



Limitless

Amy Brooks' take on life

By Jennifer McClure

Like many 27-year-olds, Amy Brooks is quick to respond to e-mails, Facebook and even text messages, and she knows a good deal more about computers than her older siblings.

When not online, she may be out shopping or creating 3-D paper art by cutting out and layering images within a picture. The avid hockey fan is a regular at Pittsburgh Penguins games, cheering on her hometown team. Visitors to Allison Park Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Pittsburgh, may find her waiting at the sanctuary doors on

Sunday, greeting attendees as they enter.

Friends and family marvel at all Amy is able to accomplish without arms or legs.

"I do everything that everybody else does; I just do it differently," Amy says. "I try, and if it doesn't work, I just do it a different way until I get it."

From Amy's perspective, anything is possible — a mind-set she credits to her parents, Rich and Janet Brooks, but a lifestyle that inspires others to see past their own limitations and embrace God's viewpoint of themselves.

Photos by Mike Gianechini at G&G Studio Creations



"My parents didn't treat me differently than my siblings," she explains. "I had to take my dishes to the kitchen when I was finished with them. I went to a public school. I did my own homework, and I didn't do any less homework than anybody else."

James Callahan, affectionately known as Pastor Cal, leads the seniors ministry at Allison Park Church. But when Amy was a child, he was her children's pastor.

"Even though the physical handicap is so visible, she still holds the value of what God sees in her," he says. "When I'm with Amy, I don't see her loss, I see her commitment to God."

Growing up, Amy says she had an understanding that God makes everyone different, and she simply accepted herself as she was.

"I always understood that God

her parents, who say they never treated her as handicapped so she never felt handicapped.

"My parents didn't treat me differently than my siblings," she explains. "I had to take my dishes to the kitchen when I was finished with them. I went to a public school. I did my own homework, and I didn't do any less homework than anybody else. Everything was as normal as could be."

In raising Amy, Janet recalls asking God, "Please show me how to raise her, and I will do

makes us the way we are for a reason," Amy says. "If I can glorify Him more in the state that I am in, it's better than if I were to have arms and legs."

Neither Janet nor Rich can recall a time when Amy questioned God as to why she was born without limbs.

"She never sat down and asked why," Janet recalls. "She never whined about it. She never once said, 'If I only had fingers, I could do that.'"

From Amy's perspective, she had a normal childhood. She believes that was made possible by

my best to do so by Your instructions." Everything from teaching Amy to balance or to roll over, Janet says, to creating makeshift arms so she could bat at her baby toys were God-given ideas.

Some of the ideas included contraptions Rich designed, such as a walker Amy used to get around as a baby.

"I looked at her, saw what she needed and tried to do it," Rich says.

Rich and Janet's journey with Amy came about because of a decision five years before Amy was born.



AN OPEN HOUSE

In November 1976, Janet and Rich signed up to become foster parents. At the time they had four children of their own. Brian, Candy, Myia and Noah ranged in age from 5 to 17. During the next 25 years, the Brookses would foster more than 80 children, most of whom had major medical needs.

"I explained to the agency whenever we started that I didn't have any training in caring for children with special needs," Janet says. "But I asked the Lord to just give me the children I was meant to have, and He does have a sense of humor."

From caring for children with no medical needs for a few days to caring for a little girl with cerebral palsy and severe allergies for three years, Janet and Rich's open door truly depicts the nature of their hearts.

"They're just a great visible example of so many things — grace, endurance through trials, love, and acceptance for people," says Jeff Leake, senior pastor of Allison Park Church.

Late September 1981, Janet received a call about a little baby girl born without limbs.

"They had already code named her so it couldn't be traced back, and when I hung up the phone it just came to me: Her name is Amy," Janet recalls. "I really took that as a sign from God."

When Amy was 6 months old, the agency began looking for a permanent home. It was then that Rich and Janet declared their de-

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Home Improvements

Once a year Allison Park Church in Pittsburgh holds a Community Care Day. Small groups from the church take on various projects around the city. This year, one of the men's small groups, Band of Brothers led by Eric Fabian, decided to tackle needed improvements around the Brookses' home.

