



Rancho Los Amigos

Post-Polio

Support Group

Newsletter - April - May - June 2019

My Polio Story

By Sandy Tackett

I was an only child. My mother lost my younger sister, who only lived a few hours, due to an Rh incompatibility (I was also Rh positive and my mother was Rh negative). In those days they didn't know about treatment for this.

I lived with my parents in Hollywood, California. My father was in the Army Air Corps (now called Air Force) and his plane was shot down over the Baltic during WW II. He returned to the US after being a POW in Germany for several months. He arrived just days after I was born.

I contracted polio when I was four. My cousin, who also lived in Southern California and was a year younger, contracted polio at the same time. It was determined by our parents that we may have contracted polio from my cousin's neighbor who we had been playing with. The neighbor child became ill first and the incubation period was right for when my cousin and I began to experience symptoms.

I remember not feeling well. My mother made a bed for me in the living room. The doctor came to examine me in our home. I remember mother telling me later that same day that she was going outside to hang up the washing and for me to stay on the couch and wait for her to come back in. After a few minutes I became anxious and wanted to see my mother. I knew I could see her from her bedroom window, so I got up and attempted to walk to the bedroom. I found that my legs would not support me, so I crawled the rest of the way. I tapped on the bedroom window to get her attention and waved to her and she waved back and then came inside and put me on the couch and told me not to get up again.

Later that evening, after dinner, my father told me that I was sick and I needed to go into the hospital where there would be nice doctors and nurses to take care of me so I could get better.

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He said I would be going the next day and he wanted to show me where it was. He then wrapped me in a warm wool blanket and picked me up and carried me to the car. I sat on the front seat between my parents. When we arrived at the hospital (LA General) it was dark and there were lights illuminating the outside of the hospital. We sat in the car in the parking lot and did not go inside. It was an ominous sight to me, but I was reassured listening to my father's gentle words that "it would be all right".

The next day at the hospital I was placed in a crib with netting on the top. I felt ill, had a severe headache and was uncomfortable. My crib faced a glass window and my mother sat on a chair on the other side of the window. My mother was attempting to read a child's book to me and held the book up to the window from time to time so I could see the pictures. The book was so far away and I wanted to hold the book and see the pictures. My mother explained that if she handed me the book she couldn't take it back to read more to me. I began to cry and was scared. I didn't understand. Then my mother left.

During the acute phase, my temperature rose quite high. I remember being packed in ice and placed outside the hospital (may have been a roof or open area that was above ground) and I could see the sky. I remember the nurse checking my temp after this and it came down and she seemed pleased with the results.

Eventually, I was transported via ambulance to LA Children's Hospital where I stayed for the duration of the 4 months I was hospitalized. There I received Sister Kenney treatments of hot packs and lots of physical therapy. I was in a large ward with other children. We were kept in cribs. We made friends there. We had fun tossing our little toys from one crib to another as we were able. I had a friend in the crib next to mine named Betty. She called me "Sandy Stink Pot". My parents helped me think of a nick name for her. It was "Bed Pan Betty".

After I got out of the hospital, my mother took me over to Betty's house to visit with her. The mothers visited and Betty and I were together, but it was not the same. We were uncomfortable together.

Besides the toy-throwing, I remember more enjoyable experiences. We had our PT in a large swimming pool at the hospital. The therapists were in the pool with us and they wore bathing suits. The nurses would pick us up and place us into the old high-backed wheelchairs and push us to the pool for therapy. We would beg the nurses to pile two or three of us together in a wheelchair for the trip. It was great fun and we giggled and enjoyed the experience immensely. If there was time, the therapist would allow us to float in the pool on inner tubes. I felt very free doing this and was grateful for each opportunity.

One thing we kids all agreed on was not enjoying the hot pack treatments. Whenever I smell moist wool I think of them. The nurses would come with the moist warm blankets and put them over us. We were told to lie still. That was an impossibility for young children. The

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nurses resorted to pinning restraints over us and pinning them to the bed with safety pins. As soon as the nurses would leave the room, we would attempt to sit up pulling the safety pins away if possible. When we were successful, we would laugh.

Another thing that was difficult was the hospital visiting policy. The parents were only allowed to visit once a week during visiting hours. By then, I felt abandoned by my parents and thought it was my fault. They would sometimes bring me a toy. I would feel guilty and undeserving. My mother told me years later that towards the end of my stay in the hospital, I would not want to see them. I would lie in the bed and turn my back on them.

