

PREFACE

Most everyone has a handicap. Some are visible; some are not. Easy to see are the physical handicaps, such as paralysis, deformities, palsy, amputations and blindness, but the handicap often most difficult to live with is the hidden one. Inferiority, shyness, jealousy, anger and fear are all handicaps we learn to deal with every day.

I, a quadraplegic dependent on a respirator to breathe for me, have a very visible handicap. This book is a journal of my struggle, my experiences, and the inspirations which have helped me to accept and live with it. I haven't done it alone for I have called to God many times in many ways. He has always answered but not always in the way I wanted.

I, too, have invisible handicaps such as fear and unworthiness. It is with these that I sometimes have the greatest battle. I'm still searching for the bluebirds of happiness in spite of my handicaps – and some days I find it. Other times I still cry out, “Lord help me.”

LORD, HELP ME

Lord, help me to achieve the

C harm in my life through inner beauty

H igh in my life through faith

A nthem in my life through love

R hythm in my life through giving

I mportance in my life through prayer

S easons in my life through acceptance

M irth in my life through laughter and an

A mbition in my life through persistence.

Then, surely, if I find all these things, I will have a charisma to my life achievable only through You.

Amen

THINGS BEFORE

The summer was lazy and warm—perfect for the beach and picnics and ball games. Our country had at last pulled out of the great depression of the Thirties. President Roosevelt was our man. It was the year 1941 and we weren't rich and we weren't poor. I was just 16 and life was fun. My greatest concern was what color bathing suit I should buy. We flirted with the boys at the beach in the sun and later met them at the Phalen Park Community Sing in the moonlight. We had never heard of L.S.D. or angel dust, or uppers and downers, or pot parties. We had never seen television or X-rated movies or R-rated movies. Clark Gable shocked the movie goers when he spoke these words, "My dear, I don't give a damn!" in

Gone With the Wind. For me it was a good time; life was full.

That fall I was a sophomore at Johnson High School and every football game found my friends and me on the benches cheering for a victory. At the school dances we did the Lindy to the recorded bands of Glenn Miller, Bob Eberle, and Artie Shaw. Crazy songs like "Marsey Doats and Dosey Doats" and Three Little Fishies" were popular. More sophisticated was Glenn Miller's "String of Pearls". A big date with your favorite guy was a streetcar ride downtown to see a movie and a White Castle hamburger later.

And then the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor—December 7, 1941. Suddenly our country was thrust into one of the worst world conflicts history had ever known, World War II. This war killed more people, damaged more property, cost more money and affected more persons than any other war in history. It opened the atomic age. Soon Germany declared war on the United States and we were then also in the battle to defeat Hitler. One by one, the boys we flirted with at the beaches and danced with at school festivals were joining the Army, Navy or Marines to fight a man's war. We kissed them goodbye – some never to return.

I had been dating one boy quite frequently at the time. We met at the beach as we both loved to swim. I was a senior when Don joined the Navy Air Corps to become a pilot; our dates became the exchanging of letters. Every time he came home on leave, it was a whirl wind of dating and fun but all too quickly over.

Our country wasn't prepared for this war and we suffered the consequences. American and Philippine troops in Battan bravely resisted Japanese forces but on March 1, 1942, by orders of President Roosevelt, General MacArthur left the Philippines in defeat. His departing words were, "I shall return."

On the home front, we bought war bonds, wrote letters, mailed packages and said a lot of prayers. Sugar, coffee, butter, meat and gasoline were rationed. Factories were turned into munition plants. We staged practice black outs. Father, far past the draft age, served as air raid warden. I wrote letters to all the servicemen I knew but I especially enjoyed hearing from a Marine in the South Pacific. His sister lived next door and so we had been friends a long time. The direction of the war is changing in our favor. Lt. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in November 1942, summoned an Allied Force that landed on the shore of Algeria. The attack caught Germany completely by surprise.

More and more of the boys we knew were being sent overseas and it was heart breaking to hear of someone you knew being killed. Why war? I just couldn't believe it when I was told, Bud, my Marine in the South Pacific, had been wounded on Tarawa. I knew by the papers this has been a bloody battle with so many of our Marines getting killed but it was a victory for us. Bud was sent to Hawaii to recover. Now that he has the Purple Heart maybe they'll send him home, I thought.

Besides all the turmoil and heart break of this war, tragedy hit our family in another way. Father died suddenly from a heart attack. I loved by dad dearly and really felt his loss. It was hard for Mother to accept because he was only sixty but she is a strong person and always seemed able to cope with life's traumas. We turned in Father's Air Raid Warden helmet. And life goes on but not as easy.

