



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, 22 JULY, 1980

THE LAUNCHING OF DR. JOHN HICKMAN'S BOOK,
"ONE STEP AT A TIME" - ADELAIDE

One of the most pleasing results of a task such as this is the insight it provides into the life of one man, like Dr. Hickman, proceeding through life's experiences, one step at a time.

Here is an entertaining and informative story of the day-to-day problems caused by physical disability.

Because of books like this, we are made to stop and think about what it means to be a disabled person in the modern world. And such reflection is important.

Dr. Hickman brings to his task, most admirable credentials. Most of us are familiar with his scholarship; it has been widely acclaimed.

But one of the attractions of this book is that Dr. Hickman leaves the scholastic world behind and gives us a simple story of determination and perseverance; which reveals to us, the courage, humour and humanity of its author.

The experiences he describes are quite outside our own, but Dr. Hickman writes so vividly and presents his reflections so well, that we become part of these experiences - both the lighthearted and the heavyhearted.

Underlying all this, the book is a story of triumph over barriers that, to many, prove insurmountable.

Regrettably, many of these barriers still exist; not just the obvious physical barriers that confront the physically disabled, but also, the more subtle barriers that are built into the attitudes and prejudices of many people when they are dealing with the disabled.

This book gives us an excellent example of an individual confronting these barriers. But it is also an example of the way in which obstacles can be overcome; abilities and potential realised.

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The book demonstrates how important it is, with disabled people, to emphasise the capabilities of the people rather than the problems created by the disability.

In fact the phrase "disabled people" is an unhappy phrase which attracts attention to disabilities first rather than to the positive abilities, aptitudes and interests possessed by people with handicaps.

This book reminds us of the significant assets and potential for growth possessed by one person with disabilities; and in doing so it reminds us of the continuing challenge to provide the appropriate opportunities and proper environment for all people with handicaps.

I know these have been provided by the Crippled Childrens' Association of South Australia since its inception in 1939.

In fact, Dr. Hickman's book is testimony to the fact that the Association's motto, "Hope and Opportunity", is not just a slogan but an active commitment to those with disabilities.

Dr. Hickman's account of his school days at Ashford House demonstrates how the hope and the opportunity that he found there complemented the support and encouragement he received at home.

I have no doubt that many people owe their start in life to Ashford House and the Crippled Children's Association of South Australia.

The dedication of people like Miss Daphne Gum, the Director of Ashford, to the needs of handicapped children, must never pass unacknowledged.

One of the most striking features about Dr. Hickman's book is the limited emphasis that he assigns to his own achievements.

Many of us have read about these achievements - the triumph over difficulty; gaining a Ph.D; and obtaining a research post at the A.N.U.

These are achievements to which most of us would never aspire; about which any of us would be justifiably proud.

Yet, in his book, Dr. Hickman passes over this sort of thing rather lightly.

It seems, that the real milestones of his career, are when he comes to terms with some of the simplest tasks of everyday living; spending a night away from home; cooking a meal for himself; emptying the vacuum cleaner; even hitting Sir Garfield Sobers for six; and taking on the bureaucracy - and occasionally winning.

Problems like these confront many disabled people in our community every day.

Because this book offers a means of understanding these problems, it is necessary reading for us all, a positive statement about life lived with disability.

Towards the end, in a chapter which Dr. Hickman has called, "Why Bother", he says, "to someone who is born with disabilities, being handicapped is natural".

Such a statement is in keeping with the confidence and determination of the book's title - One Step At A Time.

It is a motto for us all, in whatever we do.

It is an approach that we can profitably carry with us as we go forward into the International Year for Disabled People in 1981.

This year has the wholehearted support of the Federal Government; and we are looking forward to it being a year of action and achievement for handicapped people in Australia.

And this must be sustained in succeeding years.

Improved care for the disabled is central to the Government's commitment.

Over many years now, we have provided finance to community organisations through the handicapped persons' welfare programme.

In this way, the Government has helped in the establishment and operation of facilities for handicapped children and adults.

Last year, the Government provided substantial funds to eligible voluntary organisations under this programme.

We also encouraged the development of rehabilitation programmes, to assist handicapped people who want so much to play a useful part in the community.

Because of our belief in the great need for this type of assistance to be more freely available, the Government in 1977 widened the eligibility criteria for remedial and training programmes.

Where formerly, rehabilitation had been available only to those with a reasonable prospect of employment; in November 1977, this was extended to the mentally and physically handicapped to enable them to live independently in their own homes.

From that date onwards, this rehabilitation has been provided free of charge.

And last year, the Commonwealth Government made increased provision for this purpose.

Of course, declaring 1981 as the International Year for Disabled Persons gives a new and important focus to all these activities.

Above all, such a declaration provides all Australians with an opportunity to contribute to our national commitment to handicapped people and I urge them to do so.

The Commonwealth Minister for Social Security, Senator Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, has been given special responsibility for the co-ordination of Australian activities for this year and planning for a number of special projects is already under way.

There have been meetings of a Council of Commonwealth and State Ministers at which activities for the year have been discussed.

And there are State level planning committees composed of Government and non-Government representatives, local action and special interest groups.

One of the themes selected for IYDP in Australia is "Access to Community Life".

Two aspects of this theme are the need to increase the awareness in the community of the rights, abilities and potential of disabled people, and the promotion of their integration into community life through the elimination of barriers.

Dr. Hickman's book brings a new understanding and a new confidence of the way in which these barriers can be confronted and overcome.

The spirit, purpose and conviction which are alive in One Step At A Time must be translated into all we do, all the time, for disabled persons.

I would like to congratulate the publishers, Rigby Limited.

We all have good reason to be grateful to them; not only because of the lessons we can learn from reading the book; but also, because it is, in itself, an entertaining book.

It is good humoured, sometimes very funny, and, above all, very readable.

It is proof, if any more were needed, of the remarkable person that Dr. Hickman is. His achievements and now this text have inspired us all. It has been a great pleasure to be here with you today, and I am delighted to officially launch One Step At A Time.