

*Polio Survivors Network were very sad to announce that our founder and tireless advocate, Hilary Boone, passed away on 15 July 2024. We know many of you joined the funeral service in-person and also using the online streaming service. Many condolences were received and sent to her family and friends. We also received many kind donations in lieu of flowers as requested by the family.*

*We thought it only appropriate and proper to dedicate a good portion of this newsletter to the memory of Hilary, a fighter for polio survivors everywhere. Please find following the eulogy which sums up Hilary's fascinating life despite the obstacles she faced.*

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### **Eulogy - Hilary Ann Boone / Gowa Meendegaw (Dancing Owl)**

Hilary was born on 16th March 1947, in Hammersmith. In 1952 the UK General Post Office offered her father Hal, a job in Benghazi, Libya to organize the rebuilding of the telephone system. Hal flew out to Benghazi, and weeks later his wife Mabel, Hilary and her younger brother Robert went out via boat on HM Troopship Dilwara.



The yellow quarantine flag was flying because Hilary and her brother Robert had caught whooping cough and then a few months later Hilary caught polio and was paralysed from the waist down after playing with a girl at the beach. Hilary was taken to the army hospital in Benghazi, her mother Mabel was told she was only allowed to talk to her from the doorway.

Once Hilary was out of isolation her parents asked if swimming would help with her recovery. An army truck took Hilary to the Mediterranean ocean to swim every day. Hilary quickly learned to swim underwater, and her father Hal would walk alongside and hold her up whilst she got her breath back.

In December 1953, Hal's work was finished, and it was time for the family to return to England. Hal wanted to make an adventure out of this so he decided rather than going home by boat he had a car shipped out to Benghazi and they would take a ferry across the Mediterranean and then drive home through Italy, Switzerland and France, with a final ferry from Calais to Dover.

While packing up the belongings Hilary's mother Mabel slipped a disc from carrying Hilary. The only treatment was to plaster cast her from her neck to her hips, it made it very difficult for her to sit in the car. On the day the ferry was due, they were waiting at the docks in Benghazi, but the captain radioed that the sea was too rough and that he was going to sail to Tripoli 600 miles down the coast. If they could reach him in 4 days' time, they could take the ferry to Salerno and then drive home through Europe as planned. The drive to Tripoli was certainly an adventure, getting stuck in the sand, haggling to buy fuel for the car, finding places to eat and even harder somewhere to sleep.

A few years later Hal was offered a job in Jordan for a year and the family visited for a few months in the summer. They visited Aqaba but the best hotel was closed because the King of Jordan was staying, as Hal was a government official the family were allowed to stay in a suite. The only other guest was an Arab actor, they had dinner with him, he was very friendly. Hal was concerned that Arabs found white women attractive and told Hilary to stay away from him. The actor was Omar Sharif, when the film came out and he became very famous Hilary jokingly said she was disappointed as she could have been seduced by one of the most famous men in the world.

Years later when the family had moved back to the UK Hilary could walk but she fell often, she had an operation to cross her tendons that enabled her to walk more easily. Hilary went on to pass her orange belt in Judo; she was a good swimmer and passed life-saving awards to distinction in the pool and open water.

Hilary's first job was as a secretary for George Wimpey, a construction company, however this was not an exciting career choice. In 1969, she passed the medical for the Police as fit and went to RAF Dishforth to start her 13-week training. On the second day she was given the timetable for the week, Friday was cross-country running. Hilary asked to see the Sergeant and explained that she could not do this. She told the Sergeant she could run enough to get around playing tennis and netball but after having polio as a child she could not run any distance.

She thought her days as a policewoman were numbered, it was decided that as she had higher qualifications in Judo and Lifesaving, she was given the weekly chance to try and complete the rest of the training. A list went up for the 40-mile Lyke Wake Walk across the North York Moors. Hilary put her name up and later saw that it was crossed off, so she put it back up again, but again it was crossed off. She complained to the Sergeant and was told as she could not run it, it had been decided that she would not be able to do this. She asked if the others had been asked if they had walked that distance before and the answer was no.



