



**Rancho Los Amigos**

*Post-Polio*

**Support Group**

Newsletter - June 2015

## **The Seven Years That Changed My Life For The Better**

By Michael Morrione

At 39, I was yet to experience living alone, without the continuous influence and benefits of women taking care of me. I was gainfully employed and pretty much settled in this kind of environment. I could probably have rented a small apartment rather than live at home, but I think I liked this arrangement with female company. It was like home to me, so why make waves?

I had lived with my parents for almost twenty years to then marry and settle in an apartment with my wife to raise a family. So, from a beginning of parental involvement and then right into a marriage and family life, I was never really alone or on my own in the sense that would have helped me find out what I really could do. I always had at least one woman in my life that did not make this possible.

During those thirty-nine years of a home-like situation, I was pretty much under the influence and benefit of women like my mother, sister, and finally my wife, who each in their own way found themselves caring for me. They picked up after me, ironed my white work shirts, prepared my meals, washed my clothes, were a constant mirror of their ideas and possible constructive criticism, like commenting on my personal appearance or whether I needed a hair cut. My very sick father with Parkinson's disease was involved with me too, of course, but his influence did not somehow have the effect that the women did, maybe because I had associated them more with the security of the 'family nest'.

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The opportunity to be on my own did not present itself until I sadly had to divorce my wife, realizing my time with her was ended. In retrospect, the effect of this permanent separation, although painful, became an opportunity for new beginnings and for exploring channels in life not possible before and to do this on my own. I began to see I was at a point in life where I would be tested for my potentials.

Both physically and mentally, I believe I was equipped for change. Even though I was born with one hand, my right hand-less arm was more than equal in strength to my left one, to be usefully compensating. Contracting polio as an infant, left me with a very weak right leg, but this only seemed to make my strong left leg stronger, by adjusting to the change. I discovered during my late teens I was losing the ability to hear and, although there has been no easy way to compensate for this, I am continually adjusting to this loss into aging, even while experiencing some failures.

At this writing, I am 92 and fortunate to have had parents who encouraged me to learn how to improvise by using any resource available to me. This was their way of teaching me how to adjust. It has led me to see myself as an equal to most who see themselves as able bodied. The approach in getting around my physical problems has been by simply employing any method different than the norm, making me feel most of the time, as if I was physically as capable as anyone else, even though I was not.

Normal aging is expected to gradually be physically more restrictive to previously active seniors, yet it is clear that it is also more exasperating to those who are also permanently handicapped as myself, because this adds to their inability to function. The guarantee of how well one will manage in this condition, however, depends a great deal on how well one has adjusted to any new change experienced. There is no doubt a positive attitude makes this easier to do.

Although my health has always been exceptionally good, I have kept up the continuous effort needed to improve it. I resist the idea aging has to be as difficult a time as some seem to think it will be. If we want to continue being connected with the present, we must consider making the effort to regularly keep updated with what is happening around us. This allows the possibility of adjusting to a reality by understanding it. As you age, the adjustment may not always be easy to make, but if you succeed, you are more inclined to open new channels of interest that will help keep you connected.

It wasn't until I approached my new home as a single man, in a rented apartment in Lynwood, CA, that I had misgivings. While walking together with my son, Mike, and my daughter-in-law, Diane, to reach my new place I must now call home, I became uncomfortable by this

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realization. I remember Diane comfortingly taking my arm, perhaps instinctively suggesting her support for me. Mike carried freshly ironed shirts my departed wife had just ironed. As they both left I understood. I was now to find out who I was and what I could do, for I truly felt alone.

At the time, I don't remember being frightened by this drastic change in my life; going from living with family to being by myself. I just thought about being married 20 years and now it was ended. She had born me three sons I felt strongly attached to. I was just filled with the sadness of the occasion.

From that moment on, I think I went through the first few weeks of my new situation without thinking much about anything in particular and functioned daily simply out of routine. I got up early in the morning to go to work. After a light breakfast of coffee and toast I drove to my close-by work place. At the end of the work day, I would get myself a hamburger and watch TV and finally go to bed. The work days moved fairly easily because I had something specific to do, but the weekends seemed to drag on with no routine to depend on. I was having more time to think now and it wasn't always pleasant. I was more aware than at any other time in my life how much I was very much on my own.

This is the first of a multi-part story by Michael Morrione.  
It is another in our series of personal stories about living with polio.



### **We Are Survivors**

By Jerry Daniel - [jerry.daniel@comcast.net](mailto:jerry.daniel@comcast.net)

In summer of 1948, when the Los Angeles County General Hospital ambulance pulled up at Rancho Los Amigos, Ward 70, I was excited and a little apprehensive. I was used to doctors and nurses available 24 hours. I was fresh out of the iron lung, and a scared 10 year old boy.

