phone with 911 and gets a little further than Delores. The dispatcher says since it's an emergency they'll send help. But, first, he needs to know, "Is this the kind of emergency that requires a siren?"

"No," says Jackie. "You don't have to use the siren. Just get here soon and bring jumper cables."

"If it's not an emergency," says the dispatcher before hanging up, "you've called the wrong number."

Later, Juan Del Castillo, a public information officer for Metro-Dade Police, will say: "I've seen officers sent out for

far less. If a car's blocking traffic, if children are in it, if a motorist is stranded, someone will usually go out to help. But there are many individuals in the system and you're dealing with a complex communications network."

Oscar, stuck inside the van, has started gasping. His skin has grown very pale with splochy red patches. Delores, afraid he'll soon pass out, leaves Jackie with him and starts frantically knocking on car windows again.

Yes, says a smiling man. He has cable jumpers, and he'll be glad to let her use them and his car. Delores is so relieved she practically hugs the man through the open



William Kempinger, 13, from North Carolina, temporarily off his ventilator, clowns around with counselor Clay Drevitt. His big moment would come later: a quick dunk under water.