

Coping with Restricted Growth

Everyday advice for people of
restricted growth, their families,
friends and professional counsellors.

RESTRICTED GROWTH ASSOCIATION

(Formerly Association for Research into Restricted Growth)



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Written by Mary Lindley
with help from many other people of restricted growth

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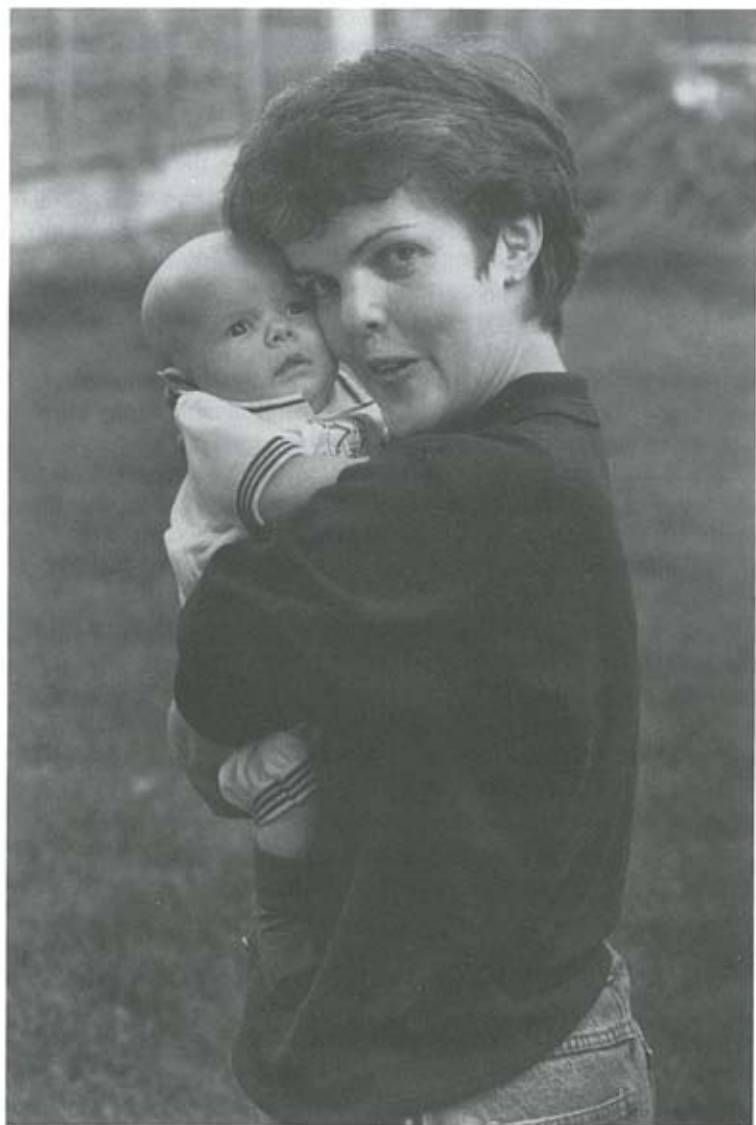
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Sandra Scott, with her eight week old son Callum

Introduction

This booklet aims to set out some of the general needs and obstacles that arise most commonly for all people whose height is severely restricted, and to offer advice on how to meet them, based on the experience of many such people, their families and friends. It is not, however, intended as a guide to living with restricted growth. Such an objective would be contrary to the aims of the Restricted Growth Association (RGA), as well as being unrealistic.

The association firmly believes that, in common with the rest of humanity, every person of restricted growth is an individual with unique abilities, emotions and ambitions, which must be encouraged to unfold to the maximum benefit of that individual. The pleasures and problems that arise along the way will vary considerably; nobody can predict, for example, exactly what childhood and adolescence will bring to a baby born with one of the many forms of restricted growth. Above all, RGA hopes that the following pages will assure readers that the problems of restricted growth are only variations of those that beset many other people. And while the answers may require an unusual degree of ingenuity or forbearance, the potential reward is a life as full and valuable as any other.

Readers may wonder why the predominant term used here is person of restricted growth, rather than dwarf, midget or little person, all of which are accepted in many contexts. The answer goes back several years. The people who gathered in 1969 to set up a British self-help organization for people of short stature decided to use a term with none of the traditional connotations of fairy tales and circuses, as they are particularly wished to establish a dignified image. They therefore eliminated the terms dwarf and midget. They also decided that little person, although used with great dignity in the United States and elsewhere, did not exactly satisfy their needs. They settled for restricted growth as a neutral term that covered all the medical conditions with which the organization would be concerned. Because restricted growth is a feature of a number of different medical conditions, it takes various forms, and individuals vary considerably in height and general appearance. On the whole they are between 3 feet 6 inches and 4 feet 6 inches.