A team of 21 men completed an array of tasks Saturday, May 30, aimed at benefiting all three members of the household, says Geoff Hatton, the group's project manager.

Previous to the event, Amy Brooks had only one exit out of the house, and the ramp she used was splintering. Now an exterior chairlift on the front of the house provides her with a second exit, and Amy will no longer get splinters when walking down the new ramp, which is made of composite materials.

Janet Brooks says she had always wanted to have a flower garden in the front yard, but a steep incline prevented it. As a gift to her, the team built a 4-foot-high retaining wall that stretches the width of the property in front of the house, then landscaped, mulched and planted flowers and a tree in the front yard.

On the back of the house, the team replaced two porch overhangs that were in poor condition and would leak when it rained. And as a gift to Rich Brooks, the team cut and split firewood.

The Band of Brothers funded the project and also surprised Amy with two tickets to a Pittsburgh Penguins hockey game.

"I am so stunned, amazed and grateful for all of their hard work," Amy says. "They truly worked as a team, and we had a wonderful day."

Earlier this year Fabian launched two foundations. One, Arms Around Amy, is to serve as a venue through which interested individuals can make donations to help the Brooks family financially. The second, Arms Around Pittsburgh, was created with the idea of raising financial support for individuals in the Pittsburgh area in situations similar to Amy's. More information is available at ArmsAroundAmy.com and ArmsAroundPittsburgh.com.

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cision to adopt Amy. Two years later, Amy's adoption was finalized.

ARTISTIC ABILITIES

Amy was the only one of the Brookses' children to graduate from high school with honors. From start to finish, she attended public schools. Tasks such as getting out her books, turning pages and writing without assistance meant homework often consumed several hours a night.

In junior high, Amy's natural artistic ability caught the atten-

Amy has kept up with her artistic skills by painting Christmastime ceramic houses, assembling and painting dolls, and creating 3-D art called paper tole. Next on her to-do list is to learn graphic design and animation. For that she is considering art school but is exploring her options financially.

Eric Fabian, a family friend and deacon at Allison Park Church, not only admires Amy's artwork and her abilities as an artist but also her selflessness.

"Amy is a giver, and a person

"I just hope I can be a vessel for the Lord," she says, "to show people that they can do anything, whether it's through my artwork or just showing them what I can do through everyday things."



tion of her art teacher. But with homework already taking up so much time, Amy was worried about taking on more work. So she decided not to follow the teacher's recommendation to pursue art in high school.

After she graduated from high school, Amy wasn't looking to continue her education right away.

"I was sick of school at that point because it took me so long to do everything," Amy says. "That, and it's a little bit expensive. So I kind of put that on hold and tried my own things."

in her position could be a taker," Fabian says. "She could be saying, 'I need. I want. Help me.' And she's totally opposite."

Recalling his memories of her as a child, Pastor Cal echoes Fabian's sentiments.

"The thing about Amy, from the time she was a small child, she's always been a giver," Callahan says. "She's always seen beyond herself. She's always blossoming out. And I believe that's because her relationship with God is so real the Spirit of God is able to flow through her."

"Even though she's physically

limited, she's constantly giving. The fruit of the Spirit is very, very evident in Amy's character."

Amy's primary goal for her life is not complex nor does it require prosthetics or even an art degree, but it is inspiring.

"I just hope I can be a vessel for the Lord," she says, "to show people that they can do anything, whether it's through my artwork or just showing them what I can do through everyday things."

"I've heard this quote somewhere: 'You should always tell people about the Lord and use words if you have to.' I hope that, by the way I'm living, I'm showing His love for people." e

JENNIFER McCLURE is assistant editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

ONLINE: Visit pe.ag.org for a video on a day in the life of Amy Brooks.

E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

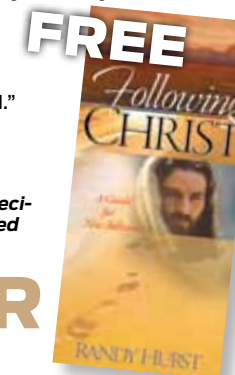
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)



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