

Though DG cannot hear, he's unhandicapped in life

(Continued from page 1.)

As public relations officer, he is in charge of the dorm newsletter. "I haven't written one lately," he said. "We have two big parties coming up — been too busy." He is also in charge of publicity for all of Moses Hall's social functions.

Coombs said he doesn't just publicize the events; he attends them all, too. He especially likes the dances, he said, because dancing is one of his favorite hobbies. So is reading science fiction books.

Coombs, whose deafness was caused by spinal meningitis, said he didn't know how to dance when he came to Texas A&M.

"I didn't dance when I first came here, but I learned fast. I guess I'm just a natural," he said with a laugh, "I've got good timing."

Coombs said he watches other people to get the initial beat and then continues on his own.

Country-western is his favorite kind of dancing and he

also likes rock-n-roll.

But not disco, he said, because he's never heard that kind of music.

"I don't have any idea what disco sounds like. I can remember going places with my parents and playing the jukebox, before I went deaf, and I heard rock-n-roll and kicker music.

"But disco didn't even exist."

When asked about his nickname, "D.G.," Coombs said, "I like to think that it stands for 'damn good'."

Actually, he picked it up when he went out for the dorm football team his freshman year, he said.

"Some dude named Big Jake kept saying, 'Tell that deaf guy to come here!' And the initials just stuck."

Coombs said his biggest problem is getting people to believe that he really can't hear.

Once Coombs and some of his friends went dancing in Houston with a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, he said, and she wouldn't believe that he was

deaf.

"Then, while we were doing the two-step, they (the band) changed to a polka — but I didn't. She believed us after that."

Even though he can't follow professors in lecture classes because they talk too fast, Coombs was named a Distinguished Student last semester.

"I don't understand a word they (the professors) say. I copy other people's notes, but sometimes they don't write everything down because they can remember a lot of what they've heard."

As for studying, he said, "I hate to study — never do. I just cram before exams."

Coombs was asked if he knew of any other deaf students here. He said that he knows one other "deaf guy" who lives in Davis-Gary Hall but that he doesn't know him very well.

"I don't like to fraternize with deaf people," he said, laughing. "I'm like the dachshund that thought he was a great dane."



Even though Bill "D.G." Coombs, deaf since the age of eight, can't follow professors in lecture classes because they talk too fast, he was named a Distinguished Student last semester. Photos by Lynn Blanco

Galveston Bay oystering will never be the same

United Press International

TEXAS CITY — Theodore "B.B." Hillman's calloused 55-year-old hands squeezed assuredly as his knife dug into the knot on the outside of a long-empty oyster shell.

He punched it open to expose the gray-tan edible muck of a baby oyster.

"There's a small oyster. See? He's growing right there. That's a spat," Hillman smiled. "It's just a small oyster that's growing on some other shell. It starts out as a microscopic organism.

"Each oyster will put out a half-million to a million seeds every year. In two or three hours, if it doesn't catch on something hard — an old shell, a tin can, a bottle — it's dead."

The recent failure of Galveston Bay spats was the reason the oystermen who gather for morning coffee at Hillman's dockside cafe — as well as related businesses — just ended their hardest oyster season in recent memory.

It was virtually a non-season. Last December, shortly after the November-to-May oyster season started, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department closed Texas' most productive bay to oystering.

Parks and Wildlife partially reopened the bay in February, but only to oystermen with private leases, small stretches to which the state leases them exclusive rights. Non-leaseholders working public reefs remained excluded.

"It was thought necessary because we had had about three years of poor spat setting," explained state biologist Bob Hofstetter. "The oyster population was down to about its lowest level in 25 years."

He said production on the increasingly industrialized bay peaked in the mid-1960s at 4 million pounds of shucked meat a season. In 1977, it dropped below a million pounds.

"We're not really sure of all of the reasons," said Hofstetter, who said human activity has both good and bad effects. "I think it was mainly because of the fresh water coming into the bay at the wrong time (largely due to flooding)."

Oysters are brackish water creatures, requiring a mix of salt and fresh water.

"In the latter part of 1978, we finally had a good spat set with young oysters coming along," Hofstetter said. "We wanted to protect as many of those as we could and increase the harvest for

the coming year."

But good reasons were not much comfort to Dwayne Forque, 28, of Pearland, who made \$7,000 during the last open oyster season in 1977-78. Or David Gillis, 24, of Dickinson. Or Bobby Collins, 29, of Texas City.

Each finished high school and went straight to the boats. They have oystered and shrimped most of their lives. They figure loss of an oyster season cuts a third from the \$20,000-plus income they enjoy in good years.

"You can't put no price on the loss," said Forque, who took his boat to bays further down the Texas Coast which were not closed but which accounted for less than one-fourth of Texas production in the best years.

"I lost living expenses, time around the house, not getting as good oysters."

Still, though winter was economically tight, all three expect to survive their oyster loss through active shrimping from now until autumn. Forque made \$15,000 last year on shrimping alone.

Lloyd Gaston, 52, a retired carpenter, will join them "chasing shrimp like a wild bull," although for the past three years he had relied solely on oystering.

"It (closing of the bay) just knocked me in the dirt," he said.

Stanley Rutland of the SBA's Houston district office said only nine applications had been processed completely but "about 50" more were expected before the October deadline.

Hofstetter conceded the oystermen had been hurt economically but said most appreciated the long-run wisdom of a temporary shutdown.

"I think most of them believed what we were doing is the proper thing," he said. "You're always going to get a difference of opinion, especially among individuals like fishermen. Some are mad because we didn't close the bay soon enough."

Hillman agreed there were many more oysters back when he was hand-tonging — using the now outdated posthole digger-like device — instead of dredging for oysters as oystermen do today.

"It'll never be like it was years ago," he said. "When we first started in business down here, it was good. Them oysters was 40 to 50 foot deep, solid oysters."

FOCUS

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Contributing to this issue were: Doug Graham, Lee Roy Leschper Jr., Kris Wiese, Mindie Rolfe, Judie Porter, Jeanne Graham and Lynn Blanco.

Editor: Beth Calhoun