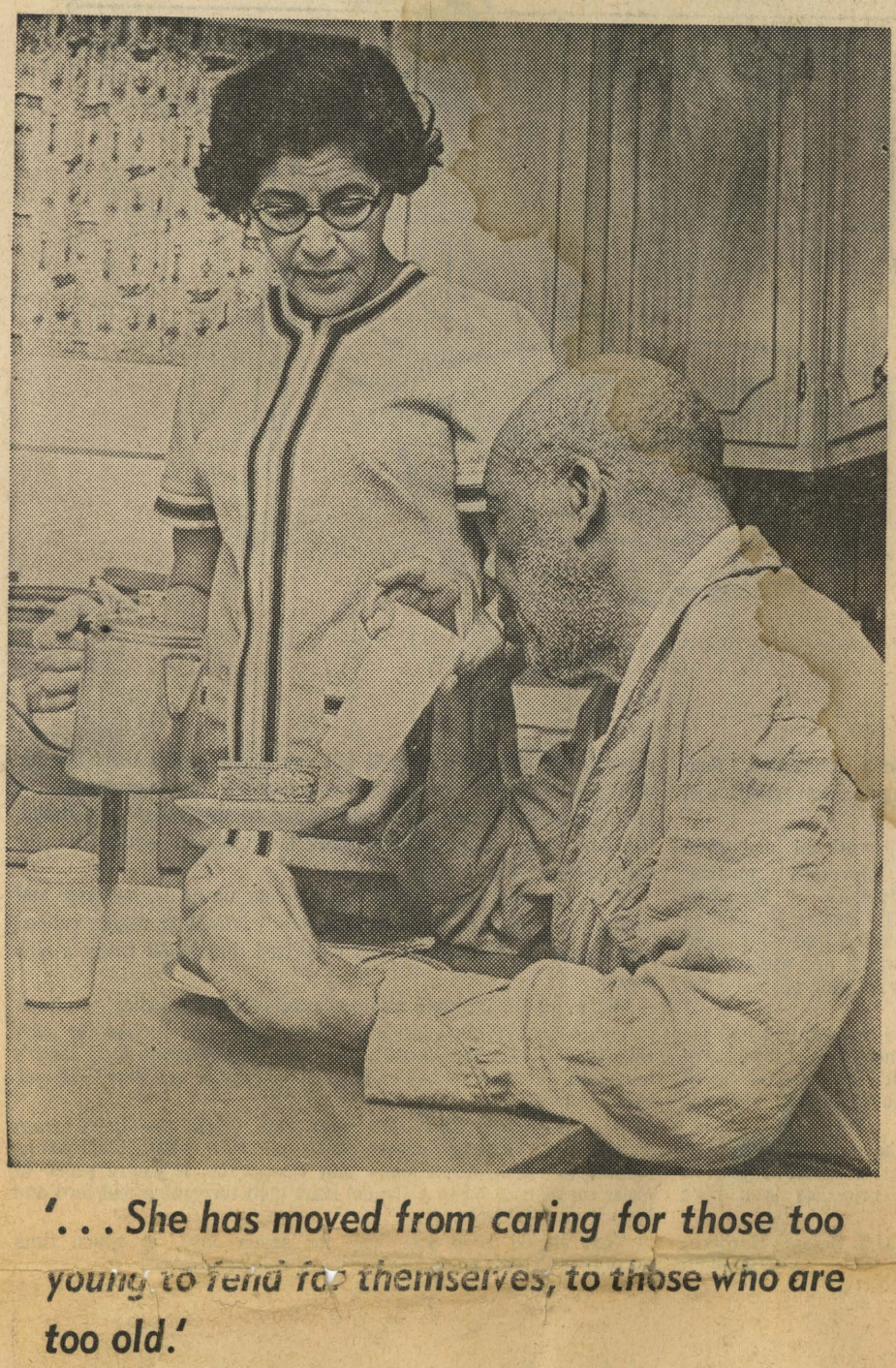
Durham Morning Herald

Features

For Foster Mother Ruth Traynham, Mingled Sadness And Satisfaction



'. . . She has moved from caring for those too young to fend for themselves, to those who are too old.'

By ED MARTIN
Herald Staff Writer

CEDAR GROVE — They took Ruth Traynham's last baby away Thanksgiving.

"I tried to build myself up for it. I knew they were coming," she says in a soft, sad voice.

