



Branson Goers Gazette

December, 2006

Volume 1, Number 4

OUR STAFF:

Editor:

Millie Lill

Contributing Editors:

Anita Bjorling
Don Hansche
Elva Suderman
Kathy Greulich
Roma Wing

IN THIS ISSUE:

Getting to Know You
(page 1)

Puffs from the Frozen North
(page 3)

A Note from Don H.
(page 4)

.....
Articles in this newsletter cannot be reprinted without express consent of the author of that particular article.
.....

If you have articles you'd like to contribute, contact by email:

Millie Lill, Editor
ml-lill@gmail.com
Anita Bjorling:
anitabjorling@hotmail.com
Don Hansche:
dhansche@centurytel.net
Elva Suderman:
suder@dtnspeed.net
Kathy Greulich
greulich@centurytel.net

This month, we are starting our "Getting To Know You" series. We will feature interviews with various members of the Bransongoers group. This month we are featuring Anita and Paul Bjorling from Eureka, Kansas.



Question: At what age did you get polio?

Anita – I had polio in 1952 at the age of six. I don't remember much about my time before that or how long I was in the hospital, but I do remember that after I came home a physical therapist came to the house 2-3 times a week. I was completely paralyzed. They had to turn me over in bed and prop me up in a chair with pillows like a small baby. I regained much of my abilities except for continued paralysis in my right leg.

Paul – I think I got polio the summer of 1951 at the age of 11. I remember being quarantined, although I was never told why. There was such a stigma about polio in those years that it was never talked about.

I took an early retirement in 2002 due to muscle weakness and acute fatigue. We had been to several Branson get-togethers and it seemed that my symptoms were suspiciously like post-polio. My doctor did a blood test that confirmed that I had had polio.

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

Anita – Unlike many people I've heard from, I don't think kids in school ever teased me about my disability. In fact, I was included in baseball games and all other activities. I couldn't run as fast in my brace as the other kids, but no one ever made me feel handicapped. At home I was expected to do chores just like my brothers and sisters, although sometimes I had to learn how I could do some things differently.

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

Anita - When I went to high school it was much larger than the small town schools I was used to, and it was then that I started feeling self-conscious. I didn't know very many of the other kids, and the whole boyfriend-girlfriend thing didn't seem to work for me. Looking back, I think I put off signals that I wasn't interested so that I wouldn't be hurt.

I wonder if I could have continued with kids I knew, or felt better about myself if that would have been different.

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

Anita - I was still a senior when I met Paul and we eloped before Thanksgiving. Again, I didn't really feel handicapped, because I knew I was loved. I worked full time as an employment counselor after our children were in school. The job included a lot of driving and walking.

In the early 80's I began to have a lot of pain in my shoulders and had to retire on disability.

Question: When did PPS enter your life?

Anita - I was so angry. I had just had my first (and only) grandchild and I couldn't even stand to pick him up and hold him. My doctor told me that I would have to eventually use a wheelchair, so we bought a manual one to use when there was a distance to walk. Unfortunately, Paul had a hard time pushing the chair, especially in places like Silver Dollar City, so I didn't use it very often. Eight years ago I finally gave in and ordered my first power chair.

I couldn't believe the difference it made. I found out that I really wasn't lazy; it was just exhausting for me to walk or stand to do things. The chair really liberated me. I loved the freedom of being able to zip around the house doing chores and carrying things. I was amazed at the extra energy I had.

Paul - It really didn't make a difference for me. I was a "passer" for most of my life, although I had no idea I was passing. I always have had a problem with brain fog and fatigue, but it wasn't until after we came home from Branson in 2002 that Anita remarked that she wondered if I had had polio and my symptoms were maybe due to polio instead of depression. My doctor did blood tests and found that I had definitely had polio at some time in my life.

Question: How is PPS affecting your life style?

Paul - Coming to Branson every year helped me to accept the changes in my life, but they have not been easy. I worked as a carpenter and maintenance man all my adult life, and was used to being active. I thought when I retired that I would be able to do all the fishing and hobbies I wanted, but have gradually eliminated anything that involves much walking or standing. Now I spend time reading or on the computer and doing a little woodworking.

When Anita started using a power chair and losing strength in her arms, I took over the cooking. I think the thing that scared me the most was what we would do if I could no longer take care of her. We have learned to help one another and make adjustments along the way. I can't drive for hours like I did at one time, and have had to accept that there are things I can no longer do, but it has help both of us to be on-line and attend the Branson get-togethers. By hearing the stories and compromises that others share, we know that we are not alone, but are part of an exclusive club.