1. Babies and young children

When babies are born with a condition that includes restricted growth, circumstances and reactions can vary greatly. Parents who are themselves of restricted growth will inevitably be better prepared than others for the diagnosis, and more aware of what the future might hold. But for most parents such a baby will come as a surprise, and they will probably experience a mixture of reactions, including puzzlement, anger, helplessness and even rejection of the child.

Immediate help

As soon as possible after the birth, the parents need the opportunity to learn all they can about their child and about restricted growth and its implications. They need all possible support to encourage them that all is not lost and that a positive attitude is best for them and the child. That will help them to sort out their initial reactions and determine

to give their baby a good start in life. A good social worker or health visitor will provide parents with information about restricted growth and the organizations that can help them. It is important for professionals, while appreciating the reality of the situation, not to encourage parents to believe that a tragedy has befallen them. In this respect, it is helpful too avoid talking about, for example, clients "who suffer from restricted growth" or who are "unfortunately of short stature". There is no reason why people of restricted growth should suffer or be unfortunate to a greater degree than anybody else.

During these early stages it is not only important to be certain of an accurate diagnosis (see *Layman's Guide to Restricted Growth*, published by RGA), ensuring the best medical treatment and avoiding unnecessary distress; it is also very helpful to make contact with other parents who have been through a similar experience. RGA and similar organizations in other countries can make that possible. Through social activities, such organizations also enable parents to meet a wide variety of children and adults of restricted growth. Many fears about the future are allayed by this sort of encounter, while practical advice can be exchanged. Brothers, sisters, grandparents and other relatives also benefit, for they too may have difficulty adjusting to a new and unexpectedly different member of the family. They all need to be shown by example that a child of restricted growth, given sympathetic support and certain necessary practical assistance, can develop normally into an independent and enterprising adult.

Early development

Depending on the child's precise medical condition, early development may proceed at a slightly different pace from that deemed normal by popular books on baby care. This should not be cause for concern provided expert medical advice is available when needed. There is usually no reason to expect that the intelligence of a child of restricted growth should be other than within the normal range, as again the example of others can show.

Once the child becomes aware of the reactions of other people, parents will be asked such questions as: "Why am I small?" and "When will I grow?" Some parents have found that these questions resolve themselves naturally and a child comes to realize that short stature is for life, without the need for lengthy explanation. Others have found these questions more persistent and have had to try to explain the situation. While explaining whatever details seem necessary, it is wise to stress that all people are different from each other, some short and some tall, but that we all have our place in the world and can all be happy and respected.

It is important that children of restricted growth should know from the outset that their families value them for the individual qualities and that their height is not significant. That security will help them to cope when people stare at them in the street or in shops, and when other children make cruel remarks. This sort of response from outsiders, which can be as painful for brothers, sisters and other family members as for the children themselves, is inevitable and there is no magic formula for dealing with it. Some people recommend a clever, cheeky response. Thus a question such as "Why are you so small?" might be answered by "Why are you so fat?" Others feel, however, that it is not in any

case wise to teach children to be rude or unpleasant and that the sensitivity of the people involved should be respected.

They may after all be well meaning in their enquiry. A smile and a polite reply may be all that is needed. In some cases it may be best just to ignore comments altogether.

Independence

While helping children to deal with their early problems, parents may be tempted to be excessively protective, but that temptation should be resisted. Independence should be encouraged in children of restricted growth, for although they must often be helped to help themselves, they will not benefit if mother or somebody else assists with every daily task, either through sympathy or because of a desire to take the quickest and easiest course. A busy mother may find her patience tried to the limit while her offspring struggles to tie shoelaces or brush tangled hair, but they both will benefit in the long term.

Simple gadgets, such as portable stools, steps and reaching devices, can enable a child with very short arms and legs to become independent in the bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and elsewhere. Such objects and their homemade counterparts should become familiar aspects of family life. While climbing onto steps to reach the sink or performing contortions in order to dress or wash themselves, children should receive encouragement. They should not be pitied or allowed to become the butt of family jokes because their behavior seems a little unusual. Similarly, short stature should not be allowed to restrain children when playing. Within reason, parents must not yield to their fears but allow their tiny offspring to climb trees, play on swings and slides and so on. In this and all respects it is important to treat children of restricted growth according to their age and not their height.

Clothes

When growth is slower than normal, clothes may last longer than usual, and this can be distressing if children see friends and contemporaries with new and more fashionable clothes. Such distress can be avoided if children can be dressed according to their age and the prevailing fashion, providing that it does not make them look ridiculous. Above all, they should not be treated differently from their brothers and sisters.