The Sergeant allowed her to attempt the walk, but her car had to be driven by someone else and had to be part of the back-up team. It was decided they would support her for the first 9 miles and then her car would be available to take her back to the training school. Her car did take someone back to the training school, it was not Hilary. Nearing the end, she had to crawl up a hill on her hands and knees, it took her 18 hours, but she did it.

She completed 4 years as a policewoman at Heathrow Airport, including 2 years in CID before marrying a colleague and moving to Lincolnshire.

In 1973 she gave birth to Michael and in 1976 Alison. Hilary continued her love of swimming and taught disabled children and adults, volunteered as a lifeguard at Chapel St. Leonards and worked as a

lifeguard/swimming teacher in many pools across Lincoln.

In 1987, Hilary fell, and she struggled to recover from this point on. From 1989 to 1994 Hilary was an Occupational Therapy Aid, working at Ancaster Day Centre and then in West Lindsay running craft groups for the elderly and disabled. She continued with her education learning British Sign Language and Adult Teaching Certifications.

Finally in 1995, she was diagnosed with Post Polio Syndrome, from this day on she tirelessly searched for information.

She met Peter Jay from the British Polio Fellowship, and they organised a meeting at a local hospital, 52 people turned up and the Lincolnshire Polio Group was reformed after 20 years. Hilary met Helena Edwards from the Leicestershire Polio Network, she said she would share all their work if Hilary started a group in Lincolnshire. The first newsletter for the Lincolnshire Post-Polio Network was published in September 1996. In 1998, she became a founding member of the Lincolnshire Neurological Alliance.

Hilary did not stop researching from that day onwards, she gave many presentations, her first at the International Polio Network Conference in 2000. Her presentation at the 2nd European Polio Conference in 2014 was featured in the Journal of Rehabilitation. She put together and edited nearly all the 126 newsletters for Polio Survivors Network and has met many of the world's top Post Polio Specialists.

Hilary met Richard online in 1997, and in real life on 20th May 2000, in the first week he took her to a State Shoot. They had to drive down a road made of sand and then turned towards the edge of palm trees. They parked the truck, and Hilary got the electric scooters out of the truck and off they went towards a few signs. One pointed to a Hawk & Knife Throw, Hilary thought she didn't want to watch them throwing knives at birds. Hawk of course was Tomahawk. Then there were folks in costume of the pioneer times both cowboys and native Americans. They met so many lovely folks and nearly everyone asked Richard if he was going to get to the Rendezvous in January.

Richard took Hilary to a Rendezvous at Charley Knights place - the last before Alafia River Rendezvous bought some land at Homeland, FL. There were tents and tipis and folks living just like in the films she had watched on TV. She had not wanted to feel out of place as Richard had loads of outfits, so she had gone into a Goodwill store and purchased a curtain and made a long skirt and luckily found a white blouse that was near enough. Going round and talking to the folks was so interesting and she told Richard that she would love to do more of this, thus began her love of reenacting.



They attended the Final Ceremony a week later and standing in a circle with three Native American chiefs performing the ceremonies and the 'cowboy' elders sitting on chairs in the circle. They all went through the circle taking a pinch of tobacco from a pouch and sprinkling that on the fire saying their prayers as they were taken up to heaven, so moving. Then they passed a talking stick round the circle, and everyone was invited to say something if they wanted to. Hilary took the stick and her voice broke, it was such an emotional experience, the most uplifting spiritual experience she had ever had. They also went to Singing River, Fort Foster and a local event in Emerson Point Park where they lived.

In March 2008, Hilary and Richard settled permanently in Lincoln, where they enjoyed the British Westerners Association events, were members of the Reepham Shooting Centre and volunteering at Lincoln University for over a decade.

**Read more tributes to Hilary (or add your own) here:**

<https://hilaryboone.muchloved.com/>

**Donations in lieu of flowers can be made here:**

<https://hilary-boone.muchloved.com/>