



Polio Stories

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I was born in 1951 at Holy Cross Hospital in Detroit. My parents married later in life, my father was 50 and my mother 35 when I was born and I began my life as an only child. Things went smoothly until later in my fifth year when I found myself at the giant Herman Kiefer Hospital children's center. The memories of the events which led to my hospitalization have left me but I do recall much of my time there. My exact length of stay is unknown to me but it was many months, perhaps 9 or 10. My main recollections consist of monotonous hours of sitting or laying in bed and/or being taken to areas where various therapies or tests would be administered. There was some sort of procedure done to the area at the base of my neck. I remember the kindness of everyone there, especially the nurses. Most of the them seemed to be very young. They may have not have had much nursing experience, but kind words and a perpetual smile goes a long way to a sick kid. I never saw anyone of them cry or get emotional in front of the children. For some reason, I clearly recall a patient, a red-headed, overweight older boy making it a constant point to stroll over to my bed, point in my direction and laugh. I wondered what gave a chubby kid the right to laugh at me. Oh well, I hope he made it out okay. My father worked day shift at a nearby Chrysler plant and stopped by everyday after work. My mother didn't drive but on weekends they would both be there. I imagine they were quite anguished at the prospect of their only child being ravaged or lost. However as time wore on it became apparent that I was not going to be affected by the more insidious forms of the disease. After my return home I recall my mother and me taking the bus every few weeks to some clinic where I would be put through the paces to determine if I was free and clear. After the last visit my parents got the good news. In looking back, I realize how fortunate I am. I've suffered no ill effects or post-polio syndrome. Our family also was relatively lucky compared to others who had to travel great distances. Despite precarious beginnings, life's been good.

It was determined by my family at an early age that I should not partake in ballet, dance, or any activity that consisted of longstanding, complete exhaustion, etc. I never did ballet. But I did dance and was notoriously famous for dancing the night away with any man who showed an interest and knowledge of dancing on any floor. Hence, my ability to glide to a waltz, cha-cha, rhumba, or "dancing with the stars" style ensued well into my late 30's. It was here that I first noticed that I was having difficulty walking off the dance floor after the music stopped. Was this the first signs of PPS? I am the mother of two boys and married to the most wonderful caregiver 31 years. Ron saw no limits to my living a full life until post polio set in, in 1996. It was as if the rug had been pulled out from under me. My life whirled, spiraled downward and I was no longer "in control" any longer. When fatigue, pain, and weakness wrote my life, I spent a lot of time with physicians who could not even conger up any reasonable explanation for my physical changes. A psychiatrist concluded the I had a "post polio syndrome: and assured me that I could control my life and that mentally I needed a shift change in what I believed was important in my life.

It took my years of research as the Michigan Polio Network librarian and hours of talking to other polio survivors to know that what was going on in my body was also going on in other who had thought they had conquered a horrific disease in their early years.