

My story starts during WWII when my father served in the Royal Signals and spent some time in the Benghazi, Libya telephone exchange.

In 1952 the UK General Post Office were looking for someone to go out to Benghazi to organise the rebuilding of the telephone system. My father's interview was late in the afternoon and he was bluntly asked, "why do you want this post?" He told them he was fluent in Arabic and he had set the charges to destroy the equipment during a retreat. He got the job and within a few months along with my mother and younger brother we travelled on the SS Delwara landing in Tobruk where my father met us.

The yellow quarantine flag was flying because my brother and I had caught whooping cough and then a few months later I was paralysed waist down with waist down paralytic polio. I was taken to the Army Hospital in Benghazi and my mother told me that initially they were only allowed to talk to me from the doorway. My mother concerned about occasions I needed the toilet was met with the reply "Oh, I just have to call Orderly and they bring me a bedpan" When out of isolation my parents asked the doctors would swimming help me and it was not long before an Army truck took me to the Mediterranean for a swim each day. My father told me that I quickly learned to swim underwater and he would walk round after me to hold me up whilst I got my breath back. After a few weeks I was allowed home but with the Army truck picking me up daily for hospital physiotherapy. We came back to the UK. I could now walk but fell often. I had to have regular physiotherapy and so remember two of the exercises. The first has caused my feet to twinge. I had to sit on a chair with my foot in a bowl of water and underneath my foot was a metal plate covered in a cotton and I had to pull a lever to give my foot muscles electric shocks. The other was to stand at wall bars in a gym and do knee bending exercises in sets of ten. If I bent my left knee more than four inches my leg would collapse.

I passed to Orange belt in Judo. I was a good swimmer and took and passed life-saving awards to Distinction in the Pool and Open Water. I passed a medical for the Police as fit and went to RAF Dishforth to start my training. The second day we were given the timetable for the week and I was horrified to see Friday was cross country running so I asked to see my Class Sergeant and explained I would not be able to do this. Imagine his response... I told him I could 'run' enough to get round tennis and netball court and I could hit a ball in rounders so far that I could walk round. I had polio as a child and cannot run any distance. I thought my days as a Policewoman would be over before they started. However, I was examined and it was decided that as I already had higher qualifications in Judo and Life-Saving that were required I should be given a weekly chance to complete all the rest of the training. The 39 mile Lyke Wake Walk is across the North York Moors and a list went up for anyone wishing to take part. I put my name up and later saw it had been crossed off. I put it back on the list and again the next day it had been crossed off. I complained to my Sergeant and was told that as I could not run it had been decided that I would not be able to complete this. Now we see an example of where the Pig Headed I can do it don't tell me I can't polio survivor. I asked have the others been asked if they have walked that distance before and the answer was No. I was allowed to do this but my car driven by someone else had to be part of the back up team. They had decided that they would support me for the first nine miles and my car could take me back to Training School. Well my car did take someone back at the first rendezvous point but it was not me. Nearing the end I had to crawl up one hill near Fylingdales on my hands and knees and it took me 18 hours but I did it.

I completed four years as a Policewoman including two years in C.I.D. and marrying a colleague. He wanted to move nearer to his home in Yorkshire and we compromised on Lincolnshire.

We all have different levels of damage, different therapy, jobs and hobbies and can add other medical conditions that need considering. Most health professionals that I have seen have been surprised that my left leg is very weak from hip to knee but right leg knee to toes. I have more weakness on the left side of my body including swallowing muscles and one that moves my eyes side to side.

We are a nightmare for health professionals especially those that have not been taught much about polio by

their Colleges of Medicine. Imagine you are one of these health professionals and you see your next patient has had polio for say 60 years. You think back to your training and Polio was a half hour lecture with Leprosy.

I spent seven years at my local hospital each time being given more physiotherapy exercises. I really tried hard but all I did was become less and less able. I found out years later my records are endorsed “malingerer.” I was given an MRI and told from the results ‘Glad you are better’ I replied “I was not better and in fact had continued to deteriorate over the last seven years, I had polio as a child could that have anything to do with this” “Oh,” said the locum orthopaedic consultant “there is something called the Late Effects of Polio but I know nothing about it” I left his office and went directly to the Hospital Library who redirected me to the Health Information Service where I was given copies of the article in the Independent by Patricia Rock and another article by a GP.... both in our PSN Library. I took these articles to my own GP who soon commented I am sorry you have been saying the same thing for some years now “I did not know the condition existed.”

It is now over 25 years and getting medical support has been varied but mostly with my providing medical quotes and articles. Although professionals that I see tend to raise a questioning eyebrow when I explain that my left leg is very weak from hip to knee, but my right leg it is knee to toes.

I have exercised as much as each daily energy and allowed. The purchase of a Hot Tub for the garden cut out a lot of actions going to and from a swimming pool. Article in our library Julie silver? As a Senior Lifeguard in Pools and at the Coast for safety, it is essential that you have someone with you to help you where needed.

I started using an electric scooter on my 50th birthday which made a huge difference to the amount of places we were able to go and time spent there. In May 2022 I had my third fall where for the third time in the last few months my legs suddenly folded and I badly bruised my ankle. Thankfully it was not broken but our bungalow is small and no room to use a scooter in the house so I used my husbands spare Jazzy electric wheelchair. My GP ordered an electric chair for me 01.08.22 with rise because my legs are not strong enough to stand without using my arms and that is quite a strain on my shoulders. It took a year for the paperwork to be done and the order was placed on 02.08.23. It took many more months and letters copied to Adult Social Care before I was brought a Jazzy Salsa Mini2 with the rise facility. Helped enormously but two more weeks to get a single footplate for use in our small bungalow. The back is still not the correct one and is fitted at the wrong angle yet still I wait.... And my health and wellbeing continue to deteriorate because of these delays restricting what I could manage including trying to help my husband who was confined to his bed for seven weeks. I have been made aware that many others are also suffering due to long delays. I wonder how much money is being wasted on the time it takes for staff to respond each time you contact them plus the often earlier deterioration of the user whilst waiting.