

Linda DeRyke



I was born and raised in Lincoln, NE. The polio virus reared it ugly head in my world Nov. 1954. After week or so of fever, swollen glands and other flu -like symptoms suddenly one night I was unable to walk. I was 7 1/2.

The Dr. came to my home, made the diagnosis, I was taken to the Lincoln General Hospital in an ambulance. I heard my Mom on the phone asking the neighbor to come and sit with my sister and brother. She said the Dr. thought I had Polio. I don't remember knowing at that time what the word meant. I do remember having to have my arms strapped down on the stretcher as they kept falling off my chest as I was being taken to the ambulance. I was paralyzed from the neck down for many months. Was a patient at Lincoln General hospital for almost a year. After I was out of isolation I remember laying in bed and hearing the Dr. tell my parents in the hallway I would never walk again. He went on to say they would try to teach me to sit so I would be easier to care for. At the time I remember thinking about never being able to ride my new bicycle I'd received for my 7th birthday in May. I now realize it was by the Grace of God I recovered, I am truly a Miracle!

Memories of the months in the hospital are sketchy. Some of the vivid ones are being in isolation, being in the children's ward. I was in a 2 bed room, my roommate was Elaine Eby from around Falls City, NE. With most of my relatives living in Lincoln I had visitors frequently.

When no one was there to help feed me I remember trying to feed my self. I don't remember how much I got in my mouth but do remember having to get my long hair cut as there was always food in it. Another memory is cold toast and grape jelly. I still cannot eat cold toast and really have to be in the right mood to eat grape jelly. I can still smell the wet wool of the hot packs. One time (and Thank God ONLY one time) a new nurse did the hot packs different from the way we were used to. She laid us on our stomachs and I aid the hot packs on top of our backs. The hospital's physical therapy department was in the basement, I remember being on a cold hard table for the exercises.

Sometimes I'd be put on a stretcher type thing and lowered into an hour glass shape warm water tank. When I was discharged from the hospital, my physical therapist came to my home three times a week. The other four days my Mother was the therapist.

Sitting was the first accomplishment. Then I graduated to a wheel chair. Due to the concern of my shoulders drooping, angle irons were welded to the back of the chair pointing forward. Heavy rubber band-like strips were attached to the irons with leather slings to hold my arms at shoulder height. I could swing my arms from left to right, and feed myself.

Not being able to use my arms to move the chair, I would "walk" my wheel chair through the halls of the ward. That was a blessing in disguise as it strengthened my legs. I had a leather-like brace on my left hand to try to keep my thumb from lying on my fingers. I had steel half leg braces attached to Boys Hi Top brown shoes. I wore the braces for about 3 years, the shoes for quite a while longer. I was really excited when I was able to wear low shoes, my options then were either brown shoes or black and white Saddle Shoes.

I didn't have any surgeries. There was some discussion of muscle transplant surgery. Each time one was suggested by the doctors, my parents would ask the odds of improvement, which were never more than 50%. To them that wasn't enough since I was able to function the way I was.

The Principal at my elementary school felt it was important I academically stay with my classmates. Once I was able to sit in my wheel chair, he arranged for a homebound teacher to teach me in the hospital. She continued to teach me at home until I was caught up with my class and was able to return to school in the 3rd grade. However, after falling down a flight of marble stairs soon after I'd returned to school, he arranged for me to attend a "special" school in another part of Lincoln. In today's terminology it would be an "all accessible" school.

Besides the school nurse, there were also physical, occupational, and speech therapists on staff. Therapy was incorporated into our day. I was picked up and delivered home daily by an Easter Seals van. I was able to go back to my original school in 5th grade.

My long term paralysis and most severe atrophy is my left side from my neck to waist, and right side from waist to toes. The opposites do show weakness but not as severe. My shoulders and arms are weaker than my legs. I am finding my neck and upper body now tire much quicker than my legs. It's a good thing I am very warm blooded as the weight of heavy sweaters and coats really cause my neck and shoulders hurt. Also, if I haven't spent time resting in my recliner or other high back chair or couch my neck gets really achy, like my head weighs a ton. That gives a whole new meaning to the term of "being big headed."

Falls have always been a common occurrence. The more serious have been when I've hit my head, either knocking me out or having to get stitches. Whenever I go to a new

beautician they always ask about my scars. I probably hold some type of record of most falls down (and sometime up) stairs. It seems like all my schools had marble steps. One of the things that bounce on marble is ME!

I led a relatively normal life until 1987 when I was noticing more fatigue. I thought it was because I'd been a single parent for a few years trying to raise 2 children, and working 50 hour weeks pretending to be Super Woman. I now realize the anesthesia and recovery from major surgery (non polio related) I'd had in 1986 probably started the progression of my PPS. It was in the late 80's, I'd read an article in the paper by Nancy Baldwin Carter about Post Polio. My Dr. told me I didn't have anything to worry about as there wasn't any such thing. Sound familiar? In 1994, I lost my job as the company closed the Lincoln office. I was unemployed for quite a while as I couldn't find a job that paid the same level of wage I'd been getting, and needed to support my family. Looking back I can now see where that stress also contributed to my PPS progression.

I went out on Social Security Disability in 1996, moved to Branson in 1997 and became a Professional Volunteer. I've noticed in the past several months my balance is not as stable as it once was. I've needed to be very careful if children are running around me, dogs jumping or wagging their tails, being outdoors on windy days, or even walking in gravel or soft ground. Also the fatigue seems to come sooner. The brain turns to mush and words don't come as easy, especially later in the day or if I am over tired.

My outward appearance is that of an able bodied person. I've become a real good actress at maintaining that impression but now finding it harder to do. The longer I interact with people, their first question is "have I had a stroke" or "am I in pain with my arthritis." When I explain I, am a Polio Survivor, it does give me the opportunity to explain PPS to them.

I have two wonderful children who grew up somehow just knowing they needed to help Mom. My daughter Angela lives in Madison, WI. My son Matthew and fiancé Car ri live in Arlington, TX.

