

Maybe they were afraid they'd harm their own children.

Maybe they were afraid of just seeing them.

Vicki would go home at night after being denounced and look at herself to see what kind of ogre she was. She is only a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman from Bayside, a young mother of three children, one of whom is retarded. All of it came back to her now and she wept and thought that eventually, maybe, when they had got used to them, when they'd come to the neighborhood open house in the summer, then maybe the neighbors would see they were not monsters.

In the house now, Adam was given a soft, rubber football.

Karen got a doll. "Thank you," she said, clearly. Upstairs, Adam picked his own bed in a room with bright blue walls and ceiling wallpaper decorated with airplanes. They gave him a large Mickey Mouse doll. Karen's room had bright green walls and white ceiling, green and white furniture and green rug.

Tom DeFaio had told his daughter that they would live on weekends with these children. "These are 'our' new children. They're slow, and most of them won't know how to talk."

"Well," said 4-year-old Ginger, "I'll teach them."

Tom and his wife saw no problem with having their own children here. Tom's younger sister had been retarded and had died at 23. Her experience showed him how little there was for retarded children in this life. So he had gone into child-care work.

They're Not Monsters

When Adam and Karen went to sleep, it was probably the first time in their lives they slept alone in their own rooms. Mickey Mouse sat on Adam's dresser while planes flew on his ceiling.

Karen asked to be tucked in three times she liked it so much, liked the idea of someone kissing her goodnight.

Their first full day in their new home saw them do things they had never done before:

Karen set the table.

Karen made Kool-aid.

Adam learned to dig with a hoe and plant vegetables.

They strummed a guitar and with child-care workers sang "Old MacDonald Had a Farm": "On this farm they had a..."

"Duk," Adam called.

"That's right, Adam. A duck," said Tom.

"Bir," said Adam, strumming the guitar awkwardly.

"Right. They had a bird, too."

Tom and Adam took a walk to Northern Blvd. Adam never walked on a street before. He bought candy for the first time.

A woman and her daughter stopped them. "Is this our new neighbor?" She put her arms on Adam's small shoulders. "Welcome to the neighborhood," she said. Tom fought back tears. "We're so happy to have you and hope you enjoy it here."

Adam smiled, as if he understood kindness.