

Barbara is determined to fight her own battles

Story: JEANNE WHITTAKER

Bright eyed, pretty, just 21. What more could a young woman ask for?

But this young woman also has a handicap that sets her apart from other healthy 21-year-olds and makes it impossible for her to fend for herself in a crowd, the market, or the job force.

Barbara Bell, and hundreds of others like her, is facing the world with multiple limitations due to birth defects. She has much to offer but she can't get the rest of us to slow down long enough to accommodate the extra time it takes her to get things done.

But that's no reason to feel sorry for Barbara.

She was having the time of her life last week when she celebrated her twenty-first birthday. Before her sat an enormous confection of chocolate ice cream, whipped topping and other assorted gooey goodies. Nearby, gift wrapped packages lay within reach as were the closest friends she has ever known.

"I'm so happy I'm gonna bust," she shouted with abandon. "I'm gonna bust. It's my twenty-first birthday and I'm gonna celebrate."

SUSAN PUTNAM is a Birmingham

mother, a partime teacher, and a volunteer with the Association for Retarded Persons of Oakland County. She is Barbara's advocate. For the past six months Barbara has been her protégé.

Unlike many persons with multiple impairments, Mrs. Putnam said, Barbara is one of the lucky ones. She has been able to remain at home with her own family in spite of being unable to read or write. And though she is dependent on others for almost all her physical needs, she receives ample amounts of loving care.

"But, just how much can a mother be expected to do?" Mrs. Putnam asks. "With other children in the home there just isn't the time or the ability for her mother to take care of all Barbara's needs."

So, she said, providing the extra pair of hands that help Barbara move about the community is her job.

"We plan our schedule week by week, which might mean going to a grocery store, my house for dinner, or a fast food restaurant. The Pizza Hut is Barbara's favorite place. I implement the care that she gets at home by getting her out, exposing her to places she wouldn't otherwise be able to go."

The relationship between the two

women is one of about 24 active matches which the ARC currently fosters in Oakland County. It was initiated, Barbara explained, at her own request.

An unabashed optimist, Barbara said, "I have three brothers, so I decided that it would be nice to have a big sister to go shopping, or bowling, or just have fun."

The first step, she said, was to discuss the matter with her social worker, who relayed her request to the ARC. At the same time, Susan Putnam approached ARC to volunteer her time.

"I read about the program in The Eclectic," she said. "I had taught mentally impaired people before. Since my own family is almost grown, it seemed like an ideal project."

Unlike many matches, the pairing of Barbara and Susan Putnam took less than 24 hours to organize. Frequently, Mrs. Putnam said, the wait for pairings is much longer.

Within a week the two met for an after school snack during which Mrs. Putnam discovered that Barbara was making her first visit to a fast food restaurant.

"The minute I met Sue," Barbara said, "I knew we would be good friends,

because she isn't so hard to know."

PART OF the experience, Mrs. Putnam said with a chuckle, has been learning how to put a bridle on Barbara's enthusiasm.

"I've always said whatever you feel like doing, do it," Barbara explained with enthusiasm. "I believe that you ought to go out and live it up once in awhile."

Mrs. Putnam said she has never heard Barbara complain. "She really looks forward to whatever we do. We do a lot of individual things, and there are lots of activities which the ARC plans for the whole group."

"Normally we meet at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, but there have been picnics at private homes, and once we had a bingo party which Barbara won."

"Then there was an outing at a bowling alley with facilities for the impaired. Barbara found that one for us," Mrs. Putnam added.

SINCE they have been together Barbara's confidence and ability to live within the community has increased by measurable amounts. Though she will never be able to venture out on her

own, she is able to make decisions for herself, communicate what she wants with conviction, and help organize what they will do when they are together.

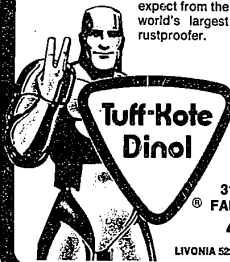
She has also begun to make decisions about how she will spend the \$20 per month that she earns in the Oakland Training Institute's sheltered workshop.

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Any person may file a written communication in favor or protest of the application. Communications may be based on but are not limited to the record of performance of any involved institution in helping to meet the credit needs of its local communities. Four copies must be submitted to the Supervisory Agent, located at the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis, 2000 Indiana Tower, One Indiana Square, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46204 by November 11, 1979. An additional 20 days to submit comments may be obtained by filing a written request with the Supervisory Agent by November 11, 1979. The application and all communications so filed will be available for inspection by any person at the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis unless application information is excepted by law from public disclosure.

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