There are various ways of tackling the problem of obtaining suitable clothes for children of restricted growth. Parents who can make clothes themselves have an obvious advantage, while a lot can be achieved by altering bought garments. Trousers, for example, often pose a problem for mothers of young boys with short arms and short, stubby fingers. The problem can be overcome if the trousers have at least a partly elasticated waist and zip, and if the boy has a device to hook the zip and pull it up. Shoes may also prove hard to find, and the answer is usually just to search until the appropriate fitting is found.

Official help

Various forms of practical and financial aid may be available to children of restricted growth from natural and local resources. In the United Kingdom, the government Departments of Health and Social Security offer certain assistance to families with handicapped children. Grants for home adaptations and rate rebates on the adaptations may be available from the local authority. Doctors, Citizens' Advice Bureau and the local department of social services can help to explain what is available and whether a family is likely to be eligible (see page 16).

2. School

Unless a child of restricted growth is severely handicapped by problems other than height alone, there should be no reason to opt for a special school. Provided children can dress themselves and take themselves to the toilet, any problems that arise in school should be solvable by consultation between parents and teachers. It is advisable to ensure that both the head teacher and the class teacher know about any special needs before a child of restricted growth arrives at school. And it is often helpful if the teacher is asked to prepare the class for the newcomer. The teacher can also be reminded to make sure that the extra small child does not get left out of activities because the others can run faster or push harder. Equally important, the teacher should expect the same academic progress from that child as from the others. Whether or not a child should be assessed for special educational needs is very much an individual matter, and depends on the local Education Authority.

Physical adjustments

A very small child may need a specially low desk and chair in order to be comfortable, without legs dangling and chin on the desk, and should in some cases sit near the front of the class to see the teacher and blackboard properly.

While participation in sports activities should be encouraged as far as possible, it should be arranged that the child need not take part when the proceedings become too rough or exhausting. It may be necessary to be excused from team games and to participate incompletely in gymnastics, but that should be worked out as and when necessary between child, parent and teacher. Some children of restricted growth are highly adept at acrobatics and the use of the trampoline.

The resulting stress on the joints may cause trouble in later years in some cases. It may be wise to seek medical advice if a child is eager to indulge a great deal in such activities.

When it becomes necessary to have books for homework, it can be helpful to have two sets, one at school and the other at home, to avoid carrying them to and fro. If a child finds difficulty, for example, in reaching the drinking fountain or in moving around from classroom to classroom in the time allotted between lessons, it may be necessary, discreetly,

to make special arrangements with the teacher. The same may apply to harassment from other children, if a child cannot deal with it alone.

All discussions between teachers and parents should be conducted with the least possible fuss as the child may be embarrassed by the need for special treatment. Throughout childhood it is necessary to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, a child's pride and determination, and on the other hand, the practical realities of everyday life. Pride is a special quality in a child who starts out at a disadvantage and it should be treated with respect, even if it sometimes seems to border on aggression. Some children, on the other hand, may respond to hardship and harassment by turning into clowns and inviting people to laugh at them. That should be discouraged, and the underlying cause discussed with the child. Such an attitude will not help the child to mature into an adult who commands authority and respect.

A sense of humour is a great asset to people of restricted growth as long as others laugh with them and not at them.

As education progresses, a child of restricted growth should be encouraged to develop individual aptitudes and special interests to the full. While sedentary skills are obviously an advantage to any physically disadvantaged person, it is not wise to try to force a child of restricted growth into a mould if the inclination is not there. A talent for painting or metalwork or science ought not be stifled unless it is absolutely certain that the practical difficulties are insurmountable; they seldom are in the experience of most members of RGA. In the laboratory, for example, it is usually an easy matter to provide steps or a specially high stool. Problems can be discussed thoroughly with teacher and child before a decision is made that might affect the child's future.

Outside interests

Children of restricted growth should be encouraged to participate in leisure time activities, making use of their own special abilities. For example, if there is no suitable part in the school play, there will be scenery to paint and costumes to sew. Camping, cycling, singing and dancing are all possible, and children need not automatically exclude themselves because they feel they will be a burden to everybody else. It is as important for the other children to learn to integrate the child of restricted growth as it is for that child to be involved. They will all benefit in the long term.

3. Teenage years

Most young people of restricted growth probably need the greatest encouragement and support during their teenage years. For then they face all the usual problems of adolescence, while they must also come to terms with their height and its consequences. Although there will be exceptions who seem to pass serenely through these years with no more than a few minor disturbances, many will have phases of depression about their appearance, other people's behaviour towards them, and their

own apparently inadequate means of responding. Inevitably they will also ponder the meaning of life and the reason they had to be so small.

