

# “Walking on Water”

## Margaretta Hoster Yanalavage

Marge is a local “Philly” (Philadelphia, Pa) girl born in 1936. She contacted Polio on a hot August day in 1937 while playing in the water from a neighborhood fire hydrant. Her sisters told her that they splashed a bucket of cool water on her because they thought she looked hot. Later that night she started with chills and fever. Her parents brought her to the Hospital for Communicable Diseases (she thinks, in Philadelphia). She was quarantined there for an unknown amount of time. Because there were 12 other children in her family, the toddler was kept in quarantine until it was safe for her to be around her siblings (Marge was the 11<sup>th</sup> of 13 children).



Marge (age 2) and her older brother

When she was only four years old, her father collapsed during a game with his Eastern Penitentiary bowling league. (He was the Sergeant of the Guards at the Eastern State Penitentiary). Doctors were unable to revive him and he passed away leaving behind a widowed wife with thirteen children. From then on the family worked closely with a social worker.

As a result of the Polio damage from the right hip down, Marge needed continuing care. She remembers her mother walking to her school three times a week to take her back to St. Christopher’s hospital for treatments where they used hot metal baths, massages, and UV lights to treat her. (She believes her records were contained in Chart #22-29-20). At the age of 10, Marge had her first surgery on her right foot done by Dr. John. Because she would drag her foot behind her, Dr. John did a fusion of her right ankle. When she woke up from the surgery, she remembers crying because she saw her mother on the other side of a glass window, unable to hug her or dry her tears. She remained there for a week before coming home with a heavy cast.

Dr. John gave Marge advice that she has held with her throughout her life, “Honey, exercise will be your way of life”. (She has never forgotten those words.)

Dr. John also wanted to operate on her “good” leg to stop the growth until the other caught up to it. Her mother would not allow it. For the rest of her life, Marge has had to buy two pairs of shoes because one foot was 1 ½ size larger than the other. She joined the National Odd Shoe Exchange which matched her with people having the opposite shoe size so she didn’t have to buy two pairs of the same shoe. The 1½-inch lift that was needed on her right shoe has also become her norm.

That same year, Marge had another surgery to transplant a bone. She was transferred to the Episcopal Hospital (also located in Philadelphia). Unbeknownst to either the child or her mother, the bone was held in place by a wire. When they decided it was time for the wire to come out it had adhered not only to the bone, but also to the ligaments and nerves in her foot. Removal of the wire caused the little girl unexpected, excruciating pain. Her screams terrified her younger sister (who, even today, can remember feeling helpless to ease her sister’s pain). Because Dr. John had been sent away to South Africa, her additional surgeries at Episcopal Hospital were completed by Dr. Martucci. After one of those surgeries, Dr. George (an assistant of Dr. Martucci), noticed an infection inside her casts and bandages. (Sadly, Dr. Martucci even went so far as to laugh about the infection in front of Marge). If it was not for the outstanding work of Dr. George, her mother would have asked to transfer her daughter once again. That infection kept her in the hospital for a few weeks past her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. She spent that birthday in a hospital ward of 33 strangers, strangers who had unexpectedly become new friends.

Marge had another minor surgery on her big toe so it would line up with her other toes. Shortly after, she became too old for the Episcopal Hospital. As a 10 year old, she remembers being in a semi-private room with a moaning woman saying over and over “Take me O My Lord,’ ‘O My Lord take me’. As soon as another bed became available, she was removed moved from that room.



Marge (lower left) and her 12 brothers and sisters (with their mother).

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The Hoster girls were given an opportunity to attend a private school in Newtown Square, The Charles E. Ellis School for girls. Providing they could pass the placement test, the Ellis school gave scholarships to children who had lost their father. This was a huge opportunity because at that time, it was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the country scholastically. (Marge’s younger sister had skipped a grade because her marks were so high). After a summer of being in a cast and studying Marge decided to take the test. She was admitted and entered the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She took piano lessons and became very active in sports such as hockey, tennis, and even softball (where other girls ran the bases for her). The very best part of the Ellis school? Life long friends.

After her 6<sup>th</sup> grade school year was over she was admitted to Episcopal Hospital again for foot surgery. (All of her surgeries were done during the summer so she would not have to miss school). She didn’t mind-this pre-teen was even able to have her black and white oxfords fitted like her orthopedics so she felt in style like the other girls!

