

For Hands and Feet, She Uses Courage

By THEODORE IRWIN



Vice President Richard M. Nixon awards President's Trophy to Dr. Carlsen, thus designating her Handicapped Person of the Year. The ceremony took place in Labor Department auditorium in Washington, D. C.

RECENTLY A 17-year-old boy, severely afflicted with cerebral palsy, unburdened his problems to his school superintendent, Dr. Anne Carlsen.

He dreaded a painful operation recommended by a specialist to relieve the tightness of his muscles. After ten minutes, the enveloping warmth and courage of the bright-eyed, sandy-haired woman proved irresistible.

"All right, I'll go ahead with the surgery," he said with a grin. Then, as he turned to go, he remarked, "You know, Dr. Anne, whenever I leave your office, I always feel bigger and stronger."

He barely glanced at Dr. Carlsen's arms. They are mere stumps above the elbows. Both her legs are artificial.

Dr. Anne Carlsen is an amazing five-foot-tall bundle of spirit and determination. Her life is built around the conviction that a child who is injured at birth, contracts a disabling disease, or has a crippling accident, need not forfeit the right to happiness. That conviction comes from experience. Both without forearms and legs, she has learned to lead a full and rewarding life as head of the Crippled Children's School at Jamestown, N. D.

Her own right to happiness comes chiefly from the 79 students at the school. "I guess," she admits, "they are a fair substitute for a family of my own."

Some of her "family" can't talk or are almost unintelligible. Some can't chew or swallow their food properly. Many move about in wheel chairs. There are children with uncoordinated movements who can't write and have to point to letters on a spelling board. But for all there is encouragement.

Last May, in recognition of Dr. Carlsen's triumph over her own disability, as well as her achievements with crippled youth, she was awarded the President's Trophy as "The Handicapped American of the Year."

Such honors climax a long, valiant struggle for Anne Carlsen, a struggle filled with painful ordeals and personal tragedy. She was born in Grantsburg, Wis., with both arms ending above the elbow, her right leg a dangling end, and her left leg deformed in a club foot.

The family physician prophesied, "She may become an intellectual prodigy. When nature is short in some ways, it often compensates in others."

There were several sieges in hospitals. First, the dangling end of one leg was removed. When she was nine, contractures of her knee were straightened out. At 12, Anne was fitted with artificial arms, found them heavy and cumbersome, discarded them, and has since relied on her arm stumps to "do everything." At 15, her remaining leg was amputated, so she uses artificial limbs.

Despite this, Anne was a high-spirited child. Propelling herself over the ground, she joined the other children's games. In baseball, there were special rules for her; the bases were shortened and she used a coaster wagon.

SHE AND HER four brothers were raised by her father and her older sister Clara. (Their mother died when Anne was four.) "It was my family's love that kept me going," Dr. Carlsen says. "Never once did I feel a hint that they were disappointed in me or wished I were different.

"I had one fear," she adds. "I worried that I would not be able to make myself useful. I fought against the need to depend on someone else. In our family, being on your own is taken for granted."

She will never forget what her father, a Danish-born florist, once said to her:

"Anne, two arms and two legs missing are not as important as having one good head. The essential thing is to educate yourself."

But in those days public schools were not prepared to educate crippled children. The resolute Carlsons had to persuade a state psychologist to test the eight-year-old girl and pronounce her "educable." On his recommendation, she was admitted to public school. The bright youngster taught herself to maneuver a pen and raced through two grades a year. She was ready for high school at 12. That was the year she was orphaned by the death of her father.

To spunky Anne Carlsen, it was another hard knock to overcome, but she finished high school and went on to the University of Minnesota where she made three honor societies.

Anne had always felt a strong desire to teach—especially other crippled children. She never felt her lack of limbs would be a hindrance. But in her senior year at college, the head of the counseling bureau told her that teaching was "out of the question." With so many able-bodied teachers available, Anne just wouldn't have a chance.

Bitterly frustrated, she sought other work but was continually rejected on various pretexts. For two years, she remained unemployed. "I felt that if I couldn't get the right kind of work," she recalls, "there was no point in my existence."

Then, unexpectedly, she heard of an opening for a teacher at the Crippled Children's School. After an intensive interview, the job was hers—at \$25 a month and room and board. When she first saw the school, she said to herself: "This is home—this is where I belong."

She was the entire high-school faculty, teaching everything from English to history and biology. Later, she took time out to get her master's degree at Colorado State College of Education and her doctorate at the University of Minnesota. In time, Dr. Carlsen was made principal and, 10 years ago,

(Continued on page 12)