



# POLIO PERSPECTIVES

Volume 25 No 2 Summer 2010

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Promoting Understanding Though the Michigan Polio Network, Inc Since 1986

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## COMING IN 2011

THE Michigan Polio Network is planning a one day conference for 2011. A committee of board members went to the Genesys & Banquet Center located just off I-75 at Holly Road, Exit 108, just minutes from, US-23 and I-475 to check on the possibility of holding our 2011 one day conference there. It is located within 70 miles of 2/3 of Michigan's population. The committee decided that the Genesys & Banquet Center will be an ideal conference meeting place and set the date for Aug 20, 2011.♦

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## BAY CLIFF HEALTH CAMP WELLNESS RETREAT

The Bay Cliff Wellness Retreat will be held September 13-19, 2010 and the MPN is offering a scholarship to it this year. For details see the form on page 19.

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## POLIO NETWORK

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Our September meeting will be held on October 16, 2010 starting at noon. Anyone can attend our meetings who wish to get information about the Michigan Polio Network.

Meet at TONY M,s

3420 S Creyt's Rd, Lansing, MI

Polio Perspectives is the newsletter of the Michigan Polio Network, Inc. It is published four times a year. (January, April, July, and October)

Send articles, information, personal accounts to:

Vera Hazel, Editor of Polio Perspectives  
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Battle Creek, Michigan 49014

# FROM THE CHAIR

By Bruce Sachs



Picnics in the park, backyard B B Q's and sitting in the shade with a glass of iced tea. This is the way we should all enjoy the warm weather. We have earned the time to relax and spend time with our family and friends.

On the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Michigan Polio Network, we continue to provide information to Michigan polio survivors through The Polio Perspectives, the MPN library, and the MPN web site.

[ [www.michiganpolionetwork.com](http://www.michiganpolionetwork.com) ] If you know a polio survivor, please give them information about the Network and how to make an appointment at the Post-Polio Clinic in Warren.

Although we added 2 new members to the Board of Directors, we did lose a long time polio survivor and Board member, Don Pixley. We continue seeking people interested in helping polio survivors.

Dr. Maynard will again be leading a Wellness Retreat at Bay Cliff Health Camp in September. Contact [baycliffhc@aol.com](mailto:baycliffhc@aol.com) for details. This is a great chance to spend a week with polio survivors and learn more about post-polio. The MPN is also offering a scholarship to the retreat. [see related article page 19]

The MPN is in the process of planning a one day conference in 2011. Details will be pub-

lished in The Polio Perspectives and on our web site [michiganpolionetwork.com](http://michiganpolionetwork.com) as they become available.

Have a great summer and continue to "conserve to preserve" -Bruce ♦

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## LETTERS

*June 10, 2010*

*Dear Vera hazel.*

*I'm one of the still snail mail writers.*

*I had a triple by pass on Dec 08 and one of the pain meds they gave me was Darvon 65mgs. I noticed while taking them how they also really helped get rid of the "crawling feeling" some of us have in our legs and arms.*

*Anyway for every one that has this "crawling feeling" problem which makes me crazy, my answer is defiantly Darvon 65mgs.*

*Dr Ryan (bless his heart) gladly wrote me a script.*

*It works for me. Hope it does for you also!*

*Ann Trewhella ♦*

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## READ ABOUT THE POLIO CLINIC

*On page 12 and 13 of this issue of Polio Perspectives you will find a write up about the Michigan Polio Clinic in Warren, Michigan. It is recommended that all polio survivors visit the Clinic to get an evaluation of their personal needs and health issues.*

*The Clinic has proven to help many of the polio survivors who went there. ☺*

**IN MEMORY  
OF  
DON PIXLEY**



*Don G. Pixley  
1929 - 2010*

**Don G. Pixley, age 81, of Rochester, Michigan, died peacefully surrounded by his family on June 21, 2010. He was born June 12, 1929, in Detroit to the late Vern A. Pixley and his wife, the late Edith Reynolds Pixley. He graduated from Rochester High School, attended Albion College and graduated from Wayne State University School of Mortuary Science. He led a normal life in spite of being afflicted with polio at a young age and was most proud of his sobriety since 1974. He proudly served the funeral profession in his family's business his entire life, beginning with the family furniture store and ambulance services. He most valued his marriage and his family. Active in his community his entire life, he was a member**

**of St. Paul's United Methodist Church for over 50 years. In the early 1960's he served on the Rochester City Council, was past president of the Michigan Funeral Directors Association – District #6, served on several committees of the National Selected Morticians, past trustee for St. Paul's UMC, a member of the Community Foundation of Rochester, the Crittenton Hospital Foundation Board, an active member and treasurer of the Michigan Polio Network, a charter member of Great Oaks Country Club, a member of the Rochester Rotary Club and was past Grand Marshal of the Rochester Hometown Christmas Parade in 2008 and was involved with the Older Persons Commission. He held Navigator Status, was fully certified with the U.S. Power Squadron and sailed his boat through the intra-coastal waters to Florida.**

