

enrolled me in a world of battle, a world I knew nothing about. This was especially true of our educational system.

## **THE FIRST YEARS OF SCHOOL**

People's attitudes proved to be one of the greatest barriers. People felt that Mandy had to master an array of skills before she could join the lives of neighbours, friends and schoolmates. I was told that people needed time to get "ready", and attitudes needed to "change" before she could be accepted into their schools. In other words, positive attitudes of the community and of the teachers were requisite for Mandy to attend school.

But I believed that Mandy could not wait for people's attitudes to change. I felt she belonged in the regular school system with her peers.

When Mandy was four years old, our family was transferred to Ottawa, Ontario. I enrolled Mandy in a nursery school for special needs children. I grappled with my conscience at doing this, and, after monitoring Mandy's progress for several months, I gave in to the gnawing feeling that she was in the wrong place. How was she going to make friends in her neighbourhood and learn to cope with everyday situations if she was segregated from other children?

After making many inquiries, I arranged for Mandy to attend a local daycare centre that had set aside three seats in their program for children with mental handicaps. Mandy spent an exciting year there. As she blossomed we saw many changes in her.

At the end of this year, much to our disappointment, Mandy was denied access to the junior kindergarten program in the same school as the daycare centre. The teacher did not feel she could handle a child with a handicap in her classroom.

This threw me into indecision. Did Mandy really deserve the same things other children took for granted? Was I being realistic? I wondered if I should I just give up — which would