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Footnotes: A Life Without Limits

Lena Maria Klingvall
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“Look up and not down; Look forward and not back; Look out and not in; Lend a Hand.” This sentiment, from Edward Everett Hale, almost perfectly suits the author of Footnotes, except that in her case it would be “lend a foot,” for Klingvall was born without arms or hands. Further compromised by a short left leg and oddly angled foot, she needed a prosthetic limb to walk. Her parents treated her as an ordinary child “who happened to have a handicap-not as a handicapped daughter.”

Children can be cruel, but she never took their teasing to heart. Never angry or bitter, she just did things differently and overcame problems as they arose, adapting every task to her feet. Others thought about what Lena couldn’t do and what didn’t work. “I wanted-and I still want-to adapt myself,” she writes, “to other people’s needs as much as possible, rather than the other way around.” From the time she fell over on the lawn while playing, her mother told the adults to let her manage as much as possible on her own. She has certainly managed, eventually learning to drive a car, play music on the keyboards, sing professionally, and swim competitively.

Faith has always been an important part of her life. Seldom did her strength wane, but on that rare occasion, she turned to God for insight. When she went to India to practice what she had learned in Bible school, her individual will felt cramped. She was unable to go out alone, due to the danger. She felt handicapped for the first time.

Goal in Sight was a television show based on her life. When the show premiered in Japan, it made such an impression that they made another film. In Japan, it is a great shame to have a handicapped child-parents will hide the child or give it away. She later followed the film with one of her many musical presentations, which helped show the Japanese a different view about disability.

Klingvall offers three reasons for her positive attitude: she has looked at the possibilities in life, not the difficulties; her parents have had a relaxed attitude toward disability; and her faith has been with her since the beginning. If readers take any of these ideals to heart, the world will be a sweeter place to live.

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