John Henry . . . a blind carpenter with a remarkable personality

By Joyce Beaton John Henry, a Nassagaweya carpenter, has been blind for 28 years. At the age of 25 John, an air engine mechanic with the Royal Canadian Air Force, lost an eye in a train accident near Woodstock, Sight in the other oye failed two years later.

To many young men this would seem like the end of the world. To John it was a challenge and he has met it head-on. "I'm as cantankerous as hell," John says. "I have a combination of Irish and English blood and this gives me great determination."

His salty personality must have been a real challenge to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. He was trained by them to operate the machinery necessary for use in carpentry. Today he runs his own shop and does remarkable custom work.

Blind children "Some parents don't want their children to go to the school for the blind," John explains, "but a blind kid just can't be trained at home. The worst thing for a kid is to be protected, they have to bash a few shins and knees before they learn."

into things even now. However, he explains that a blind person has a certain built-in radar and gets a feeling when something large such as a post is in the way.

"I've had some real dirty bangs from things sticking out, he says, "some stupid thing that is head high can really be a catastrophe."

Talking to John, it's difficult to think of him as blind. He turns the light on when you go into a room and reminds you to watch your step when going over rough ground. He talks of things he has never seen, such as tolevision, as if he watches it.

As I was preparing to take his picture he reminded me of the lighting in the room and suggested I adjust my flash so it wouldn't reflect off the panes of glass. I momentarily forgot I was taking a picture of a blind man and we both laughed at the humor of the situation. He owns a camera and speaks in great detail of the pictures he and his wife Margaret have.

John says atmosphere in controlled areas. means a great deal to him. "Some days I may as well work and would be if done by quit, it's just too black," he a sighted person. That it is the

John admits to bumping says. "In my head I get a pick things up as 1 should." Apparently on days like this

his instincts are not as sharp as usual. He says ordinarily his instincts are pretty good when sizing up people.
Admitting that he likes most people he meets, he says he can tell a "long-haired hippy" without seeing him. "Some you can tell are just longhaired idlots," he says, "they couldn't care less and won't try to do things for themselves. Everything is just too

much trouble for them and

they want money for everything they do.' On the other hand he also knows and admires many young people. Among them are blind youngsters who must most the challenge as he has done. He must be a great inspiration to them. Each year for two weeks in the summer he attends the CNIR camp at Lake Jo in northern Ontario. There everything is set up to accommodate the blind. Swimming, fishing, boating and lawn bowling are enjoyed

His carpentry is first class ash.

product of someone who can't in industry and does what he see his materials or equipment is remarkable.

"I have the advantage of having seen before," John says, 'I knew what a drill press looked like. Someone who has never seen before has no mental picture."

People are constantly asking him how he can work with machinery, how he can make a job just so when he is blind. He explains that it is different when you don't have the use of your limbs. He feels fortunate to have the capacity to work with his hands and justly proud of the reputation his work has won.

Popular carpenter His biggest advertiser is word-of-mouth and this year. has proven to be an exceptional one for business. "I can't say I've missed any deals over the years because of less advertising," he says.

However, he admits to overhead being high for what one person can produce. Today the costs of materials are eating up much of his profit and he is having trouble getting quality lumber such as walnut, cherry and white

He understands the problems of the handicapped

can to help others. He explains how they are always the first to be laid off and in measure windows. some cases it doesn't pay to go to work at all, when they hardware, oil, brooms, and can't depend on staying with an assortment of handy

one job. He is a member of the executive of the Sir Arthur Pearson Association for the War Blind. He describes it as a legion for war-blinded persons where refresher courses are offered and a rehabilitation centre is run.

John Henry is known for his custom work throughout the county. The Georgotown and Acton libraries have record cabinet bins he has made, many

Custom work

Good news

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Information about the next sessions of night school classes will appear in next week's paper. These classes will all begin in January,

homes in the area have his cupboards and houses, old and new, have his made-to-In his off hours he sells

equipment from home / workshop. John and his wife Margaret have been married since 1956. Margaret is a small vibrant person who is obviously supportive to John in many ways. None of them are in any way protective, at least not to the casual observer. However, it

is obvious they make a good

Seven years ago Margaret learned she had diabetes and two years ago discovered it has caused the blood vessels inher eyes to deteriorate. She explains there is more blindness caused from diabetes than from accidents and is now wearing the strongest glasses she can

This has caused her to give up the driving of the car so heavily relied upon by John in his work. "We're damned near grounded," says John, "the car is sitting there but it doesn't get much exercise." As usual he meets the situation with good humor.



OPERATING THE POWER SAW is just one of the challenges John Henry meets through the day. Totally blind, he makes custom furniture, doors, window frames and any other job a carpenter would do. The only special tools he uses are a 12-inch Braille ruler and a yard ruler equipped with rivets.

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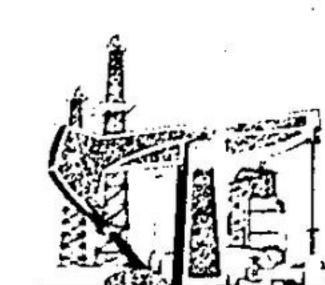
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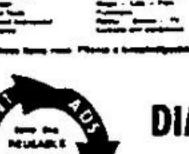
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