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“Getting To Know You”

featuring Kathy and Charlie Greulich
from Reeds Spring, Missouri.



Question: What is your name and at what age did you get polio?

Charles (“Charlie”) Wayne Greulich. September, 1947. Got polio at 14 months.

Question: How did you having polio affect the way you were treated?

For first and second grades, a teacher came to the house. I started going to an actual school in third grade. The only special treatment I received was that, in grade school, they insisted that I go up and down stairs after everyone else and that I always had someone with me (usually my good buddy Monte Jones, so we got to have even more fun – or was that mischief?!). In high school, there was no special treatment at all... I even took the stairs at the same time as everyone else. We did a lot of elbow wrestling in high school and the only guy who could beat me was a fellow polio survivor!

Question: What did polio do for your self-esteem?

I don’t think my self-esteem suffered any from polio. My heritage is German, which is quite stubborn. My Dad really reinforced in me that I could do anything that anyone else could do... I just had to find a different way to accomplish it. So I did. Even though I couldn’t stand without full-length leg braces and crutches, I’d get up on the roof if it was needed – by pulling

myself up each rung of the ladder and swinging a leg until the foot caught on the rung so I could pull myself up another “step”. I was treated exactly the same as my seven brothers and sisters – we all had chores and I learned how to do all aspects of housework, even using a wringer washer, hanging clothes on the line, and ironing. When we lived in the country, we had a huge garden (about an acre) and raised our own meat. We gardened, butchered, canned... and I was in the middle of all of it.

Question: Are you married, and if so, how did you meet your mate?

As y’all know so well, I’m married to Kathy – who could forget? We went to high school together. I wanted to date her, but our family was poor and she was the “rich kid” – her folks owned their own business, which, in the 60s, meant you were RICH! So I didn’t have the nerve to ask her out. About 15 years later, she brought her vacuum cleaner in to the repair shop where I worked. We talked a little bit and, a few months later, I called and asked her out. Three months later, we got married... and 26 years later – contrary to what everyone thought, we’re still together!

Question: When did PPS enter your life?

I don’t know when I started experiencing PPS symptoms. I always thought of polio as just something I went through that affected my body for the rest of my life. At our first BransonGoers reunion (2000, the second one for the group), because of all the talking and comparing of symptoms, Kathy and I became aware that my need for much more sleep (than most people) was a very common thing among survivors; I hadn’t known that before. It was a relief to know that was the cause – and not that I was lazy! At a reunion a couple of years later I finally consciously realized that physically, I was wearing out much faster and couldn’t concentrate nearly as much as before. I’ve never been “officially” diagnosed with PPS, probably because I don’t go to a physician who treats that – just a regular family doctor.

Question: How is PPS affecting your life style?

I sleep much more now (approx. 12-15 hours a night) and am exhausted almost all the time. I may have two “decent” hours a day. I’ve lost a lot of strength in my arms (2 years ago, I could pick up a 50 -pound bag of feed, but can’t do that anymore). My endurance is drastically reduced.

My hip and shoulder joints are deteriorating. I have more pain in my hips now (which I’m sure is not helped by having to sit on them all the time). I’m in constant pain in my shoulders. Medicine controls the pain in my right shoulder, but only takes the edge off the pain in the left.

About 2 to 3 years ago, I had several “spells” in one week, which were probably TIAs (transient ischemic attacks, or baby strokes). Since then, my mind has deteriorated a LOT! I find it hard to concentrate sometimes. Memory? Well, that’s pretty much left the building! This is very frustrating, because I used to remember everything and could fix almost anything. Not any more!

Wet macular degeneration has affected both eyes, so I can no longer drive or read – I feel SO LOST! With computer programs from the Blind Association, I’m able to enlarge print on the computer so I can read it (but it’s very slow going) and I can have the computer read emails... but it’s sure n ot the same! I really enjoy audio books. The federal government has a program in each state that provides , totally free, audio books and some magazines for visually impaired (and some handicapped) individuals. I can close my eyes and picture what’s being read – and it’s perfectly clear!

I also have diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol – I feel like I’m absolutely falling apart, and I’m only 60!



(Savannah tickles Grandpa Charlie)

Any comments to/from your spouse/supporter?

Charlie is the man I most admire in the entire world! His strength of character (sometimes called bullheadedness), caring, compassion, kindness, and depth of love are, in my opinion, unmatched. I cannot imagine the amount of pain he endures, yet he doesn't allow it to change his disposition. And, to have all these other health problems thrown at him and still maintain his sense of humor and never complain – WOW! He has taught me patience, the honor of being loved unconditionally, how to be more self-sufficient, much more than I can think of right now... and that (sometimes) I *can* be more bullheaded than him!

Thank you for sharing with us Charlie and Kathy Greulich.

T'N'T: Tips and Techniques for Polio Survivors

by Dr. Richard L. Bruno

(This column is for information purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.)

Not from Tennessee? You may not know the name Steve Cohen. If you don't, write it down. Because if you're a polio survivor anywhere in the United States, freshman Democratic Representative and polio survivor Stephen Cohen has just become your Congressman.

"Delayed gratification," was Cohen's reply when I asked how he felt about winning. "I'm excited about going to Washington, where I've wanted to be my entire life."

Cohen has been trying to get to DC for forty years. At sixteen, he applied to be a Congressional page.

