

Woman's recovery from brain injury is chronicled as a guide for others

By **TAMMY WELLS**

Staff Writer

SACO — Those of religious faith may be familiar with the expression "sin of omission." Some might know it as a pang of conscience that comes with knowing you could have done something to benefit others, but didn't.

Earlene "Kitty" Ahlquist Chadbourne said she thought about sins of omission when her son, Iraq war veteran Adam Cole, asked her to write about her experiences with traumatic brain injury to help veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

So she gathered her journals and her thoughts and began to write.

Chadbourne's "Parenting Myself: Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injury," was published in August by Custom Communications of Biddeford. It chronicles her 10-year journey back after a brain injury that had her relearning who some of her close family members were, how to cook a meal, how to knit and how to cope with depression borne of pain and fear. The book lists resources and terminology for those coping with traumatic brain injury and their caregivers.

"Parenting Myself" tells the story of a 40-year-old woman who set out on her bicycle to ride to a nearby cousin's house one August day in

1990 but never arrived, ending up instead at Maine Medical Center with severe head trauma.

"More and more is coming out about head injuries," said Chadbourne in the history room at Dyer Library where she works as an archivist. "It is a hidden damage. When my physical scars began to heal and I began to speak, people assumed because I could read I should be able to do all I had done."

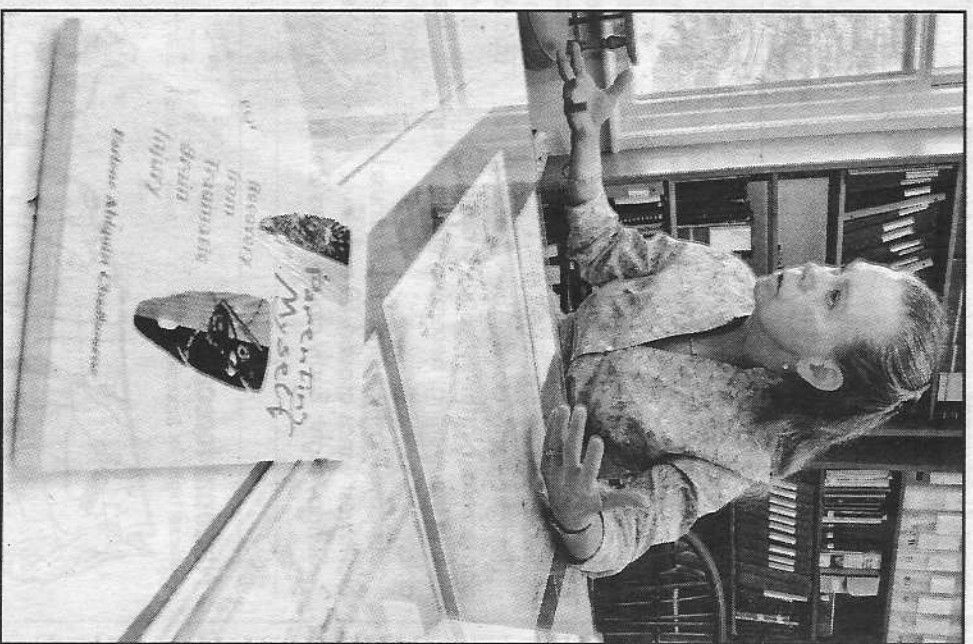
Chadbourne could read, but not comprehend. That came later.

She said her book is written like a mystery because "living through it was a mystery."

Chadbourne was involved in two bicycle accidents that day, the first, she said, believed to be a hit-and-run to which there were no witnesses. Some hours after that crash, she gained consciousness, climbed back on her bike and then tumbled headlong over the handlebars going down a hill. She landed on her head. A couple in a car saw the crash and one of them, a nurse, came to her aid.

Chadbourne has no memory of either crash — she said she remembers intending to go out on her bicycle that day, but not what later transpired.

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Local author Earlene "Kitty" Ahlquist Chadbourne speaks about her new book Wednesday at the Dyer Library in Saco.

