



**LOSS OF LIMBS NOT A HANDICAP** — For 41-year-old Rosanne Laflamme of Quebec City, who lost three limbs in a tragic farm accident when she was three, the loss of her legs and right arm eventually gave her a true purpose in life. In Moncton last week to address a local

group of insurance underwriters Rosanne recounted the events of a sorrowful childhood and adulthood which led to her finding true happiness by helping world understand the disabled. (Studio One).

## *Conquering handicap brings full, rich life*

By SHANE HARPER  
Staff Writer  
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The apartment in Quebec City is only 30 miles from the tiny village of St.-Francois-de-Montmagny where Rosanne Laflamme was born.

Its walls are lined with trophies, medals, cups, plaques and other mementos of sporting achievements. Skiing has been her major field of sporting endeavor, but there are trophies telling of high-calibre performances in various sports, including swimming, the shot-put and javelin-throwing.

Although the apartment is a short distance in miles from her childhood, it is light-years away from the despair she endured and conquered while growing up in a world which misunderstood her as much as she misunderstood the world.

Rosanne has no legs, no right arm, and the tips of three fingers on her left hand are missing. She says she is normal but people who have met her will tell you differently. This is her story.

The sun was shining and the sky was a magnificent blue when the three-and-a-half-year-old child woke up that Thursday morning to explore her father's fields on the first day of harvest.

Edgar Laflamme was up early that morning sharpening his harvester for the long day ahead. His wife Rosa, who had given birth to their third son, was confined to the family homestead located three miles from the village of 3,000 French inhabitants.

Rosanne spied her father who was nearby on the large machine he had worked hard to buy and which now helped support the family of eight. Dropping the glass jar in which she kept potato bugs when she wasn't busy looking for strawberries, Rosanne ran through the thick, tall plants towards her father.

A moment later the golden strands glistened with Rosanne's blood which the jagged blade had drawn from her tiny body so swiftly that when the hum of the harvester died, only her father's scream remained.

Nearby, Laflamme's neighbor and his farm hand were working. Reputed to have "special healing powers" the hired-hand whispered his special words and miraculously the bleeding reportedly stopped from her arm which was severed at the elbow. Her legs, severed just below the knees, also stopped bleeding and the child's buttocks, stripped completely of flesh, also started to clot.

Such was Rosanne's condition when Dr. Paul Racicot of Levis' Hotel Dieu Hospital prepared the child for death, not concerning himself with how the child's stumps would look. It was agreed, Rosanne would surely die.

A special ceremony in the parish cemetery marked the interment of the child's mangled limbs, but Rosanne refused to follow the dismembered parts of her body to the grave.

Under the sedation of powerful drugs, the child remained in the hospital but was sent home after only two months. A government pension of \$40 a month awaited Rosanne at the age of 20, but the lack of initial government

assistance turned out to be a benefit in disguise.

Without a wheelchair, Rosanne, with the help of a remarkable set of leather knee pads given to her by the village shoemaker, learned to keep pace with her three brothers and two sisters.

"I could even climb trees," said Rosanne in Moncton last week, as she prepared to deliver her personal message of life for members of the Moncton Life Underwriters' Association at Hotel Beausejour. It's the same positive message she has delivered to groups from Vancouver to Europe in the past several years.

When Rosanne entered Grade 1 in the one-room school, the six-year-old with the five-pound wooden legs immediately took on the nickname "penguin".

But her years in school soon became filled with happy hours until in the seventh grade a physician diagnosed fatigue and a nervous breakdown, and Rosanne pursued her limited but otherwise contented life at home on the South Rural Route of Quebec.

In fact, at 17 she fell in love, and for six months discovered that a dismembered body was not a handicap after all. When the relationship ended as a result of peer pressure on her boyfriend, the six months of a first romance killed her passion for life as swiftly as the jagged scythe had removed her limbs.

Rosanne would be 24 years old before the passion for life and peace of mind returned.

At 24 with a sixth grade education, Rosanne returned to school and two years later found herself teaching teenagers who were her teenaged classmates a day before.

"I learned a great deal in my 17-year teaching career, but most of all it was the growing self-confidence which eventually led to my coming to terms with myself and the world," said Rosanne during last week's interview.

For Rosanne to approach life on the offensive was a slow, painful process that never really ended until four years ago when she ended the suffering of another human being.

Edgar Laflamme, now, 74, lived on the verge of insanity for endless weeks after the terrible accident which was to lead to his daughter's true purpose in life.

Her father adapted to the growing pains, the dances where Rosanne would return to her seat after only one song, and the tears which flowed when her friends married and bore children.

For more than 30 years the eyes of Edgar Laflamme were sad. When his daughter tried to discuss her situation with him, he refused, until he was 70, when they talked.

"I told him he must talk to me about what happened. That he was probably near death and should come to terms with himself to find the happiness he once had a long time ago."

It is easy to understand why Edgar Laflamme felt the way he did, and as Rosanne knows

now, his peace of mind could not have been attained until she had also found her own.

Rosanne is missing three limbs, but it is not her disfigurement which attracts the attention of others, it is her incredible glow of life which commands the understanding of others, who once felt pity.

German is a language she is currently learning, the fifth language Rosanne will soon master, already having learned French, English, Italian and Spanish. As well, she plays the organ and trumpet.

She is the only French Canadian woman on the 32-member National Advisory Council on Fitness And Amateur sport. Because of her now public life, Rosanne has learned to live out of a suitcase and travels thousands of miles a week by jet and averages 500 miles a week on her Oldsmobile Cutlass.

The 17-years of teaching in a small private school in Quebec did much for Rosanne's self-confidence, but it was a sports clinic in 1971 which was destined to change her life.

On Feb. 26, 1971, Rosanne's 34th birthday, she attended a clinic jointly sponsored by the Federation of Leisure and Sports and the Society for the Handicapped in Quebec City.

Only days before, Rosanne had attended the society's annual banquet, her first experience with other handicapped persons, as she had never attended rehabilitation classes of any kind.

For two hours Rosanne watched 400 disabled persons perform the simple act of eating. Many could not even feed themselves and the sight turned her stomach and made her realize for the first time in her life, that she was "very fortunate."

It was this experience which ended her need to wear a sweater over her shoulders so that the stump on her right side would not show. A simple thing in itself, but representative of a new life.

Thus it was a winter day seven years ago that Rosanne attended the clinic operated by Belgium trainer Jacques Vanden Abeele and opted to join the group of handicapped persons whose upper limbs were disabled.

In her best-selling book which has been recently translated into English by the Canada Arts Council, Rosanne writes that it was because she was not wearing her artificial arm that she decided to join that group instead of those whose legs were disabled.

Today, Rosanne refuses to wear an artificial right arm, explaining: "I have two artificial legs. I can live without an artificial arm." Gone are the days when she paced the Maskinonge Bridge in Quebec, looking at the water far below which promised an end to suffering.

Only two days before the interview with Rosanne in Moncton, she learned of her appointment to Canada's National Alpine Ski Team for the disabled. She first learned to ski in 1971 and by 1973 achieved sixth position in the downhill competition held in France. In 1975 she returned to France, winning three medals and a cup.