**On June 19, 1956, he was united in marriage to Ernestine Dribben Pixley at Paint Creek Methodist Church. This marriage was blessed with his loving children, Martha Mishler and her husband, Dan; Susan Lauri and her husband, Tony; Vern Pixley II and his wife Lori, and David Pixley. He was the proud grandfather of Philip, Emily, Jillian, Andrew (Don G. Pixley, II) and Alex. Brother of the late Joyce Yerex and uncle of Mark Yerex, Bob Yerex, Beth Ryan and Mary Lossau.**

**Following services at St. Paul's Methodist Church, he will be laid to rest at Mt. Avon Cemetery.**

***DON PIXLEY was a devoted member of the MPN Board of Directors. Most of his years on the board he served as our Board Treasurer.***

# **LIBRARY CORNER**

Michigan Polio Collection  
Library  
c/o Laura Barbour, Librarian  
1156 Avon manor road  
Rochester Hills, MI 48307-5415  
By Laura Barbour



Greetings to all of you, as warm July gives way to hopefully not-even-warmer August. Funny how much we long for summer heat when we're surrounded by January snow and cold....until days like this past Friday appear, when the humidity seems to be a hundred-plus and you don't feel like doing anything, especially anything involving being outside.

Our letter carrier delivered several books to our door (too large for the mailbox, of course). Here's a short review of each:

**Dirt and Disease; Polio Before FDR** was published in 1992 by Rutgers University Press. Authored by Naomi Rogers, it's described on its back cover as "a social, cultural, and medical history of the polio epidemic in the United States. Naomi Rogers focuses on the early years from 1900 to 1920, and continues the story to the present. She explores how scientists, physicians, patients, and their families explained the appearance and spread of polio and how they tried to cope with it. Rogers frames this study of polio within a set of larger questions about health and disease in twentieth century American culture."

In her acknowledgements, Rogers herself writes that her "interest in polio was first stirred by **I Can Jump Puddles**(1955), the autobiography of Alan Marshall, who, as a boy in the Australian bush, had his legs

paralyzed by polio in the early 1900s. His unsentimental story of overcoming tremendous obstacles made [her] think about human resilience and the relations between disease and society. [Her] study dwells more on the social response to polio epidemics than it does on individual experience, but it cannot be understood without acknowledging the strength and determination of the victims of polio and their families."

Brenda Serotte's **The Fortune Teller's Kiss** was published by the University of Nebraska as part of its "American Lives" series. A look at the book jacket shows the following: "Shortly before her eighth birthday, in the fall of 1954, she came down with polio-- painfully singled out in a world already marked by differences. Her bout with the dreaded disease is at the heart of this poignant and heartbreakingly hilarious memoir of growing up a Sephardic Jew among Ashkenazi neighbors in the Bronx." "This was a world of belly dancers and fortune tellers, shelter drills and vast quantities of Mediterranean food; a world of staunchly joined and endlessly contrary aunts and uncles, all drawn here in loving, merciless detail...a heartfelt tribute to a disappearing culture and a paean to the author's truly quirky clan...also a deft and intimate cultural history of the Bronx fifty years ago and of its middle-class inhabitants, their attitudes toward contagious illness, womanly beauty, poverty, and belonging."

The third new book in our collection is entitled **Polio and Its Aftermath: The Paralysis of Culture**, and it was written by Marc Shell (published by Harvard University Press in 2005). On the back of the book jacket, there are comments by two people who bear

*Continued next page...*

## LIBRARY CORNER *continued...*

names familiar to many polio survivors: Daniel J. Wilson and Julie K. Silver, M.D. Wilson wrote: "Marc Shell's [book] is some thing of a hybrid. It is part memoir, part literary, film and cultural criticism, part cultural history, and part meditation on the meaning of disease, especially the cultural meaning of polio. There is nothing quite like this book in the extant literature on polio.

Nothing with the sweep and range of Shell's book has been previously published."

Dr. Silver added this comment: "[Shell's book] is distinctly original. There is nothing like it in the current literature. Shell's writing is at times witty and irreverent, but always outstanding. He uses some fabulous literary techniques that capture the reader's interest and imagination. Polio and Its Aftermath is truly outstanding."

The last book to be mentioned in this issue's "Library Corner" is entitled Fifty Years of Miracles and Adventures. Author Raymond Youdath recounts his story in this autobiography, which was published by Publish America in 2006. As the book cover "blurb" states, "At nineteen, Raymond is put into an iron lung, his prison for six months. This book is the insight of a young man that loses everything in one day. Raymond's fast-moving story is an adventure of fast cars, fast women, rape, mental abuse, seeing death at its worst and life at its best. Feel his lifetime of roller-coaster emotions."

If you are interested in borrowing these or any other books in the MPN collection, let me know at [denilaur@sbcglobal.net](mailto:denilaur@sbcglobal.net) or call 989-739-4065.

Until the next issue of "Polio Perspectives," take care!

Laura Barbour, Librarian

## **Memor by woman who lived in iron lung is going national**

Martha Mason's hometown also plans museum to house the 800-lb. yellow machine.

By Joe DePriest

[jdepriest@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:jdepriest@charlotteobserver.com)

Posted: Saturday, Jul. 24, 2010

LATTIMORE Folks in this small Cleveland County town still talk about the community's most famous person - the woman in the iron lung. Polio victim Martha Mason - paralyzed from the neck down - died in 2009 after spending 61 years in an airtight tube that breathed for her.

