

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

ROBERT C. NEUMANN

When one sees the world with his heart instead of his eyes, the view can be quite spectacular. Acknowledgement of beauty does not always require visual appreciation as is attested by the lives of Robert C. Neumann and his wife Sunshine, both of whom have been sightless for the past ten years.

How can a view be spectacular when one cannot see it? "Because I pay attention to what I touch, what I smell and what I feel," says Bob. "Those with sight often take these senses for granted. Seeing is often enough for them."

How does one accept a life of darkness? Bob and Sunshine admit it is a very difficult adjustment. "You've got to cry a bucket full first and then when you stop crying, you can start living again," she says. "You must pick up the pieces and go on."

And indeed they have done just this. No sorrow or sadness permeates the Neumann household. Instead, there is a lot of laughter, and love and sharing. Often a tinkling silver bell announces the closeness of a beloved pet, a jet black cat, supposedly a Russian Blue, with dazzling green eyes named Her-Mine-Cat II, affectionately called Herman. They feel her presence and she feels theirs, in warm affection.

"You have to be phlegmatic about blindness," Bob adds. "If you worry about it, you're dead. You just can't be disturbed about what goes on around you." To prove he means what he says, Bob goes about Leisure World with calm assurance, riding the busses, crossing streets without fear, shopping, banking, attending meetings, bowling, playing golf, shuffleboard and the piano. He has reason to be proud of his golfing score 71 for nine holes plus the fact that he won a turkey in a shuffleboard event.

Bob belongs to the Hikers Club, Aerospace Club, American Legion, Vista Nuevas and the Wisconsin Club, but his biggest project is as a member of the Laguna Hills Lions Club where he served as President from 1975 to 1977. Currently he is Regional Committee Chairman and he and Sunshine attended the Catalina Lions Convention in May. Two years ago they went to the National Lions Convention in Hawaii. Sunshine is a member of the Lady Lions.

A major program of the Lions Club is sight conservation. Bob states that last year over \$10,000 was netted in the annual Laguna Hills White Cane Drive. "Every bit of this money goes into sight conservation," he says.

Expanding this project further, Bob is also a member of the Ham Radio Operators Club, contributing his part to the Eye Network Program conducted by the Lions Club Doheny Eye Bank at the USC Medical Center where people have donated their corneas after death. The membership now totals over 50,000. In this program one cornea is exchanged for another wherever the need exists.

The Eye Network is composed of amateur radio operators all over the western half of the United States. They are on the same frequency every evening at a certain hour, telling each other where a cornea is needed. Arrangement has developed with airlines to fly, without charge, frozen corneas to any area where the patient lives. Bob was personally responsible for an eye-saving situation through his transmitter.

How does a pharmacist from East Troy, Wisconsin meet and marry an educator from New Mexico, each having lost sight at almost the same time? "Ours is a fairy tale," Sunshine recalls. They met in Little Rock, Arkansas at a rehabilitation center for the blind. "We went there to learn how to be blind," she says. Both alone, far from family and friends, they were relatively free from inhibitions. "We kept bumping into each other," Bob laughingly remembers. "It was a very touching experience."

Bob recalls that at first he was falling flat on his face most of the time, but not any more. Now he joins the members of the Hikers Club every Saturday morning, walking anywhere from three to five miles. "I plant my feet like an Indian," he says. "I feel for the ground, I don't just move along." This way he can stop immediately if he comes to a hole in the ground.

In speaking of a hike to Majestic Canyon recently, Bob says, "It was just beautiful out there." And we know what he means. His senses were tuned into the fragrance of orange blossoms, Eucalyptus trees and clean, fresh air with its gentle, caressing breezes.

It's true. Bob and Sunshine have never seen each other. But their loving marriage, wrapped in the warmth of a deep caring and sharing have made their lives together enriched beyond what most ever know.