

SPECIAL PARENTS, SPECIAL KIDS



If selflessness is a main requirement for parenthood, Camille and Michael Gerald are surely qualified. Since 1986, the suburban Miami couple has taken 28 children with special needs

into their home. They have adopted 11 of the youngsters and are in the process of adopting the other 17.

Given up by their birth parents, the children, the majority of whom have Down syndrome, come from as far away as Peru. For some, the Geraldis' house is the only home they have ever known outside of a hospital; others have spent their whole lives in foster care.

The Geraldis, who also have two biological daughters, raise the children in a bustling three-house complex, with the help of five full-time assistants. Michael, a pediatrician, and Camille, a nurse, give the children all the medical attention they'd get in a hospital,

plus healthy doses of unconditional love.

It's that love that enables the couple to see past the many challenges of raising so many special-needs kids (they've already seen three of the children die) and focus on the happy times, such as watching a child learn to use a walker or to feed himself.

"Sometimes when we take a step forward, we take five back," concedes Camille, who began working with disabled children as a volunteer when she was 15. "But the important part is, it's a step."

To support the family, the Geraldis supplement their own resources with funds from Up With Down Syndrome, a national nonprofit organization that Camille founded in 1987. Camille acknowledges that there's little money or time for luxuries, but, she says, both she and



The Geraldis, a family with heart.

Michael are happy to sacrifice creature comforts for the good of the kids. "You have to do what you love to do," she says. "And we're doing exactly that." **SHELLY REESE**

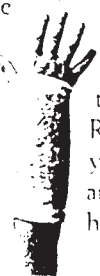
All-New Casts

Wanna sign it? Commissioning friends John Hancocks used to be the only way for kids to brighten up an otherwise dull white cast. Now, the plaster badges of courage come in splashy colors and wild designs—from pictures of soccer players and skiers to drawings of dogs, cats, and dinosaurs. Some even feature sports-team logos and, yes, those sewer-dwelling friends of kids everywhere: the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

The colorful casts, which are made from a preprinted fiberglass mesh, aren't just more fun for kids to show off—they

have practical benefits, too. According to Mason Solosabal, a casting specialist at Children's Hospital in Seattle, the casts help stop newly injured kids' tears and motivate even the wildest after-school warriors to treat their immobilized limbs more carefully. These days, most kids

Solosabal treats choose the flashy casts. If Jessica Starck is typical, it's not hard to understand the designer bandages' appeal. Reports the Chula Vista, California, nine-year-old, who recently sported a bright green-and-yellow model: "All my friends wanted to have broken legs, too." **GLENDIA WHEELER**



Daycare Grades

Paying childcare bills is taxing enough on a family's finances. Now comes word that states don't do much to ease that burden where tax breaks are concerned. The nonprofit National Women's Law Center graded each state on how substantial or skimpy its childcare tax breaks are. Only Minnesota earned an A grade for providing generous tax credits, among other benefits, to low-income families. Seventeen states received Fs for failing to provide any credits or refunds. The report card:

- A-** Minnesota
- B+** Hawaii
- B-** Iowa, Oregon
- C** Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio
- D** Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia
- F** Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin

CHRISTINE HUMPHREYS

States without grades either have no personal income tax or provide only indirect childcare benefits.