



Rancho Los Amigos

Post-Polio

Support Group

Newsletter - October 2017

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following first person account was originally printed in *Boomerang*, the newsletter of the South Bay Post-Polio Support Group, and is reprinted with the permission of the author.

My Bout with Polio

By Hal Hichborn

It was the summer of 1948. I had finished my first year at Occidental College where I had hurt my left knee playing football. I played center on offense and linebacker on defense. (I even played in the Rose Bowl against Cal Tech.) I tried to strengthen my knee by playing baseball (at catcher) the following semester. I had a pretty good job in construction with my father in the summer and was in pretty healthy shape. I was also chasing around and not getting much sleep. On the Fourth of July weekend we were having a party and for a unique time in my life I didn't care about eating. In fact I felt pretty crummy, like with the flu, but it didn't go away. (Mom said that she had seen a fly walking on my lips when she awoke me one morning.) Then a fever set in and a doctor was called. He arrived at the house early Monday morning, checked me over, and dispatched me to Los Angeles County General Hospital. His diagnosis was either Poliomyelitis or Spinal Meningitis. He mentioned Meningitis because it was curable.

At General Hospital I was placed in a two-man room with another young man. I felt terrible all over and accused him of smoking. My fever was so high that I could smell myself burning. I was fed intravenously with fluids and medication intended to reduce the fever. It was during this period that my right arm was immobilized for the feeding tube, and I believe the disease settled in my right arm and shoulder because of this. After the intravenous feeding was no

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longer required, it was several days before I had strength to move a forkful of food to my mouth with my right arm. Involvement started with my right thumb and hand, right arm (particularly biceps), right triceps and pectorals, then down through the left abdominals.

Sometime during that period when I was pretty sure I would feel better dead, I asked a kindly nurse to call my pastor, who happened to be on the radio at that time, and ask him for prayer for me. I don't know if she made the call, I never saw her again. It was not long afterward that the fever broke and I thought I might live.

The Spinal Tap

After some amount of time (probably the next day) I was taken to a laboratory or operating room where a red headed female doctor administered a spinal tap. That was done by having a guy about the size of King Kong grab the nape of my neck and the hollow of my knees and draw them together. Then the doctor inserted a very long needle/syringe between a couple of vertebrae. On the first poke, the muscles on the entire right side of my body painfully tensed to the point of cramp. When this was not successful she withdrew the needle and reinserted in the same spot, but this time the muscles on my entire left side painfully tensed against each other. In addition to the pain, this procedure causes loss of strength and diminishment of fighting spirit. While the doctor did obtain some spinal fluid, it was not adequate to analyze properly and contained some blood.

The next day the spinal tap procedure was repeated using the same entry point as before. The results seemed similar, but the pain was more intense. However, the spinal fluid obtained was adequate to confirm Polio.

I was moved to the Polio ward on the top floor of the hospital as soon as they determined that the fever had broken, about four days after I entered the hospital. I had burned off quite a bit of weight from the fever. In the bed next to me was a pleasant man of about forty years who had a wife and two children. There were some other young men a little ways away from us. I was nineteen years old at the time.

The next exciting adventure started with the announcement that the Sister Kenny treatment would start in the morning. As treatment started, I asked what were the expected results. First they told me that I would be able to touch my forehead to my knees with my legs straight . . . and this would happen before I could be released. I, of course, said that was impossible as I had never done that before. But they have a method.

To start out, they placed me on my stomach and covered me with a steam heated "hot pack"

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blanket, leaving it in place for about twelve minutes

Next, they placed me on my back and tied my knees down to the bed. Then King Kong arrived to assess the situation. He placed one hand behind my neck and started raising my head up and toward my knees. I hadn't really noticed that during the previous few days that my back and neck muscles had been tightening and my head was drawing back. I noticed it now. At first I could feel the stretching and it didn't feel too bad. Then as my head was approximately over my hips, I knew that the limit had been reached. Any further stretching would tear all the back and neck muscles. He pressed further and decided to agree with my assessment. He lowered my head to the bed, let it stay there for a few seconds, and started again with the stretching. This process was repeated a few times before the session ended.

The afternoon session was about the same without much perceptible progress. I could rest for the remainder of that day. The following morning the "treatment" was repeated. There was perceptible progress. In the afternoon I wanted a longer time under the "hot pack". I got that, but got more stretching too.

The days followed with similar treatment and improving results. In only ten days King Kong was able to move my forehead to my knees with my legs straight. Even better, I was beginning to be able to do it for myself.

