



**Rancho Los Amigos**

*Post-Polio*

**Support Group**

Newsletter - February 2017

## **Report: December 3, 2016 Meeting**

Every December the Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group hosts a Holiday Pot-Luck. It is one of two joint meetings we schedule with the Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County. Some years we have a special speaker. Some years we show a film or documentary. Every year we have a good time.

Our December 3, 2016 program focused on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first large polio epidemic in the United States. In 1916, there were over 27,000 cases of polio in the United States, and more than 6,000 deaths. The death rate was about 25%. There were no medical interventions available at that time to help polio patients experiencing breathing difficulty.

The staff of Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center loaned our group a working iron lung. The Polio Survivors Association brought polio related photographs and posters. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health provided material that emphasized the importance of immunization.

For many of those in attendance it was the first time they were able to actually touch an iron lung and listen to its unique sound. One of those in the group said the whooshing sound reminded him of an old oil well pumping.

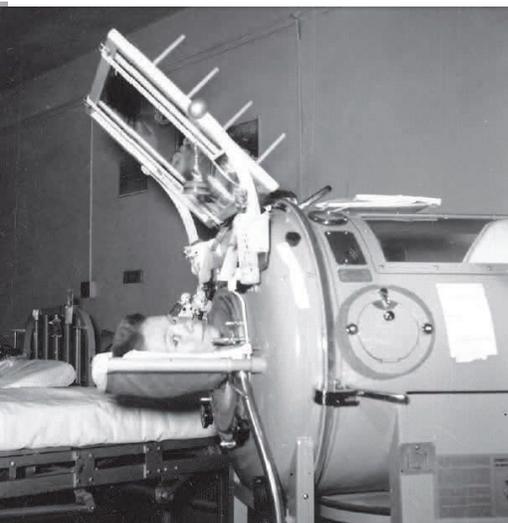
Emma Eivers and Richard Daggett were both present to answer questions about the iron lung. They each spent months in an iron lung, and the late effects of polio have required that they once again use breathing assistance.

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The information presented at our meetings and/or contained in this newsletter is solely for information. It is not an endorsement of any product, medication, or individual.

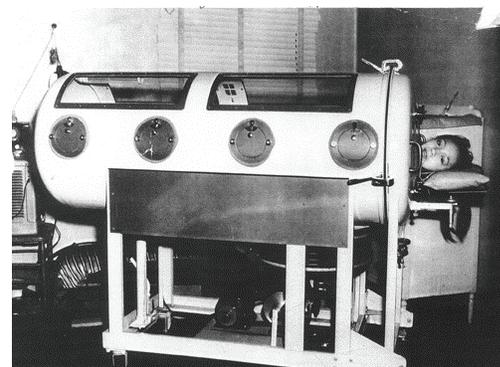
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Richard in 1953

Emma Eivers and Richard Daggett

Richard was thirteen at onset, and remembered “almost every minute” of his first days in the hospital. He told of entering the hospital with a stiff and painful neck, but with no obvious weakness. During the first night he began to notice weakness in his arms. He remembered thinking, “Uh oh, I think I have it.” He said the same thing to his parents the next day. He knew they didn’t want to hear this. No parent wanted to hear the word “polio”.



Emma in 1956

In Los Angeles County parents could visit their child, even while the child was in quarantine. Parents were required to wear gowns, and no physical contact was allowed, but their presence and their voices were reassuring to the younger patients. This was in contrast to many areas of the United States, where parents were completely separated from their children.

Los Angeles County physicians also had a more proactive treatment strategy. Richard told of having a tracheotomy\* and being placed in an iron lung before he noticed any significant breathing difficulty. His tracheotomy was done under local anesthesia. He was wide awake during the procedure.

\* *Tracheotomy (without an 's') is the name of the surgical procedure to make an opening in the trachea (airway). A tracheostomy (with an 's') is the name of the opening after the surgery.*

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Richard said that he had moments of apprehension prior to the tracheotomy, but was never really frightened. Of course he wondered what was happening to him and around him but, except for the spinal tap, nothing that had been done was very painful and everybody acted like things were going fine. When the doctor doing the tracheotomy made one final cut, Richard's breath started sucking in and out of the hole the scalpel made. Richard thought the doctor must have done something wrong. He tried to ask the doctor what had happened, but every time he tried to talk more air bubbled up out of the hole. Blood seemed to be everywhere. His blood! Now he really was frightened. When they finished the operation they put him in a large tank respirator, more commonly known as an iron lung. He vomited as his head was sliding through the front opening. He tried to apologize but the words wouldn't come out.