Social activities

Some difficulties stem from the time when school friends are developing rapidly and taking an interest in the opposite sex. Teenagers of restricted growth tend to be left behind, and they feel excluded from many discussions and activities. The pressure on young people of average stature to conform to certain rather strict social rules makes it difficult for them to go out with others who look drastically different from themselves. Thus some very small teenagers may never have a boy or girlfriend, and most of them find that partners of the opposite sex are hard to come by.

Family activities can compensate for some of this lack of social life. Teenagers of restricted growth who have plenty of opportunity to mix with other people at home will generally benefit later when they have to make their way in the world. A home that welcomes many visitors is likely to be a good base for a teenager with few other sources of social contact.



*Andrew Smith with some of the medals and trophies
he has won for various sporting achievements*

The gap can also be filled to some extent by communal activities such as amateur dramatics and singing, where everybody has a function and is valued for that. All such interests should be encouraged, together with any special interests inspired at school, by the television or in any other way. An absorbing concern for music, ballet, electronics or aviation can bring much satisfaction, even providing an outlet for some of the emotions not expended on the opposite sex.

Perhaps paradoxically, at this time teenagers may decide that they no longer wish to mix with other people of restricted growth, even if they have been doing so since birth. Maybe they have decided that all such people are boring, or they do not wish to be reminded of their own appearance or situation. If gentle persuasion has no effect, there is no value in trying to force determined teenagers to attend meetings of RGA or similar groups. At a later date they may well go spontaneously again. Meanwhile their parents may decide to maintain the relationship with their own friends of restricted growth.

Open discussion

Teenagers should always be encouraged to talk openly about worries and unpleasant experiences. In some cases slow physical development may suggest to children of restricted growth that they will never attain adulthood, especially if they have never met adults like themselves. Teasing by other children may be another source of distress. Such worries will be compounded if restricted growth is treated as a taboo subject: full and open discussion between parents and children is undoubtedly valuable. However, some teenagers may feel that by admitting their worries, they are showing themselves to be defeatist. They should be encouraged gently to talk about their concerns. Of course there is unlikely to be any benefit in pressing them to explain themselves against their will, and, as in all relationships between parents and teenagers, flexibility and sympathy will be needed in large measure.

Positive action

Sewing should be encouraged among boys as well as girls if they show any aptitude and inclination. In these, as in all endeavours at this time, teenagers need compliments for their successes and common sense advice when things go wrong. Parents may have to accept without complaint the failure of some early sewing efforts, confining themselves to suggesting alternative uses for incomplete garments.

Many young people of restricted growth have a tendency to put on extra weight if they do not control their diet carefully. Excess weight is not only unsightly, it also puts an undesirable burden on the legs and the rest of the body. Teenagers should therefore be very strict about their diet. A certain amount of exercise is also necessary. While team games will probably prove too exhausting and unsatisfactory, from the point of view of all participants, cycling, walking, swimming and golf are all eminently suitable for people of restricted growth.

When the time and opportunity are ripe for learning to drive, the modifications necessary to the car depend on the exact bodily dimensions of the novice driver. Usually the minimum requirements are extensions of the pedals and a cushion on the driver's seat. A platform for the feet may also be necessary and perhaps an extension to the gear lever. Usually it is necessary to purchase the car and modify it before learning to drive it, and a local mechanic can often help with the modifications. In the United Kingdom, the local department of social services will supply details of parking privileges and how to apply for them. Financial assistance for disabled drivers, who fulfill certain conditions of eligibility, is dispensed by the government's Department of Social Security, from which details can be obtained.

4. Higher Education

A young person of restricted growth who does well at school and shows an inclination towards higher education should be encouraged. Not only will a qualification of some sort provide a useful basis for a career; the opportunity to spend two or three years free from most responsibility other than to learn, among young people of similar interests and varies backgrounds, provides a useful half-way house between the security of home and the competitive world outside.

Making a choice

The choice of college or university should be based on much the same criteria as for anybody else. The young person in question might wish to go to the institution with the best course in a particular subject, or to be taught by a particular professor. However, it is wise to take account of the layout of the place, the accommodation and the transport facilities. If there is no reason to choose academically between a university scattered in a city and one set on a campus, the latter would probably be a better choice, as life would be simply be less exhausting. A student of restricted growth may find personal transport an asset, but it need not be essential, and in some places a car might be a nuisance.

