

It was 1953, I was five years old and in my first year at school. I have a clear memory of trying to get out of bed and my legs giving way under me. Our GP had seen me the previous day and told my mother to give me a couple of aspirin and I would be fine. I do not recall much of what happened after that. The paralysis was confined to my legs and I do recall being taken out in a pushchair but I was cared for at home so it must have been a relatively mild condition. I was deemed to have made a good recovery but I became a sickly child with lots of pain in my limbs. When I returned to school, I felt detached from my surroundings and the other children. I was often in trouble for daydreaming and looking out of the windows, wishing I were somewhere else. I seemed to be tired all the time and cold. I scraped along at school, just getting by.

After leaving school I had a succession of jobs and decided to redress my lack of education by pursuing an Open University degree. Married at twenty-one I had the unstinting support of my hardworking wife, who was a nurse. I secured a post at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington in 1974 and commenced a rich and fulfilling career, initially as an assistant curator and for the last 14 years before I retired as the Biodiversity & Conservation Officer in the Zoology Department. I ran international development projects throughout South and tropical Southeast Asia, mostly based on surveys in tropical rainforests. I supervised PhD students and postdoctoral researchers and followed my career dream. Problems that were later recognised as PPS began to cause problems. Episodes of brain fog were the most alarming because I had no idea what the cause might be, and I avoided public speaking, lecturing and conference presentations. Episodes of fatigue had long been a problem but they became overwhelming. I was still riding high running international projects but mobility became an increasing problem, with leg pain and weakness. Following a serious road accident on the borders of Vietnam and China in 2013 it became increasingly clear that I could not continue. All field work ended. I continued at the Museum for a further three years before retiring.

In 2021 and after 50 years in our much-loved home, we realised that a three-storey house was no longer suitable. We moved to a bungalow close to shops and amenities. It was a big step to take but proved to be an excellent decision and perfect for our current needs. I still contribute to scientific papers and write articles but productivity is low, I work around the fatigue brain fog and pain. The most important thing that I learned from the Lane Fox Unit at St Thomas' Hospital was to pace myself and be careful to work within my limitations. It is frustrating but the only way.