



Dr. Henry writes about Polio Literature

As an infectious disease, historical evidence would indicate that polio has been in existence for over five thousand years. However, over these many centuries, the literature on polio has been limited. In this century there has been more in the medical literature about polio as a result of the epidemics that began in the early part of this century. With the development of the Salk and Sabin vaccines, the medical literature regarding polio quickly vanished. Now, with the reality of Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS), the literature, both medical, non-fiction and fiction has increased in the last decade. In my opinion, this literature has resulted for two reasons. One is due to PPS and the other is due to books that have been written by polio survivors and family members of polio survivors. In our support group's library, we have many of the medical books on PPS, but we do not have many of the non-medical books. Listed elsewhere in this newsletter ([see below](#)) are some of the books with a polio or PPS connection. This is by no means a complete list. I have read some of these books, but certainly not all of them.

As complete as this list seems to be, a connection to polio still occurs in literature or the arts when I least expect it. Last fall, I audited a course on Job at a local seminary. The course dealt with "Job in the Bible and Beyond" and how the story of Job has influenced the arts down through the centuries. On one evening, the professor was showing slides of art that best depicted the suffering of Job. One of the slides was a painting by Piero della Francesca in Arrezzo Italy. The painting revealed a recently resurrected Jesus, half in and half out of the grave. There was still some of the look of death on Jesus' body. At this point, the professor read a passage from a novel, *Crossing to Safety* by Wallace Stegner.

"But I noticed that Sally stood a long time on her crutches in front of that painting propped temporarily against a frame of raw two-by-fours. She studied it soberly, with something like recognition or acknowledgement in her eyes, as if those who have been dead understand things that will never be understood by those who have only lived."

In the novel, Sally is a polio survivor who wears leg braces and uses crutches. She and her husband Larry become life long friends with Sid and Charity when both husbands are young college professors at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1930's. Both wives get pregnant at the same time. While vacationing in Vermont, Sally is stricken by polio. Years later, the two couples travel to Italy and the scene described above occurs. One interpretation offered by this scene is that many polio victims can identify with Job or the suffering of the crucified Jesus. Many polio survivors have risen to full lives despite the damage of polio. However, many can recall the fear and even horror of a near death experience. We may tend to forget that thousands of children died from acute polio, especially before the development of the iron lung. This disease has shaken thousands of families. Many of us do "understand things that will never be understood by those who have only lived."

I can identify with many interesting passages in this novel. Larry, Sally's husband, writes this novel in the first person. Larry comments on the uncertainty of life with these words: "You can plan all you want to.

You can lie in your morning bed and fill whole notebooks with schemes and intentions. But within a single afternoon, within hours or minutes, everything you plan and everything you have fought to make yourself can be undone as a slug is undone when salt is poured on him. And right up to the moment when you find yourself dissolving into foam you can still believe you are doing fine." This sounds a bit like the process of PPS. Many of us have "fought" to be contributors and not burdens to our individual worlds, only now to feel undone by the "salt" of PPS.

Again Larry speaks of the friendship that has developed over the years between his wife Sally and Charity. "The cant word these days is 'bonding.' I suppose some people see in a relationship like that signs of an unacknowledged lesbianism---the same people who probably speculate about the sex life of somebody like me, a perfectly healthy man with a crippled wife. I don't care how they speculate, or what their answers are. We live as we can, we do what we must, and not everything goes by either Freudian or Victorian patterns. What I am sure of is that friendship---not love, friendship---is as possible between women as between men, and that in either case it is often stronger for not having to cross sexual picket lines. Sexuality and mistrust often go together, and both are incompatible with *amicitia*."

Near the end of the novel, Larry writes of his observations upon living his adult life with his polio disabled wife.

