

Annie Glenn fights to overcome stutter

By KAREN FELD

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LOS ANGELES — If a heart surgeon gets detained in a meeting, his wife can't fill in for him in the operating room. If an attorney has two trials scheduled for the same day, his wife can't argue the case for him. But politics is different. It's one of the few professions where a candidate's wife is an acceptable surrogate. And if she is a good speaker, knows the issues, has charm and exudes warmth, she can enhance his image.

Even when Jimmy Carter's popularity waned, his wife Rosalynn was an asset. Prior to that, Jackie Kennedy contributed an ambiance of elegance to the White House, and Lady Bird Johnson was perceived as an active, energetic woman who helped beautify the nation's capital. On the Republican side, Betty Ford was independent and outspoken, and Nancy Reagan has once again brought glamour back to the White House. The first lady commands media attention and has become a highly visible model for American women.

BUT THE WIFE of presidential candidate John Glenn has a physical handicap that interferes with her ability to speak out on issues, and often causes her to be misunderstood. Annie Glenn is one of the 2 million Americans who stutter.

Annie Glenn, 63, who was born a stutterer and practices her speech daily, is encouraged by slow but steady improvement.



Annie Glenn can proudly take her place beside her husband in his campaign for the presidency since she has received speech therapy.

□ Treatment for stutterers varies, E25

Once terrified of the telephone, she now makes three phone calls every morning. She calls a department store and asks for a specific department, an airline and asks for a schedule, and a grocery store to ask if they carry a certain product.

"When you talk on the phone, you can't see the reaction of the person on the other end. I could only think of all the horrible experiences I've had face to face," says Annie, who has been laughed at, called mentally retarded, and deaf and mute because she could write but couldn't talk. People ask her if she's cold because her jaws jump up and down.

SOURCES SAY ROSALYNN Carter objected to Sen. John Glenn as her husband's vice presidential running mate in 1976 because of Annie's speech impediment. The Glens don't deny that. When Vice President Lyndon Johnson requested a network TV hookup at the Glenn home in Ohio during the first space shot in 1962, then astronaut Glenn called the vice president to refuse for fear Annie would be misunderstood by the public, as stutterers so often are. That same year she declined to speak on a Bob Hope television special with the other astronauts' wives.

There have been many times in Annie's 40-year marriage to her childhood sweetheart that she's been called upon to share

See Annie, E25

the microphone and the limelight. Until recently, the mere thought of it paralyzed her.

Annie and John Glenn grew up in New Concord, Ohio, a small town which offered comfort and protection to Annie, who stuttered 85 percent of the time. "When I opened my mouth to say a word that began with an a, e, i, o, or u, my mouth would open, but no sound would come out," Annie explains. "To carry on a conversation was work. But in New Concord, they just ignored it and accepted my way of speaking."

When Glenn was in the Marine Corps and they moved from city to city, her stuttering became a greater disability. "I just couldn't talk." Yet, Annie wasn't shy. In each city, she would find a job playing the organ at a nearby church. And she'd sing. All stutterers can sing without stuttering.

TRADITIONAL SPEECH THERAPY proved unsuccessful. Before she underwent a new form of intensive, live-in treatment at the Communications Research Institute at Hollins College in Rpanoke, Va., first in 1972 and again in 1978, Annie couldn't call the doctor if one of her children was sick, and couldn't order dinner from a menu if a restaurant, much less talk to the press or make a campaign speech. She once worked as a secretary, did typing and shorthand, but couldn't answer the phone.

She was one of the first 100 students to complete Hollins' three-week, 11-hour-a-day program. At Hollins, Annie began by pronouncing one-syllable words very slowly at the rate of two seconds per syllable, timing herself with a stopwatch. She observed how the words were formed in her throat, mouth and jaw. She also learned how to breathe with an open throat, taking deep breaths.

Coming back to the outside life the second time was a much bigger improvement over the first time." Annie says. "My friends would cry. They couldn't believe the change."

SHE PRACTICES REGULARLY: with her monitor (she talks into a microphone equipped with a green light that goes on if she stutters); over the telephone; with Patryce Thompson, her speech therapist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

The nature of stuttering is that it varies tremendously depending on the fatigue and anxiety level," Thompson says. "Annie's in the 10 to 25 percent range now." That means that she stutters when saying 10 to 25 words out of every 100.

She gave her first speech at a Memorial Day service in Ohio in 1977, and now fills in for her husband speaking around the country. Thompson,



John and Annie Glenn with their family, from left clockwise: Philip and (daughter) Karen Freedman; Lyn and (son) David Glenn and grandson Daniel.

who frequently travels with Annie on the campaign trail to give her feedback, is amazed at her progress.

"She's leaping into speaking situations she hasn't done before," Thompson says. These include rooms with poor acoustics, the pressure of press interviews with cameras and lights, advertising and fielding questions and answers.

Although many stutterers outgrow the affliction by the time they reach their teen-age years, Annie's father, a dentist, also stuttered throughout his adult life. The Glenns' daughter, Lyn, 36, stuttered as a child but outgrew it. Their son, David, 37, never stuttered.

The cause is unknown. Dr. Ron Webster, director of the Hollins Communications Research Insti-

tute, is one of those who feels it may be caused by physical rather than emotional factors. He's investigating a middle ear interruption that he believes may cause a slight delay in the verbal signals to the brain.

TODAY, ANNIE MAKES a point of speaking slowly. She concentrates on speaking with an open throat rather than a tight one. She still stutters and has difficulty with m's and n's, f's and th's, and s's and t's. But she gives campaign speeches. "I think the people like to see us together," says Annie, who campaigns with Sen. Glenn as well as alone.

Annie can now say the words "astronaut" and "senator." She's practicing "president."