

In spite of disabilities, author sees life from ‘the bright side’

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By Jessica Dooley

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HEMPHILL—Doctors told Mary Howell’s parents their daughter— born with cerebral palsy—would never walk or talk. But with the encouragement of family and friends—and her strong faith in God—Howell exceeded all expectations.

She not learned to walk and talk, but also became an award-winning small town newspaper editor.

Author
Mary
Howell
with
copies
of her
book,
*Life on
the
Bright
Side.*

Even after an accident later in life left her a quadriplegic, she dictated a newspaper column. And she wrote her memoirs—the recently published book, *Life on the Bright Side*.

Howell, a member of First Baptist Church in Hemphill, dictated her life story to her caregiver, Connie Mitchell. Mitchell wrote by hand Howell's words verbatim in notebooks, and then Howell's sister, Clara Murphy, typed the notebooks' contents on Howell's computer.

"It's a God thing, because who else could rattle off 57,000 words with no outline and no notes to fall back on?" Murphy said.

Although Howell has faced many trials and setbacks since birth, she never gave up on her dreams.

In spite of her cerebral palsy, her faith in God led her to complete high school and maintain a position on the dean's list throughout college.

Years later, Howell landed a job with the local newspaper, *The Sabine County Reporter*. She started out as a columnist and eventually was hired as a reporter and typesetter. In time, Howell worked her way up to editor.

She won numerous awards, including first place for editorial writing from the Texas Press Women's Association. She was selected as one of nine women for the Communicator of Achievement Award in 1985.

She wrote a poem, "Salute to America," that received commendation from President Gerald Ford and President Ronald Reagan. An editorial she wrote was published in the Congressional Record on July 30, 1984.

But then she faced another series of setbacks. First she lost her job at the newspaper. A few months later, her mother died. Then she suffered a fall that left her unable to use either her arms or legs.

Through it all, Howell learned to rely fully on God during her tough times.

She spent most of her time accompanying her father, Clarence Howell, who served more than 20 years as pastor of First Baptist in Hemphill. Together, they visited nursing homes and hospitals. She also frequently attended the funerals and weddings he conducted.

When her father's health began to fade and he had to limit his activities, Howell realized she needed something else to do.

Mitchell encouraged Howell to start dictating letters to the editor. Before long, she started writing a column for the paper.

"Writing my column, "On the Bright Side," turned my world around. For the first time in 18 years, I felt as though I had a purpose, and I realized that being confined to a wheelchair did not keep me from reaching my goals. I was still Mary Howell," she said in her book.

After Howell gave a speech, "Life on the Bright Side," God began to open doors, she said. Friends soon gave Howell the materials needed to write a book, including a new computer and Internet access.

In her book, Howell talks about her struggles, her accomplishments, her

family and—most of all—her desire to follow God’s will.

Howell hopes that her book will “open up the door to be a witness and inspire people to live for God and serve the Lord no matter what.”

Her next step is to write a book with her brother-in-law, Neal Murphy, about her father. The book will include his life story and a compilation of his sermons, spanning 50 years in the ministry.

Her father died when Howell was in the process of writing her memoirs. His absence not only left an emotional strain for her, but also a financial one, she noted. Proceeds from the sell of her books will allow her to continue to help pay her caregivers.

For information on how to secure a copy of the book, e-mail paperdoll@sabinenet.com or write to P.O. Box 443 Hemphill 75948.