

## THINK OF ME AS A PERSON

You look at me with pity,  
concern or indifference,  
for I am a retarded child.  
But you only see the outside me.  
If I could express myself,  
I would tell you what I am inside.

I am very much like you.  
I feel pain and hunger.  
I cannot ask politely  
for a glass of water, but I know  
the parched dry feeling of thirst.  
I itch when mosquitoes bite me  
and run when I see a bee.  
I feel cozy drinking cocoa in the kitchen  
when a snowstorm blusters outside.

I had a heaviness inside  
when I left my mother  
to board the minibus for school.  
My eyes darted back and forth,  
seeking escape,  
but knowing there was none.  
When my sister takes me to the  
playground  
and children call me names, she cries  
and takes  
me home. Then I feel warm and dizzy,  
and it is hard for me to breathe.  
Mother's eyes are wet; she holds me  
and tells me a story, and  
I forget the children's jeers.  
When I dress myself and Mother  
pats my head, saying "Good job,  
Jim!" I feel...big. As big as Greg,  
who goes to second grade.

I am a child –  
in age now, and in ability always.  
I find the touch of soft toys  
and snuggly dogs comforting.  
I love the toys of childhood –  
a kite, a balloon, a wagon to pull.  
I like to let go at the top of a slide

and after dizzy seconds find myself at  
the bottom.  
I like sleds on soft snow,  
the wetness of rain on my forehead.

Though it is comfortable to be babied,  
I am less dependent  
when people treat me as a big boy.  
I don't want their sympathy.  
I want their respect for what I can do.  
I am slow, and many things  
you take for granted are hard for me.  
I can hardly understand  
what "tomorrow" means.  
It took me months to learn  
to pedal the tall blue tricycle,  
but I was so proud when at last  
both feet pedaled in the same direction  
and the wheels went forward.  
How happy I was when I turned on the  
right faucet  
to get a drink of water.  
I didn't want to ever turn it off.  
If I can learn at my own pace and still  
be accepted,  
I can fit into a world  
where slowness is suspect.

Think of me first as a person,  
who hurts and loves and feels joy.  
And know I am a child to encourage  
and direct.  
Smile, and say hello –  
even that is enough.