There were other adventures in the hospital such as getting up and walking to the window at night to see the eastern part of Los Angeles from the eighteenth floor. We could see parts of the Interstate Freeway system being constructed. We learned later that these were the I-5 and the I-10. Other things happened. Staff people and patients came and went from the ward. My folks were allowed one visit while I was there for those two weeks, since we were essentially still in quarantine there were few visitors.

Moving Day

Finally the day came to be moved to a rehabilitation facility. That turned out to be Rancho Los Amigos, in Downey, for my continued rehabilitation. I thought that was a little strange because that the place, near my grandparents' home, had been known as the "County Farm" or "Poor Farm" during the Great Depression years.

On the day I was to be moved, my few personal items were put in a sack and I waited for transportation. About 10:00 A.M. I was put in a wheel chair, was wheeled to the elevator, rode to the basement, and put into an ambulance.

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On arrival at Rancho Los Amigos, I was taken to “Ward K” which was really a large Quonset hut on a concrete deck. I was wheeled into the building which had a long aisle down the center and ten beds on each side of the central aisle. Mine was to be the bed on the end next to the outside doors. Patients in the ward were in varying conditions and had been there for varying periods of time, some for many years. Some required chest respirators much of the time and one was in an “iron lung” almost full time. He was paralyzed to the point that he used a mouth-held device to turn pages of a book while lying on his back.

About an hour after I was moved in my mother arrived to visit me. She had only seen me once since I was placed in the hospital system. She entered the ward from the outside double doors as I was sitting on the side of the bed facing the doors. I was feeling especially good at the moment and told her what I thought was very good news. I told her that “I could only raise my arm up to here,” indicating shoulder height and parallel to the floor, “but I used to be able to raise it up to here,” indicating high over my head. While I did that, the guys behind me were cracking up, but Mom didn’t understand what I had done, and started to cry. I apologized and explained before she really understood.

From that day on, my days were occupied with physical therapy and rest. I got to the point where I could help others there with their many problems. Some of that help was also good for my right hand and arm which had to be re-taught to do many tasks, such as holding a fork and writing.

Returning Home and Selective Service

After four or five weeks of physical rehabilitation, I determined that I could do my rehab as well at home and I was able to be released and let someone else have the bed. While being driven home, we stopped at the Selective Service Office in Downey so that I could register for the draft. That was a legal requirement and I didn’t want to get locked up as a “draft dodger.” I gave them all the appropriate information including my height and weight. I was over six feet tall and weighed about 135 pounds. I had lost about 50 pounds burned off from fever. After looking at me, they assigned me to category 4-F which means last to go and physically unqualified for service.

Upon arriving home there were new lessons to be learned. Playing with the dog taught two of them: first, don’t move too fast or you’ll fall right over; second, when throwing the ball to the dog, one must release it instead of grabbing tighter. The concepts are simple enough. I attended outpatient therapy at Rancho for a while, but finally decided that I could do as well without it.

I had been home for about two months and was getting stronger and pretty well under control

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when my father got a contract to install an auxiliary fuel system at a large manufacturing plant near L.A. Airport. It involved setting a 30,000 gallon liquid petroleum gas tank and running a six-inch high-pressure gas line under an old airport runway. Of course, needing the exercise, I started with a 120-pound air jack hammer through the concrete. It varied from about eight to twenty-four inches in depth. After about twenty minutes on the jack-hammer, I would rotate with two other men, taking the shovel, while one took the pick, and the other the jack-hammer. We quipped that this was a good way to shake the bugs out of anybody. After the first day on the jack-hammer, my hands were swollen to three-and-a-half inches thick and had a weird shade of purple. Of course my mother didn't want me to go back to the jack-hammer, but I did. In three days we had the digging done and were ready to start laying the pipe and do some piping inside the building. The project was quite successful and I gained strength. I returned to college the following semester.

Returning to College

I re-entered college in January and was still gaining strength allowing normal progression for a couple of years when I was directed by Selective Service to report for physical re-evaluation as the Korean War had started. I did, passed, and was classified 1-A and qualified for service.

In order not to be drafted immediately, I applied for, and was granted, the classification of 2-A-S, which meant a student deferment. This turn of events brought on a new mind set, so I applied for a commission in the Navy. I passed all of their examinations and was still awaiting their final papers after I had graduated. Then I received the notice from Selective Service to report for duty in the Army. I immediately went to the Navy's office of officer procurement to appeal for their immediate action to take me "now."