Her 2003 memoir, "Breath: A Lifetime in the Rhythm of an Iron Lung," released by a small N.C. publisher, has just been reissued by a national firm with a foreword by novelist Anne Rivers Siddons, who called it a story of "hope and heroism."

The community is also raising money for a town historical museum that will include Mason's 800-pound yellow iron lung. She had no close relatives and asked her friend Polly Fite to dispose of her property. A week after Mason's funeral, Fite got calls from all over the country about buying or borrowing the device. She turned down all requests.

"I decided there was no question - it stays in Lattimore," said Fite, 71. "Martha never told me what to do with it, but I felt like that's what she wanted. The iron lung was her life. In our museum, we need to have a Martha place."

At the time of her death, Mason was one of fewer than 20 people in the U.S. still living in iron lungs and one of the longest survivors. A few days after the polio epidemic of

*Continued next page...*

## *MEMOIR BY WOMAN continued...*

1948 killed Mason's older brother she came down with the same virus and never walked again. Despite her fragile condition, she graduated first in her class from Wake Forest University. Mason wrote her memoir on a voice-activated computer. When she died at age 71, her obituary in the New York Times caught the eye of Nancy Miller, an editor with Bloomsbury USA. The account mentioned Mason's out-of-print memoir, and Miller found a copy.

### Community portrait

A former executive editor at Random House and HarperCollins, Miller had worked with such authors as Gail Godwin and Mary Doria Russell. When Mason's book arrived "I don't know if I was expecting much," Miller said. "But I fell in love with her voice."

A native New Yorker who knew little about North Carolina, Miller felt an instant connection with Mason and the community she wrote about. Despite the author's paralysis, Miller felt she was more joyful about life than most people who weren't disabled.

"We decided this would be a great book to reissue," Miller said.

Mason's friend from childhood and former Davidson College English professor, Charles Cornwell, encouraged her to write the memoir and edited it. Seeing the book reissued in paperback "is an enormous pleasure," he said. "But it's bittersweet. I wish she was alive to see it happening."

The book grew out of an old friendship between Cornwell and Mason. It's not just about her battle with illness, but life in a small Southern town. That part of the story is "every bit as idyllic as Martha made it sound," said Cornwell of Charleston.

"Nothing was exaggerated."

Founded in 1899 at the intersection of two railroads, Lattimore was in the middle of cotton country. Mason grew up there in the late 1940s and wrote that she felt "secure and accepted." When polio struck, the community didn't forget her. Visitors dropped by the home where caretakers looked after Mason. Conversations touched on politics and religion, literature and food.

"Martha was absolutely the most intriguing person I've ever met in my life," said former State Rep. Jack Hunt, 87, of Lattimore. He brought over hot meals - along with an occasional bottle of wine - to share with Mason on Wednesday nights.

"She had a fetish about not wanting pity," Hunt said. "She looked on the upbeat side of things and didn't dwell on the negative. She taught me to appreciate life. I miss her every day - especially Wednesdays."

### Powerful symbol

For many, Mason's iron lung is a powerful symbol of her life. The machine is stored in Steve Cornwell's income tax office in downtown Lattimore.

Polly Fite remembers how people were often startled when they saw Mason for the first time - her head sticking out of a strange machine. As they talked, they focused on the person - not the contraption she was in.

When the nonprofit museum opens, Fite hopes the iron lung will help keep her friend's story alive - not only for local residents but for people who never met her.

"Martha's influence is still here," Fite said. "She can be an inspiration to others ♦

Read more:

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/07/24/1580394/memoir-by-woman-who-lived-in-iron.html#ixzz0uzlLMpms>

# SUPPORT GROUPS & INFORMATION CONTACTS

## ANN ARBOR (PPSG)

Liina Paasuke (734)332-1715  
Sunny Roller (734)971-1335  
Meetings 3rd Tues. of August and December.

## CLIO AREA POLIO SURVIVORS SUPPORT G.

c/o The Clio Area Senior Center  
2136 W. Vienna Rd.  
Clio, MI 48420  
We are seeking a permanent facilitator for a Polio Support Group.  
If interested call director Daryl at 810-687-7260

## HARTFORD, MICHIGAN - PPSG

Jeannie Wessendorf  
Support group meetings at Hartford Federated Church, Hartford Michigan for meeting times please call Jeannie at 269-621-2059 or email jeanniew@provide.net

## LANSING AREA SUPPORT GROUP

Bill Messeroll (517)641-6398  
Meet 1st Wed of Month (except July & January)

## MID-MICHIGAN (PPSG)

Jean Iutzi, Harrison, MI (989)539-3781  
Group info. 1-800-999-3199  
Meeting twice a year. June and Nov.