When I finally returned home, my parents treated me like a “normal” child. I remember the family being together at Christmas. I was still having difficulty walking and I remember falling. My grandmother saw this and said o-o-o-dear and started to get up to help me and she was promptly addressed by my mother that the doctors had instructed not to give pity and let me learn to do for myself.

My mother diligently performed the Kenney treatments on me as directed. She would place me on the ironing board or the kitchen table. I remember the exercises being painful and I dreaded them. My mother told me years later that she dreaded them too. Her diligence paid off, though, as I had very little residual.

The hospitals were very crowded due to the polio epidemic that year, and my cousin was sent to a Catholic hospital for her care. They did not do the Kenney treatments there and she had more residual weakness.

I remember having to wear special high-top shoes (which I hated). I also had a contracture in my left foot and had surgery for this when I was about age 6 or 7. I did not feel different than the other kids in school, with the exception of Physical Education or playing games like baseball. I was always one of the last kids chosen for the team. I always seemed to be trying to keep up with everyone, but was always lagging behind.

Polio did change my life in many ways. I do believe that I have some post-traumatic stress related to being hospitalized for so long at such a young age. This may have been part of my desire to become a registered nurse (I wanted to be on the “power side” of the bed instead of being a patient). I also became a rather competitive driven person to some degree.

I learned of Post-Polio in the 1980s when I was in charge of our County’s Immunization Program. I went back to the CDC in Atlanta for training and met some experts who had been working on the issue. It was there that I learned of Dr. Jaquelin Perry at Rancho Los Amigos.

A few years later I was in a motor vehicle accident resulting in fractured ribs and right patella, broken teeth, etc. It was taking me longer to recover than normal, so I contacted Dr. Perry who

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told me this was normal for post-polio patients. She saw me twice in the clinic. I remember how authentic she was and how she took time to teach me what was going on and how to preserve as much function as possible, and to listen to my body, etc. Dr. Perry was a kind and compassionate person who I was blessed to meet.

After applying Dr. P's "energy conservation" instructions, my fatigue lifted and I have managed to live a full and rewarding life. I raised a fine son who is now 31, completed 45 years as a registered nurse, nursed my husband who died of cancer, and have traveled the world.

I am grateful to be alive and cherish each day as a gift.

NOTE: Sandy Tackett's "My Polio Story" is another in our series of first person stories about the polio experience. If you have a story to tell, consider sharing it with us. Your story does not need to be "perfect". Few of us are "perfect" writers. Just record your recollections as best as you can. We can often help with formatting.



Commentary

By Richard Daggett

I was reading an Opinion article from the New York Times about a woman who began using a wheelchair and felt she became almost invisible to a large segment of the public. I can relate, but my perception of my own public image has changed as my polio journey has changed me.

The author of the Opinion piece wrote, "... as she used the wheelchair more and more, she understood why. In the chair she became invisible. In the chair she turned radioactive. People looked over her, around her, through her. They withdrew. It was the craziest thing. She had the same keen mind, the same quick wit. But most new acquaintances didn't notice, because most no longer bothered to."

In my case, I entered the hospital at the age of thirteen. I had no visible symptoms of polio, but my back and neck were very stiff and painful. Within two days I was in an iron lung. I couldn't breathe, swallow, or move. After about six months in an iron lung, two operations on my spine, and three years of hospital therapy, I returned to the real world. If I was standing in a crowd, or sitting at a dinner table, most people wouldn't notice that I had significant polio after-effects.

This changed if I was walking. I walked well, but I wore leg braces and had a noticeable limp. I never needed crutches, but my gait was surely different. Once, many years ago, I was in Quebec, Canada, walking toward the Château Frontenac. A young couple passed me on the

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sidewalk, going in the opposite direction. After the couple had gone a few steps, the man leaned toward the woman and said, “He (meaning me) is spastic.”

For some reason this really got to me. It was almost as if he had punched me in the stomach. I turned around and was ready to respond, “And you, sir, are rude and uninformed!” My better nature stopped me, so I turned back and continued on my way.

When I was walking, and had a higher level of function, I worked at minimizing the appearance of disability. I always wore a sport coat and tie. This might be seen as vanity, but to me it was just a way to “fit in”.



Now I use a large power wheelchair. There is no possibility of hiding this, so I don't even try to hide it. In a strange way, this has been liberating. I still try to dress well, within the limits of wheelchair use, but that is about as far as my efforts go. The people I care about know what is inside.



However, I find that in many situations I encounter the same “invisible” status that the lady in the Times Opinion article talks about. This happens frequently when I am shopping. I often have an ambulatory person with me, and when I approach the sales person and ask for an item, the sales person will most often start talking to my friend. I have once again become “invisible”.

