

## Scaling “The Wall” by Millie Malone

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You can't do it. You can't scale “The Wall.” You know the one I'm talking about – the infamous “Polio Wall,” the thing you hit when you overdo. You know the drill. You bop along, feeling fine, thinking that you can do another hour's worth of whatever you're doing, even though you know you might be pushing it. Then, all of a sudden there it is – The Wall- looming large. Your muscles are totally out of strength, with no energy to take another step.

What do you do when you hit The Wall? You crash – that's what you do. You may pay for trying to scale The Wall with a stumble, a few days in bed, even a fall. Perhaps you will be lucky and be able to remain somewhat vertical, though sadly out of plumb, but pay you will. In my own case, I will stagger around for a few days in a zombie-like state, hurting all over, ears ringing, and incoherent. Rather a high price to pay for another hour's worth of shopping, missing a couple of hours of sleep or any of a multitude of things that can pull the trigger that pops The Wall up in front of me.

Why do we keep hitting The Wall? There is Drs. Bruno and Frick's theory that all polio survivors have Type A personalities. They think that we strove so hard to overcome the original polio and its aftermath that we cannot slow down even now that PPS has reared its tired head. Do we hit The Wall because we're Type A? I don't know. But I do know that sensible able-bodied people will take a break when they are tired. They will call in sick when they are ill. Not us polio survivors, though. Nope. Can't be thought of as wimpy. Must keep up with the pack. Actually, we must be *ahead* of the pack to be “comfortable.” But comfortable for a polio survivor means comfortably aching in every muscle, comfortably stumbling, comfortably falling down. If we stopped before we hit The Wall, people might think we are “crippled” or in some way not as capable as our family, friends or co-workers. We must outdo everyone even if we undo ourselves. We must scale The Wall. It is the POLIO WAY!

The Way must change. We are wearing out our remaining motor neurons when we overdo. We must learn to “Conserve to Preserve.” If we want any quality of life, this is a lesson we must learn. I have heard it over and over again: “I am working as hard as I can to stay out of a wheelchair.” However, if we stop working as hard as we can and use a wheelchair, we will be able to walk around our houses without falling down, without pain, for years to come. I now use a power wheelchair. It makes the difference between being able to go into one store and dragging my weary body home or being able to spend a couple of hours leisurely browsing through all the items on display and returning home with enough strength left over to get back in the house.

It is hard for us to “give in,” to allow ourselves to use the aids that we need, like canes, braces, walkers, scooters or wheelchairs. But why is it so hard? No one thinks you are being a wimp if you drive your vehicle to the store. It's too far to walk, so you drive. If it is too far for you to walk around the mall, why not use another kind of vehicle. Vehicles are merely tools, after all, be they cars or scooters or power chairs. I think we don't want to return to the days when we had braces, crutches and that damnable wheelchair. We feel we have failed if we go back to using those aids again.

But we have not failed! Polio survivors have struggled valiantly, have gotten an education, married, raised a family and did everything that an able-bodied person could do and often, things they couldn't do! It should be no disgrace to use whatever tool it takes to keep doing and enjoy the rest of our lives. If using a wheelchair conserves enough energy to go to a ball game with our grandchildren, where is the harm?

Let's slow down, smell the roses, go slowly enough to enjoy the view and make our bodies feel better and last longer. WE have earned this, we deserve it and we should not be ashamed to do it. It's time we all got in our scooters and power chairs and drove AROUND The Wall.