



ADOLF RATZKA, hospitalized since 1961, continued his education by tutor. In 1965 he was among the five best secondary school graduates of the whole of Bavaria. His hopes to achieve a higher education and become a teacher were thwarted by the medieval facilities of German universities. After finding a university that would accept a respo, he arrived in the U.S. in March 1966 to study at U. C. L. A. (University of California, Los Angeles). His expenses are being defrayed by scholarships and the Bavarian Government.

ODYSSEY of a BAVARIAN SCHOLAR

by Adolf Ratzka
(respo) Bavaria/California

In July 1961 I contracted polio. After having spent three months in an iron lung I was able to breathe on my own during the day. For sleeping purposes I am still dependent on respiratory aid.

In 1963, after learning to sit up in a wheelchair with the aid of a leather and steel corset and to write legibly, I felt like continuing my education. During the next years some teachers came into the children's hospital, the place where I am still living, and tutored me in the main subjects. In July 1965 I was lucky enough to pass the final exams of the secondary school with a good average.

It had always been my plan to attend a university after secondary school. But after polio this seemed impossible. Because of the great age of German universities they contain many architectural barriers to wheelchairs. The buildings, which are dispersed over the city area, are narrow with small, overcrowded rooms.

Now it is time to tell of the key figure in my post polio life, Mrs. Vollmar manager of the "Pfennigparade E.V.," an organisation for the aid of polio vic-

tims. Mrs. Vollmar, the most unusual and charming person you have ever seen, had encouraged me to continue my secondary school. She had the idea that in the U.S.A. there might be better chances for me to attend a university especially adapted to the needs of the disabled. Someone told her of the *Toomey j Gazette* so she wrote for the excellent 1962 edition, "Quads on Quadrangles," and in December 1964 we began our inquiry for a university which would take me.

During this time of hope and setbacks, Mrs. Joseph S. (Gini) Laurie, managing editor of *Toomey j Gazette*, was happy with me when I reported success and encouraged me, gave me new ideas, and some more addresses when I told her about disappointments.

During the last year, I contacted the following schools: University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, University of Missouri, University of California (Los Angeles), University of California (Berkeley), City College of New York, and Hofstra University.

Hofstra and the City College of New York replied that they had no residence

halls for me. The U. of Missouri rejected my application for admission because I was not self-sufficient--I have only use of both hands and the right arm below the shoulder. The U. of Illinois, which seems to have the best facilities for wheelchair students in the world, also handles mostly independent students. Although it has a program for a few non-self-sufficient students, this is still in the pilot study stage.

Southern Illinois U. admits the more severely handicapped student, but makes his admission dependent on his already having secured an attendant.

I turned to California where the climate is said to be favorable for respos. At Berkeley, there are two *Toomey* readers living in the university's infirmary and doing well despite the hilly campus.

In September 1965, Mrs. Vollmar visited, on her trip through the U.S.A., the U. of Illinois and U.C.L.A. At U. of Illinois, she was informed that they could not take me because of my kidney troubles, on account of their lack of surgical facilities. At U.C.L.A. she was told that my polio disabilities would constitute no obstacle to my academic admission if I could work out arrangements for my housing and attendant.

In California, Mrs. Vollmar also met *Toomey* reader, Mr. Ralph Dosch of Long Beach, of whom she had heard through Ralph's pen pal in Munich, *Toomey* read-

er Miss Ingrid Leitner. On my inquiry for a university I asked many *Toomey* readers for information and they helped me in every way possible and encouraged me a great deal. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all. I found out that *Toomey* readers stick together like a crew.

As soon as Ralph heard of my plans to attend U.C.L.A., he started doing everything possible as to getting information, contacting firms and organizations, visiting places and meeting persons. My final arrangements are: the first few months I will attend English courses as an auditor and will live in a nearby Convalescent Hospital (Beverly West Hospital, 1516 Sawtelle Blvd., Los Angeles 25, Cal.). In the summer session I will start regular study and will live in a Residence Hall, if possible, or find a suitable apartment and live with one or two attendants.

Without Ralph's and his mother's help it would have taken me much longer to find such accommodations in Los Angeles. Since I know that I will have a real friend there, I am even more happy about the thought of going to L.A.

Soon after I had begun my correspondence I realized that, using a rocking bed, it would be difficult to get a room. So I looked around for a less bulky respirator. First I tried out a Thompson pneumobelt which *Toomey* reader, Mr. Charles Froelicher, European Thompson repre-

sentative, lent me. After it turned out that I could not sleep with the aid of the pneumobelt, I tried a chest-abdomen cuirass. After original difficulties I am now used to it. I also found out that my chances of getting admitted by a school would be better if my medical report did not contain "kidney troubles." Since my iron lung period I had had a big kidney stone which always caused troubles. After examinations and considerations, the surgeons finally took the right kidney out in December 1965.

But all endeavors would have been in vain if Mrs. Vollmar had not solved the main problem--the finances. Because I am a war orphan the Bavarian Government is sponsoring me. But to convince the authorities that there was no way for me to attend a German university and to interest them in financing my study in the U.S.A. was Mrs. Vollmar's work. This was in the summer of 1965. Then, in February 1966, the officers of the Bavarian Government--all are nice people--were ready to sign the necessary papers.

After getting the visa and making all preparations, I am today (March 25, 1966), three days before my take off, the happiest man in the world.

I would be happy if these lines would be of some value to other respos who are looking for a suitable school or if they could even encourage others to start the Odyssey from university to university applying for admission. ☪