"But when they took him, something in my heart just snapped. It just dropped."

The child had come to her when he was four days old, born out of wedlock. He was 17 months old when the Orange County Department of Social Services found him a permanent home.

To Mrs. Traynham, his bloodline made little difference.

She is a foster mother. You might call her an interim mother.

Since about 1952, she has had 80 children.

Not counting the five of her own.

"I guess the way I came to get interested was when the lady from Social Services just came up one day and said, 'I've got two children who need a foster home.'

"My husband was teaching out here then. I said I'd have to ask him. And, as with most things, he said, 'That's up to you.' "

The neat, white frame house on the side of N.C. 86 in rural Orange County became a depot for youngsters who had nowhere else to turn.

As she talks about her role as a temporary mother, one of her real daughters comes in.

The question of when the first two foster children came arises, and Mrs. Traynham and her daughter begin sifting through the years. They decide it was about 1952, based on the age of the daughter.

"I guess I was about 9 when I started sharing you," the real daughter says.

Mrs. Traynham laughs.

"They've always been more or less like me," she says of her own children. "They've always accepted the kids that came. There never was really much adjusting to do."

Now, Mrs. Traynham has nine grandchildren. She talks with motherly pride about the accomplishments of her own children, and about how she spoils her grandchildren.

She chuckles over the question of whether there were any spats between her own children and the stream of outside youngsters who poured through.

a Herald Profile...

"Oh yes," she says. "They were all healthy children."

Mrs. Traynham's foster children have come from all backgrounds. When they get to her house, though, the background makes little difference.

"Some are from broken homes, some are those whose parents are dead. Some come for medical purposes, maybe to be closer to hospitals." But they share a trait that tempers the hearts of all mothers: sooner or later, they leave. Sometimes their families get things worked out and go back together. Some are adopted.

Then, Ruth Traynham's cycle begins again.

Under regulations of the Department of Social Services, she is not supposed to have more than four children at once. But emergencies come up. At one point, she had nine for about two weeks. Five were from one family.

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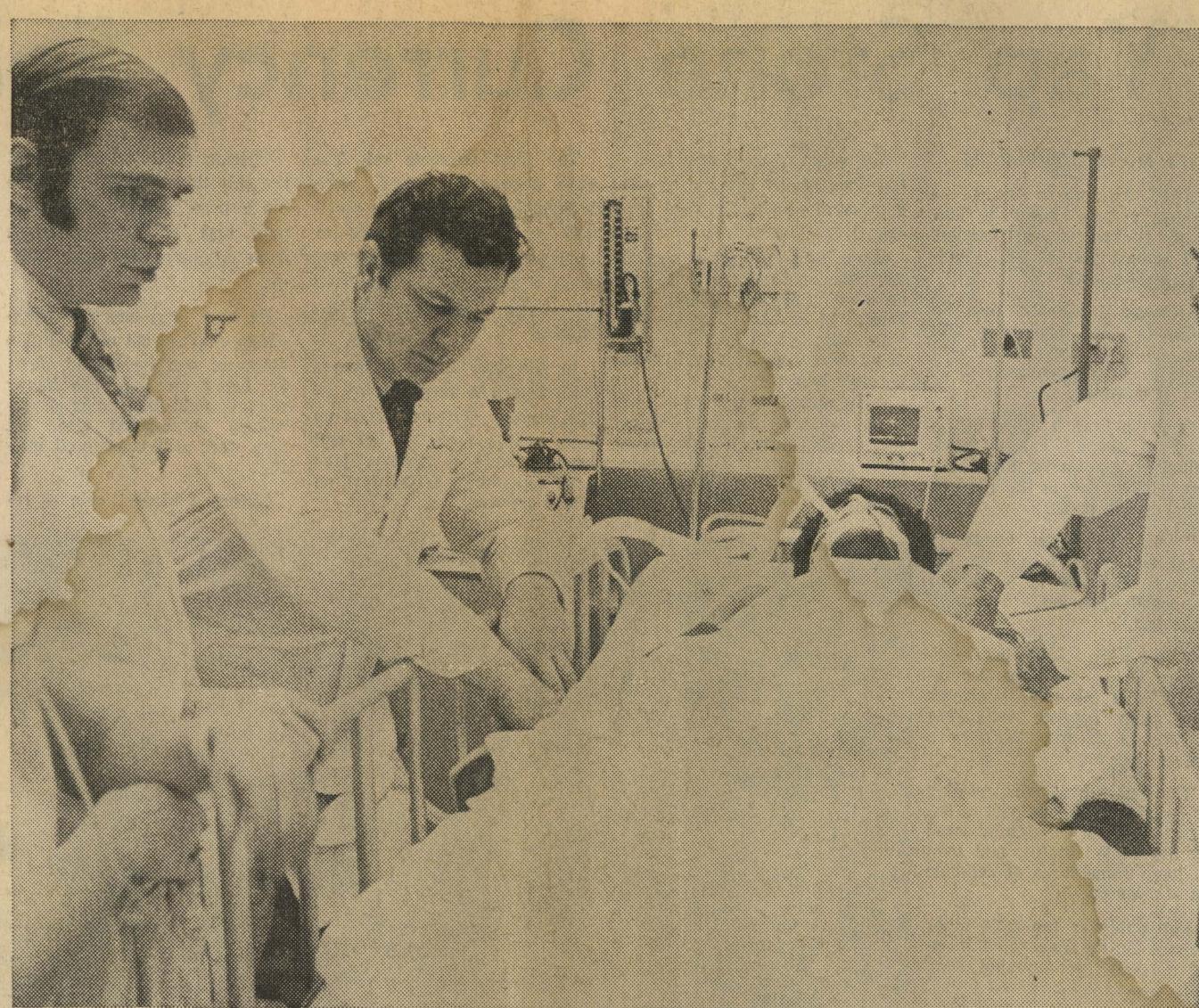
RIGHT: *When seconds may mean a human life, the trauma care unit of Cook County Hospital, Chicago, is equipped to save those seconds. The trauma care system makes special treatment available to accident victims, and is credited with having cut the Illinois auto accident mortality rate by about eight per cent. The doctors are, from left, Robert Lowe, David R. Boyd and Sakharam Mahurkan.*

