

Mary Ellen Hemby



I was born July 4, 1952 in Osceola, Nebraska, the youngest of three daughters of an attorney and housewife. Polio affected my life 2 months after I turned two years old. I was hospitalized 45 miles away from home for about a month. When I was released, I wore two long leg braces and learned to walk again with a metal pipe frame in our living room. The right brace broke after a while, and I wore one long left leg brace from then on. One surgery when I was nine supposedly helped my leg...

Public small town school was my early education. I taught myself to ride a bike and swim and did just about everything I could. I graduated from college with an elementary education and behavioral science degree (because I liked the honest way children looked at disability). During my college years, my brace guy tried a new brace to replace the metal and leather I had always worn. It was knee high plastic, by pressing my foot down it was supposed to press against my knee so I could walk. I did use it for a bit, but my leg and hip did not have the strength to make it work. Graduate hours in Montessori education completed my school career. I applied at private pre-schools in the Southwest immediately in order to escape the Nebraska winters!

Not knowing anyone there, I moved to Houston, Texas, and taught in Montessori schools for 5 years. I met and married my husband, Kenneth, there. I started having back pain and fatigue, so I quit teaching and took a desk job as a service representative for Southwestern Bell. The job evolved from some walking to almost all sitting at a computer as the years went by. We had one daughter there and transferred to East Texas where our second daughter was born--both by cesarean section.

In 1986, polio affected me again. Lower back pain and tremendous fatigue sent me to Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (TIRR) in Houston to the Post Polio Clinic. Dr. Carlos

Valbona confirmed that I had post polio syndrome. I progressively moved from just a brace, to adding a cane, then forearm crutches, manual wheelchair, scooter, and now a power wheelchair full time. In 1988, I quit work and began Social Security Disability. I was 33 years old with a husband and two small daughters. As I physically grew weaker, my daughters grew older and were a great help.

The post polio support group that I started in East Texas in 1987 is still meeting. My husband and I make Native American crafts that we sell on the internet (<http://www.acetradingpost.net>) and at craft fairs, bike rallies, and pow wows. I enjoy doing hand crafts, but have found that my hands are weakening now, too. I nap every afternoon from 2pm to 3pm, try to stay independent with my accessible van, and stay connected with many PPSers through the internet.

Polio definitely affected my whole life. I lived with an apparent physical disability and dealt with all types of comments and prejudice. My husband and children are very understanding and assertive in accessibility issues also. Counseling never went far enough to relieve the emotional scars.

I enjoyed meeting PPS friends from the internet while living in Nebraska for a few years, caring for elderly.

