

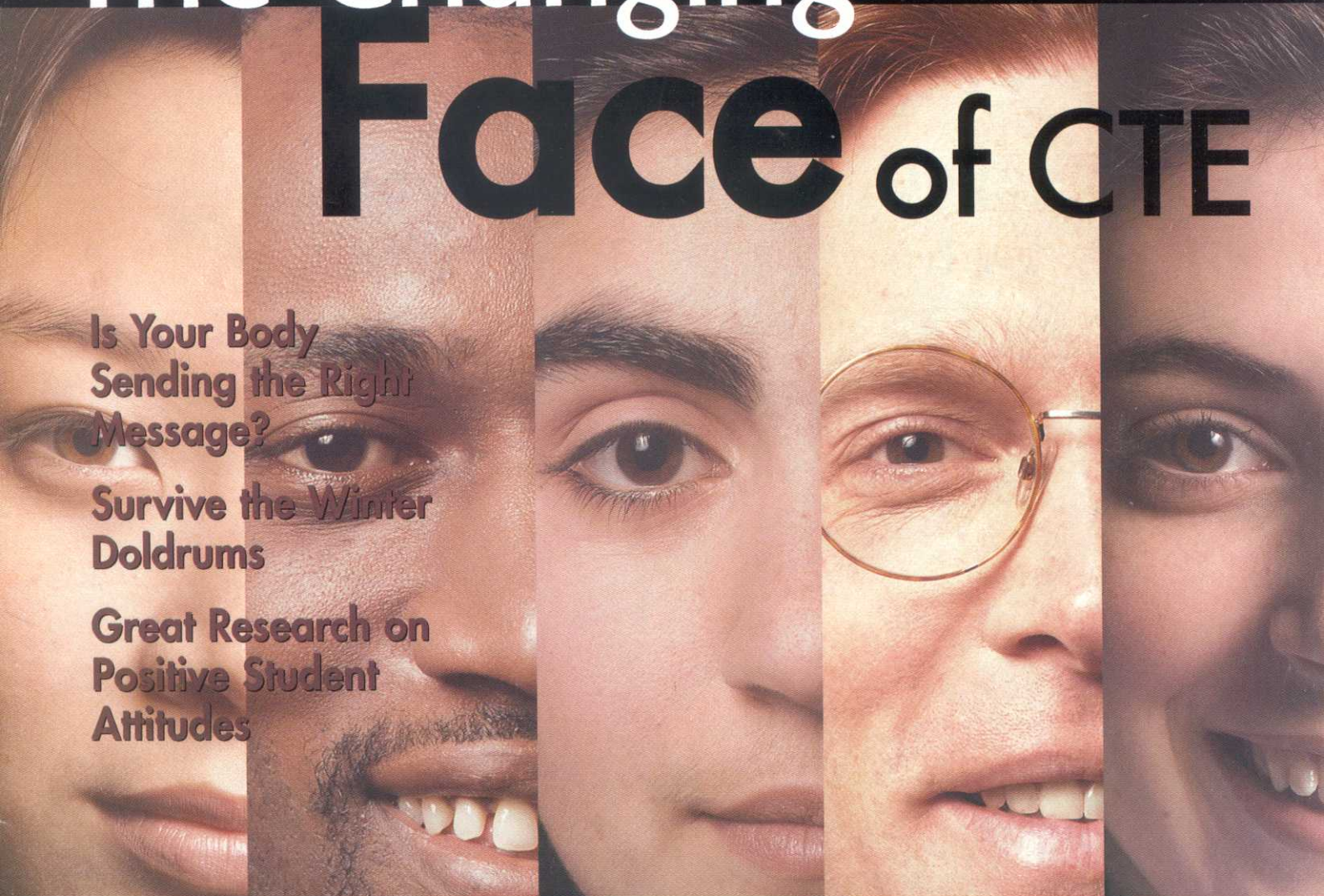
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Baby Birds' Solo Flight

By Barbara Alexandrow

We were all seated around a conference table with distinguished doctors, health care professionals and board members from Palm Healthcare Foundation. I looked over at our two senior students, Joanne and Emmanuel, from our medical program at Lake Worth High School. They were very proper and a little frightened, but their professional blue scrubs were impeccable, and I was so proud—like a mother bird with her baby birds, their feathers preened and ready for their first solo flight into the big, wide, wonderful world!

The students were on the agenda to speak about the Allied Health Career Academy and the proposed grant and scholarships that were being requested. I asked Joanne to speak first.

She was very articulate saying, "I am a senior and am now attending Keiser College for Medical Assisting. I speak four languages: French, English, Spanish and Creole. All that I have ever wanted to be was a nurse in order to help others, especially my own people. I come from a home, and we have very little extra money to attend any special programs.

"I have been so fortunate, because Mrs. Alexandrow started the Allied Health Career Academy three years ago, and I was selected to become a student in the medical program because I was only in the United States three years. My teacher, Mrs. Smith, guided me for

three years to take advantage of my opportunity, and, with Palm Healthcare's scholarship of \$500, I am learning how to draw blood and master procedures that a medical assistant would perform in a physician's office. I just want to thank you all on this board for the privilege you have allowed me. When I graduate in June, I will continue at Keiser and graduate in January as a medical assistant. Then I will be able to get a job and have the necessary money to continue my studies."

Of course, I looked like I was just about to burst with all my feathers so fluffed up! Then I looked at Emmanuel and asked him to relate his story.

Emmanuel started calmly and stated, "My mom works very hard at the Hyatt as a maid. She makes minimum wages and is very proud of me. I was only in the country one year when Mrs. Alexandrow admitted me to the academy. I was very limited in English but of course spoke Creole and French. I want to become a nurse also, so I signed up for emergency medical technician in my senior year so that I could learn the trauma skills that are so necessary. My expenses of \$600 and my national test of over \$150 were out of the question for my mom. Palm Healthcare came to my rescue, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to become an EMT."

I looked to Emmanuel, and I said to him "What are your friends doing now?"

He looked at the board members and replied, "One of my friends is in jail; the other has dropped out of school. I know if it weren't for Mrs. Smith and this program that I could have gone the same way. I passed my FCAT and will graduate in June. In July I will take my national EMT test. I am so thankful, and I want you to know that I owe it all to you!"

My tear glands were about ready to overflow, but I was still in control. Mother birds know that they have to let go sometime, but it still hurts. I knew that my two baby birds would be fine. They were in control, and they, the board and I knew it. That day the board members had a glimpse of success in the making. They knew their money was well spent. They knew that they had removed an obvious barrier from underprivileged students who would otherwise have been set up for failure.

The meeting closed that day on a high note. We knew that we had changed lives for the good, but even more important, we all walked away knowing that those two young people had indeed changed our lives forever. **I**

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