"Over the years, I applied to be a Congressional intern, a government lawyer, and for jobs in Democratic administrations." Cohen was never hired. He also lost a 1996 Congressional bid.

But, although Washington was always on his mind, Cohen was working hard in Tennessee. A practicing lawyer, Cohen was elected to serve as a Shelby County commissioner, where he helped to create "The Med," a community-funded regional hospital. Cohen was elected to the Tennessee State Senate in 1982, where he served for twenty-four years and supported expanding healthcare access, voting rights and the medical use of marijuana.

Some of Cohen's passion for public service and health care can be related to polio, which he had at age five in under particularly disturbing circumstances. "My father was a pediatrician, participating in the 1954 Salk vaccine trials. The protocol was to give vaccine to second graders, like my brother Martin, who got the shot. My father thought about taking some vaccine home to give to me. He didn't do it."

Cohen isn't sure why his father withheld the vaccine. One notion is that his father thought there was a small chance Cohen could get polio from the vaccine. "The other story is that my father didn't give me the vaccine because it wasn't right, my not being in the study group. I got polio in fall of '54, an ironic situation."

Cohen was hospitalized in isolation and then in a rehabilitation facility for about 3 months. "My left leg and back were affected." He got the usual treatment -- hot packs, water therapy and PT -- and used crutches for all of first grade. "I wore a cast sophomore year in high school to stretch my Achilles tendon, which didn't work. So, I had tendon lengthening surgery my junior year."

Cohen is one of not even a handful of polio survivors in the public eye who admits to having Post -Polio Sequelae. "I limp more than I used to. The past year, when I'm standing, I feel like I'm going to lose my balance."

Cohen also says he gets more tired than he used to. "But, I drive myself. I go way beyond warp, and I always have." Based on the theory of conserving to preserve poliovirus -damaged neurons, Cohen says, "I probably took five to seven years off my leg during the campaign, because I was going every minute. I was hustling like when I was 20 year-old!"

But, Cohen knows what he has to do now ; "Take two rest periods, sit when you can and save your neurons... the opposite of what I've always been thinking: Exercise, Exercise, Exercise." A PT had given Cohen exercises -- muscle resistance, quad strengthening by squatting and balancing on one foot -- which he hasn't done.

What's more, Cohen was planning to manage his PPS even before he was sworn in. He asked for a ground floor suite in the House office building closest to the Capitol, right next to the escalator going to the subway that travels to the Capitol building. Cohen is also thinking of getting a Segway.

Cohen is already planning to help polio survivors and promote polio vaccination during 2007, declared by Congress as "The Year of Polio Awareness". He has already talked to Rhode Island Representative and quad Jim Langevin, who asked Cohen to join the Disability Caucus with another polio survivor, Missouri Congressman Ike Skelton.

"Polio is part of my life. I want to do whatever I can to help polio survivors and encourage vaccination in Africa and in America. I am a testimonial to what vaccination could do."

Delayed gratification and persistence; A winning combination for one polio survivor from Tennessee and 1.63 million polio survivors across the US.

Dr. Richard Bruno is Chairperson of the International Post -Polio Task Force and Director of The Post -Polio Institute and International Centre for Post -Polio Education and Research at Englewood (NJ) Hospital and Medical Center. His new e-Book, How to STOP Being Vampire Bait: Your Personal Stress Annihilation Program, is now available through PostPolioInfo@aol.com.

Puffs From the Frozen North

by Millie Lill, Editor

I'm thinking of buying a bedpan. Not for its normal use, no, no, no. I'm going to use it for a small, easily transported toboggan. There is now 4' of snow on the ground and winter hasn't even worked up a sweat yet. And talk about cold! I don't even have a thermometer because I think it would be cruel and unusual punishment to the mercury to have it live outside. Also, if I knew how cold it actually was, I would undoubtedly freeze to death!

Not that I would know, even if I did have a thermometer. Canadians are on the metric system. So, how cold is -37 Celsius, anyhow? Well, it is definitely time to bring in your brass monkey, that's for sure.

I could have used that toboggan last Wednesday, when we got more than a foot of snow dumped on us. The snow was piled up on my front door to a height of 12" or more. I could have parked myself on my little toboggan and slid to the post office. But alas, I have no toboggan and would have had to walk home if I had.

I'd heard on the radio on Tuesday that we could get up to 27 centimeters of snow. I have no idea how much that is supposed to be, but the weatherman sent us plenty just in case we ran short. I had to close the doggie

door to keep out the cold wind. The next day, when I opened the doggie door, I found a snowdrift in the opening. I had to shovel it out with the barbecue spatula. My little Fiona, being by far the smarter of the two dogs, waited till Daisy, the larger dog, got out and broke a path for her.

When we got our first snowfall this year, Fiona had never seen snow before. She wasn't born till last January and had been inside the rest of that winter being a puppy. This year, she went out the doggie door, saw the softly falling snow, ran back in and kissed me all over the face to thank me for making such a cool thing just for her.

That was the first snowfall. Wednesday's was not the first, nor will it be the last. Fiona is bored with this magic now. She would like me to pull the plug. Believe me, I would love to do that, but unfortunately, I am not the miracle worker she thinks I am.

If you happen to go along First Ave. North in Hyas, Saskatchewan, and see an old lady and two little dogs sleigh riding on a bedpan, please don't call those guys with the white coats and the butterfly nets. Just give me a ride back to the house and make us some hot cocoa, will you?