Application and after

Many of these questions should be investigated before a would-be student applies for admittance to an institution. Other points can be raised at the interview. If practical work, for example in a laboratory or workshop is contemplated, the question can be discussed at this stage. It is obviously not wise to give an impression of weakness or ineptitude, but the interviewer may well wonder whether a small student could cope with all the necessary machinery or apparatus and an honest discussion of the situation is advisable.

Similarly a would-be teacher of restricted growth, applying for a place at a training

college, may have to work hard to convince an interviewer that it is possible to control a class without the authority vested in height. The same might apply to a young person of restricted growth wanting to study social work or business administration. In such cases it helps to remember that all teachers and social workers do not have to deal with rowdy delinquents: there are aspects of both professions that can be done as easily by a small person as by a tall person.

On the other hand, if serious doubts arise and a student is convinced that the wrong course has been chosen, there is no shame in changing to another, even if that means applying and being interviewed all over again. All students and academics know that there are many good reasons why courses are switched. Provided the pros and cons are discussed thoroughly, the change is likely to be for the best, in spite of the extra work it often brings.

Student life

As at school, a student of restricted growth probably makes the most of university or college life by joining societies and participating in communal activities. Public speaking, serving on committees or standing for elected office, if the opportunity arises, will all help to establish self-respect and status within the student community, as well as being a preparation for later life.

5. Employment

In employment there is more scope that might at first be realized for people of restricted growth with enthusiasm and a will to work hard, whatever their level of education. The range of jobs done by small people is considerable, and it suggests that very few jobs are barred to those who are determined to do them. In both the United Kingdom and the United States there are, as might be expected among people of restricted growth, plenty of accountants, book-keepers, secretaries and typists. But there are also nurses, dental technicians, social workers, teachers - of both juniors and seniors - businessmen, factory workers, engineers and mechanics of various sorts, gardeners, watchmakers and repairers, librarians, shopkeepers, journalists, public relations officers and many more.

These are not necessarily jobs that would seem obviously appropriate for very small people. For example, one might think that a small person could not be a librarian because of the difficulty of reaching high bookshelves. But of course there is more to librarianship than putting books on shelves. Light engineering, such as assembling electronic instruments, may also seem unsuitable, but a high stool, or a box on which to stand, can counteract lack of height. It often turns out that when a small person gets into an office or factory, it is easy to supply a mobile stool to make it possible to reach filing cabinets and equipment, or to ease the discomfort of dangling legs. If people are willing to help themselves, others are usually glad to cooperate.

Thus within reason it seems best to seek employment according to interest and ability, rather than according to what might seem to be suitable for people of restricted

growth. A person of restricted growth who wants to be a gardener or a mechanic, for example, need not feel automatically barred from such a job. Obviously the jobs that are most likely to be unsuitable or unobtainable are those that depend purely or predominantly on physical prowess, and some kind of skill will always be an asset to a person of restricted growth. Thus any opportunity for training, retraining or further study should always be taken seriously. It is also important to remain flexible. If it is proving difficult to find a job, and an opportunity arises in an unexpected area it may be worth trying it. A person of restricted growth who feels best qualified to be a clerk or a cashier may be able to do other things, such as sewing, woodwork or working with animals, which could be a source of a comfortable income and real satisfaction.