"One of the peculiarities of polio is that its victims, once they have recovered from the virus and settled down to whatever muscular control it has left them, live a sort of charmed life. Crippled as they are, they are rarely ill, they are surprisingly tough and durable, they astonish their sound companions with their capacity to endure. But that is not forever. There comes a time in the life of every such patient when the whole system---muscles, organs, bones, joints--begins to fall apart all at once, like the wonderful one hoss-shay. Every polio patient is warned to expect that time, every polio family lives with the foretold doom waiting for it at some unknown but expected time in the future. One learns to live with it by turning away from it, by not looking. And yet on occasion one is aware of an intense, furtive watchfulness, and the victim, the doomed one, must surely have just as often the vulnerable sense of being watched."

In my mind, the above paragraph is describing PPS. The author of this novel, Wallace Stegner, lived from 1909 to 1993. *Crossing to Safety* was published in 1987, around the time PPS was being identified as an entity. Stegner has written many novels and wrote this one after fifty years of writing. I wonder how he knew so much about the character of polio. Perhaps, he had some personal experience with polio. If any of you know, please let me know. In his career, Stegner won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and O. Henry prizes.

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Polio Books.

EDITORIAL NOTE: As an indication of availability we have checked two major US Online Bookstores for each title and provided a link to the title listing. Where both hardback and paperback editions are available we have linked to the paperback entry (alternative hardback and library binding editions may be available). These links may alter in time so we have also included the entry page for each of the three bookstores from which you will be able to search for author or title. Unless you already have a preferred online bookstore we recommend that you check a reasonable cross section of stores as not only

availability varies but also pricing and delivery cost/time. Some titles may also be published under separate imprints in different countries so if you live in the UK for example, it may be quicker to order the UK version from a UK bookstore although it may not necessarily be cheaper. For an extended list of Online Bookstores see our [Book Store List](#).



Primary Reference: *Crossing to Safety* by Wallace Stegner. Penguin Books. New York. 1987, pp. 274-275, 201, 288, 336.

[\[Amazon\]](#)

1. *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio* by Peg Kehret, (Children) reading level, grades 4 to 6. (Non-fiction) 1996.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
2. *Close to Home: A Story of the Polio Epidemics* by Lydia Weaver, Aileen Arrington. (Non-fiction) 1997.
[\[Amazon\]](#)
3. *A Paralyzing Fear* by Nina Seavey, Jane Smith, Paul Wagner. (Medicine) 1998. (This is the book that accompanies the film of the same name).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
4. *Managing Post-Polio: A Guide to Living Well with Post-Polio Syndrome* edited by Lauro Halstead and Naomi Naierman. (Medicine) 1998.
[\[Lincolnshire Library Booklist\]](#)
5. *Dirt and Disease, Polio Before FDR* by Naomi Rogers. (Medicine) 1994.
[\[Amazon\]](#)
6. *In the Shadow of Polio* by Kathryn Black. (Diseases) 1997. (the author's mother died of polio when the author was a child).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
7. *Polio* edited by Thomas McDaniel and Frederick Robbins. (Diseases) 1999. (nine essays written by polio survivors and caretakers).
8. *Post-Polio Syndrome* edited by Lauro Halstead and Gunnar Grimby. (Medicine) 1995.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
9. *A Summer Plague* by Tony Gould. (Non-fiction) 1997.
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
10. *Breakfast at the Liberty Diner* by Daniel Kirk. (Fiction) 1997. (a children's book about a boy with a brace from polio and his meeting with President Roosevelt at the Liberty Diner, has illustrations).
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
11. *Flexible Bodies, Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* by Emily Martin. (Diseases) 1995.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
12. *The Golden Handicap, A Spiritual Quest, A Polio Victim Asks "Why" and Turns His Life Around* by Garrett Oppenheim and Gwen Oppenheim. (Psychology) 1993.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
13. *Hidden Dangers in Polio Vaccines* by Elanor McBean. (Medicine) 1993.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
14. *Jonas Salk* by Carmen Bredeson. (Juvenile biography) 1993.

