

From Henry's Desk.....

Tell Your Story

For the last fifteen years I have attempted to write a column or essay on some subject related to Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) or a life with polio in almost every issue of the Deja View. On my computer hard drive I have stored eighty-three articles which if you divide that number by fifteen (years), the answer is 5.5. The Deja View is published six times a year and almost every issue has some missive by this author. Some of my articles originate as inspirations or I get a clue from something someone says or writes to me. In reviewing my articles I have noticed that on several occasions I have encouraged polio survivors to write their stories. This article is an effort to get readers to begin that task. I have started writing my story, but I admit it is a laborious undertaking. Your story might be equally laborious or maybe it will take less time. If you feel you cannot write it yourself, perhaps someone of the younger generation would be willing to listen to your story and write it down for you. I have learned that this method of getting an oral history can be most effective with other groups. It works very well for veterans of World War II and for Holocaust survivors. Compared to those two events polio did not kill as many people, but polio did mark and distinguish us in a way that should not be forgotten. At least within the Central Virginia Post Polio Support Group we could attempt to collect some histories of our experience with polio and PPS. If you have no one to write your history, I am willing to listen and do it for you. Below is a suggested outline to use, but you are certainly encouraged to write it with your own emphasis and narrative style. I would encourage writing in the first person.

Write about identifying data such as birth date, sex, and place of birth.

When and where did you contract acute polio and how old were you.

Describe whether it was a city, rural or a small town (less than 25,000 people)

Describe how you probably contracted polio.

Describe all the details of your acute polio illness such as early symptoms, who made the diagnosis, and memories of being hospitalized in isolation and thereafter in a hospital.

Identify the hospital's name and location. If you remember, write about when you were admitted and memories related to admission and when you were discharged. Also, describe when you learned that you had polio and who told you.

If you remember names of doctors, nurses, physical therapists or others, write about them, the good and the bad.

Write about other patients you remember at the time.

Describe in as much detail as you recall about the damage to your body during acute polio.

Describe your condition when you left the hospital and whether you used any orthotic devices upon discharge.

Describe the makeup of your family at the time you had polio and what impact polio had on your family at that time and even later.

Following acute polio describe that time period when you functioned at your maximum physical capacity after polio; even if you feel you had completely recovered. During this good time period, describe what you could do and not do. After maximum recovery did

you still need some assistive devices such as braces, special shoes, crutches or even wheel chairs?

If you had visible signs of polio, describe them and how that made you feel.

Write about your successes and failures in life that had anything to do with polio. For example did polio help or hinder you in pursuing an education? Did it help or hinder you in getting a job or having a career. If you were a home maker, did it cause problems for you in that activity? Did it have an impact on your life in other personal ways, such as marriage or having children?

Describe the challenges that you met and those that you were unable to accomplish.

Write about your religious faith if it was a factor in living with polio past and present.

Of course you should write about PPS and its impact on your life. You can follow some of the same factors in describing your life with PPS; the onset, the progression and the new limitations.

From your life with polio and PPS, what words of wisdom would you like to offer?

I strongly encourage all polio survivors to make an effort to write your story. The generations that will follow you should know of your unique experience. Let me know if I can be of any help.

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