## NORTHEAST MI SUPPORTGROUP

meeting 3rd Wed from March to October at Alcona Library.  
M 72 Harrisville, MI  
Ruth Wisniewski (989)-354-4038

## SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN (PPSG)

Bonnie Levitan 313-885-7855  
co-facilitated by Bruce Sachs 586-465-3104  
Dianne Dych-Sachs 586-465-3104  
Bobbi Stevens 248-549-2149

Meets 4th Sat. of the month  
March thru October 10am-Noon

## THUMB AREA PP SUPPORT GROUP

Rita Wall (989) 673-3678  
Blue Water Center for Independent Living  
1184 Cleaver Rd Suite 1000  
Caro, MI  
Meets last Tuesday of each month 2:30pm

## WEST MICHIGAN PPSG

Jim Huttenga -Grandville (616)538-3472  
George Waddell-Comstock Park and North (616)785-9440  
Michael Balcerzak -Wyoming (616)531-1634  
Lynette Acosta -Grand Rapids/E (616)455-5748  
Scheduled meetings: Apr, June, Sept, Nov  
For time/place email:bigsteelhead@earthlink.net

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### FRED MAYNARD, MD

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580 W College Ave, Marquette, MI 49855  
Phone 906-225-3914  
fmaynard@penmed.com

### Post-Polio Health International (PHI)

4207 Lindell Blvd #110,  
Saint Louis, Missouri 63108  
FAX (314)534-5070 Phone (314)534-0475  
info@post-polio.org www.post-polio.org

# POLIO SURVIVORS SHARING

This is a one-on-one e-mail list so you can mail only to the selected name; an e-mail list of Polio Survivors who wish to communicate with other Polio Survivors and discuss your concerns, ideas, fun, jokes, as well as sharing information of what is happening to each other. I would like your permission to add you on this list. Please email to [vlhazel38@comcast.net](mailto:vlhazel38@comcast.net) to get on the list! Also include your city and state. Happy Sharing!!  
Vera Hazel, Editor

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## **CHALLENGES**

By Bernadette(Bernie) Pawlus Oleksa

My first five years were the usual happy ones. Then, nearing the age of six, when I was about to meet the first great challenge - school - I met instead another challenge and was stricken with the polio virus on August 15, 1935. Just the day before, after spending hours running through the lawn sprinkler with my siblings, I had complained of severe neck pain and ran a high fever. When I awoke the next morning, I couldn't walk nor stand. My parents took me to a local clinic in the Detroit area where they were told to take me immediately to Detroit's Children Hospital as they feared I had contracted the polio virus.

So little was known during that decade and treatment so limited. It was recommended that the affected areas be completely immobilized until the pain subsided. In my case that included the lower extremities and I spent the next three months in a cast from chest to toe. After the body case was removed, I was transferred to the Farmington Convalescent Home and received physical therapy there for the next twelve months. During that time Dr Blodgett and Dr Fisher performed surgery on each foot - an ankylosis on the right foot and a muscle transplant on the left foot -- at University Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Gradually, I was able to walk again with the aid of a back brace, two long-leg braces plus crutches. Thankfully, March of Dimes paid for all my medical care.

Schooling studies started at the convalescent home and when I was finally able to go home, I attended Oakman School for Crippled Children up until the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. My therapy continued at the school by a registered physical therapist who did

*Continued next page ...*

## CHALLENGES *continued...*

most of the treatment in a therapeutic pool. School attendance meant special transportation, which meant catching a 7:00 a.m. bus for a 9:00 a.m. class, and then a matching two-hour ride home in the afternoon. Playmates were few and far between, for fear and ignorance were rife. However, my seven siblings gave me encouragement. Constant cries of "Come on Bernie ... Move!" echoed through the house. There was no coddling, no "special consideration." I was expected to do my share of the housework.

By the time I entered Cass Technical/High School of Commerce, I had discarded all braces and the crutches. Enrollment in a business course at Cass/Commerce again meant coming to terms with reality - academics would be taken at Cass (they



*Burnadette Pawlus Oleksa 1936-7*

had an elevator) with business courses at Commerce (they were centered on one floor), and now a three hour bus ride each way. With my diploma from Commerce achieved, I spent a summer as a counselor at Grace Bentley Camp while deciding a future course.

Another new challenge begins. While tests from the Michigan Rehabilitation Center indicated I was college caliber, I preferred to begin working since I was anxious to become independent and purchase a car with hand controls.

My first employment was with a publisher doing secretarial work, then a 10-year employment in the Media Department at the Detroit offices of J. Walter Thompson Company, where I scheduled advertising for the Ford Dealer's Association of USA, and was also treasurer of their Credit Union. A short retirement from the business world proceeded wherein I was faced with another challenge of raising two energetic sons who became MSU graduates and then provided me with five grandchildren to love.

Again, I, entered the business world, and for 30 years I worked for a commercial general contractor, eventually retiring at the age of 80.

Mobility challenges were many along the way, and now I'm back to a one long-leg brace, using crutches, and a scooter. Aids all over my home - toilet seat risers with arm rails, a lift chair, a trapeze to pull me up from the bed, ramps, and a mechanical arm lift in my van to raise the scooter. The list keeps getting longer. I've lost the strength in my arms and the shoulders ache from overuse of crutches. Mechanical devices are my saviors. Stay tuned for the next challenge.