TRAUMA CARE PITS A TEAM AGAINST TIME

By C. G. McDANIEL

CHICAGO (AP) — Seventeen-year-old Susan Turner is working part time as a waitress and finishing high school.

There, a doctor immediately noticed blood in her ear. This indicated bleeding inside the head, an injury too severe to be treated at the local center.



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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1973

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(Staff Photos by Harold Moore)

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Under regulations of the Department of Social Services, she is not supposed to have more than four children at once. But emergencies come up. At one point, she had nine for about two weeks. Five were from one family.

Now, she speaks most often of the first two, Virginia and John. They were 11 and 4, respectively, when they came to her.

"She's married now and lives in Graham," Mrs. Traynham says of Virginia. John, she thinks, is in New York.

Later, she adds: "The girl, Virginia — I kept one of her kids for 2½ years."

She hears from Virginia occasionally. Some of her other foster children, including a New York woman who, she says, insists "I'm not your foster child — I'm your daughter," keep in touch.

But most are buried in their own lives, too much so to call, or maybe write once in awhile.

"I'd just like to know where they are, and if they're doing all right."

For 13 years, Mrs. Traynham's husband has worked away from home. He used to teach at Cedar Grove School, next door to the Traynham home, but the school has been closed for years.

Mrs. Traynham drove a bus "the whole time the school was open," and now she has found another use for the school. She teaches adult sewing classes there at night, and takes in sewing at her home.

With her husband away from home except for weekends, and only a minimal stipend from Social Services to maintain the foster children, Mrs. Traynham has borne much of the foster parent role herself.

She takes pride in her garden. "I do a lot of canning and preserving." And she has often sewn and bought clothes for the foster children.

So, among other things, they would look nice when she carted them down the road to Mt. Zion AME Church on Sunday morning.

Her role has been one of mingled sadness and satisfaction.

Born in Person County, she moved to Cedar Grove in 1948. In 1957, her father became an invalid. He died a year later, and she took over the family. Her mother still lives with her.

After a life of mothering youngsters, she has moved from caring for those too young to fend for themselves, to those who are too old.

Her two wards now are in their 80s. One is an uncle. "I took him because his wife wasn't able to look after him anymore." The other is a woman whose daughter was not satisfied with her care in a rest home.

"You ask if I just care for children," she says rhetorically. "I guess I just care for people."

