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# Champion COMMUNITY *Page*

## First she battled back, now she's determined to help someone else

By IRENE GENTLE  
 The Champion

Ever since a brain aneurysm forced Anna Gibson into a wheelchair last spring, she has been hard at work learning how to climb out of it again.

Having coaxed her limbs to walk through months in a Hamilton rehabilitation hospital, Anna, 16, now has a new goal. She's hoping to collect enough pop tabs to buy a wheelchair by the end of this summer.

"When I got rid of my wheelchair, I said 'I'm making a wheelchair,'" she recalled.

When she achieves her goal, she will donate the chair either to Milton District Hospital or Chedoke McMaster, where she was treated. Her plan is to sell the soft drink tabs to Co-Steel Recycling on Highway 25.

The proceeds from the tabs will buy the wheelchair, said Anna. It's no small feat. A typical wheelchair will require up to two tons of pop tabs to fund. It's no wonder, then, that Anna is looking to bring more people into the act.

"We're hoping to make this a community project," said Anna's mother, Diana Gibson.

To that end, the grade 11 Milton District High student has put her school to work, hanging pop tab collection bags at convenient corners throughout the facility.

Ms Gibson, a physical education teacher at E.C. Drury High, has also recruited her school to pitch in. The result is bags and bags of pop tabs stashed in the Gibson home.

"My husband says we're junking up the basement," joked Ms Gibson.

Anna's ordeal started early last year when she began suffering from what was initially thought to be a series of migraine headaches.

After ruling out every likely cause for Anna's pain, her doctor sent her in for a computerized axial tomography (CAT) scan.

That marked the start of Anna's lengthy hospital sojourn. The CAT scan was quickly followed up by a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) screening. An angiogram — the one Anna now calls 'the awful test' — followed.

Immediately after that, the golden-skinned girl with the thick dark blonde hair was told she had an aneurysm.

"I was still at the hospital. I wasn't allowed to leave because this cut (from the angiogram) had to clot," said Anna. "I just had to stay still for four hours."

During that time, the doctor gathered mother and daughter together and gave them their options. The decision was simple.

As Ms Gibson explains it, an aneurysm is a blood vessel that swells up like a balloon. If left alone it would likely have burst, killing Anna.

Somehow, Anna was able to just focus on getting better. "I was never scared," she said. "I just figured I had to do this."