Has this ever happened to you? How did you handle it? Did you say something? Has a sales person ever responded or apologized? I would appreciate your thoughts or suggestions. If you have email, you can send your comments to me at: polio1953@gmail.com If mail is easier, send your comments to: **Newsletter Editor, 12720 La Reina Avenue, Downey, CA 90242**



DONATIONS



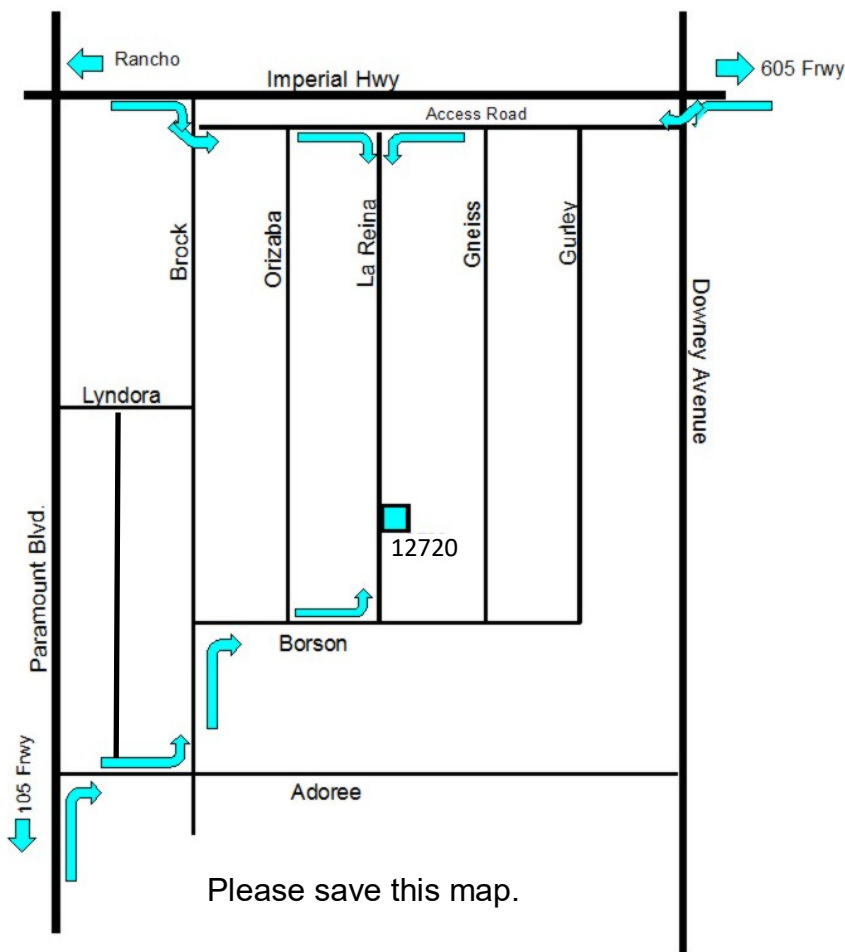
We survive on year round donations from our readers. Small donations from all readers will ensure that our newsletters and meetings will continue to provide information on what polio survivors want to know. Please mail your donation to Support Group Newsletters at 12720 La Reina Avenue, Downey, CA 90242. Make your check out to PSA—Support Groups, and write newsletters in the memo area of the check. The Rancho Los Amigos group publishes four to six times a year and the Orange County group publishes meeting notices. We share the same mailing list, and all donations are shared equally.

Meeting Notice

Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group

Saturday, June 22, 2019 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Annual Picnic

This year we will meet in Richard Daggett's back yard. Follow the map below to 12720 La Reina Avenue in Downey. This is just a few blocks east of Rancho Los Amigos. Most of the food will be provided, but if you want to bring something to share that will also be welcome. If you need additional directions, please call Richard at 582-862-4508



Saturday, July 27, 2019

2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Polio Videos, from our extensive video collection.

Saturday, August 24, 2019

2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Charles DuBourdieu, CPO

Charles is a registered orthotist in Rancho's brace service. He will tell us about their new office on Imperial Hwy., across from the hospital. This facility will provide services similar to those available through Rancho, but they will be available without going through the Rancho clinics.

For additional information, please contact us at:

RanchoPolioGroup@gmail.com

or Diane at: **562-861-8128**

or Richard at: **562-862-4508**

Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County

The Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County is now meeting quarterly. For information on their meeting dates and meeting topics, please check their website: www.ppsupportoc.org You can also contact them at: Priscilla prisofoc@aol.com or call her at **714-968-1675**