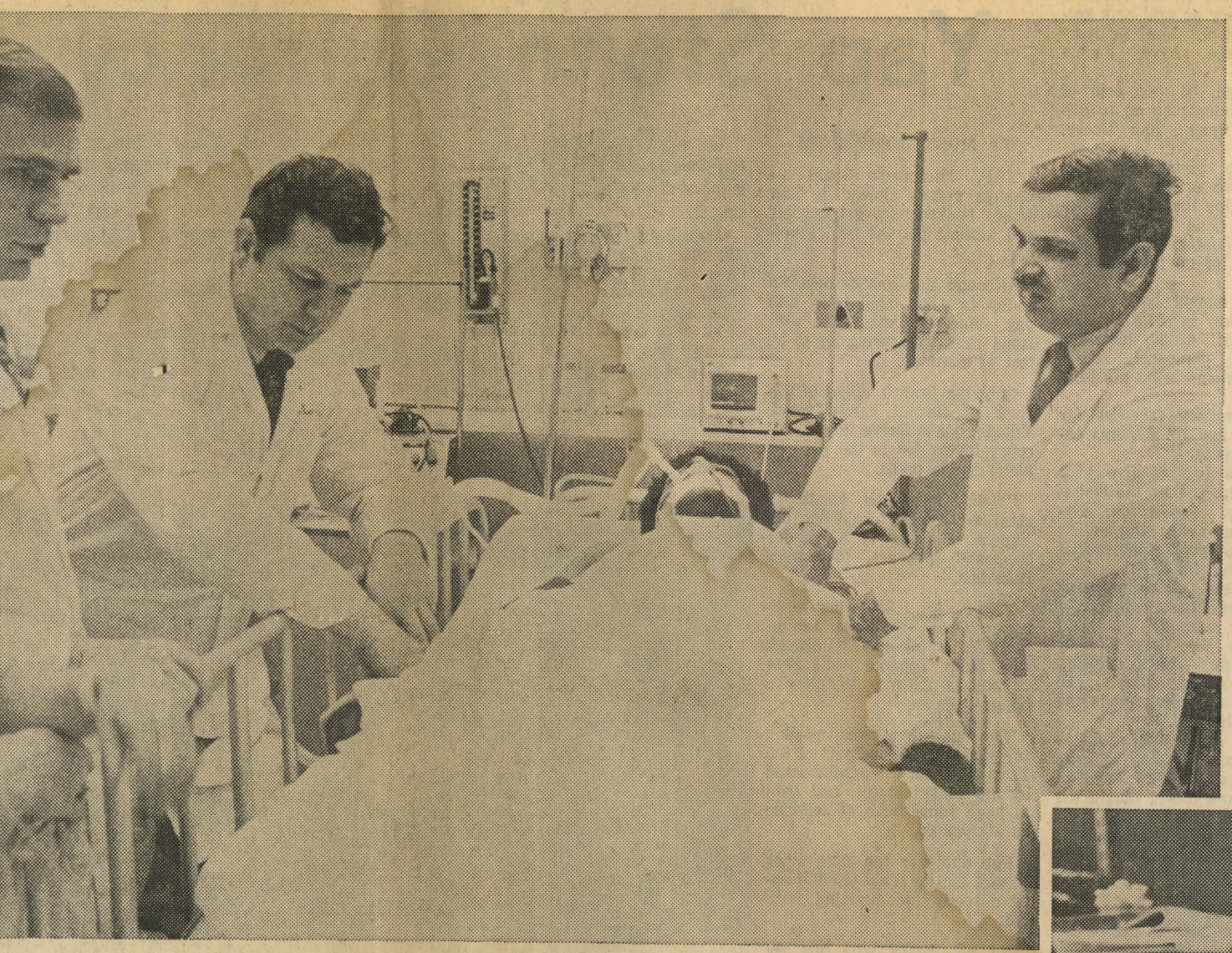
Each time the Department of Social Services came to claim a child, Mrs. Traynham winced. Now she evades the question of whether she will take in more children.

"The children think it's time for me to think about myself some," she says.

"I have been hurt so many times with the children coming and going. And each time, I say I won't do it any more."

She smiles.

And you don't really believe she won't do it any more.



BELOW: *For Susan Turner, 17, of Atlanta, Ill., there is little evidence of the auto accident that almost took her life two years ago. Doctors say she probably would have died of the head injuries she received without the trauma care system which enabled her to be rushed to a hospital where a neurosurgeon was waiting to operate immediately.*