An iron lung helps a person breathe by creating a rhythmic negative pressure within the tank. This negative pressure creates a partial vacuum and the patient's chest wall expands trying to fill this vacuum. When the chest expands the patient draws in air, mimicking natural breathing. Those with significant paralysis of their breathing muscles often had additional air forced into their lungs through a tracheostomy. The tracheostomy can also be used to suction mucous from a patient's lungs. Richard said he is sure that this early intervention saved his life.



A typical polio patient unit at Rancho Los Amigos Hospital - 1953

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Richard explained that, contrary to popular misconception, an iron lung is fairly comfortable. “Yes,” he said. “You are confined, but a patient in an iron lung usually has little ability to move anyway.” An iron lung pretty much takes over your life. It is much stronger than a patient’s weak muscles. It tells you when to breathe and how deeply to breathe.

Talking while in the respirator can be very frustrating too. A person would get in the middle of a word and have to stop and wait for the next breath. Richard said, “People using respirators often talk in sentence fragments.”

Emma and Richard both spent long periods at Rancho Los Amigos Hospital (the name of the institution during the 1940s and 50s). Rancho was the largest of thirteen regional polio centers established by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (March of Dimes). Most of the polio patients living in the southwest United States, who had significant pulmonary involvement, came to Rancho Los Amigos. Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center (the current name) still has an outpatient Post-Polio Clinic.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to food and fellowship. Many in attendance brought delicious treats to share. Everything was good, and no person left the meeting hungry. Our meeting room is large, so everyone had room to move around and enjoy each other’s company. There were many stories exchanged, and our special friendships were obvious.

One person remarked that, if we hadn’t had polio it is unlikely we would have ever met. He added, “You can often find gifts in the most unusual places.” Everyone agreed.





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**The Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group meets monthly.  
Our meeting schedule for the remainder of 2017 is:**

Saturday, February 25 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Saturday, March 25 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Saturday, April 22 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Sunday, May 21 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Post Polio Support Group of Orange County  
*This is a joint meeting. Please note the Sunday meeting day.*

Saturday, June 24 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos  
*This is our annual picnic*

Saturday, July 22 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Saturday, August 26 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Saturday, September 23 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

Saturday, October 28 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos

No meeting in November

Saturday, December 2 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at Rancho Los Amigos  
*This is our annual Holiday Potluck*

Unless notified, all Rancho meeting are in **Room 1150** of the **Support Services Annex** with covered parking. Program information for each meeting will be included in the newsletters.

We encourage you to invite your family and friends.

## Support Groups Meetings

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

This February marks the 30th anniversary of the Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group. Our roots go even further back. In 1974 a group of mostly respirator-dependent polio out-patients of Rancho Los Amigos were discussing some of their common concerns. Among these were how to remain independent in their own homes, and how to obtain and maintain adaptive equipment necessary for their independence. This group of polio out-patients decided to organize as the Polio Survivors Association and, in 1975, formed a nonprofit corporation to promote the well-being and improve the quality of life for severely disabled polio survivors. At that time few people knew about the late effects of polio, or what we now commonly call post-polio syndrome. The Polio Survivors Association was the first organized polio support group.

In 1986, Dr. Jacquelin Perry asked permission of the Polio Survivors Association to use their mailing list to contact individuals who might be interested in forming a local support group for those experiencing the late effects of polio. The response was immediate and positive. Our first meeting was in February 1987. We have been meeting monthly since that time.

### **Saturday, February 25, 2017 - Annual Anniversary Pot Luck**

Please join us and, if you can, bring a favorite dish to share. Finger food is the easiest to eat and is preferred because of the ease in cleaning up. Most of our meetings are at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, and are from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. We have covered parking.

A map with directions is available at: [www.ranchoppsg.com](http://www.ranchoppsg.com)

For meeting information, please call Diane at (562) 861-8128

For newsletter comments, please send an e-mail to: [ranchoppsg@hotmail.com](mailto:ranchoppsg@hotmail.com)

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

### **Saturday, March 11, 2017 - Mobility Center**

Presentation on personal assistive devices and wheelchair lifts for vehicles.

### **Sunday, May 20, 2017 - Dr. Perlman - Update on PPS research**

Please note the Sunday meeting date. This is a joint meeting of the Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County and the Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group. Dr. Perlman's presentation is always informative. Please try to attend.

A map with directions is available at: [www.ppsupportoc.org](http://www.ppsupportoc.org)

For meeting information, please call Aleta at 949-559-7102

or send an e-mail to Priscilla at [prisofoc@aol.com](mailto:prisofoc@aol.com)