

The Sound of Faith Comes from Within

By Joan M. Smith

Not a Don Quixote who battles imaginary windmills. Instead a Sharaine Rawlinson, a vibrant young lady who confronts real-life challenges made more difficult because of a handicap.

Sharaine, a senior at Rochester Institute of Technology, has been deaf since an attack of spinal meningitis at age 14. That was six years ago and she's been going full steam ever since.



SHARAINE RAWLINSON

Proof of her vital existence is the fact she has just become engaged, and on May 23 will graduate from RIT with a BA in social services. Added to these momentous occasions will be her receiving the Sacrament of Christian Initiation on Holy Saturday.

According to Sharaine, she hadn't given religion, least of all Catholicism, much thought while growing up. Although she had a feeling she was missing something in her life, it wasn't until she came to Rochester that that something took shape.

Her friends would drag her to Mass, she said. At first she would just sit and wonder what she was doing there. Then she became curious and

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EFFECTIVE LIVING

An Effective Living Seminar designed for mothers and daughters will be held Mother's Day weekend, May 8-10, at the Cenacle Renewal Center, 693 East Ave. The seminar is also open to all adults and older teens, and offers the participant instruction on developing a higher self-concept. Further information is obtained by calling the Cenacle (716) 271-8755.

began asking questions. When her friends could no longer answer her intense theological queries, they sent her to those who could.

It will be her three instructors and dear friends from campus ministry who will bring her into the Faith at Easter Vigil. Deacon Ray Fleming will baptize her, Father Gerald Appelby, ministry co-director, will confirm her, and Sister Shirley Pilot, ministry director, will give her communion.

There isn't a room big enough to contain Sharaine's excitement over these im-

pending events. But then, all life is exciting to her. She treats everything as an adventure whether it's visiting the family in her hometown of Albuquerque, N.M., or her fiancée in Kansas City, making costumes for the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, or serving on the RIT parish liturgical committee.

"People ask me," she said, "if I will ever slow down." She shook her head, "There's so much I want to do."

Her interests range from rollerskating, to dancing, to reading. "Once I hated to read," she said, "but now I devour books."

A prime interest of hers is to become involved in social changes for the handicapped, especially the educational system for the deaf. Presently, she is waiting for word on a possible job with a Kansas City center for independent living for the disabled.

Sharaine has come a long way since that fateful bout with meningitis and considers herself lucky. It has just been in the last few years that she learned that she hadn't been expected to recover at all from the disease.

At first, after her recovery, the deafness was thought to be temporary. Then it became evident that it would be permanent. Sharaine's first thought when learning of the diagnosis was that she would never have a boyfriend. Depression also settled in but then she decided she couldn't spend all of her time wishing for something that wasn't there.

She returned to high school but because of her hearing deficiency began to fail subjects. "I became fed up," she declared and through a self-teaching schedule, aid from a teacher, and family support, she overcame the obstacle and successfully continued her education.

A particular difficulty for her was to become the outgoing person she had been before the disability. Even today, she finds it difficult to go up to strangers and ask directions.



It takes patience from both parties to communicate, she said. If there isn't that patience, communication becomes an exercise in futility.

Sharaine uses sign language as well as speech. The public's idea that deaf people can't talk is a misconception that she would like to correct. Even those born deaf, she explained, and who haven't the experience of hearing vocal sounds can be trained to talk.

Phone conversations pose another difficulty for Sharaine. When telephoning she must have an interpreter which cuts down on the privacy. Shortly, however, she will own a teletype phone that will relay messages by signal over the wires which will be picked up by the receiver on a screen or decoded on paper. It is a graduation gift from her parents.

The fact her disability is termed permanent doesn't cause Sharaine loss of sleep. Her bywords, faith and patience, make her optimistic she will hear again, and it is these qualities she urges for all the disabled.

"There are lots of bad times," she admitted, but through her own experience she knows there are also many good times and added, "All things in God's time."

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Dignity Liaison

Dignity-Integrity/Rochester is an ecumenical and social organization existing primarily to witness to the reality of a gay and Christian lifestyle. Our primary outreach is to gay Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, although our mission is not exclusively to gay people. All persons seeking a more humane and greater understanding of the issues involved are always welcome.

What is Dignity? Dignity is an organization of gay Catholic men and women and other concerned people who believe that through Baptism we all share in an inherent dignity that is preserved and strengthened through the sacramental life

of the Church in which we as Catholics have a right to participate. Dignity believes that gay people can express their own sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ's teachings. We further believe that all sexuality should be exercised in an ethically responsible and unselfish way. The emphasis, then, is on the total human person and not just on sexuality.

Dignity-Integrity/Rochester has a liaison position with the Division of Special Ministries. We are totally self-sufficient and receive no funds from the diocese. Our contributions help to support the work of Bethany House, Melita House, St. Joseph's House and Jail

Ministries. We are also presently supporting a Cuban refugee. Since Easter 1976, Roman Catholic Mass has been celebrated every Sunday at 5 p.m. at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Days of recollection and spiritual retreats are held yearly. We have a chaplaincy staff that consists of two priests, one Roman Catholic and one Episcopalian, and a religious Sister. Our office is located at St. Luke's Church and can be reached by calling 232-6521.

An outgrowth of Dignity-Integrity is a support group called Families and Friends of Gays whose purpose is to help non-gay people overcome the ignorance, fear and bigotry that surrounds human sexuality, and to help them overcome their isolation in dealing with their gay loved ones. Sincere inquiries are always welcome by calling 442-7173 or 232-6521.

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