

# Gleason Grimes



In 1952, I was a 12 years old, living with my parents and two younger sisters on a ranch in the sand hills of Nebraska, near Chambers. That fall I remember having no energy and just felt “blah”. Then I developed a high fever , a sore throat and was delirious for several days. The local doctor didn’t know what was wrong and thought I might have sleeping sickness, so he sent me to Children’s Memorial Hospital in Omaha, NE, some two hundred miles away. There I was diagnosed with polio by Dr. Donald C. Nilsson, with the aid of not one, but two spinal taps. My polio affected both legs below the knees. I was at Children’s Memorial Hospital from 9/21/52 to 10/13/52.

I was transferred to Clarkson Hospital for rehabilitation. Dr's Burney, Hamsa, and Campbell were my orthopedic doctors. During my stay, 10/13/52 to 11/10/52, I was treated quite well. Some of the low points were the hot wool blankets on my back and legs twice a day and the therapy, especially the stretching of the back and legs when my knees were strapped to the table. Then the therapist would rock me back and forth pushing harder each time. To start with, I couldn't touch my knees with my hands. At the end, I could touch my toes with my wrists and still can today.

A couple of other memories are the cold bedpans, which must have been kept in the freezer and then shoved under the covers against my back at 6:00 AM each morning. Another gripe was changing the bedding before breakfast and then serving me dry toast, so I had crumbs in the bed most of the time I was in the hospital. Today, I still don't eat in bed. Food in general was good. We had two choices on most items. We made our choices each morning. One disappointment was City Fried Chicken. That turned out to be steak strung on a stick—good, but not chicken.

Some high points were visits by my parents, twice a week. Thanks to Alfred, Lillie, and Ralph Maas who did the farm chores and took care of the livestock, especially the dairy cows. Occasionally my grandfather would come with my parents to visit. Another high point was the many visits with family and friends over Short Wave Radio. Thanks to a neighbor, Eugene Baker-WKBR-and Offut Airforce Base with the use of a phone patch. Another radio operator, Stan Elkins-WBJF-, whose son, Rodney, was in my class in high school, would let friends who were in town on Saturday night talk to me on his short wave radio.

I also remember a substitute RN on my floor: She heard me say that I was going to be a carpenter. She told me I would never be able to do that. She was reprimanded and had to apologize to me. If I knew who she was, I would thank her for the challenge. We had a lot of student nurses on our floor and most of them were very nice and caring. But one night there were no RN's available, so an older student nurse was in charge. One night a week we stayed up past lights out to watch wrestling on TV; black and white, and no remotes. She decided to use her authority and turn the TV's off, but the guys in the next ward had a TV that one boy's dad had rewired the controls to his bed and she couldn't turn it off. Naturally, we protested, to no avail. But, we got even. A doctor who taught in the school of nursing was our buddy. He dumped out his Scrabble letters on the table and wrote down the letters, just as they had fallen onto the table, gave it to her as a word and asked her, in class, for a 100 word report on that word. She stewed for a week before he told her what he had done and to leave his buddies on first floor alone. We learned later, from other staff, that this was very out of character for him.

Another special person that needs to be thanked was a young Episcopal Priest who came to our ward to visit a man, who was a member of his denomination. He would always ask what we needed and would get personal items and craft items for us. He was very much appreciated.

Starting to walk with crutches and braces was difficult, but rewarding, when told, "When you can walk, you can go home." My mother recently told me that it made her day when they walked into the hospital and I was walking down the hall. I worked hard and got to go home in a few days. At home, with the help of my father, we did exercises every night. Things progressed well. My mother took my crutches away when I could take 8' to 10' strides on them in a foot race with friends. She was afraid I would fall and kill myself.

The year 1954 brought muscle transplant surgery, done by Dr.'s O'Donahue and Donahue in Sioux City, Iowa. I would liked to have done serious harm to the person who left thick felt pads in the casts back of the knee, which were supposed to have been removed to allow for swelling. When the casts were removed, I had large sores, which soon healed. I was given a wheel chair and also braces again. The wheel chair wasn't worth a hoot on a sand hill ranch so I moved on the 8N Ford tractor. My father decided I should do work instead of riding around, so switched to the Farmall MD and mowed hay with my grandfather a ll summer. Operating the clutch and brakes built strength in my legs.

The Ford tractor also got me in trouble. I decided to chase the milk cows out of the pond with the tractor—so I drove the tractor into the pond and my casts were under the water and g ot full of water and sand. Since the toe of the casts was open, the water ran out, but not much of the sand. Needless to say, it was scratchy until the casts were removed.

The March of Dimes helped out and paid for most of my hospitalization. I wore braces about 6 months and continued to attend school and worked on the ranch all through high school. After graduation, in 1958, my family moved to Milford and my father and I attended what was then, the Nebraska Vocational Technical School and now known as Southeast Community College, in Building Construction. I have worked in carpentry ever since and also managed a church camp for ten years. Even though I walk with a limp and have weak ankles, this has not affected me pursuing my profession or enjoying I life. About 1995 my legs started getting weaker and fatigue started to become a problem —aka— Post Polio Syndrome. For the past two years, I have been using a cane to help with my balance and just recently purchased a scooter to use for longer distances—such as State Fairs, Auto Shows, etc.

Several years ago, my mother read an article in the paper about polio survivors, sent my name in, and I started receiving the “Gleaning”, the Nebraska Post -Polio Newsletter. I attended several meeting of a polio support group that met in Lincoln, for a short time, and now attend the meeting in Omaha. From one of these meetings, I learned about various web sites on the Internet. Signed up on one of the Email lists and became acquainted with lots of other PPS'ers. Five years ago, one of the men in Missouri, wanted to put faces with the names. We met in Branson, May 1999, and have gotten together every year since in June. Getting together with fellow PPS'ers, from all over the world, through the Internet and these special gatherings is the best means of support and gathering information on PPS, but best of all—these people and their spouses/supporters are very, very special friends.

Gleason and Pat married in May 1964. Gleason and his Dad owned and operated C & G Cabinets, specializing in custom kitchen cabinets from Jan. 1965 - Feb. 1984. Then Gleason and Pat became managers of the United Methodist Church Camp - Riverside Park - just north of Milford and remained there for 10 years. Moved back to town and Gleason continued in carpentry and maintaining his Dad's and our rental properties. Pat went to work at Rediger Chevrolet as their bookkeeper/receptionist. We have two grown daughters. Karen, her husband Richard and children - Madison (6) and Parker (4) live in Wilsonville (Portland) Oregon. Susan lives in Lafayette (Denver), Colorado and is engaged to Gordon Wolfgang. They are planning a Nov. 20, 2004 wedding and we will also increase our grandkids by three - Bill (14), Kristen (16) and Meghan (20). They will be living in Longmont, Colorado.

Gleason retired in Sept 2003 but still maintains rental property and pursues his woodworking hobby. Pat is planning on retiring after March 2005 and they hope to do some traveling and spending more time with family in Colorado and Oregon.