Obstacles

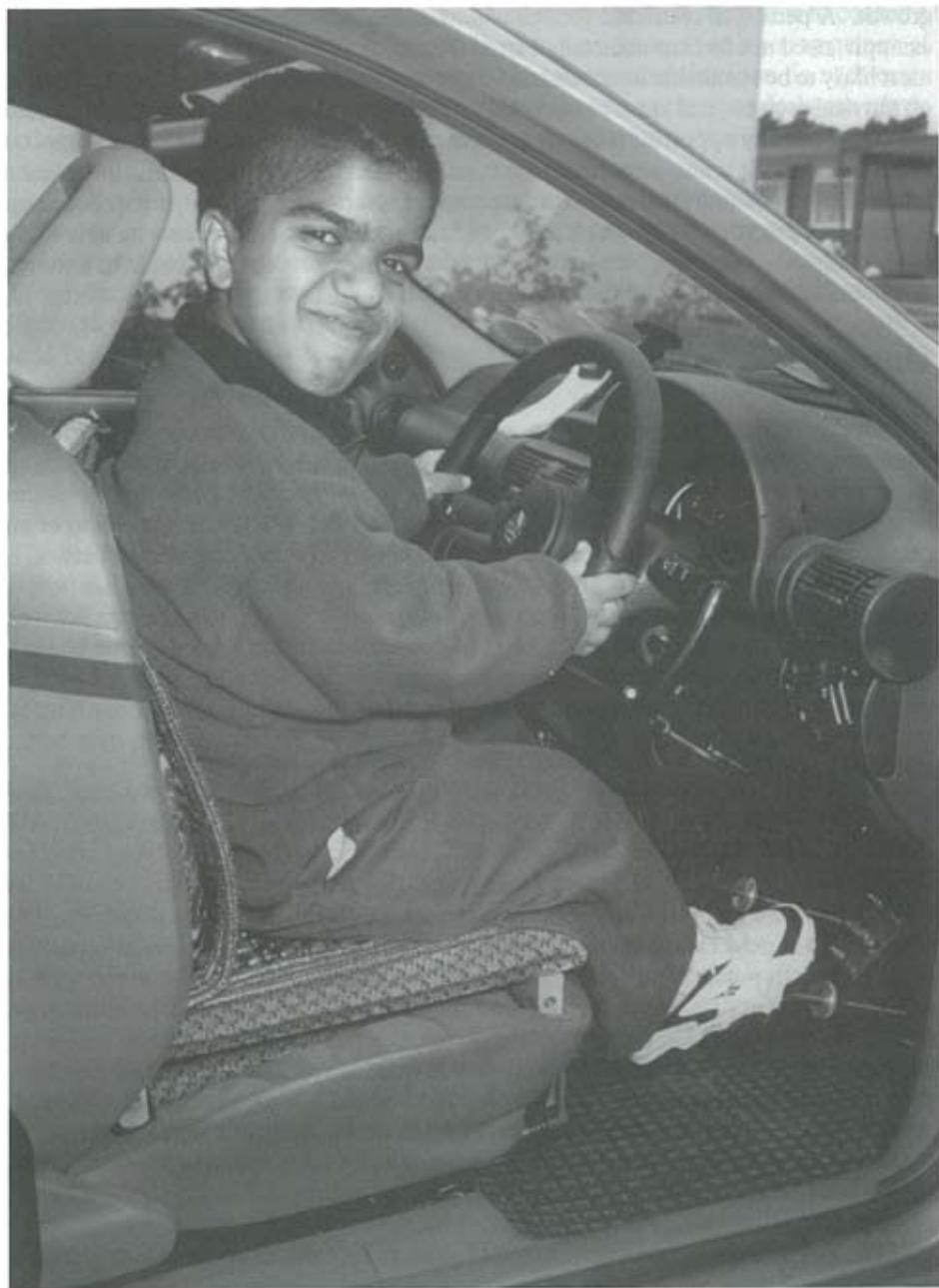
One problem that may crop up where there is heavy machinery or laboratory equipment is insurance. Employers may not be prepared to have small people in such an environment if they feel they may be at risk. This is sometimes a barrier to a particular job. Of course it may be impossible to know whether this is a genuine problem or an excuse from an employer who does not want the bother of employing a small person.

Prejudice does seem to survive among some employers, and whenever small people gather together, some of them will recount experiences of being turned down for jobs just because of their size. Indeed this sort of discrimination can sometimes be blatant, for example, if an application seems to be going well until the applicant's height is discovered. But often it seems more likely that an unsuccessful applicant has blamed prejudice when it is really a case of lack of qualification, or being beaten by a better qualified applicant.

Making the application

On the whole people of restricted growth seek jobs by all the usual means. Because of the frequent need to compete with many other suitable candidates, it is very important to make the best possible impression. Letters of application should be literate and legible, and if a statement of previous work is required, it should be neat and if possible typed out. There should be thorough preparation for an interview, with the applicant practicing answers to basic questions such as: "Why do you want this job?" and "Why do you think you can do it?", as well as, more specifically, "How would you cope in the office (factory or whatever)?" It is also wise to practice sitting in various sorts of chairs without being swallowed up. A small person clearly must not be sloppy when applying for a job. These strictures of course apply to anybody seeking a job, but for the small person they are perhaps especially significant.

There is no agreement among people of restricted growth as to whether they should declare their height before going to an interview. Some say one should prepare the interviewer; others say height should be irrelevant in such circumstances. The answer has to be a personal decision. Also there is no agreement in the United Kingdom as to



Nashwan Fayyad takes to the wheel

whether it is advisable to have the so called green card, issued by the government's Department of Employment to registered disabled people. According to this scheme, a company above a certain size is required by law to employ a proportion of disable people, and so the green card can afford some form of protection. But this to must be a matter for personal decision.

Good workers

Some young people of restricted growth find their first job easily, while others have many interviews before being offered a position. At that stage it is necessary to be very determined and keep trying, without losing heart or becoming cynical. There is ample evidence that once a small person has a job, he or she is as reliable and productive as everybody else (if not more so). There may be a tendency for people of restricted growth to be less mobile than many other people, not moving from job to job once they have found a comfortable niche. This should not necessarily be considered a disadvantage or an admission of defeat; people of average stature often make a career in a single company.