Yes, life has been good in spite of some unpleasant challenges. I have worked as volunteer for the March of Dimes and Jerry Lewis fund campaigns; been a member of the Michigan Polio Network since its conception in 1986, served as Board member for many years, as well as a Facilitator for the Southeast Polio Support Group in Troy; and attended several Polio Conferences in St Louis. Currently, I am a Board member of the Michigan League for Crippled Children that sponsor Grace Bentley Camp for Crippled Children on the shores of Lake Huron where I spent many pleasant summers as a camper. It's my way of giving back to all the wonderful charities that have helped me to conquer "challenges." ♦

# A GEM FOR POLIO SURVIVORS

When we first contracted polio most of us felt isolated from our peers because of our disability. As we grew older we rarely knew another polio survivor, and now with post-polio syndrome we are searching for answers for why we are experiencing new problems. Most of the primary care doctors have very little knowledge of post-polio, and once again we feel isolated.

Ten years ago after seeing several post-polio patients as part of his practice, Dr Daniel Ryan realized that there had to be many polio survivors in need of help dealing with their Post-Polio Syndrome. With help from The Michigan Polio Network, the Southeast Michigan Post-Polio Support Group and Bonnie Levitan, a member of both organizations, Dr Ryan, and the St John Hospital System, a Post-Polio Clinic was established and began accepting patients in March 2001 in a St. John Physical Therapy Center in Shelby Twp.



*Dr. Ryan checking Dianne's brace*

In 2005 the clinic was moved to its present location at 13850 East 12 Mile Road in Warren. The clinic continues there today and in 2007 an Orthotic Department was added. Braces can be cast and fabricated on site.

The clinic was scheduled to be open 2 days a month and as the word spread, it took several months to get an initial appointment.

The staff consists of Medical Director Dr. Daniel M. Ryan, Physiatrist, Dr Mark J Dukaj, Internal Medicine, Mark Eveningred, Physical Therapist, and Tamera Treanore and Scott Fager Orthotists. Becky Hutko is the clinic secretary.



*Tamera checking Bruce's foot drop brace*

When the clinic first opened it was decided to have a polio survivor as a greeter, in the waiting room, to answer non-medical questions. Bonnie Levitan was the first greeter. Bruce Sachs was added as a greeter in 2003, and Dianne Dych-Sachs was added in 2006. They continue to provide helpful information to the patients and a positive atmosphere in the waiting room. In the last couple of months the clinic's orthotic department has become part of Pros-Tech Orthotics of Troy. The clinic will continue to provide the same services as before and with the backing of a long standing orthotic company.

Continued next page...



*Post-Polio Clinic  
Secretary Becky Hutko*



*Post-Polio Clinic Greeters Bonnie Levitan,  
Dianne Dych-Sachs, Bruce Sachs*

To schedule an initial appointment call the Post-Polio Clinic at (586) 778-4505, Monday - Friday, and ask for Becky. The clinic meets the first and third Thursday of each month and new patients are scheduled in the morning.

Your initial appointment could last 1 - 2 hours. During that time, you will meet with each member of the staff and before you leave you will receive follow up recommendations, prescriptions, for physical therapy or medications, if needed, business cards of all the staff, and a book, *Managing Post-Polio* by Dr. Lauro Halstead, a polio survivor. At that time a follow up appointment will be scheduled. During a follow up appointment you will meet with Dr. Ryan and an orthotist. These appointments usually are much shorter unless you need brace work.

The St John Post-Polio Clinic is the only clinic in Michigan that uses the team approach. It is also one of about 30 clinics in the entire United States. The clinic has seen over 1,000 polio survivors. But there are over 16,000 survivors in Michigan.

It is strongly recommended that all polio survivors schedule an evaluation at the clinic.

Many polio survivors are unaware of the local, state, and national organizations and newsletters available to provide support. The following web sites will link you to more post-polio information.

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Southeast Michigan Post-Polio Support Group

Bonnie Levitan 313-885-7855

Michigan Polio Network 989-739-4065

[www.michiganpolionetwork.com](http://www.michiganpolionetwork.com)

The Polio Perspectives Quarterly

Subscription \$15 per year

The MPN lending Library 989-739-4065

Bay Cliff Health Camp Annual Post-Polio Retreat

906-345-9314 or baycliffhc@aol.com.

Post-Polio Health International

[www.phi.org](http://www.phi.org)

Monthly newsletter \$25 per year

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Call for an appointment Monday - Friday at:

ST. JOHN POST-POLIO CLINIC

CENTER FOR PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND

REHABILITATION

13850 EAST TWELVE MILE RD.

WARREN, MI 48088

[586] 778-4505 FAX [586] 558-4878

---

*Article by: Dianne Dych-Sachs, polio survivor since 1952, Polio Clinic Greeter, Co-facilitator Southeast Michigan Post-Polio Support Group, Secretary Michigan Polio Network. Bruce Sachs, polio survivor since 1940, Polio Clinic Greeter, Co-facilitator Southeast Michigan Post-Polio Support Group, Chairman Michigan Polio Network*

# MARJ TRUESDELL

## POLIO STORY

As a teenager my life changed August 1946, the day I found it difficult to walk. It felt like I had bricks attached to my shoes. Not feeling well I laid down most of the day. This was the time of year I had Hay Fever so bad my body was completely shut down. During the night I had pain in the muscles of my legs and arms and called my Mother to my room. As the pain in the muscle of my left arm hurt she rubbed it till it stopped, however the pain was then in my right arm. It then went to my legs and each time my Mother warmed it with her hands till the pain went away. This was a Saturday night and on Sunday morning Mother called our family Doctor who came 10 plus miles to the house. After checking me he went into the other room to tell my parents I had every indication of Polio and he would return in 48 hours to see if I would be affected with any paralysis. Tuesday the virus settled in my right leg, knee on down. Being just weeks away from attending school, I was disappointed when the Doctor said I'd probably miss a year.

