

35 years of teaching

She didn't let hearing loss be handicap

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Helen Coville retired in June after a teaching career of 35 years and is now looking for a job.

"But it must be a worthwhile job, something worth my time. I was so lucky to find a job that I was so well equipped to do. It completely filled up my life and I have no idea how I can fill that void. Whenever I thought about retirement, it scared me," she said.

When Coville speaks, she looks straight at you. When you answer, you must be looking straight at her, because the conversation is dependent entirely on her ability to lip read. With but only 5 percent hearing ability, she led first, second and third graders through their academic years and was declared an asset to our school system by Dr. James N. Pepper, Oak Park Public Schools superintendent.

"Because I have functioned so successfully in spite of the handicap, I know I can help others with handicaps to make it in this world," she said.

Her first piece of advice would be: "Look sharp. Dress sharp. Be in tip-top condition. Look alive. Glow. Keep your head up. Don't let your handicap show."

She takes her own advice. After a 4:30 a.m. alarm, she begins the day with a physical workout in her Farmington Hills home, or an eight-mile jog three days a week.

Coville FIRST realized she was going deaf at age 18. Always a conscientious student, she came to class one day unprepared for a history test.

"I just didn't hear the assignment," she said. After that, all through her studies at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University, she said she

people

was known as "the girl who always sat in the front row."

AND AFTER that, during faculty or school committee meetings, she was still sitting up front.

"The hearing aid helped some, but not much. I had to concentrate on the speaker's lips. I mastered that and it has helped me in whatever experiences I've had. The hearing aid hardly helped at all when teaching, particularly first graders. Their voices are so soft. I relied solely on the lip-reading," she said.

She prepared for class by scanning the lesson to be taught. Then she would concentrate on the lips of each of her students, one at a time.

"It became a habit and I did it so quickly I didn't miss a thing," she said.

ABOUT THE only thing Coville misses is the ring of the telephone.

"I had an over-protective father and have an over-protective husband," she said of her husband, Don. "Don answers all the calls and does any calling I have to do for me."

Helen's "over-protective husband" has wanted his wife to retire for several years; much of that had to do with the phone calling.

"We were lucky to have survived this past year," she said. "I was teaching third grade and still holding complete control over the class. But it was a terrible strain."

"Third graders are a different lot than first or second graders. And never before in my life had I had 28 children. 21 of them boys, and 10 of those with very special problems. They came from single-parent homes, or parents who were addicts, or had very rough home lives."

"Don was on the phone every single night with some parent or another. It took up all of our time. We felt it was a miracle that we survived until June," she said.

DON RETIRED five years ago and would like to take a "vacation whenever we please instead of waiting until the peak seasons when school is out and everybody is taking a vacation."

Helen doesn't "want to sit home and vegetate. I am tapping all channels for possible part-time employment," she said. "I am highly motivated and very energetic. Even this past year — with its troubles — I could see the fruits of my labors. I can help others. I know I can."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Don Coville (left) wanted his wife, Helen, to retire, and she did. But now she's looking for another job.

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Neither cartilage, ligaments, or lining cells are made stronger, or have their function improved, by exercise. The capacity of the joint may be prematurely lost by injury or augmented conditioning. Injury to the joint is usually an incident of bad luck; conditioning means undertaking prolonged, rigorous, and repetitive activity. This level of exercise is not a practical program for an individual with arthritis.

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