When she was 20, Marge married her husband Bill. Initially, they lived with her mother (to help pay the bills). Her mother never remarried after the death of her father and always worked within the family home. Marge started her professional career in one of the jobs deemed respectable for women of the time – Bell Telephone. The couples moved to Abington and were blessed with two children. Her mother lived nearby. Once Marge’s youngest went into first grade, she went back into the work force at a Kelly Girl Agency. Marge worked her way up to a full time career at Prudential Insurance Company and took evening classes. Over the years her siblings all moved to the area and she was once again surrounded buy her family.

After so many years of hard work, Bill wanted her to enjoy a home with more land. They moved to five acres of land with a barn and pond. With help from her brothers and sisters, they spent years fixing up the house. Eventually? Bill’s “dream” and Marge’s “nightmare” was complete. Because of her limp, weak leg, everyday housework was always hard for her. But still, she did her best to complete “farm owning” tasks such as cutting the grass, plowing snow, cleaning the barn or throwing hay. She was always particularly happy taking care of their social life.

Antsy again to get to work, Marge started working at the National Bank of Boyertown and continued her education taking classes at AIB and Albright College. She became a supervisor at the bank but discovered there were no guarantees for a woman to advance in the field of banking and commercial loans. She walked out the door, and was off to something new.



Marge and Bill on their side-stepper (with their hackney).

Marge had a pony run about and a hackney pony for driving. As a result of their love for hackney driving, the couple decided to start Cider Mill Riders and Drivers Association. The man who owned the ring (where they practiced) had a friend who needed someone to run his office, in comes Marge! In the 1980s she was making more then \$40,000 annually which (was unheard of for a woman) and became Vice President of his company.

Because of her history of Polio, Marge’s on the job back injury was not covered under Workmen’s Comp. Her boss had decided to sell the business, and her job came to an end. She was off for only a month before she got bored. She started working with the County in the Office of Aging with her County. She found it to be interesting work, went back to school to get three more humanities credits and became an Assistant Accountant at the On-the-Job-Training Office.



The Hoster “girls” and their mother at sister Bunny’s wedding.

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The Polio damage was always there. Marge continued to have problems with her knees filling with water. She had a knee replacement that left her with a long and difficult recovery. She was in the hospital two separate times and needed rehabilitation as well. All in she was out of work for ten weeks and returned part time at first, working up to full time again.

Marge was given another opportunity from the Devereux Foundation as their Administrative Assistant to the Principal and Educational Director. The Devereux Foundation was located in Downingtown at the Devereux Day School. (The Devereux School only has special needs students). She loved the job that included an audit trail and the training of employees. She retired from this at the age of 65 after a successful professional career, when constant movement became a burden and she felt less independent. She was surprised when her orthopedic doctor told her she qualified for disability. They asked what had taken her so long! Marge never thought of herself as disabled.

Marge had left a job and kids that she enjoyed but was only retired for about nine months. After much convincing, Marge took a job working as an ACCESS consultant where she put Federal Funded ACCESS programs in 15 local schools. Each school annually received at least \$1 million only to be used for the purposes of special needs children.

In 2008 Marge woke up screaming and was taken to the hospital with her first herniated disk. Did that slow her down? No. She regained strength and went back to work, up and down filing and doing paperwork for ACCESS. She retired after her second herniated disk and saw that she was losing some independence at the age of 75.

After a back surgery for a herniated disk, at Reading Hospital in Reading PA, she noticed herself needing a cane more and more. Her orthopedic in Reading said that it was the beginning of Post Polio Syndrome. Marge wanted a second opinion and turned to Hershey Medical Center. They ran tests for months and came back with the opinion that there was no such thing as Post-Polio Syndrome. After another back surgery, she began using a walker. Her braces helped correct her problems but she still feels more secure with a walker to keep up with friends and family.

Today, Marge still enjoys swimming as her exercise; the pool is a very special place for her because she has the ability to walk. She does deep water, heart and arthritis water classes three to five times per week. Each class is approximately 90 minutes and the water warms her muscles, alleviating some pain. Over her life she did a variety of activities including tennis, bike riding, and of course swimming. “I learned you can exercise daily and enjoy it so you don’t even realize how much good you are doing.” Although Marge now cannot do some of the things she expected in her retirement such as traveling and everyday tasks such as shopping for more than short periods of time, she still always considered herself normal. Her family did not speak of polio much and for most of her life she considered her raised foot minor. Since post polio hit her at 71, Marge has felt like she has been held back from being able to get up and go as she pleased. She doesn’t understand why even having the vaccine years after her bout with polio she has Post-Polio Syndrome later in life. Marge never pitied herself and knows she can do anything she puts her mind to.



Marge is the little girl in the striped dress.



Marge and her husband Bill.

Through all the ups and downs in her life Marge still has one word for herself, “blessed”.