Ms Gibson, on the other hand, had plenty of time for fear, since

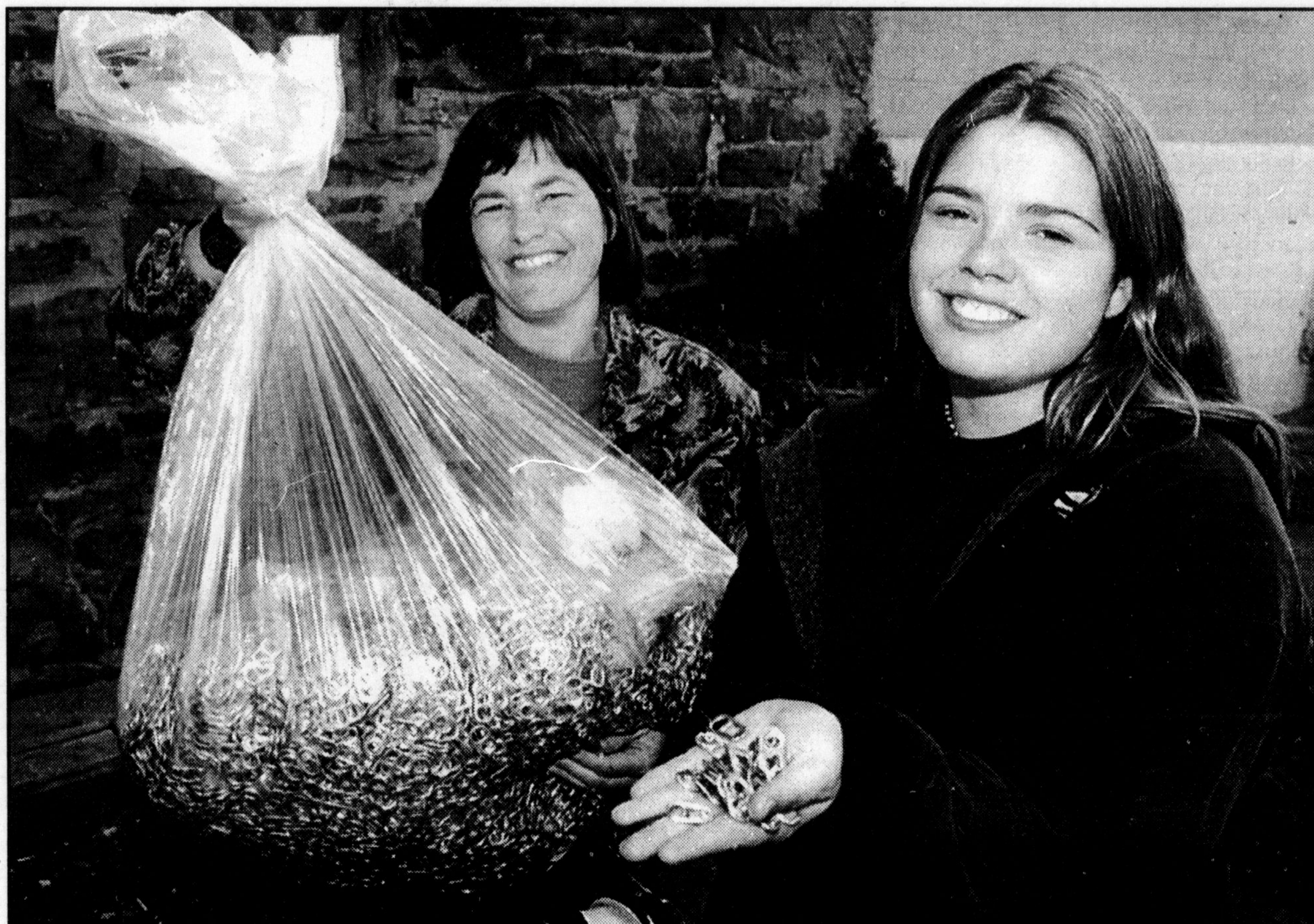


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Anna Gibson, 16, with help from mom Diana are collecting pop tabs in hopes of purchasing a wheelchair by the end of the summer. Anna is setting out to help others after a brain aneurysm temporarily forced her into a wheelchair last spring. She has since recovered.

her daughter responded to the surgery by lapsing into a 10-day coma.

When Anna finally awoke, she discovered that the inch-long aneurysm that had been located on the left side of her head had paralyzed half her body. "It was like I'd had a stroke. I was in a wheelchair for most of the summer."

As the weather warmed and June approached, Anna recovered enough to be transferred to the Chedoke McMaster Rehabilitation Hospital. She turned sweet 16 there, learning to familiarize herself with the halls of her new home and the feel of her new wheelchair.

Today, Anna has regained a full range of mobility, but remnants of the ordeal still linger. Short-term memory problems persist. Her right arm suffers from what she calls 'tremors.'

The weakness there is bad enough that she can't manage to lift

even small items with what used to be her dominant hand.

That means Anna has had to adjust to living as a lefty. "You just get used to it," she said philosophically. "Hopefully they can fix this. If not, well, I'm left-handed."

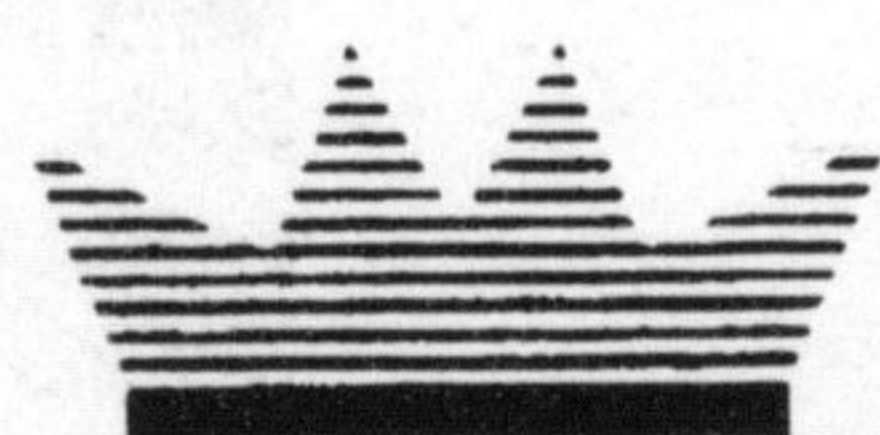
Other unseen reminders of her aneurysm are the three titanium clips lodged permanently in her brain.

For Anna, the main thing is that she can walk. Not only can she walk, but she can snowboard, get back on the swim team and roller blade. She has also just received her learner's drivers license and can be found tooling around in her parent's vehicle.

It is a life so close to the one she had before the headaches, and the tests, and the surgery. For the sake of those who aren't as fortunate, she's collecting the pop tabs.

To help out, drop collected tabs off at either E.C Drury or Milton District high schools.

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