

## **“Building a Life”**

Survivor Roger Pollazzi (as told to PPSN Intern Lauren Voltz)

As an active 10 year old, living in a tight knit community in East Detroit, Roger enjoyed the summer of 1947 playing with his friends in the neighborhood. Soon the summer fun came to a harsh end with the spread of polio. Roger reflected that many doctors did not know much about polio at the time. The three hospitals in the area were quickly filled with children of the community. They called it the “summer gripe” .

Because the hospitals were overflowing Roger was not taken to the hospital when he first contacted polio, instead, he stayed at home for a few weeks. After a three-week battle with the virus, he was almost completely immobile and was taken to the hospital. Much of his right side was paralyzed. He was taken to Saratoga Hospital in Detroit. Although it was the hospital, Roger was put in a “garage type place” next door to the hospital because there were no open beds. He was not placed in an iron lung (because there were none available). As he remembers it, the hospital only had 20-30 in total.

The only therapies he remembers receiving in the hospital were hot cloth massages. The towels were placed in boiling hot water and placed on his skin; then the heat was worked into the muscles by massage. He remembers his mother continuing this once he returned home. Roger has good memories of this making the pain much better and even thought the boiling towels felt good.

Roger explained to me that because it was such a concentrated area, polio spread quickly through the neighborhoods in East Detroit. He believes that about 30-40% of his classmates’ contacted polio along with him. In addition, he believes that the virus remained in that very concentrated 4.5-5 square mile area. Roger’s 3 year-old sister Arlene, did not contract polio.

Although he was out of school for 6 months, he was able to recover without any surgeries. His only visible signs of having had polio remained in his ankle brace and knee brace throughout his years in school. His ankle brace consisted of a heavy-duty ace bandage wrapped around a split. A knee brace allowing full range of motion also supported Roger for somewhere between six months to a year. The right side of Roger’s body took most of the “hit” from the virus, and thus his right leg was 3-4 inches shorter than his left. As Roger grew up, the difference in his legs evened out from natural adjustments in his hips and growth.

Roger completed high school in Detroit and then moved to Chicago, Illinois. He enjoyed being active in high school, participating in both swimming and baseball teams. Although polio had affected the right side of Roger’s body, he had no lingering pains when he played the position of pitcher in baseball. He earned an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering from Lawrence Tech and went on to Michigan State for his Master’s Degree. He married Maureen in 1965, and they had three sons.

Once out of college he worked for Joy Manufacturing Company for many years. He stayed with them until his retirement in 2007. Roger had moved from Illinois to Buffalo, NY and then again to Claremont, NH. and had grown tired of moving. After he opened up an additional plant in Wilson, NC, he decided to move between NH and NC. As a result, he moved his family to what would be their permanent home, in Bucks County, PA.

The Pollazzi family eventually settled into their current home on what was previously farm land. The parents of three growing boys, the Pollazzi’s were kept busy with family life, Joy Manufacturing, and a family run farm. As the boys grew up, Roger would grow crops like corn and soybeans and the family also enjoyed the company of animals such as chickens, donkeys, pigs and

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even a pet turkey ! Roger led a very active life and also enjoyed skiing during the east-coast winters and hunting with his boys.

Now retired, Roger and Maureen still live in Bucks County with his dog “George” and cat “Dusty”. His three sons each have two children of their own. He still works around the farm and hunts. Roger is blessed to have all three of his boys and their families in the area to enjoy their company and take part in his grandchildren’s lives.



Roger and Maureen’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

At 78, Roger realizes that he started noticing some possible effects from the polio about 3 years ago. Although he has not been diagnosed with post polio syndrome, Roger notices increased pain and fatigue in his right leg, shoulder and hand compared to his left side. During the winter when outside, he has noticed that his right hand becomes extremely cold, far more quickly than his left, which he believes could be a lingering effect of polio. Additionally, while working on the farm throughout the years, Roger noticed that previously when he would overdo a muscle he

would continue working through it and the pain stretched on longer. Now, if he does the same thing, he needs to take a few days off to rest before continuing on with the task at hand.

Roger and Maureen like to vacation in Florida during the winter. He says that the warmer weather on his muscles is a nice treat each year and a needed break from the harsh PA winters. He has maintained a healthy life and is active in spite of arthritis in both hands and shoulders.

Roger is a proud husband, father, and grandfather. His life is filled with his love of family and the values he has shared with his family for generations. He has worked hard to share the importance of hard work to his children. He hopes to be able to pass on to his grandchildren the importance of family and a work ethic .

Although he notices some differences in what he can do today over years ago; Roger believes, as many do, that aging causes many of these things. He steadfastly believes you must deal with what you have. The only thing anyone can do is try their best.