The Doctor gave my Mother the choice of sending me to the Hospital or doing the "Sister Kenny Treatment" at home. My Mother chose the SKT. Having two brothers in their 20' s they helped set up the bedroom, putting cement blocks under the bed posts to raise it up so my Mother would not have to bend over so low. They brought up from the basement our washing machine wringer, a galvanized tub and a hot plate. Mother would heat up the water, take a large heavy towel, run it through the wringer and put it on my leg - then cover it with a piece of oil cloth. This was repeated each time the towel cooled. Mother did this for weeks. Around six weeks the Doctor felt I could get out of bed. Needless to say my legs were like jelly. I had to learn to walk again, taking one step at a time holding onto the furniture. My brothers brought my bicycle into my bedroom and mounted it on a wooden platform where I peddled it each day. I was to sit in our bathtub each day filled with water as hot as I could take it and then let it cool down.

I informed the Doctor I wanted to return to school in January. I asked for crutches but he only agreed to a cane, saying I'd throw the cane away eventually but rely too much on the crutches.

January 1947 I entered Plymouth High School in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The Principal, Mr. Schmidt, was wonderful. He arranged all my morning classes on the first floor, and the afternoon classes on the second floor. He also arranged my schedule to make up the class material I missed in the first semester. I shared a locker with a great gal - wanting me to leave my cane in the locker and she would walk me to my classes. Several fellows picked up my books and had them on my desk for the next class. The daily routine of walking down Cowan Road in Nankin Mills (now known as Westland) to Wayne Road to catch the school bus to Plymouth High School plus walking through the school halls gave me the exercise I needed to strengthen my legs. By my senior year I no longer needed help and walked down the isle to receive my diploma June 1948. Three months later I hired in at Ford Motor Company, P&A Division, Ypsilanti, MI as their Teletype Operator and no one ever knew I had Polio, altho I had a slight limp. I worked 8 years for Ford Motor, four of those years at the Ford Tank Plant Levan & Plymouth Roads. It was later called the Ford Transmission Plant. During that time I married Phil Truesdell, lived in Plymouth and had two boys. I left Ford Motor in 1956 with the birth of our first son, Edward, and became a stay-at-home Mom. Our second son, Thomas, was born in 1959. Nothing held me back. I never felt restricted with my legs.

In 1970 we moved to Howell, MI and with the boys in High School I returned to work in 1976 for a Manufacturing Company supplying parts to the Auto Companies. I worked as Executive Secretary / Administrative Assistant to the owner, wearing 3 inch high heels to work. In 1987 I had a hard fall on both knees. I was checked out and no broken bones or hair-line fractures, just badly bruised. Two weeks later I could no longer stay steady on the 3 inch heels and had to go to lower shoes. My office was 20 steps up to the second floor and I had to take one step at a time.

In 1993 my Husband died of a heart attack. I did OK living alone but three months later fell and broke my right wrist. I had family with me until I recovered.

*Continued next page...*

## LIFE WITH POLIO

I retired from the Company in June 1995 and one week later took a trip to Australia. The second week of the tour I fell and broke two bones in my left leg and from then on I used a cane.

Several years later I fell out our back door, two steps into the garage. I did not break any bones but realized the reason I fell was my Polio leg developed a Recurvatum (back knee) Deformity which caused the fall. I then started using a 4-wheel walker.

From 2000 on I've noticed my muscles weakening throughout my body, especially my arms and hands. I use to be able to type 80+ words a minute - now I type with one finger and can no longer play my piano. In 2004 I went through a battery of tests in preparation for a Mitral Valve replacement. One of those tests was for the muscle around my heart to see if Polio effected it.

In June 2009 I once again fell causing a hair-line fracture just above the break from Australia. I was in Re-Hab for eight weeks coming home the end of August. I'm now using a wheelchair and walking some with my walker. A PT & OT has been working with me and it has helped with their exercises in strengthening my arms, hands and legs. I have help three hours a day with personal attention, food preparation, laundry and cleaning. I have noticed with each fall it weakens my muscles and wonder if this has been the case with other Polio Survivors. Hopefully this will be my last fall.

