



Melissa Stuckey (left), an Upland Hills student from Birmingham, waits for her Lansing School for the Blind partner Karen Horn to adjust the ill-fated earphones that were supposed to provide a running

commentary about the circus. When the transmitter failed, Melissa filled in Karen about the circus-fair happenings.



After meeting her Lansing School for the Blind partner Robert Umbo, Shantih Yamasaki, 10, an Upland Hills student from Rochester, leads him into the Joe Louis Arena.

Triumphs:

A special kind of friendship reigns

Story: CRAIG PIECHURA
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Chalk up this day at the circus as a triumph of human communication over its electronic counterpart.

The people who handle publicity for Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey had gone to great lengths to line up braille circus programs, and two dozen headsets and a transmitter to broadcast a play-by-play, growl-by-growl account of the circus to the 21 students from the Lansing School for the Blind.

WJR radio's Warren Pierce of Birmingham was on hand to describe the sights along with Peggy Williams, who handles educational services for the circus.

Trouble is the headsets malfunctioned because the transmitter kept picking up the transmission of a nearby radio station. So, instead of hearing the commentary, they heard intermittent dance music and snatches of the garbled transmission. Attempts to remedy the problem were unsuccessful.

The headphones were packed up by Bell Telephone representatives.

Sounds like a spoiled excursion, right? Wrong. Because sitting next to the students from the Lansing School for the Blind were kids who attend the Upland Hills Farm School in Oxford. They were paired with the blind students to share observations on the sights and sounds of the sights of the circus.

EVERY INDICATION was that even if they were working properly, the headphones would've been a distraction, or redundant. Because no professional commentator could've been more successful in communicating with the audience than the group from Upland Hills Farm School. Kids from

both schools must have been hoarse the next day because most of them never stopped talking during the entire performance.

"What's going on down there?" asks Donna Grantham, 15, pointing to Ring 3.

"I don't know," answers Adri Brockman, 10. "Oh, it's a clown opening up a chest. And inside's another chest."

"What's going on over here?" Donna asks, motioning to Ring 1.

"A clown's on a unicycle. He's riding in a circle. Now he's going no-handed. Boom, he fell off," says Adri in rapid-fire commentary. "Now he's up doing a dance on his unicycle. All right, now they're changing the scene."

"I know I read about it in the program," says Donna who's having a ball at her first circus. She says she can't make up her mind on a favorite act but ranks "the monkey riding the motorbike" and the firecrackers right up there at the top of the list.

Nine-year-old Randy Reiss of Birmingham and Velvet Cunningham, 9, two sighted students, quickly made friends with Tracy Golemo, 10, of Westland. Tracy attends the Lansing School for the Blind, where her favorite subject is art. Tracy, like many of the student, is not completely blind but has impaired vision.

Tracy's an old hand at circuses and thought the performance Wednesday was one of the best "because there's lots and lots to see at this one; before there wasn't so much."

The three had no trouble discussing the highlights of the circus.

"IF SHE can see things, I ask her," Andy explained. "If she can't, I tell her."

The conversations certainly weren't one-sided. Impaired vision didn't keep anyone from forming indelible impressions of the Greatest Show on Earth.

One of the most imaginative and talkative students in the crowd had to be Beth Leach, 15, of the Lansing School for the Blind, who watched the show with Beth Grossman, 15, of Troy.

Miss Leach was a little bit disappointed there wasn't a man walking on hot coals in the show. You see she's working on a novel with such a scene in it and it all takes place at the ice follies.

With little encouragement she elaborates. In her novel the words "Holiday on Ice" are written in lights suspended over the arena.

The main character is a dazzling woman named "Miss Ice." When the book is made into a movie, she explains, "I was to be the star."

All the kids were stars Wednesday afternoon. And the Greatest Show on Earth was happening in the stands.



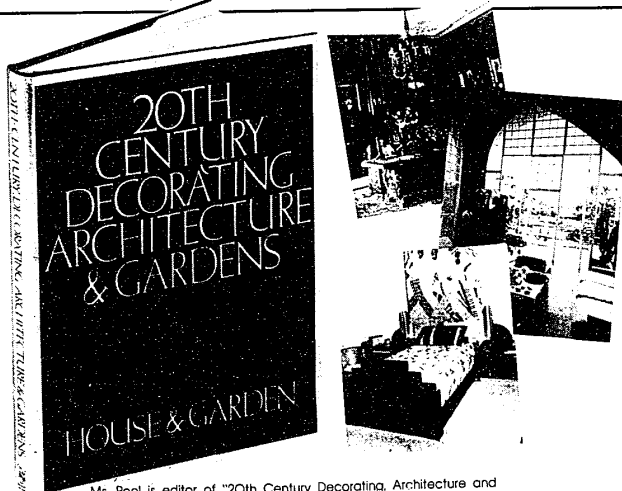
Tami Westling (right), of Oxford Township, explains what's happening on the circus floor to her Lansing School for the Blind partner Lisa Benrowski.



Jonathan Grossman (right), an Upland Hills student from Troy, helps Lansing School for the Blind student Kathy Olson down the Joe Louis Arena steps. The Upland Hills kids were coached in advance on how to help a sight-impaired person in unfamiliar surroundings.

Coming Attractions

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Ms. Pool is editor of "20th Century Decorating, Architecture and Gardens, 80 Years of Ideas and Pleasure from House and Gardens", and editor-in-chief of House and Gardens magazine. Like the magazine, her book is an exciting reflection of its time, and she will be at Hudson's to speak of those wonderful 80 years. Join us for continental breakfast at our Northland restaurant, October 29, 9 a.m. Or for a wine reception at our Eastland restaurant, October 29, 6:30 p.m. For reservations, call 223-2404.

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