On June 6, 1944 some 3,000,000 Allied forces crossed the English Channel to stage a giant invasion of France. It was known as D Day. It was the beginning of the end of Hitler.

I soon heard that Bud was back in the battle again. He was with the force of Marines that invaded Okinawa. They had encountered fierce opposition but were ordered to resist to the bitter end. It was the major and most savage battle of the war. The next step was Tokyo.

I couldn't believe it. Don Johnson has been reported "Missing in action". His plane was shot down over Manila Bay. His chances of being alive were very slim. I had just received a letter from him a few days before. He wrote, "Your letters mean so much to me out here where things are so uncertain." I visited his family.

Mother wanted to take a trip to California to visit her brother and sister, so in spite of the crowded trains and the war, we packed our bags and were on our way. We planned to be back by the end of February for the birth of another grandchild. Our trip was just what Mother needed and we were home again to welcome little Kathleen June into the world. I hoped someday to marry and have dozens of kids. The war rages on—they're even drafting married men with children.

On May 7th, 1945 Germany Surrendered! From all directions, Allied armies closed in on the Germans, bringing this part of the war to an end. Thousands of persons were released from concentration camps. What a victory this has been. Now we could pursue all our efforts towards winning in the South Pacific. Our destination being Tokyo, Japan.

V.J. day came on August 14, 1945. It was the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that finally caused Japan to surrender. Now the war was really over. What a celebration it caused everywhere. The main streets of every city in the United States were filled with joyous, shouting, thankful people. The boys can come marching home again and the lights can go on again, all over the world. Midst all the celebration, I felt a little sad. Don would never be coming home again. I think the vision of his plane going down in flames will stay with me forever.

The war was over; there was peace in the world. President Roosevelt didn't live long enough to see this time — instead we had Harry S. Truman to bind up the wounds and change the country back to civilian life. There were no more black outs, no more rationings, no more goodbyes. Factories turned back to producing civilian goods. The boys came home to marry their sweethearts and the baby boom began.

I was pleasantly surprised, one cold January day, 1946, when I answered the front door-bell and found a tall, thin Marine smiling down at me with his clear, blue eyes. I didn't have time to say, "Welcome home," before I was in his arms and he was kissing me. Bud was home from the South Pacific.

I had never expected this relationship to turn into a whirl wind romance, but it did. By April, I had a diamond solitaire on my third finger — left had. It turned out to be a beautiful summer. Picnics, pow wows, swimming, dining and dancing filled our days and evenings. We were to be married the following April. Life was wonderful. We were too happy.

Then it happened! It was in 1946 that Minnesota suffered the worst polio epidemic in the history. All through the summer months newspapers listed the number of new cases and the number of deaths each day. The totals numbered in the hundreds. All beaches were closed. Even the grand, exciting Minnesota State Fair was canceled to prevent the epidemic from spreading. People were urged to stay away from all large gatherings but still it raged on.

Two floors of the contagion department at County Hospital were filled with polio patients. Iron lungs pumped on day and night. In spite of all the precautions, which we followed carefully, the epidemic didn't begin to diminish until September. It was then, my 18 month old niece, Kathy, was admitted to the hospital — her right arm paralyzed. Two days later she was in an iron lung. The family could visit her from the hallway. She looked so little in that huge machine, I thought as I gazed at her through the doorway on Sunday afternoon.

That evening, after we had toured a model home (our dream house) I sent Bud home early. I wasn't feeling well. The diagnosis? Poliomyelitis. I started a journal.

September 11, 1946

I woke from a sound sleep this morning at 1:00 A.M. with a severe headache and stiff back. I tried to touch my chin to my chest but couldn't. I cried out, "No, no, I've got polio." This was one of the tests the doctors gave my little niece, Kathy, before she was admitted to Ancker Hospital just a week ago. Now she's in an iron lung. My anguished cry roused the family. June was the first one to my room, an older sister to the rescue. She hadn't been sleeping well as she was so concerned about her 18 month old baby, Kathy. June tried to assure me that I was OK. "You probably just over did while cutting the grass yesterday," she lied. Mother soon appeared in my room to see what the commotion was about. She was very calm, gave me two aspirin tablets, rubbed by head and neck and soon I was feeling better but inside I knew I had polio and I knew my family was plenty worried too. I was terrified.

All day I was restless. I alternated between the couch and pacing the floor, I couldn't be still. Sharon and Butch, niece and nephew, wanted to play but I shooed them away; they might get my germs. About four o'clock this afternoon, Mother asked my brother-in-law, Bill to drive us to the hospital. "Let's get it diagnosed one way or the other. The uncertainty is terrible," she said. I agreed.

All the regular tests were given, a spinal tap was taken, the diagnosis— poliomyelitis.

Lord, I'm so frightened!