

= Brother 's Little Helper =

" Brother 's Little Helper " is the second episode of The Simpsons ' 11th season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on October 3 , 1999 . In the episode , Bart floods the school gymnasium , which prompts the school 's principal Seymour Skinner to diagnose Bart with ADHD . Bart is prescribed a psychostimulant drug called Focusyn (a parody of Ritalin) , and initially starts paying more attention to his studies . After a while however , Bart starts turning psychotic and is convinced that Major League Baseball is watching over the people of Springfield .

The episode was directed by director Mark Kirkland and was the first episode staff writer George Meyer received a sole writing credit for since the season 5 episode " Bart 's Inner Child " . Meyer , who was facing some psychological difficulties while writing the episode , felt so dissatisfied with the episode 's first draft that he turned it in with a pseudonym . The episode satirizes the perceived misdiagnosis of behavioral disorders in children , which was a controversial topic at the time the episode was written . The episode 's title is a parody of The Rolling Stones song " Mother 's Little Helper " , which was also written on the topic of psychological medication .

The episode features former Major League Baseball player Mark McGwire as himself . Finishing in 51st place , ratings for " Brother 's Little Helper " were considered disappointing by Deseret News , although the episode became the most watched program on the network that night . Following its broadcast , the episode was positively received by critics . In response to the episode , five months after the episode originally aired , United States president Bill Clinton held the first ever White House conference on Mental Health .

= = Plot = =

Principal Skinner introduces a fire safety skit to the students . When Ned Flanders catches on fire , the fire department tries to extinguish him by rolling . This only spreads the flames further , and when they attempt to use the fire hose to put it out , they discover Bart has used it to flood the school gymnasium . Eventually a tidal wave of water bursts from the gym , drenching the school yard and putting out Flanders . Skinner has Homer and Marge come to the school , where they learn Bart has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) . Principal Skinner tells Marge and Homer that Bart must take a radical , untested new behavioral medicine called Focusyn or Skinner will have to expel him .

After several failed attempts by Homer (including naming several celebrities on drugs , such as Mötley Crüe 's Tommy Lee , sitcom actress Brett Butler , and actor / comedian Andy Dick , and offering Bart taffy laced with several Focusyn pills sticking out) , Marge convinces Bart to take the medication . His behavior immediately improves . He begins paying attention in school and being respectful to his parents (even tutoring a Navajo boy in his spare time) . However , Bart begins to suffer from drug psychosis and he starts to develop Paranoia , claiming that Major League Baseball is spying on the town using satellites . The doctors recommend that Bart go off Focusyn , but he refuses . Before anyone can stop him , he swallows several handfuls of Focusyn and runs away .

Bart wanders onto a U.S. Army base and manages to hijack a tank . He cuts a swath of destruction through the town , until he eventually stops at the school . There , he points the tank 's cannon into the sky and shoots down a Major League Baseball satellite ; inside are detailed documents on everybody 's behaviors . Mark McGwire appears , but instead of explaining the bizarre situation , he distracts the townspeople by asking ? Do you want to know the terrifying truth , or do you want to see me sock a few dingers ? ? (the latter choice being selected by everybody present) ; he accommodates them , and then hides the evidence under his cap . Marge takes Bart off Focusyn for good and puts him back on " hugs , fresh air , and good old @-@ fashioned Ritalin " . Major League Baseball , however , is still able to spy on the Simpson family due to an autographed bat McGwire gave Bart , with which he hit his 70th home run of the 1998 Major League Baseball season , which contains equipment that notes down every detail of the Simpsons ' house at 742 Evergreen Terrace .

= = Production = =

" Brother 's Little Helper " , which was originally called " Bart a Go Go " , was written by staff writer George Meyer and directed by director Mark Kirkland . It was first broadcast on the Fox network in the United States on October 3 , 1999 . After the season 5 episode " Bart 's Inner Child " , Meyer got " a little burned out on writing scripts " , so he wrote " Brother 's Little Helper " in order to " try [his] hand again " . While writing the episode , Meyer was going through " some psychological problems " and found the episode very difficult to write . He was initially so dissatisfied with the first draft that he turned it in with a pseudonym ; Vance Jericho . Co @-@ producer Tim Long jokingly commented that the script was " literally moist with contempt " but went on to say that it was in fact " an amazing draft " . The writers discussed what sort of rampage Bart would go on during the second act , and writer Matt Selman suggested that Bart obtain a tank . In the DVD audio commentary for the episode , Selman stated that he got the idea from watching a news report about " a guy " who had died while " [going] nuts with a tank " .

To show the side effects Focusyn had on Bart , the animators made slight changes to his face as the episode progressed . It is first seen in the scene where Bart is reading " The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Pre @-@ teens " : a cheek line is added just under his eyes to suggest that he is starting to change . In another scene , Bart can be seen speed reading and later on , the animators drew him with " mini @-@ pupils " . The staff discussed whether Bart 's pupils would be bigger or smaller than normal while he is on the drug . The writers settled on smaller pupils and , according to Kirkland , " several model sheets were going back and forth over the fax machines " until the staff were satisfied with the size of Bart 's pupils while influenced by the drug . In fact , psychostimulants used to treat ADHD are more likely cause pupils to become bigger (dilated) .

In the scene where he escapes the laboratory , Bart can be seen swallowing a handful of pills on his way out . Originally , Bart was supposed to " upend " an entire jar of Focusyn , but , according to Meyer , the censors wouldn 't allow it . The scientists who prescribe Focusyn to Bart are based on one of The Simpsons ' staff members and his wife . They were voiced by Hank Azaria and Tress MacNeille , respectively . Azaria also voiced Sir Widebottom , one of the clowns in Krusty 's car , as well as one of the marine soldiers . Former Major League Baseball player Mark McGwire guest starred as himself in the episode . Mike Scully , an executive producer and the show runner for the episode , commented that McGwire was " probably the biggest man [he 'd] ever seen " and that he " did a great job for [them] " .

