

The Miracle of the Singing Bunny

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Her bright blue-eyed pre-kindergarten daughter lie flaccid in a hospital bed, almost completely paralyzed from polio. Now 60 years ago, that horrifying summer polio epidemic had swooped this young family into its vile clutches, never to fully let go during their generation. Devastated, Marj, her husband, Art, and their toddling one-year old son, Scotty somehow got a ride back and forth to the urban acute care hospital every day to see Sunny. It was 1952 and the couple didn't even own their first car yet.

Throughout their frightening earliest bedside visits, they knew death loomed all around. Children with polio were dying in the beds nearby. Would their firstborn little girl live or would she die with the others?

After what seemed an eternity of days, an attentive young nurse approached them smiling, "I have good news. We're out of the woods! Sunny will be okay. We don't know how much strength she will regain though. The doctors say she will need about nine months of rehabilitation now, likely followed by several orthopedic surgeries and years of physical therapy. But she has survived!"

So now it began—this young family's search for the strength to stay endlessly hard working, encouraged and optimistic. Marj lovingly asked Sunny that afternoon, "What would you like me to bring you tomorrow, Sunny? What would make you feel better?" Sunny searched her imagination. "A singing bunny," she softly whispered.

"Yes," Marj thought. "Perfect. A cuddly and cheerful bed-friend with a music box inside to hold close and sing to her in this humorless hospital." "Okay Honey. I will bring you a singing bunny..."

Do you believe in miracles? I do. I recently read that nearly 80% of Americans do too. I have seen miracles, felt the presence of encouraging and comforting angels and have encountered many spiritual inspirations. They are often what helped me get through my tough lifelong encounters with polio. With this in mind, let's get back to the story about a miracle that happened to my mother long ago in 1952 ...

Marj left the hospital that afternoon determined to make Sunny a singing bunny. She found a stuffed toy rabbit at home in a box of playthings. She figured out that she

could snip a slit in the fabric, dig out a little filling, and then find a small music box to sew into the bunny. But in searching through all the toys, she found no music box anywhere in the house. So, determined to get to the shops before they closed, she swooped Scotty up, lowered him into his baby stroller and hustled half a mile downtown to buy a music box. Sunny must have a singing bunny! But after searching the shelves and inquiring in every promising shop downtown, she was left bereft. Every single merchant told her, "Sorry, we have none."

What could she do now? A musical stuffed animal was her fragile little girl's lone request. And this mama knew that right now, a singing bunny could be the one special buddy Sunny needed to keep her company through the grueling months of stinky hot packs, painstaking physical therapy and learning to walk all over again with orthopedic braces and crutches.

Bewildered, Marj plodded along the sidewalk toward home, mindlessly steering her son straight ahead in the baby stroller. Suddenly a sparkle in the grass caught her glimpse. As her eyes focused downward to the shiny object, she couldn't believe what she saw. It was a little music box that someone must have been dropped or thrown away. Amazed and delighted, she snatched it up and wound it up. Dingling a tune, it worked! Racing home, Marj washed the newfound treasure off and carefully stitched it into the awaiting stuffed rabbit. Together Marj and Art delivered the new singing bunny to Sunny the next day. And that bunny stayed close and served its purpose as part of the family for years to come. Actually he's still around somewhere.

I'm so thankful that Mom shared this story with me before she died. She taught me that there are unexplainable events in our lives that help us get through. And just as Mom shared her account with me, I believe that we may very seriously want to consider sharing our life experiences with the children and grandchildren in our lives. Who we are and what we have experienced in life can offer young people a sense of their genetic heritage: describing where they came from; endorsing what they can still become.

Recording our life experiences might be a wonderful project to do in our support groups. Together we can begin to encourage one another to document our personal stories either in writing, on audiotape or DVD. Each person might write a comprehensive memoir or just one or two short stories. The support group could invite a guest professor from a local college to help members learn about how to write effective memoirs or successfully record oral histories. The group also might want to engage a local media specialist to help certain members create quality DVD recordings.

Support group members could choose to compose short autobiographical stories that teach life lessons or illustrate personal values. We could document individual

experiences about overcoming the odds or taking risks that either paid off or failed. We could tell about the role of people we encountered throughout life that either helped us succeed or who were desperately difficult and discouraging. We could write at home, and then bring the stories to group meetings to share--even engaging each other to constructively critique the writings for diction and syntax. Another option might be to find a child, grandchild or student who needs "service-learning project" credit to record our life stories. We might even find a budding journalist like the lead character in this year's movie, *The Help*, to listen and write it all down for us. Whatever works!

As polio survivors, we have a rich legacy to leave. We have experienced life from a unique and important perspective. Believe it or not, the "kids" in our lives want to hear from us directly now more than ever. And frankly, we'd better do it fast.

Sunny Roller, a polio survivor, has written a variety of published professional articles, personal essays, and book chapters; edited an instructor's manual for a holistic wellness program for people who had polio; and presented at national and international post-polio conferences. In 1997, the Regents of Central Michigan University awarded Ms. Roller an honorary M.D. degree for her pioneering work in the field of post-polio disability and wellness. She currently serves on PHI's Board of Directors.

Source: Post-Polio Health International (www.post-polio.org)
