

Confidence In Life Greatest Gift Of All

No matter how high the heap of dollars to support research into MD, and to help victims of the disease through a network of clinics and local chapters, MDA-supported clinics provide diagnostic facilities, medical supervision, and assistance. Throughout the country, 370 MDA chapters furnish vital needed services to patients and their families. They include the setting up of special recreational and educational programs for MD children, helping to defray the cost of wheel chairs, lifts and braces, and providing expert counsel to help meet the many problems caused by MD.

Little Robin Balnis in her wheel chair has that gift.

Before you really "register" the fact of that wheel chair, six-year-old Robin will be making a friend of you, asking for your autograph in her bulging album. With a winsome smile and a toss of her long, golden hair, she'll ask you to draw a picture for her "to remember you by." Robin's blue eyes look on life with eager curiosity and serenity. Yet she has never walked.

How did Mr. and Mrs. Balnis give the "greatest gift" to their gravely-ill little girl — the feeling that the world is made for friendship? When the shocked parents first faced this challenge, they were overwhelmed.

"It was a frightening day," confides Mrs. Balnis in her strong voice that has no self-pity, "when the doctor said that Robin, only 16 months old, had muscular dystrophy. I knew what it was, a mysterious disease that weakens and wastes the muscles, a disease that as yet has no cure. My own little sister died of it at five. How could I tell my husband this horrible news? How could I make a home for him — for my children — with this hanging over us?"

But there was a strength in the Balnis family, enough strength to meet the stress of tragedy. Nancy Balnis and her husband, Joe, were knit closely to their small community. Home-loving people, they were always ready to set another place at the table; to help neighbors "in a jam" or a joyful celebration; to dispense cookies along with hand-aids to kids with cut knees; to take in stride the chores of homemaking along with the fun. Nancy and Joe already had the basic elements of the "greatest gift." But could they give it to Robin? See for yourself. This is the way she talks:

"I love to write letters. I tell them to my mother and she writes them down, and I put 'Love, Robin' at the end of them."

Robin knows about love. And she knows adventure, too.

"Look, I'm skating!" Robin points to the tiny skates strapped to her feet as she sits in her wheel chair. In her imagination, she's chasing down the street after her little friends, darting in and out of the toy automobiles and tricycles.

Her brother and sister help her.

"Joey and Linda and me play Little Princess. They have to kneel down on the step of my wheel chair before they can come into my castle because I'm the princess, you know. And I send them all over the house getting things."

Robin's mind is active and alert.

"I go to school on the TV and I pledge allegiance with the other boys and girls, and I can sing the ABC song all the way through," and Robin begins to sing in a small but surprisingly robust voice.

Then there's parcheesi and checkers, and giggling in the morning when the children all wake up in the same room. "Sometimes Joey and Linda climb on my bed and play clowns. I can't jump but they can, and I laugh."

The parents realized from the beginning that they must learn to treat Robin as much as possible like Joey and Linda who were in good health. Though there were many things Robin couldn't do, there were lots of things she could. By snapping a large tray to her wheel chair, Robin could play trucks with her brother. Because some muscles were useless was all the more reason to encourage her to use others. "I love to push my blanket off in bed and lift my legs up in the air and play," Robin says, shiny-eyed. "I have to lift them up because they can't lift up by themselves, but it's fun!"

Most important of all, Robin needed a happy home in the close company of her brother and sister and her Mommy and Daddy.

"That was the hardest," Mrs. Balnis confesses. "At first, my husband wouldn't even talk about Robin's illness. He kept it all in. But then it brought us closer, and he could talk about it, and things started to get better." Nancy Balnis grins her good hearty grin. "I look up my scrappy rock garden again and I painted the porch chairs real giddy colors. We started having friends in for my spaghetti that Joe is always bragging about. . . the neighborhood kids came for lemonade and cookie parties on the porch, and Robin right along with them in her wheel chair. . ."