= = Themes = =

According to Genevieve Koski , Josh Modell , Noel Murray , Sean O 'Neal , Kyle Ryan , and Scott Tobias of The A.V Club , the ' 90s saw a " dramatic increase " in diagnoses of behavioral disorders , such as ADHD , in children , and debates over whether or not to medicate children with concentration difficulties were heated . Meyer , inspired by the debates , decided to write the episode to be about the subject . The episode criticizes how children with school issues are being misdiagnosed as having ADHD , as well as the prescription of psychostimulants to children in general . This in particular is shown in a scene in the Springfield Elementary schoolyard . In the scene , it is revealed that the general populace of the school is medicated for various misdiagnosed behavior disorders . Meyer himself was not entirely sure about his stance on the issue , however . He stated that " for all I know , the drugs help [the children] and help the world . " However , he went on to say that " I just have a feeling they 're gonna be a disaster . Down the line . "

= = Cultural references = =

Focusyn , the fictional psychoactive drug that is prominently featured throughout the episode , is based on the real @-@ life medicine Ritalin , which is used to treat disorders such as ADHD . Hosey the Bear , which can be seen in the beginning of the episode , is a reference to the United States Forest Service 's mascot Smokey Bear . After Bart has flooded the school gym , Skinner can be

seen wiping mud off his eyes in an homage to American actor Oliver Hardy . The sequence of Bart stealing an army tank and destroying half of Springfield under the influence of mind @-@ altering substances is likely a reference to Shawn Nelson , a man infamous for a similar , albeit serious , incident . A scene in the episode shows Marge standing in front of the tank Bart has stolen . The scene is a reference to Tank Man , the anonymous man who stood in the way of a column of tanks the morning after the Chinese military forcibly removed pro @-@ democracy protesters from Beijing 's Tiananmen Square .

Other things referenced include the film Showgirls (1995) , which Homer and Marge go to see . Homer says that , since taking Focusyn , Bart has gone " from Goofus to Gallant " , a reference to the characters Goofus and Gallant from the children 's magazine Highlights . When Lou sketches Bart based on Homer and Marge 's description he ends up drawing Dennis from the comic strip Dennis the Menace . A shirt at the military base Fort Fragg reads " I Went to the Persian Gulf and All I Got Was This Lousy Syndrome " , a reference to Gulf War syndrome .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast on October 3 , 1999 , " Brother 's Little Helper " finished at no . 51 in the ratings , according to Nielsen Media Research , making it the most watched television program on Fox that night . Despite being the most watched program of the network , the ratings were considered disappointing by the Deseret News . On October 7 , 2008 , the episode was released as part of The Simpsons - The Complete Eleventh Season DVD box set . Mike Scully , George Meyer , Mark Kirkland , Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , Matt Selmán and Tim Long participated in the DVD audio commentary of the episode .

Following its broadcast , " Brother 's Little Helper " received positive reviews from critics . About nine years after its original broadcast , Robert Canning of IGN posted a " flashback review " of " Brother 's Little Helper " . Canning , calling the episode " funny " and " a standout episode in this later season , " was particularly fond of the episode 's opening . However , he was less impressed with the third act of the episode , calling it " lackluster . " He felt that the part involving Mark McGwire was " a silly cop out " and that it wasn 't as funny as what was leading up to it . He also stated that he was put off by the writers wanting to come across a message . " It 's not that I necessarily disagreed with this sentiment , " Canning wrote , " but at the time , I didn 't think I needed to be taught a lesson while I watched The Simpsons . I still don 't . " He did , however , " love " the " tag back " to the volunteer fire department seen in the beginning of the episode , and " the fact that they can 't find how to fight a satellite fire in their handbook . "

In his review of The Simpsons - The Complete Eleventh Season , Brian Tallerico of The Deadbolt considered " Brother 's Little Helper " to be one of the season 's best episodes . Colin Jacobsson of DVD Movie Guide was favorable as well , calling the episode " pretty good " and that it " provides some good laughs . " He especially liked seeing Bart well @-@ behaved . He also appreciated the episode 's message , writing that " the show offers a clever spotlight on [the] issue . " He did , however , dislike the characterization of Bart. He wrote that Bart is normally " not particularly overactive or distractible , " and that the writers " trie [d] to make [Bart] seem more hyper than normal . " He concluded by saying that " Bart 's a behavior problem but not ADHD . "

Five months after the episode aired , Bill Clinton , who served as president of the United States at the time , held the first ever White House conference on Mental Health . Scripps Howard News Service columnist Deroy Murdock mentioned the timeliness of the conference in connection with the episode as being an instance of The Simpsons " clairvoyantly predict [ing] the news . " In 2007 , the fictional word " exorcism tongs " appeared in Cracked.com 's list " From Cromulent to Craptacular : The Top 12 Simpsons Created Words " , ranking in at number 10 . The word is used in a scene in which Homer eats a mixture of taffy and Focusyn , which puts him in a " mildly hallucinogenic state . " Seeing this , Todd Flanders asks his father , Ned , " Does Mr. Simpson have a demon , daddy ? " To which Ned replies , " Looks like it . Run and get daddy 's exorcism tongs . " About the word , Mark Peters and Daniel O ' Brien of Cracked.com wrote " We 'd be lying if we said we didn 't go out to every Christian @-@ themed general store in the country hoping to acquire our

very own set of exorcism tongs the day this episode aired . "