

## ANNA, AN ISOLATED CHILD

by Kingsley Davis (adapted), University of Chicago Press, *American Journal of Sociology*

Early in 1940 there appeared... an account of a girl called Anna. She had been deprived of normal contact and had received a minimum of human care for almost the whole of her first six years of life. The first few days and weeks of Anna's life were complicated by frequent changes of domicile.... She was an illegitimate child, the second such child born to her mother, and... her grandfather, a widowed farmer in whose house her mother lived, strongly disapproved of this new evidence of the mother's indiscretion. This fact led to the baby's being shifted about....

Since, however, the grandfather would not and the mother could not pay for the child's care, she was finally taken back as a last resort to the grandfather's house (at the age of 5½ months). There she remained, kept on the second floor in an attic-like room because her mother hesitated to incur the grandfather's wrath by bringing her downstairs.

The mother, a sturdy woman weighing about 180 pounds (about 81 kg), did a man's work on the farm. She engaged in heavy work such as milking cows and tending hogs and had little time for her children. Sometimes she went out at night, in which case Anna was left entirely without attention. Ordinarily, it seems, Anna received only enough care to keep her barely alive. She appears to have been seldom moved from one

position to another. Her clothing and bedding were filthy. She apparently had no instruction, no friendly attention.

It is little wonder that, when finally found and removed from the room in the grandfather's house at the age of nearly six years, the child could not talk, walk, or do anything that showed intelligence. She was in an extremely undernourished condition, with skeleton-like legs and a bloated abdomen. She had been fed on virtually nothing except cow's milk during the years under her mother's care.

In 1939, nearly two years after being discovered, Anna had progressed to the point where she could walk, understand simple commands, feed herself, achieve some neatness, remember people, etc. But she still did not speak, and though she was like a normal infant of something over one year of age in mentality, she was far from normal for her age....

On April 25, 1940, a clinical psychologist, the late Professor Francis N. Maxfield, examined Anna and reported the following: large for her age; hearing "entirely normal;" vision apparently normal; able to climb stairs; speech in the "babbling stage;" and promise for developing intelligible speech later seems to be good.

The school for retarded children, on July 1, 1941, reported that Anna... could bounce and catch a ball and was said to

conform to group socialization, though as a follower rather than a leader. Toilet habits were firmly established. Food habits were normal, except that she still used a spoon as her sole implement. She could dress herself except for fastening her clothes. Most remarkable of all, she had finally begun to develop speech. She was characterized as being at about the two-year level in this regard. She could call attendants by name and bring in one when she was asked to. She had a few complete sentences to express her wants. The report concluded that there was nothing peculiar about her, except that she was feeble-minded....

On June 22, 1942, a final report was made on Anna. It noted she could now string beads, follow directions, identify a few colours, build with blocks, and choose between pleasant and unpleasant pictures. Her sense of rhythm was quite good, and she showed the ability to love a doll. Anna's speech had developed, but was confined to phrases. She did, however, try to carry on a conversation. Her clothing was kept clean, her hands were washed, and she had begun to brush her teeth. She was easily excited, but otherwise had a pleasant disposition.

A short time later, Anna unfortunately died at the age of 10½. Her death was caused by... jaundice.

## ISABELLE, ANOTHER ISOLATED CHILD

by Kingsley Davis (adapted), *University of Chicago Press, American Journal of Sociology*

Isabelle was discovered in November 1938, nine months after the discovery of Anna. At the time she was found she was approximately six and a half years old. Like Anna, she was an illegitimate child and had been kept in seclusion for that reason. Her mother was a deaf-mute, having become so at the age of two, and it appears that she and Isabelle had spent most of their time together in a dark room shut off from the rest of the mother's family. As a result Isabelle had no chance to develop speech; when she communicated with her mother, it was by means of gestures... Her behaviour towards strangers, especially men, was almost that of a wild animal, manifesting much fear and hostility. In lieu of speech she made only a strange croaking sound. In many ways, she acted like an infant. She was utterly unaware of relationships of any kind. When presented with a ball for the first time, she held it in the palm of her hand, then reached out and stroked the researcher's face with it. Such behaviour is comparable to that of a child of six months. At first it was even hard to

tell whether or not she could hear, so unused were her senses. Many of her actions resembled those of deaf children.

It is small wonder that once it was established that she could hear, specialists working with her believed her to be feeble-minded... The general impression was that she was wholly uneducable and that any attempt to teach her to speak, after so long a period of silence, would meet with failure.

In spite of this interpretation, the individuals in charge of Isabelle launched a systematic and skillful program of training. It seemed hopeless at first. The approach had to be through pantomime and dramatization, suitable to an infant. It required one week of intensive effort before she even made her first attempt at vocalization. Gradually she began to respond, however, and after the first hurdles had at last been overcome, a curious thing happened. She went through the usual stages of learning characteristic of the years from one to six not only in proper succession but far more rapidly than normal. In a little over two months after her first vocalization,

she was putting sentences together. Nine months after that, she could identify words and sentences on the printed page, could write well, could add to ten, and could retell a story after hearing it. Seven months beyond this point, she had a vocabulary of 1500-2000 words, and was asking complicated questions. Starting from an educational level of between one and three years, she had reached normal level by the time she was eight and a half years old. In short, she covered in two years the stages of learning that ordinarily require six....

When the writer saw Isabelle a year and a half after her discovery, she gave him the impression of being a very bright, cheerful, energetic little girl. She spoke well, walked and ran without trouble, and sang with gusto and accuracy. Today she is over 14 years old, and has passed the sixth grade in a public school. Her teachers say that she participates in all school activities as normally as other children. Though older than her classmates, she has fortunately not physically matured too far beyond their level.