December 29th I checked into the Hospital because of breathing difficulties and it was determined I had congestive heart failure. Returning to my Heart Doctor and having an Echocardiogram it revealed the Pigs Valve I had to replace my Mitral Valve in 2004 was no longer working properly and will have to be replaced. I am now in the process of preparing for this operation. I enjoy receiving the Polio Perspectives and reading the stories of other Polio Survivors.♦

One of many P.P.S's, Marj Majors-Truesdell

*Interesting info from my cousin in PA. She was studying to be a nurse at Municipal Hospital in Pittsburg, PA. There Dr. Salk had a lab experimenting with monkeys trying for a cure for the Polio virus. He lived down the street from where she had an apartment and saw him walk by every morning. As a student she took care of the children in the iron lung machines. She asked her instructor if she could get into one so she would know how the children felt being inside. She has never forgotten it.*

By Phyllis May Peters

I was stricken with polio in September, 1940, at age 13. I had new shoes and a new dress to start eighth grade, but a fever and terrible headache did not allow me to begin school. A visit to our family physician at White Pigeon checked me over and said I had growing pains. But shortly after that visit my Dad and stepmother became worried and took me with a stiff back, fever of 101 degrees, and a terrible headache to the Three Rivers Hospital Emergency Room. I was seen by Dr. O'Dell and he ordered a spinal tap to confirm his suspicion of a serious illness.

There had been several cases of polio reported in our state and many of the parents were over cautious with their children. My back was stiff and it took two nurses to hold my back curved to insert a needle in my back to get fluid from my spine. The pain was so severe I moaned a little, the nurse had a wet cloth to remove beads of sweat from my forehead, I felt like I would pass out. A kind RN patted my arm and said, "You are a very brave little lady." That support helped me through the painful ordeal. Dr. O'Dell asked the RN's to care for me, he stepped outside the room and closed the door. Shortly I heard my parents sobbing and I knew it was not good. I said a silent prayer.

I felt so bad I remember arriving home and carried into the downstairs bedroom, placed in the bed, and listened to the conversation between the St. Joseph County Health Dept. workers and my parents. "The doctor is making arrangements for her to go to the University of Michigan Hosp. at Ann Arbor. Phyllis must be in isolation to prevent this disease spreading to other members of the family." My door remained closed and items removed had to be handled with extreme caution.

Mr. Coates the local funeral director came with the hearse and prepared to take me and my parents to Ann Arbor. As the stretcher was placed in the hearse, the interior was scary and I cried my

*Continued next page...*

heart out, "People will think I am dead," I recall sobbing. Mr. Coates said I would be just fine, we are going to take good care of you. You just rest as much as possible, this will be rather tiring for a sick girl, but you will be better soon.

Once at Ann Arbor I was placed in isolation and my parents did not see me again until I was removed in two weeks. I was frightened but attempted to follow everything I was asked to do. I was placed in a small room. Across the room was an iron lung I knew from photos I had seen in the newspaper. I am so thankful it was removed from the room during the night and I tried to relax. I was checked closely often and remained quiet unless asked a question.

The days passed and one cold day I was bundled warmly in blankets and placed in a huge wooden buggy with a partial cover overhead like seen on a baby buggy. The orderly pushed me across the lawn to another large part of the hospital and put me in a bed in the children's ward. It was noisy with the cries of little tots and a baby in a crib. I did not like it but I remained silent. After a few days I went to a sixteen bed ward. I was placed next to a girl my age. I was placed on a frame on my back, after 12 hours I was sandwiched between two frames, secured with straps and turned on my stomach. The second frame removed. I had an open space to drink and eat on my stomach. I feared rolling off the flat surface, but found it safe. My legs were put in splints and wrapped from hip to toes with elastic bandages.

Each day I went for underwater treatments in a basement area. This continued daily for months. At night I was so lonely for home and cried.

Evenings an orderly or student exercised my legs to encourage the muscles to respond.

Each day I had underwater exercises, as the therapist moved my legs my brain was thinking I was moving the various muscles, although I was not able to. The left leg showed absolutely no change, I was unable to even move my toes. I moved my toes a little on the right foot, very encouraging.

In seven or eight months I was measured for two, full length leg braces and a back brace. The doctor explained that would allow me to stand and begin to learn to walk. The first time my black metal braces were strapped to my legs it was painful. I had to learn to endure the pain until my legs adjusted to being secured. The polio caused the left leg completely paralyzed to develop club foot and drop foot and there followed talk of corrective surgery later on.

Much to my delight I was discharged to return home to stand in braces and crutches to accept my eighth grade diploma. I had schooling at the hospital with bedside teachers. My hands and arms were weak and a small platform held my book as I studied. It was exciting and I strived to do my very best so my instructors would be proud of my achievements.

My journey had started out lonely, but with encouragement from the doctors and nurses I felt courageous and struggled to improve walking. With each small gain came confidence in myself that I could do anything I made up my mind was possible. Getting home with family and friends was a big boost to my morale even though I struggled to take each step. We had a rail across the front of our porch, I learned to hold on securely with both hands and take little steps. What great therapy it proved to be.

When I was 17, my parents and my grandma Reed, a local merchant, talked about having the corrective surgery done in Kalamazoo, closer to home. Dr. Homer Stryker, a great bone specialist and his assistants talked to me what would be done. All went well and I left the hospital days later to heal at home with regular check-ups. Later I had to have a skin graft on the incision and the outcome was excellent. Later I went to a half leg brace and then to none on the right leg.

In 1946 I met an Army veteran home from the Philippines after WWII, a very wonderful, compassionate gentleman and we were married in 1947.

*Continued next page...*



I became the mother to a daughter and a son. My husband made me a metal walker in 1948. I learned to drive a car and walk with a cane part of the time. How was I to know God had a plan for my life that included special school, public school, marriage, college, there was no stopping this happy, energized and considered impaired person that became an established writer.

