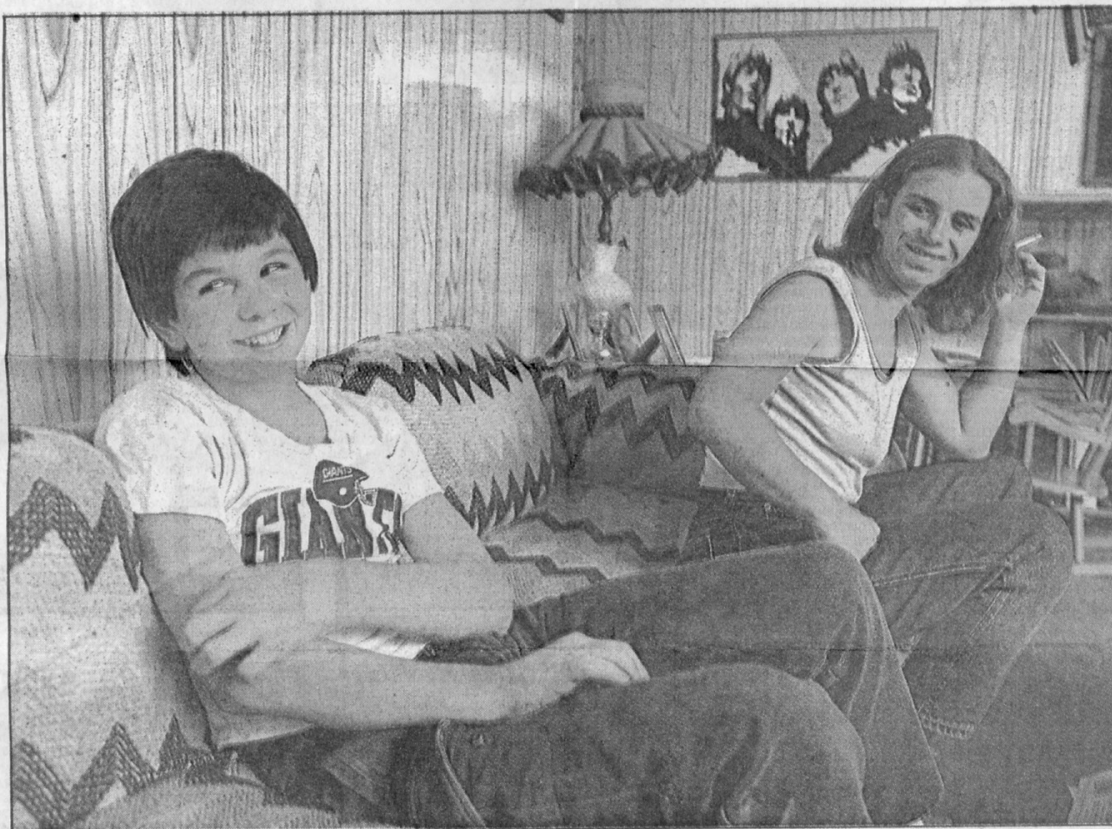




Peter Schwepker / THE PHOENIX GAZETTE
T.J. Mathias lies in a hospital bed last year after his accident as his mother, Kerry, tries to talk to the boy. T.J. would occasionally open his eyes.

Back from the Brink



Peter Schwepker / THE PHOENIX GAZETTE
A year later and fully recovered, T.J. Mathias clownes around with his mother, Kerry, in the living room of their home.

Wreck left 11-year-old youngster for dead, but T.J. fooled them all

By Barbara Yost
THE PHOENIX GAZETTE

TJ. Mathias climbed a tree last week. Boys all over the world climb trees, but for the past year, T.J. hasn't been like other boys.

T.J. is a cat with eight lives to go.

As the 11-year-old stepped on a lower branch, the limb gave way, and T.J. went tumbling to the ground. He let out a moan, and Mom rushed into the back yard, holding her hand to her mouth.

When she got there, T.J. was laughing. He had suffered a few scrapes, but most of his moaning was for show. Kerry Mathias had harsh words for her rambunctious son for sending her heart into her throat.

Mathias calls T.J. cocky. She also calls him a survivor — "my ass-kickin' kid."

his skull severed from his spine. With his bike in pieces beside him, T.J. lay gasping for breath.

It was a partly sunny, breezy Wednesday. The week before, T.J. had been suspended from riding the school bus for using bad language. His mother's car had been repossessed, so he was riding his bike the 2½ miles to Horizon Elementary School.

Kerry Mathias had just gotten home from the night shift at Dunkin' Donuts. Weary from a night's work, she fell into bed at 7 a.m. Tim Mathias Sr. was working at Ramsey Pest & Termite Control. Bobby Jackson, a family friend staying with the Mathiases, saw T.J. off to school.

At 8:30 a.m., the phone rang. It was Horizon calling to ask if T.J. had left for school. Mathias said he had. Was he riding his bike? Yes, he was.