Question: How did you meet each other?

Anita - My mom had a restaurant and hired Paul as a cook. My twin brother and I helped out in the café doing dishes and peeling potatoes, and sometimes waiting table. I was 17 and he was 23. I remember the first time I saw Paul, I knew that he was the man I'd marry. My mom wasn't too crazy about him, but he started walking me home and we fell in love.

I don't remember what the fight between him and Mom was about, but after we had been seeing each other for a couple of months, she fired him and told me I couldn't see him again. Young love was not to be denied; we waited until the folks had gone to work, and Paul picked me up in his Plymouth coupe, and we eloped.

Through the next two decades we fought and made up, and fought and made up again. We separated several times, and in fact we were divorced for two years in the midst of this time. He was and is the love of my life, and we were never able to stay apart.

I am so glad that we held on, the last 15 years have been wonderful. Paul has always been my caretaker and encourager. He is wise enough to let me do what I can, but he sometimes sees before I do that I need to make another adjustment. I've heard of marriages that didn't survive post-polio, but Paul has never given me any idea that he resents the changes we've had to make.

Even before Paul knew that he had post-polio, he would never consider not coming to Branson. I think, too, that knowing we share post-polio has made us both more sensitive to one another. He knew it was something we both needed and we

have made the most wonderful friends, friends that have become our family. I think knowing that we share post-polio has made us more sensitive to one another.

Thank you, Anita and Paul. Next month we will interview another couple.



PUFFS FROM THE FROZEN NORTH

A group of us polio survivors were chatting the other day and talking about how difficult it was to ignore those old 'tapes' of what we were taught when we had polio. You know...keep on trying, try harder, push more, don't give up, don't whine, you can do anything if you put your mind to it.

Too many of us are still doing that...still trying to keep up with the Able-Bodied Joneses. And it is bankrupting us, in a sense, by causing us to spend motor neurons that we cannot spare.

Vicki said it had just dawned on her that we no longer have polio...we now have Post Polio, and they are NOT the same ailment. What worked so well to help us recover from polio just makes PPS worse. We must learn to reverse our thinking.

But if we don't do all the things we did before, we feel so guilty. I know I do. Maybe we should try to stand back and look at ourselves objectively...look at ourselves as if we were looking at a stranger. Would we ask another person to push himself or herself till he simply cannot move anymore? No, I don't think so. I think if we met someone who was in pain and was making it worse by overdoing, we'd tell that person to slow down, that they don't need to do all the things that seem so important. I believe we'd be far more compassionate to a complete stranger than we are to our own bodies.

I know I have no room to talk. I frequently give out exactly that advice and I have been known to say that any normal, sane, able bodied person would call in sick if he didn't feel well, but a polio survivor would go to work, dragging himself

in on bloody stumps if necessary, just so no one would think he was a wimp or a cripple or, somehow, 'less than.' And then I go shopping with a girlfriend and don't take my travel scooter because it might inconvenience her. Or I cook a big meal for my able bodied family and insist on doing the dishes afterwards.

Let's start treating ourselves as well as we would treat a complete stranger, at least!

- A Note from Don H. -

It's that time of the year again. Shoppers everywhere, empty shelves here and there. Everyone busting about to get that one last gift bought. Buy it here... buy it there.... who has the best price? Seems like a story that never ends. Stress can become more and more of a problem as we deal with these things during this time of the year.

Overeating too much of the great Christmas food and desserts has it's disadvantages too. Perhaps like so many of you, I find myself wondering why we indulge in the holidays the way we do.

The answer is really simple once we slow down long enough to think about it. Christmas is about family and friends and being with them at this time of the year. It's about exchanging gifts and opening our own gifts so everyone can see. It's about sharing special moments from yesteryear. It's remembering your first baby doll or BB gun. Christmas is about celebrating the birth of Jesus and fashioning our lives for a higher purpose or calling. Christmas means so much to so many.

As a contributing editor, I'd like to interject a few additional thoughts about Christmas. For one, I hope you will make the time to do nothing but reflect on your Christmas past, present and future. Try to remember those things that make you happy and bring a smile to your face. Remember the closeness you have or had with that special someone. Christmas is a joyous time of the year, full of faith, memories and dreams of tomorrow. Try to make this season special for yourselves as well as for others. Remember your PPS family and know that you are never alone.

Merry Christmas!

from

The BransonGoers Gazette Staff