Their answer was that Selective Service had priority. Then I appealed to Selective Service, pointing out that I was not trying to avoid duty, but was pursuing a previous option. After much discussion, I was granted opportunity to be on active duty in two weeks however I did it, but have the commanding officer send them "this card" certifying I was active so that SS did not come looking for me. After futile search for a place in the Navy or Air Force, I enlisted in the Marine Corps for immediate activation. (That's how I became a "draft dodger".)

About half-way through "boot camp," my CO called me in to ask why I was not an officer candidate. I told him the long story and added that their medics had told me I was not qualified due to eyesight. He picked up his phone and called the dispensary next door and asked the doctor to check my eyes in the morning. I was told to report to him at 7:30 the following morning. I did, and the doctor tested my eyes using a "peep sight" and determined that I was visually qualified for officer candidacy.

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In due time I was sent to Marine Corps Education and Development Command at Quantico, Virginia, for assignment to Officers Candidate Screening Course. That's a program available to all active enlisted Marines selected by their commanding officer. In the class are all enlisted ranks from privates to sergeant-majors. In the course all rank insignia is removed and members are treated equally. We were told at the onset that some fifty percent would drop out or be washed out and that anybody who wanted to quit "now" would be returned to his unit with no negative effect. Half the class was gone by the time we graduated and sent on to Officers Basic School. After being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and completing Basic School, I was assigned to engineer officer training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I completed that training and received orders assigning me to the First Engineer Battalion, First Marine Division in Korea.



While in transit to Korea, I took leave long enough to be married in Los Angeles to my college sweetheart. Following a brief honeymoon in Palm Springs, she drove me to the air base for transportation to Korea.

The year spent in Korea was after the armistice was signed (supposedly no shooting) and was really very interesting. I supervised construction of an airfield, some road maintenance, and the construction of a military field hospital which was really intended as a manufacturing facility for the Koreans following our departure. While in Korea, I was promoted to First Lieutenant.

On return home, I transferred into the Marine Corps Reserve. I had expected to work with my father in construction, but work was not enough for two, and too much for one. I found a job as production control supervisor for a manufacturer of precision hydraulic and pneumatic components for aircraft. After a year of learning a lot, but without seeing much opportunity for advancement in that company, I moved on to another in a working-supervisory job in manufacturing of products for home exercise and weight reducing. After a year in that job I was lured away into a manufacturing-consulting job which turned out to be an employment company I didn't care for at all. When a pay check bounced it was time to move on.

In 1958, I started work with International Business Machines Corporation. They wanted a person skilled in mathematics and manufacturing to help establish a new discipline that was bringing a scientific approach to the business community utilizing computers. My new title was Applied Science Representative. This was exciting new territory to everybody who was in it. Over the years I was a "techie", a salesman, an instructor, a researcher, a programmer, a developer, a manager, and a corporate program administrator. I retired with almost thirty years of service with IBM.

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During the time with IBM I continued with the Marine Corps Reserve in various billets, finally attaining the rank of Colonel and retiring. Also on retirement from IBM, they offered me an opportunity to teach in a college or university. I accepted and taught graduate school at Northrop University for two years. IBM's objective was to provide first hand knowledge of the computing environment from an experienced professional. I taught interesting subjects like computer aided design and principles of automated manufacturing. That was as much work as any of the things that I had done before.

Another unusual thing for an old Polio was that as I was about to retire from IBM, I started playing senior softball. My athletic daughter got me started in this activity by getting me a ball glove for my birthday and telling me I had no excuse for not playing with the old men. I've played for some twenty five years and had a wonderful time. Another paper summarizes my softball adventures.

Looking Back

Many things have happened that I find no reason for, other than God's plans are bigger than I can fathom. He's given me challenges that seemed life-destroying. But in looking back, I'm sure that his plan was working very well, but I didn't understand it then. But now I see some of it. My incapacity was temporary and it kept me away from a combat situation until that situation was calmed. I was provided education and some world travel. It all seemed inconvenient and not part of my plan at the time. However, the inconvenience was temporary, the residual weakness and pain are minimal, and my life has certainly been full. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife, three children, seven grand-children, and eight great-grand-children.

© Hal Hichborn

Support groups are a great resource for people to maintain control over their lives, to give and take the wisdom and experience that comes from living with the aftereffects of a devastating illness. If you haven't attended a meeting lately or, if you have never attended, make an effort to attend. You will find a cheerful, upbeat group of people who care about each other. They can offer many insights and suggestions to make life easier for you and those around you. Please join us!

Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group Meetings

Saturday, October 28, 2017 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Open/Sharing

No meeting in November

Saturday, December 2, 2017 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Holiday Party

Please bring any Finger Food treats that you want to share. This is always a Festive Time

Saturday, January 27, 2018 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Open/Sharing

Saturday, February 24, 2018 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Special Anniversary Party

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

For newsletter comments, please send an e-mail to: ranchoppsg@hotmail.com

Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County Meetings

Saturday, November 11, 2017 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Beatriz Nunez

Health Information Counseling & Advocacy Program (HICAP)

Make an Informed Decision about Your Healthcare

Saturday, January 13, 2018 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Finger Food Potluck and discussion

Saturday, March 11, 2018 - 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. - Disaster Preparedness for the Disabled

With Jerry Couchman, Red Cross Volunteer

For meeting information please call Aleta at 949-559-7102 or email; prisofoc@aol.com

For newsletter comments, please send an e-mail to: abaldwinkeen@gmail.com

Please remember. All meetings of both groups encourage attendance by your relatives and friends. Both groups are open and friendly. Both groups allow time to share your problems and concerns. Coping with post-polio is easier when we share the journey.

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 Groups' 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 on even numbered months and the Orange County group publishes on the odd numbered months. We share the same mailing list, and all donations are shared equally. All donors are acknowledged but amounts are never listed. In 2017, up to the time of printing this issue, we have received donations from:

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Thank you very much!

A complete list will be printed at the end of the year.

Another way you can help is by agreeing to receive our newsletters by email. The emailed edition is the same as the printed one, except that the emailed version is often printed in color. You can read it on your computer, or print it to share with your doctor. Sending the newsletters by email saves time, effort, and printing costs. Just send a note to us at:

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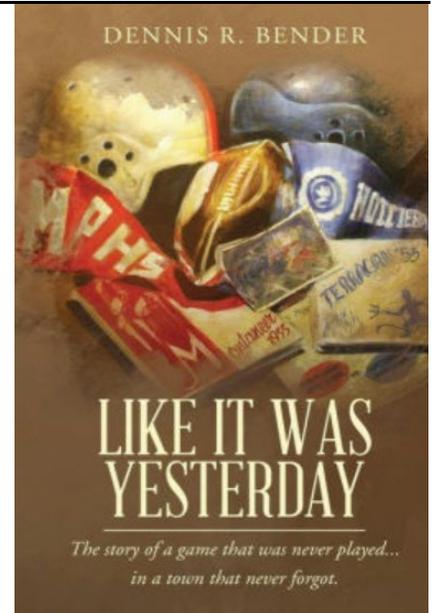
The Rancho Los Amigos and the Orange County support groups share the same mailing list.



Like It Was Yesterday

In Dennis Bender's circle of friends, no one ever tires of talking about the 1954 football game between Mont Pleasant and Nott Terrace that never happened.

"Both teams were unbeaten and had racked up something like 300 points while allowing only 16," said Bender, whose new book, "Like it was Yesterday," focuses on the 1954 high school football season in which both Schenectady, NY schools had 5-0 records as they prepared to square off in their annual Election Day contest that November. "It was a huge rivalry, a really big thing. It was a game these kids start dreaming about playing in when they're in sixth grade."



The game never took place because of a polio outbreak that affected both football teams. Danny Monaco, a senior fullback and co-captain for MP, was struck with paralytic polio during a Saturday practice before Tuesday's game, and within 24 hours it was learned that Sonny DeVito, a reserve fullback for Nott Terrace, was also diagnosed with paralytic polio.

"Polio was a big threat back then, and 1953 and 1954 were some of the worst years for polio in America," said Bender, who was a sophomore at Mont Pleasant that year. "They came out with the vaccine the following year, but that was too late to help Danny and Sonny."

Back in the 1950s, Nott Terrace and Mont Pleasant often played their games at McNerney Stadium, home to the Schenectady Blue Jays, a minor league baseball team. Larry Mulvaney was the Mont Pleasant head coach and Pete Shula handled the reins at Nott Terrace.

"Tickets were sold out and they were expecting at least 10,000 people," said Bender. "But they had to cancel the game and then the rest of the season. It's something people never really got over. It was kind of sad for me to revisit the whole thing, but it was also very interesting."

"Nowadays it can be hard to get a hold of people on the phone, but I started leaving these long messages, explaining who I was and what I was doing, and emailing people," said Bender. "It was amazing. I probably talked to about 100 people for this book, and for every one of those messages I left and emails I sent out, not one person failed to get back to me. It was such a big thing in their lives and like the title of the book says, it was 'like it was yesterday.'"

Both of the young athletes remained paralyzed the rest of their lives.