It didn't take long to get up in a wheelchair that I peddled with my legs. Then came hard muscle stretching and hot packs. We had excellent PTs who had a job to do. They started out just chatting, and then grabbed an arm or leg and took off with it. It was bend until it hurt, and then bend a little farther. We kids and adults sometimes cried with pain, but were helpless to do anything about it. It's the same basic story throughout the United States.

Then came braces, huge body casts, severe deformities, wheelchairs, crutches, orthopedic surgeries, disappointments in love, and heartache to our spouses, parents, and siblings. We had failures in the job market before we found out what we do best. Now many of us are in the twilight of life. And, we are still survivors.

*Bonnie Hagy became severely paralyzed from polio and triumphed over it. She experienced as much of life as possible, while connected to a ventilator and using a wheelchair for nearly 59 years. The following story contains excerpts from her autobiography:*

### **I Run with What I Have**

By Bonnie L. Hagy

What is it like to be paralyzed? When I was a kid, around the age of eleven, I used to ride horses, climb trees, swim, shoot marbles, and run. I loved running; I would pretend I was riding a horse and look for things to jump over. A kid has a great imagination, and I had fun using mine. Lots and lots of memories come flooding back in my mind when I think about my life before I became paralyzed, and I'm so grateful for all the things I did.

#### Reflections on Caregiving

Taking a live-in job for a totally disabled woman takes a unique kind of person. Whenever I place an ad in the newspaper, I've learned to be specific. The State of California gives me a set amount of money and, since I can't be left alone, I offer a salary plus free room and board.

Most people don't want this kind of job, featuring poor wages, no paid sick leave, no paid vacations or holidays. Consequently, about twenty years ago, I started putting ads in a large Los Angeles newspaper that outreaches to the Hispanic community. My ads read as follows: "Person to live-in weekends, help disabled woman, must have driver's license, valid social security number, must speak some English." It was as if I had struck gold. I was astounded at the large number of phone calls I was receiving—twenty or more per day.

These lovely, compassionate people brought to me by God, mostly from El Salvador and Mexico are, on the whole, honest, hardworking and genuinely caring. Their view on what's important in life hasn't been tainted by life itself. A good example is their love for their own elderly. They take care of them, not place them in nursing homes. I'm grateful for the many Latinas who have come through my door. Not only are they my caregivers, but many become my friends. Their families, husbands, and kids take me in as part of their family. They don't have to do that, but they do. I've been to weddings and barbeques and Christmas Eve celebrations, and they consider it an honor if I come. For me it is indeed an honor to be invited, to be included as part of their family.

I have had losers come work for me also. People who lie, telling me that "so-and-so" died, and they have to leave abruptly, not giving me time to look for anyone else. That's the hard part, because I am left with no one to take care of me.

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If I don't have a back-up caregiver I could end up in the hospital, taking a chance that I could experience damage and even loss of house, furniture, car, or personal effects without anyone to keep watch. My back-up people are previous caregivers or my sisters or my brother. This is the second hardest thing that we disabled have to deal with; establishing a back-up system for the times family and friends are not available.

In my opinion, this is where the church needs to step in and help. So another polio friend and I tried to establish an emergency back-up system with several local churches in the area, but very few were interested. We spent an entire weekend teaching church folks, men and women alike, how to help the disabled, with practical, hands-on applications.

Have you ever fed a disabled person spaghetti? We chose that particular food for its obvious challenge and it was hilarious! Have you ever sat in a chair, your feet firmly planted on the floor, and not allow yourself to move at all for five minutes? Try it. You can't scratch your nose when it tickles or shift your weight when you feel your buttocks getting numb.



Bonnie Hagy died on January 23, 2015, after a long battle with breast cancer. She was diagnosed with polio in 1953, when she was eleven years old. Polio left her with no use of her arms, but enough strength to operate her wheelchair with her left foot. Bonnie and her mother both had polio, and both were in iron lungs.

The use of a ventilator did not hinder her active life. Bonnie eventually met and married her husband, Frank, who also used a ventilator. Frank preceded her in death. Although having to use a ventilator, and getting around via a power chair, she went everywhere she wanted. With her husband, caregivers, and friends, Bonnie visited beaches, parks, and malls.

Her love for her church topped her week's activities. "I cannot live in this world and confront problems without an ongoing faith," She said. "Faith gives me strength, and keeps me going in the right direction."

Bonnie was active in the early years of disability awareness, and spoke often at board meetings and public events. She was an advocate for California's In-Home Support Services program, and other programs that allowed the disabled to remain independent. She chronicled her life with a significant disability in her autobiography, "I Run with What I Have."