Showbusiness not for all

Whenever small people discuss employment, somebody mentions showbusiness. Certainly there are some very successful entertainers among people of restricted growth, but the days are gone when no other profession was open to them. Those with real talent and inclination are free to pursue it, while others go their own very disparate ways.

6. The small person in society

When parents learn that they have a child of restricted growth, one of their earliest concerns may be whether that child will eventually be able to marry. Such qualms, premature though they may be, are sometimes encouraged by friends and relatives whose own outlook has been rather limited and who assume, in their fluster, that lack of height must be a barrier to many of the normal processes of life. The preceding chapters, and the example of many small people, have shown that adjustment to normal development is perfectly possible, and marriage is no exception. Adolescent problems with the opposite sex are not necessarily carried over into adulthood.

It is common to see marriages in which both partners are small, or in which one is small and the other of average stature. These people meet and form their partnerships in the usual way. Some of them of course are brought together by RGA and similar organizations in other countries, but the rest meet for the first time in all sorts of circumstances.

Families

Many of them later have families, some naturally and others by adoption. There are several factors to be taken into account when a couple decides which course to follow. The prospective mother must consider her health and the likely effects of pregnancy.

The outlook for the offspring is also an important consideration (The Layman's Guide to Restricted Growth discuss medical aspects of pregnancy and genetic counselling). It must finally be a personal decision whether to have natural offspring: there is no consensus of opinion among people of restricted growth. Some feel that it would be wrong to bring into the world a child that might be like themselves, while others believe that they can draw on their own experience to give such a child the best possible start in life. Anybody who has met a wide variety of people of restricted growth knows that there can be no hard and fast rule in such a matter.

It is always wise for people of restricted growth to seek the advice of a genetic counsellor before deciding whether to have children so as to know what can be expected. General practitioners and associations such as RGA will know how to do this. It is also very helpful to discuss pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing with people of restricted growth who have first hand experience of them.

Some stay single

While there are many happily married couples, there are also people of restricted growth who have remained single and made very satisfying and successful lives for themselves. Some become deeply immersed in work which they enjoy, and others enthusiastically pursue extramural interests and talents. However they fill their lives, these people are fully occupied and they feel useful and appreciated. It is always helpful to remember that life can be good without marriage. Possibly the worst of all worlds is to remain aimlessly single, convinced that life will be worthwhile only when a partner turns up. Parents can help by encouraging independence and self-sufficiency.

Activities

In every way people of restricted growth find it rewarding to pursue interests and activities, both professional and amateur, ensuring that they make many contacts and acquire plenty of friends and colleagues. Possibilities are legion; for example, they may pursue amateur dramatics, fishing, photography, music, pottery and more esoteric pursuits such as archery. And of course there is always the pleasure of learning more about literature, history, politics, art and the many other offerings of evening classes.

People of restricted growth do not need to be reticent about sitting on committees or accepting responsibility: height is not usually a prerequisite. The same applies to professional activities. Much may be gained from involvement at the national or local level in trade union affairs or in the bodies associated with such professions as librarianship and accountancy.

People of restricted growth with a yen for foreign travel or skiing or some other activity that may seem rather daunting need not necessarily be deterred. It is wise to know in advance what will be involved and to make sure that no insuperable physical problems are likely to arise, especially when travelling alone. And it is of course advisable to take the minimum of luggage and not to purchase bulky souvenirs.

Clothes

Clothes for special occasions as well as for everyday wear pose various problems, according to the bodily dimensions and exact size of the person concerned. Women who can sew often find they can make most of their own clothes, while others find they can buy garments and adapt them. Yet others have friends or a professional dressmaker who can do the necessary work for them. Tights can usually be found if the smallest styles are sought out.

On the whole, men experience greater problems with clothing because their jackets, suits and trousers usually have to be made for them and prices may be very high. But is often possible to find a tailor who does not charge an exorbitant price to make a good suit for a small man. Shirts can often be made to fit by shortening the sleeves, or simply by wearing arm bands. Some men whose short stature involves a very high waistline, wear polo-neck sweaters most of the time. These conceal the waistline and also avoid the embarrassment of flapping shirt tails.

Shoes pose problems for most people of restricted growth. Usually it is a matter of searching through the available selection of children's shoes to find those that combine the required style, length, and width - many people of restricted growth have very wide, though short feet. Clothing problems of all sorts can often be resolved by discussion with other people of restricted growth. When all else fails, in the United Kingdom, general practitioners can recommend patients to have shoes made to measure under the National Health Service.