Robin's outgoing ways have widened her world far beyond her home in South Tewksbury, Mass. Because of her marvelous knack for making friends, she was selected in 1958 as poster child for the local chapter of Muscular Dystrophy Association of America, Inc. This national voluntary health agency has raised millions

of dollars to support research into MD, and to help victims of the disease through a network of clinics and local chapters. MDA-supported clinics provide diagnostic facilities, medical supervision, and assistance. Throughout the country, 370 MDA chapters furnish vital needed services to patients and their families. They include the setting up of special recreational and educational programs for MD children, helping to defray the cost of wheel chairs, lifts and braces, and providing expert counsel to help meet the many problems caused by MD.

Robin was so successful as poster child for the Middlesex County Chapter — in which her parents are active workers — that next year she was chosen to represent MD victims in the entire state of Massachusetts. Robin's poise developed rapidly as she made public appeals during MDA's annual fund-raising drive, the March for Muscular

Dystrophy. When the 1960 national MD poster child contest was held, Robin was selected from all the state winners. She is now serving as MDA's ambassador to the public on behalf of the more than 200,000 victims of muscular dystrophy in the United States.

Robin takes to being national MD poster child like a duck to water. She loves touring the country, making personal appearances in her wheel chair on TV and radio. Her autograph album is sparking with messages from famous stars. In her ingenious, friendship-anticipating way, she asked Siobhan McKenna to draw her a picture, and Miss McKenna obliged with a fine sketch of her native Ireland. When Robin met Jerry Lewis, she gave him a big kiss and told him, "I love you, Jerry, because you help all the little muscular dystrophy children." He was so deeply moved that tears came to his eyes.

How many more Christmases will come to Robin? Perhaps only one or two, unless an effective treatment is found in time to arrest MD's ruthless progress. Meanwhile, thanks to her courageous parents, Robin gets more out of life and gives more to life than many children who are well.

WELSH RABBIT SPREAD

12 ounces (bottle or can) beer or ale
1½ pounds aged cheddar cheese, grated
¼ pound hoaguerd cheese, crumbled
1 teaspoon dry mustard
2 tablespoons soft butter
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
¼ teaspoon Tabasco
2 teaspoons grated onion
½ teaspoon salt

Open beer or ale and let stand until foaming stops. Mix together remaining ingredients. Gradually add beer or ale, stirring until smooth and creamy. Serve immediately or store in tightly covered steins or other containers in refrigerator. Yield: 5 cups spread.

MAMMA, IT HURT

NEW YORK (UPI) — Cold sores, also known as fever blisters, are called "cold" instead of "hot" because frequently they appear at the start of a cold. The sore is caused by a virus, but not by the same types of viruses causing the common cold.

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A SERENE and confident little girl, Robin Balnis, serves as 1960 National Poster Girl for Muscular Dystrophy Associations.

Religion And History Lead

NEW YORK (NEA) — The Boy Scouts should love this holiday season. "God and Country" type book titles peer out from the shelves of book stores in the hope of attracting the gift giver's eye.

Religion and history, particularly Americana, are favorite topics for publishers releasing new books in the fall.

The ideal title, encompassing both categories in one breath, probably is "The Story of America's Religions," by Harzell Spence.

The name of Christ, of course, and Christianity are used in many titles. "The Day Christ Was Born," by Jim Bishop, "The Last Temptation of Christ," a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis; "The Kingdom of Christ" by Peter Bamm and "The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine" by Etienne Gilson will be given prominence at your local dealer.

"The First Noel," the story of

the birth of Christ illustrated by Marriage" by Otto A. Piper. Alice Martin Provensen, is something for the children.

The Bible as a whole, the Old and New Testaments, and specific Christmas tracts are dressed up in a variety of new editions. To help you along, there's "The Bible Companion," a reference guide to the Bible edited by William Neil; Marc Chagall's "Drawings for the Bible" and "The Biblical View of Sex and

Even the religious freethinkers are not overlooked during this season. "Science Ponders Religion" by Harlow Shapley, "The Gods of Prehistoric Man" by Joseph H. M. S. and "Religion and the Rise of Skepticism" by Franklin L. Baumer could easily make their way to the skeptic's shelves.

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