

Monday

May 31, 1999

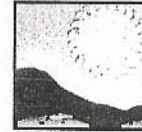
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Antelope Valley Press

TODAY'S OUTLOOK



Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid-70s. Lows tonight in the mid-40s.

WEATHER: B2

LOTTO: A2

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Obese teen hopes, prays for life-saving surgery

The temperature was in the high 80s and 17-year-old Calvin Morales was sitting in a back room of his house trying to stay cool. He's not looking forward to summer.

While many of us in the Antelope Valley can go to a nice air-conditioned theater or the Antelope Valley Mall to escape the heat, Morales can't. He rarely gets out of the house.

It's not that he doesn't want to. He wants to badly. It just that it's not easy for him — he weighs 610 pounds.

"It's hard to walk places," said Morales, a sheet loosely draped over him in lieu of clothes. "It's easier to sit than move."

"Yesterday it was like my leg was frozen and I couldn't really move it. I don't like being like this. It makes me mad that I can't go to the movies or walk to the store. But I just can't."

Morales lives in Lancaster with siblings and his father, Calvin Yates. He's hoping that his new insurance company, Blue Cross/Health Net, will cover the cost of a surgical procedure for obesity. Medi-Cal wouldn't.

"I've tried diets and exercises, but nothing really worked," Morales said. "I'm feeling like this is my last hope. That this is a lifesaving opera-

tion for me."

Morales' grandmother, China Boyd, enrolled her grandson in Blue Cross/Health Net and hopes that following a few medical tests next week, the insurance company will authorize the operation. The cost of the operation, hopefully to be performed by Los Angeles surgeon Dr. Mal Fobi, is about \$36,000.

"If it doesn't, I don't know what we'll do," said Boyd in a short phone interview last week. "Calvin's not getting any better, only worse. He needs the operation."

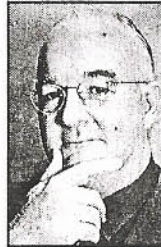
Calvin's condition forced him to drop out of "normal" classes at Desert Winds High School. He's on a home-study program.

"I went to Desert Winds instead of Antelope Valley (High School) because at AV the classrooms were farther away," Calvin said. "But it even got too hard at Desert Winds."

"Besides, I never really liked the other kids talking about me behind my back, making fun of me. I wanted to say I was just like them, only bigger. I didn't let them know it bothered me. I just kept it to myself."

Morales said he's been a "big kid" since even before junior high when he entered school with more than 300 pounds on his 5-foot, 9-inch frame.

High Desert Story



By Rich Breault

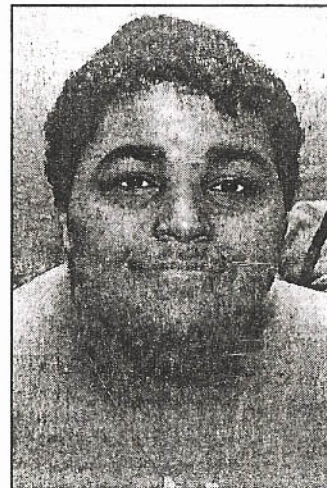
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"Everybody thinks I eat too much, but I just eat like a normal teenager," Morales said. "For lunch I'd have milk, a burger, chips and a cookie."

"I wasn't one of those obese guys that ate a loaf of bread and a pound of bacon for breakfast. I just ate like any hungry teenager would."

His father agreed.

"That's what's so strange. It's not like he ate himself to this weight," Yates said. "We've had tests run and they've all been negative for hypothyroid activity, high cholesterol



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and the like. He has some high blood pressure, but that's understandable."

Yates said there is some history of weight problems in the family. Morales' great-great-grandmother passed away from obesity and his mother and older sister are overweight.

"He's suffering unbelievably," Yates said of his son. "We don't talk too much about it. It's really painful

when we do. It hurts."

Yates was visibly affected when his son talked about his hardships and his condition.

"I don't get much sleep. I can't sleep on a bed. I always sleep sitting up. Otherwise it's hard to breathe," Morales said. "I'm afraid to lay down."

Morales added that he is also dreading the Valley's hot weather — that's when he sweats and he gets blisters, sores and rashes on many areas of his body because of the sweat and chafing.

"When I move, it hurts. It hurts like being burned," Morales said. "The more the sores and rashes hurt, the more I don't want to move. The more I don't move, the more blisters, sores and rashes I get."

"I've talked to people about the surgery and I know it's not going to be easy; that it's not a walk in the park," Morales said. "Even with the surgery, it's going to take at least a couple of years to get the weight off."

"Right now, I get really depressed and I cry all the time. I don't want to talk to anybody. I see my brother go outside to play football and I can't go with him. It hurts. I want it to stop. I know with the surgery it'll be better."