15. *Polio, A Special Ride* by Diane Arlene Hawksford. (Diseases) 1997.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
16. *Post-Polio Syndrome* by Theodore L. Munsat. (Medicine) 1991.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
17. *Post-Polio Syndrome* by Marinos C. Dalakas, Harry Bartfield, and Leonard T. Kurland. (Medicine) 1995.
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
18. *Oh God, Help Me! I Cannot Help Myself, A True Story of Polio in the Life of a Polio Survivor* by John Earl Lindell and Ethel Brooks. (Religion) 1988.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
19. *Passage Through Crisis: Polio Victims and Their Families* by Fred Davis. (Medical Ref) 1991.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
20. *Post Polio* by Betty Garee. (Medicine) 1987.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
21. *Through the Storm, A Polio Story* by Robert F. Hall. (Medicine) 1990.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
22. *Blackbird, Fly Away* by Hugh Gallagher. (Non-fiction) 1998.
[\[Amazon\]](#)
23. *A Nearly Normal Life* by Charles L. Mee. (Essays) 1999.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
24. *Patenting the Sun, Polio and the Salk Vaccine* by Jane S. Smith. (Science) 1990.
[\[Amazon\]](#)
25. *Hero of Lesser Causes* by Julie Johnston. (Fiction - juvenile).
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
26. *Jonas Salk* by Majorie Curson. (Non-fiction - juvenile).
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
27. *The Molecular Biology of Poliovirus* by Friedrich Koch. (Science).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
28. *Measles and Poliovirus* by Edward Kurstak. (Medicine).
29. *Polio's Legacy: An Oral History* by Edward Sass. (History).
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
30. *Contagious and Non-Contagious Infectious Diseases* by Karen Bellenir. (Diseases).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
31. *Gold in the Garden* by Dorothy Harrison. (Fiction - juvenile).
32. *Jonas Salk* by Victoria Sherrow. (Medicine).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
33. *Healing Warrior: A Story About Sister Elizabeth Kenny* by Emily Crofford. (Non-fiction - juvenile - biography).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
34. *Time and Place* by Bryan Woolley. (Fiction).
[\[Amazon\]](#)
35. *If It Weren't for the Honor, I Would've Rather Walked* by Jan Little. (Health).
There appears to be two versions of this title.
1st version: [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
2nd version: [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
36. *The Cripple Liberation Front Marching Band Blues* by Lorenzo Milam. (Health).
[\[Amazon\]](#) [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
37. *Handbook on the Late Effects of Poliomyelitis for Physicians* by Gini Laurie. (Medicine).

- [\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
38. *Scientist and Strategist, June Rooks* by Mary Verheyden-Hilliard. (Health).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
39. *God's Green Liniment* by Lois Joh Rew. (Health).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
40. *Little Billy* by Carolyn Baber.
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
41. *Jonas Salk* by Michael Tomlinson. (Health).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
42. *Abandoned Child* by Marie Morgart. (Children/Family).
43. *FDR's Splendid Deception* by Hugh Gallagher. (History).
[\[Amazon\]](#)
1998 Memorial Edition [\[Amazon\]](#)
44. *Rehabilitation Surgery for Deformities Due to Poliomyelitis* by Edwin Krol. (Medical Reference).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
45. *The Grey Filly* by Virgil Cross. (History).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
46. *Poliovirus Attenuation: Molecular Mechanisms and Practica* by Fred Brown. (Medical Reference).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
47. *Epidemic Poliomyelitis: Report on the New York Epidemic* by a Collective Investigation. (Medical Reference).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
48. *Acute Poliomyelitis (Heine-Medin's Disease)* by Ivan Wickman. (Medical Reference).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
49. *The Volunteers, Means and Ends in a National Organization* by Columbia University.
50. *And They Shall Walk* by Elizabeth Kenny. (History/Biography).
51. *Survey of Cripples in New York City* by Committee on Survey. (Family/Children).
52. *Intelligence and Personality Factors Associated with Polio* by E. L. Phillips. (Family/Children).
[\[Barnes and Noble\]](#)
53. *This Is My Story, This Is My Song* by Mary Bramer. (Self-Improvement).
54. *Tales from Inside the Iron Lung (and how I Got out of It)* by Regina Woods. (Health).
55. *Definitions of Time and Recovery in Paralytic Polio Convalescence* by Fred Davis. (Medical Reference).
56. *Two Steps at a Time* by Marc Stein. (Medical Reference).

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