Most of the symptoms experienced by people of restricted growth are due to common ailments of the sort that afflict everybody. But certain complaints are peculiar to the condition of the individual concerned. To understand these and to be prepared for them, it is wise to know what to expect, as far as that is possible, by reading about the medical aspects of the condition in question. Most general practitioners have very little experience of the conditions underlying restricted growth and understandably they may not seem very knowledgeable. People of restricted growth can help by being patient and by introducing their general practitioners to *The Layman's Guide to Restricted Growth* and other such literature. That and associations such as RGA can help them to find a medical specialist with good knowledge of restricted growth.

Practical aid

For dealing with many of the inconveniences of everyday life in the home and elsewhere, various lightweight steps, stools and reaching devices are available. A wealth of less formal devices has been invented for individual use, and gatherings of people of restricted growth provide an opportunity for the exchange of information and advice.

Sometimes more substantial solutions are needed and, whether married or single, people of restricted growth may find it helpful to avail themselves of some of the services and privileges offered to disabled people (some of which are mentioned in reference to parents and children on pages 4 and 8). Although some people of restricted growth may

at first be offended by the term disabled, they find that it serves as a useful label to help them cancel out some of their disadvantages. For example, the ability to park a car near the office in a busy city may be vital to a successful career, or modifications to a kitchen or bathroom may make independent living possible. In the United Kingdom parking privileges, grants for home modifications and rate rebates on the modifications are administered by local government authorities, and initial enquiries should be directed to the local department of social services. Rules of eligibility and resources available vary from area to area, and a person of restricted growth in one town will not necessarily receive the same treatment as one living in another town.

Attitudes of other people

However well people of restricted growth may be integrated into society, there will always be those of average stature who respond to them inappropriately.

The most obvious and forgivable group of course is children, who are usually merely curious when they say: "Look at the funny little lady, mummy". Sometimes mummy replies with a sensible remark such as "Yes, dear, we're all different, some of us are small and some of us are tall, and some of us are very small, but it doesn't matter". More often, mummy however is embarrassed and just tells the child to be quiet, which does nothing to help the child or the person of restricted growth. Parents can do much to influence the way their children think about others who look drastically different from everybody else.

Careful response

Of course adults too are often unsure as to how they should respond to people of restricted growth, especially at their first encounter. Some average sized adults take to very small adults as though they were children, or do not address them directly at all, speaking over their heads to taller companions. Others brush aside people of restricted growth when introduced to them, while yet others launch into stories of little people they have known. Depending on the circumstances, this can be merely fleetingly annoying, calling for no response or just a smile, or it may call for a more careful response.

People of restricted growth learn that on the whole a straightforward, polite reply is best; there is no benefit in being rude or making the other person feel foolish. It is necessary to be assertive but not aggressive, as it is also in situations where very small people tend to be ignored or pushed aside. In queues they must speak up clearly when ignored or not noticed by a salesperson, giving their order before the next person has time to start a transaction. In museums, art galleries and other places where people look at exhibits, the very small person can feel justified in making their way gently but firmly to the front of a group. There is no reason why taller people should obscure their view; it will not inconvenience them to stand behind somebody two or three feet shorter than themselves.

Integration

In any circumstances, people of restricted growth wishing to maximize their comfort do well to remember that much can be achieved with a smile. Other people do not as a rule wish them harm, but are sometimes unsure how to treat them, perhaps through embar-

nessment or unfamiliarity. One of the aims of organizations such as RGA is to wipe out unfamiliarity. People of restricted growth do not want to be exactly the same as everybody else; they will always need certain practical assistance, and their lives may not unfold precisely according to convention. But they wish to be recognized for what they are - simply a part of the natural range of human variation.

7. Miscellaneous information

Local sources of assistance

Citizen Advice Bureau can provide advice about schemes, services and sources of support at all levels.

Many large towns have a DIAL office which provides advice and information for local disabled people.

Social services departments are part of the local authority and can usually be contacted at the town hall or municipal offices. They can provide assistance to eligible disabled people although services and resources vary from place to place.

People who can be helpful

Health visitors, social workers and occupational therapists can advise on schemes and facilities available to assist and support people with various needs. They may not know very much about restricted growth, however.

Disablement Resettlement Officers, at local Jobcentres can advise on registering as disabled (see page 12) and discuss employment and training schemes.

The Restricted Growth Association encourages members to share information and sources of help. This is published in our Quarterly Newsletter and retained in our office files for later reference by members and health and other professionals acting on behalf of people with restricted growth. We also have addresses of organizations whose services may be useful to people with restricted growth and their families.

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