

My Polio Story

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In 1948, after returning from summer vacation in the country, I came down with polio. It was non-paralytic, and my family decided to keep it a secret. And they did and died with the secret. In graduate school I studied Virology with Dr. John Winsser, who was a Team Leader with Dr. Albert Sabin when he developed the oral polio vaccine. I learned everything about polio, except that I was a survivor. During my early years of teaching Microbiology on the college level (I'm still teaching Medical Microbiology at 85). one of my students asked me about PPS. He saw something about it on the news the other night. I never heard about it. I visited the 3 Support Groups in my area and heard the "nightmare" stories. Each group asked me to talk about polio. I realized that survivors really had no idea about the disease, especially 3 types of viruses. At that point I changed my research from Microbiology of the Eye to PPS. With the 3 group leaders, my college, Touro College, now Touro University, sponsored the first conference on PPS. I attended a Polio Convention in St. Louis and met survivors from all over the country. I began to receive invitations to speak in person, to their Support Groups.

In the early 1980's I began to experience PPS. I was diagnosed with PPS by an Orthopedist, and a Physiatrist. On a trip to Boca Raton, FL, to talk to the group, I stopped by my aunt. She confirmed that I had polio. Shortly thereafter, I needed an AFO (short brace) on my left leg, and over the years it became a full metal and leather brace. As the years continued, I needed an AFO short brace on my right leg, and 3 years ago, a full metal and leather brace on my right leg.

During these years I developed Power-point Presentations that I presented to Support Groups, and at Polio Conference across the United States. Since COVID, I have had the opportunity to Zoom with Support Groups in the United States as well as Canada, Australia, and to a Rotary Group in London. My highlight was receiving an invitation to speak to a group of Orthopedic Surgeons, by Zoom, in Beijing, China. I continue to Zoom. I have 5 Power-point Presentations, and I continue to create others.

I am extremely lucky not to have had the early effects of polio, and I treat PPS as "a little inconvenience." I am not handicapped. I am "handicapable."

Because of this big secret, I was drafted out of college in 1958, and sent to Germany as a Senior Medical Aid Man, when Khrushchev banged his shoe on the podium of the United Nations, and walked out. We were ready for war. Thank God that didn't happen. I was released in August 1960. to return to school. If I knew I was a survivor, I would not have had to serve. It turned out that, without war, it was a blessing in disguise. The Veterans Administration made my braces, my glasses, hearing aids, and take wonderful care of me when I need them. They have accepted the fact that the service may have perpetuated PPS.

I am presently writing a book: "Polio, Then, Now, and the Survivors, I hope to complete it by December, 2023. I have met so many survivors through Zoom, and they have been the motivation for the book. I would like this book not only educate polio survivors and their families, but the Medical and Allied Health Communities as well.