JEFF LASSE/ Journal Tribune

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Sen. Olympia Snowe says she is still hoping to contribute to health care reform.

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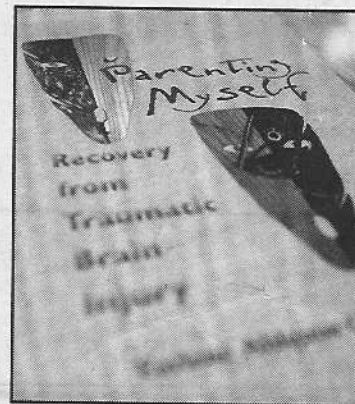
A Sunni leader linked to Saddam Hussein has been barred from Iraq's election.

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WEATHER



Earlene "Kitty" Ahlquist Chadbourne opens to a page of her new book Wednesday at Dyer Library in Saco. She was inspired to write the book after a traumatic brain injury forced her to re-learn many simple tasks.

JEFF LAGASSE/Journal Tribune

Book

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Her brain injury included severe swelling, concussion in the right front temple area causing prefrontal lobe lesions, damage to the frontal lobe and motor cortex on the left side of the brain, a skull fracture and the severing of a nerve that affected her right ear.

In the hospital, she recognized Ted Chadbourne — a fifth cousin she'd met some years earlier. But in the early days of her hospitalization, she didn't recognize him as the man she had married 18 months previously. She had no memory of daily hospital visits by her sons Guy and Adam Cote.

Always an enthusiastic cook who prepared dishes from her own handwritten recipes, Chadbourne assembled ingredients for a meal several days after she was released from the hospital and quickly realized that she didn't know what to do with them. An aunt and her grandmother came to her aid.

In the early 1990s, there were few local resources for those with traumatic brain

injury. Chadbourne depended on her medical team at Maine Medical Center and Dr. Judith Shedd, her osteopathic physician.

"She worked with me every week," said Chadbourne. "Dr. Shedd said, 'God gave you a body that wants to heal, we are going to create an environment where healing can take place. We don't know how far that will take us.'"

Besides learning things she once took for granted — how to cook and how to knit — she said she learned to be more contemplative.

"I had to find my place in the family when I couldn't do things I had been able to do," she said.

Chadbourne also found out there were some things she didn't need to relearn — like Latin, and calculus. One thing that helped, she recalled Wednesday, was joining the writer's group at Dyer Library and writing her journal.

Close to her heart is her desire that her journey back from traumatic brain injury may provide help to veterans returning from Iraq and

Afghanistan.

"TBI is far more of a big issue than first imagined," she said.

The Associated Press reports that the number of U.S. troops who have suffered wartime brain injuries may be as high as 360,000 according to a private study, or as low as 180,000. While many heal without treatment, an estimated 45,000 to 90,000 troops have suffered more severe and lasting symptoms, Brig. Gen. Loree Sutton, the head of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury told the AP in March.

Adam Cote, who wrote the preface to his mother's book, was a platoon leader with the 133rd Engineering Battalion in Iraq earlier this decade.

"My year serving in Iraq brought my mother's situation into focus as I saw first hand the damage done to my fellow U.S. service members from improvised explosive devices and other weapons used to target them," Cote wrote. "I realized those families were going to have to deal with the same issues my family faced so many

years ago ... So I asked her to share her story."

These days, Chadbourne continues her work as an historian and author of historical works, and is active in Maine and nationally with the Daughters of the American Revolution. She's a member of Saco Bay Rotary and is available to speak about her book and her experiences at libraries and other venues. She'll be speaking at a mental health conference for returning veterans sponsored by the Maine National Guard in Portland in April.

Chadbourne, who has roots in Sanford and Saco, now lives in Cumberland with her husband Ted.

On Monday, Chadbourne will be reading from her book at a 6:30 p.m. presentation at Springvale Public Library.

In the preface, Cote notes that recovery from traumatic brain injury is a job for a marathon runner, not a sprinter.

His mother concurs.

"You have to be willing to rework your dreams and be open to more dreams," she said.

— Staff Writer Tammy Wells
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