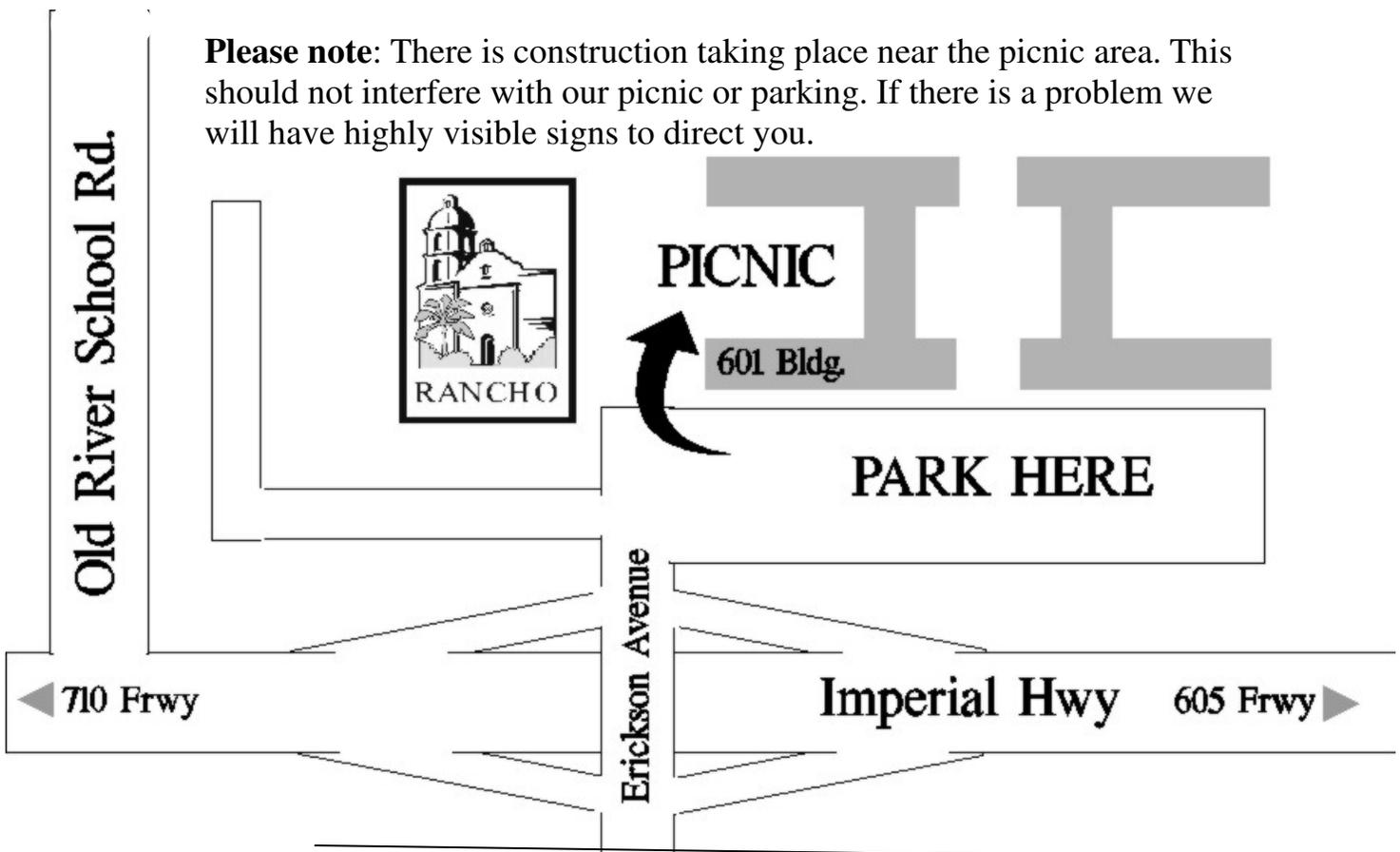
In a 1996 interview for New Mobility magazine she was asked about life using a ventilator. She smiled and replied, "Ohhhh ... a ventilator, an electric blanket ... what more could I want?"

## Support Group Meeting Notices

### Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group:

**Saturday, June 27, 2015** - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is our **Annual Picnic**. Join us for Food, Fun, and Friendship. We always have a good time. There might be a game or two, and we might have a surprise guest. If you need additional information please telephone Diane at (562) 861-8128

Our **Annual Picnic** is a joint event with the Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County.



### Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County:

**Saturday, July 11, 2015** - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Pharmacist  
Timely info on drugs from a pharmacist we know well

**Saturday, Sept 12, 2015** - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
Videos from 2015 Post-Polio International Conference