

newsletter Jean Knight Five

What a coincidence! How often you hear that phrase but it seems to happen time and time again. My 'coincidence' has to do with Hilary – but let me start at the beginning.

I had polio in 1942 when I was 9 years old, right in the middle of the war when doctors were in very short supply and those that were around were ancient – at least I thought mine was and unfortunately he didn't know anything about polio so consequently I was not diagnosed as having had polio until two years later when my mother took me to an orthopedist because my feet were deformed. This all happened in North Hykeham, right next to Lincoln. (Now do you begin to get the connection to Hilary?)

Years pass and I eventually end up in California where just a few years ago I was diagnosed as having pps. Living in a rural area of Northern California my only access to information on this condition has been through the internet. The first thing I found when searching for information was the link to the Lincolnshire post polio network. I immediately fired off an e-mail to ask question about the years back then. I knew that others in Hykeham had had polio at the same time I did but I was curious as to whether any of them were still around. When I finally heard back it was from this lady by the name of Hilary Hallam. She wanted more information from me and eventually we had a long conversation on the phone and when she told me that she lived in Hykeham we got to talking about what life was like sixty years ago. She said that her children had gone to the Kesteven Grammar School and I told her that when I was a child that area was a farm where I used to go every morning for our daily jug of milk. (Incidentally, my mother taught at the Robert Pattinson school in the fifties).

One of the things about having to slow down is that I have time to reminisce. Speaking to Hilary and thinking about writing for the LincPin brought back so many of those childhood memories. My love of reading developed during the months that I was in bed. My father built me a wooden backrest and a cradle for my legs so that I could read, write and do puzzles, etc. I was also blessed to have a mother who was a nurse and my eventual recovery was due to her excellent care. At the same time she was working at the ARP first aid post, filling in for the district nurse and various other and sundry medical needs of the village (yes, it was a village in those days!) during those long war years.

And now to the present and the different needs of pps. One of the hardest things for me has been to learn to say "no". The first time was the hardest but cutting back to doing only the things that give me the greatest sense of fulfillment was a good thing to do. I never have liked to cook so I am an 'extreme' fan of the crockpot – easy to put together a meal in the morning when I feel at my best and then enjoy the wonderful aromas while dinner is cooking. Other energy-saving tips are to share the chores with your spouse and if it's not important – "Let it go!" I would highly recommend doing the things you enjoy (also the advice given me by the doctor who diagnosed my pps). I struggled with the "I've just got to do this" and "I really ought to do that", but if it's not important to your life and well-being, it really isn't important at all.

I have a wonderful husband who for several years was not able to help very much because of the pain of disintegrating hips. Last year he became the proud recipient of two

new hips and now he is my 'legs'. It was a rough year but because I was able to help him I don't have a problem with asking for his help when I need it. The big word here is 'sharing'. He loves to go shopping (I don't), so between us we have worked out a system that enables me to function and to enjoy life. When dealing with family and friends about the disabilities of pps it is best to be honest. Be willing to say "I can do 'this' but 'that' is too energy draining". I lie down or nap every afternoon and have asked people not to call me during that time. Polio survivors tend to be very independent (or so I have read) and the fear of giving up some of that independence makes one reluctant to ask for help. As long as you do the asking and make it quite clear that help is welcome and appreciated, you are still in control of your own life.

I direct a church choir which gives me a great deal of joy and when I told them that I might have to retire, they were all willing to step forward and help so that I can continue.

I have two very dear friends who have been going through the rigors of cancer and it has helped me to see how inconsequential my disabilities are compared to the many rounds of chemotherapy and its after-effects.

My husband says, "It's a good day - I woke up this morning!" (He's almost 80). I try to treat each day as a blessing - a gift. I got up this morning!

Please feel free to e-mail your comments to me at evh@pacific.net

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