

Hats Off To A Real Olympic Champion

Crippled Coed Sports Queen

In a day when the use of superlatives is being taxed to the limit to describe achievements in space, Livonia has a much more down to earth and right at home celebrity who goes beyond all such sparkling descriptions.

She is Alice Wonnacott, 19, of 2907 Pickford. Where Livonia is concerned Alice is a very special young lady who is made even more special by her unassuming nature and a self-assurance which

shuns special recognition or help. She put on a near one-woman show for the American team, participating in two European international competitions for the physically handicapped late in the summer.

Alice, who has been without the use of her legs since an accident when she was two, returned to the United States clutching the fruits of her efforts.

From paraplegic competition

in Stokes-Mandeville, England she brought home nine gold medals. She won three swimming events and six track events including the 60 yard dash (in wheelchair), shot put, javelin, discus, and club -- an event which involves hurling an Indian club. She also placed first in the five - event pentathlon.

In the slalom, an event which requires the contestant to perform various maneuvers with the wheelchair, and the archery events she placed sec-

ond and third respectively. Earlier, in Vienna, Austria, Alice won the special 500 meter race as well as the 60 meter dash during the Second International Wheelchair Games.

She also captured a second place silver medal in the discus and two third place bronze medals in the shot put and club. A grand total of 15 medals and one large cup -- for the first in the 500 meter race.

Yet all this modest girl offered about her accomplish-

ments was a short "It's a lot of work."

Reflecting Alice's natural reticence as well as her search for new challenges was the statement from her mother, Mrs. Alfred Wonnacott: "Alice would really like to learn how to ski if there were some way to fit braces on the skis."

Alice's personal history to date is one marked by one personal triumph after another, beginning with a mastery of a

life in a wheelchair. This involved lengthy therapeutic sessions -- some running to five months -- in the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children in Chicago.

WHEN ALICE entered Bryant Junior High School in Livonia, she did so as the first severely handicapped person to attend a school there on a regular basis. Her presence in the Livonia school system opened the eyes of school officials to the special needs of such handicapped individuals.

Such special measures as ramps, handrails and sloping curbing have since been added to Livonia schools.

Alice attended Stevenson High School where she capped her public schooling as the first graduate of the school's first graduating class in 1968.

She then moved on to Wayne State University where independence for such individuals is emphasized while their few special requirements are fully recognized.

"THE UNIVERSITY is set up to meet their various needs," explained Miss Elizabeth Ferris, director of educational rehabilitation services at WSU.

Miss Ferris and her staff of four full-time professionals are responsible for the development of the various handicapped students attending WSU.

"For the past six years University policy has been that architects of new buildings must incorporate specifications from this bureau so that handicapped individuals are serviced as well as any normal individual," Miss Ferris pointed out.

Generally, this amounts to adaptations to toilets, elevators, telephones and drinking fountains. New buildings also must have ramps in addition to steps as well as handrails.

Curbing at crossings is sloped instead of the normal abrupt drop so that they can be more easily navigated via wheelchairs.

"Our purpose is to give a student with a special disability the same range and quality of services offered to the normal student," Miss Ferris explained.

"This is all part of our overall purpose which is to prepare these people for their future -- when they must move on from the University and become part of society," she added.

SHE SAID that the emphasis is on independence so these people may move out of the University totally reliant on their own abilities and not dependent on the help of others.

"Our students are active in nearly all student activities -- the only one specially tailored to them is the athletic program," Miss Ferris said. Alice, to whom athletics means so much, was first introduced to the athletic world when she was a student at Stevenson High.

A former physical education teacher at the school, Miss Lois Stinson, managed to get Alice interested in archery and swimming, according to Mrs. Wonnacott.

Alice is now at the point in her athletic career where she is captain of the Road Runners, WSU's female athletic team for the physically handicapped.

Alice received assistance in entering Wayne from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation under the State Board of Education, with Peter Helst as her coordinator.

IT IS THE JOB of Helst and his co-workers to contact and help any mentally, physically or emotionally handicapped students while they are in high school.

"To make employment available for these people is our long-range goal," Helst said. He will assist Alice throughout her years at the university, with job placement and for a time after she lands a job.

Alice is presently an art student and is becoming interested in commercial art. She enrolled for the fall term at Wayne for 16 credits but admits that she may drop one course in order to devote the amount of time she wishes to her all-important art classes.

Alice also looks forward to the athletic program, and at least part of her interest and success in that area can be attributed to Charles Gerald, physical therapist and coach

of the men's and women's physically handicapped teams at WSU.

"SHE REALLY surprised me," Gerald said, referring to her athletic triumphs on the continent. "I promised her a steak dinner if she won at least four gold medals -- I certainly didn't expect this," he said.

Alice's achievements during the competitions take on even greater significance when the number of nations participating is considered.

In England, where Alice starred for the American team, there were approximately 25 nations represented while at the games in Austria there were but five.

Alice explained that the English competition has a long standing tradition while the Austrian games are only in their second year. Popularity of the English games as well as financial considerations for the individual teams probably caused many teams to pass up the Austrian games, she said.

She explained that in the racing and slalom events there were several elimination heats with five entrants in each. In no event were there less than six participants, Alice added.

SHE SAID that the swimming, basketball and ping-pong competitions drew the largest crowds.

Alice, who holds the American record for the 60 yard dash at 15.5 seconds, looks to 1972 with a gleam in her eye.

That is the year the Wheelchair Olympics, held the same year as the World Olympics, will run in Munich, Germany.

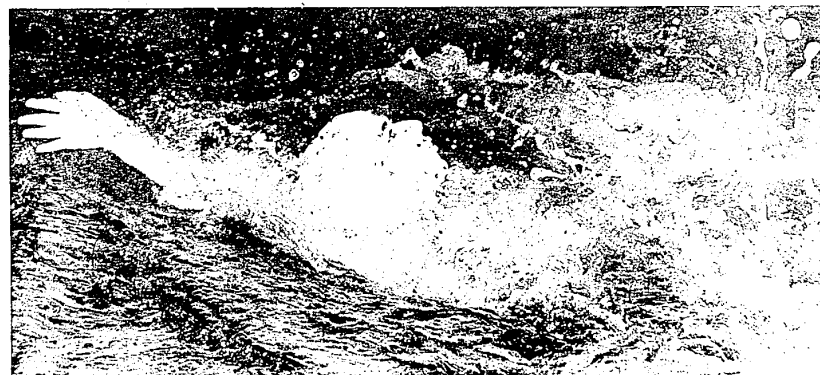
During the more immediate future she plans to learn to drive through the special education services in which she will be aided by Helst. This difficult task is managed through a special car which has been adapted with a complete system of hand controls.

Alice also admitted that "it would be fun to learn how to scuba dive some day" while adding that the possibility of learning to fly interests her quite a bit.

"We're real proud of her," Mrs. Wonnacott exclaimed. Livonia couldn't have put it better.



Perfect swimming form is shown by Alice Wonnacott in breaststroke



Alice swings down the lane in backstroke competition for a victory



She gives her all in heaving the shot put.



Did you ever try to throw the javelin from a wheel chair?

Pictures By
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