

Jim Sutton



It all happened on Sunday, September 16, 1951, a bit over a month following my 13th birthday. It was drizzle rain. I arrived home at 2 p.m. after a Boy Scout hiking trip in the nearby forest.

I was tired and laid down for a nap (very unusual for me at that time). I woke up at 4 p.m., having to go to the bathroom (loo).

I stood up and immediately fell down. The right leg didn't seem to be working properly. I fell down a number of times on the way to the bathroom and back. My mother was watching all this and called the family doctor (made house calls in those days).

The doctor immediately diagnosed polio and I went to the hospital right away.

I don't remember much about my stay in the hospital. I remember the 'penguins'. Wonderful nurses - but firm. I remember the spinal tap. That was the only time in my life I experienced a true 'cold sweat'.

I even had a private room. It was stark white with a single light in the ceiling. To this day, I very much dislike a ceiling light in a room. I get an immediate feeling of discomfort - fear, maybe?

I was sent home for further recuperation. 'Home' was the hotel that my folks owned. The authorities would not allow that! They were going to quarantine the hotel. My folks had a house

outside of town some 10 miles away. My mother made that trip twice a day so she could apply the Sister Kenny treatments. Not only that, she coordinated with the school so she could bring my lessons to me and take them back. As a result, during the 9 months, or so, I didn't miss any school. She did all this and still tended to the business of the hotel.

During this time, I saw my life plans go away. Although I was only 13, I *knew* I wanted to have a career in the U.S. Air Force. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind. I thought about suicide. There have always been guns in our house and I had been trained in their use. I'm a logical person now and I was then. I looked logically at all sides and decided suicide was not a good idea.

Also, during this time, I discovered humor. It's been with me ever since.

After a time, I was turned over to a sadist with the title of physical therapist (I always toyed with the idea that 'therapist' could have been made up of two words - 'the rapist'. Hmmm.

The Sadist made everything I had, bend - whether it wanted to or not. I was given the 'no pain, no gain' routine.

I was given daily exercises to do at home. Again, as a logical person, the exercise regimen of going beyond pain made no sense to me. So, I went only until I felt pain, then quit. Now, decades later, it turns out that that was the correct way.

I firmly believe that *my* way of exercising was the reason that I am in as good a shape as I am today.

Add to that the fact that I am more of a Type B than a Type A.

I had two sets of surgeries - age 16 and age 18. Three toes on my right foot were stiffened (with pins inserted from the ends of the toes) and some muscles were taken for transplanting elsewhere. My Achilles tendon was sliced and sewn back together to eliminate the foot drop.

When it came time to pull out the pins, they came out with no pain at all, as I had found them and had been turning them around and around.

During the times with the toe-to-hip cast on, I discovered that an auto's radio antenna (with the little ball on the end) was *wonderful* to use for sticking down the cast to scratch.

So, all things considered, I'm in quite good shape... for the shape I'm in.

Keep :-)