At 83, I have slowed a little and manage well with the aid of a walker and a wheelchair. I retired as a journalist having worked for three great newspapers. I have been widowed for 12 years, but family and friends see I am well taken care of. I am so blessed as a Mom, Grandma, and great-grandma to 11, and embrace old age with faith, joy and happiness. Life with polio has been a magnificent journey for this individual. I praise all the professionals in my life whom have guided me in the right direction with so much spirit and genuine caring. God bless my angel helpers.♦

*Needless to say I never wore the new shoes for school Sept 1940, my sister wore them out. She wore them to the hospital to show me how they would look if I could walk. She also wore the new dress with a circle skirt, she twirled around and the skirt flowed straight out from her waist. It was beautiful and I never forgot her sharing what I messed out on. Lovely memories I treasure.♥*

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### ***REAL OPTIMISM IS***

*Aware of problems but recognizes solutions;  
Knows about difficulties but believes they can  
be overcome:*

*Sees the negatives but accentuates the positives:*

*Is exposed to the worst but expects the best;  
Has reason to complain, but chooses to smile.*

*By William Arthur Ward*



## **YOUR POLIO STORY**

We again encourage all polio survivors to write their “polio story” and send it to the Polio Perspectives editor for publication. Our Polio story is important to not only our family, but to all polio survivors.

A few suggestions to help you write your story:

**When and where did you contract polio?**

**Were you hospitalized and where and how long?**

**Tell about either what you remember or what you have been told about your experiences with polio.**

**When you got home, was there any kind of treatment that you received at home?**

**How did your family react to the polio?**

**Did you ever try to get any medical documentation regarding your polio?**

**Have you ever had any corrective surgeries due to the polio?**

**Were these surgeries effective?**

**Who paid for these surgeries?**

**When did you entered school after having had polio?**

**How did your peers react to you?**

**Have you gone to college?**

**What work have you done in your lifetime?**

**Are there any positive experiences that have come out of the polio experience for you?**

**Do you think that you are more self conscious now or more accepting now of polio and what it has done to your body?**

**Please send your Polio Story to:**

**VERA HAZEL**

**15235 ACKERSON DR**

**BATTLE CREEK, MI 49014**

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## **The Post-Polio Clinic Center for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation**

**13850 East 12 mile Road**

**Warren, MI 48088**

**Phone (586) 778-4505**

**MICHIGAN POLIO NETWORK,  
INC.**

**NEW WEB PAGE**

**http://**

**www.michiganpolionetwork.com**

### **MICHIGAN POLIO NETWORK, INC.**

#### **MEMBERSHIP FORM**

The Michigan Polio Network, Inc. is a tax exempt non-profit organization with 501 (c) (3) status. Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law. Membership includes our newsletter Polio Perspectives. To join it is not necessary to be a resident of Michigan or be a Polio Survivor.

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State: \_ ..... \_ Zip: .....

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**Rochester Hills, MI 48307-5415**

# **BAY CLIFF HEALTH CAMP POST-POLIO WELLNESS RETREAT SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA**

The Michigan Polio Network is offering one scholarship, to the Post-Polio Retreat being held at the Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay, Mi September 13 - 19, 2010. This scholarship will cover the entire registration fee of \$250.00.

**Applicants must:**

- 1. Be a Michigan resident or have been a camper at Bay Cliff as a child**
- 2. Be a polio survivor**
- 3. Be independent in ADL [activities of daily living] or be accompanied by a caregiver. The caregiver is responsible for their own registration fee.**
- 4. Arrange their own transportation to and from the Camp. There is no public transportation to the camp**
- 5. Be a first time Retreat attendee**
- 6. Be willingly to show proof of financial need**
- 7. Be a member of the Michigan Polio Network**

**Applications must be received by August 15, 2010**

## **INFORMATION ABOUT BAY CLIFF HEALTH CAMP.**

**The Camp is located about 30 miles West of Marquette on Lake Superior**

**The Camp continues to provides help for handicapped children in the summer**

**On site housing is wheelchair accessible and all meals are home cooked on site**

**A scooter or power chair is recommended for those with mobility issues**

**For more information visit their web site at [www.baycliff.org](http://www.baycliff.org) For an application to the Wellness Retreat contact Bay Cliff Health Camp, P.O. Box 310 Big Bay, Michigan 49808 (906)345-9314**

## **SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION TO BAY CLIFF POST-POLIO WELLNESS RETREAT**

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ **M / F**

**ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_ **CITY** \_\_\_\_\_

**STATE** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-MAIL** \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTENDING WITH CAREGIVER / SPOUSE      YES / NO**

**SHORT STATEMENT WHY YOU NEED A SCHOLARSHIP TO ATTEND THE RETREAT**

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**THIS APPLICATION MUST BE RETURNED BY AUGUST 15, 2010 TO:  
BARBARA ONISZCZAK ,52 N. PLAZA BLVD APT.428, ROCHESTER HILLS, MI 48307 or  
DIANNE DYCH-SACHS, 1070 BALMORAL, MT. CLEMENS, MI 48043**

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