

Flo Black

Her life of experiences, travel and caring for others.



I had just returned from a week's vacation at Geneva on the Lake. I was almost eighteen years old and was embarking on a nursing career. While at home, I was preparing to start an "on the floor" study the on the following Monday. Three days prior, I started having a weird sensation on my skin. It continued all day. By evening I was vomiting and had spinal pain. My mother called our doctor who arrived on Saturday morning. He said I had "Rheumatic Flu". I worsened that night and began to have left leg pain. My mother (having read Sister Kenney's polio treatment) wrapped hot towels around my leg all night. By morning I was worse and my right arm was paralyzed.

The doctor returned and tried to get me out of bed. I couldn't move. He had me go to the ER where four doctors checked me out. The doctors thought I had a brain tumor, but one suggested that I get to Pittsburgh to see Dr. Jessie Wright who was a leading orthopedist specializing in rehabilitation.

I was taken to Dr. Wright's office in Oakland where her waiting room was filled with an iron lung, many stretchers and ill patients. She diagnosed me with Polio. This was in 1950 and not many people in Butler, PA had polio. I returned home with my parents. Dr. Wright had me doing daily exercises on my leg and arm but I was not allowed to do stairs for six months. I saw her two more times and by then I was able to walk with a customized shoe.

A year later, I was offered a spot at Butler Memorial Hospital in the School of Radiology Technology. I accepted and began a new life. Although I did not need a leg brace I was left with a limp. I felt very lucky to have gotten through this. Of course, I got the polio vaccine as soon as possible after the onset of my illness, but the damage was already done.

Fast forward about forty years. I had never heard of Post-Polio Syndrome but I had shown some signs of left leg weakness. I decided to cut back and work only two or three days a week. About a month later I tripped at home, twisting my left leg causing me to fall. Looking down I saw my tibia (shinbone) sticking out of my left leg. That was career-ending for me.

My orthopedic surgeon told me my polio had left my leg without muscle support. My leg was totally shattered. I went through two years of operations and healing.

The forty years prior were as normal as possible, but by this time my parents had passed, and being an only child, I really had to lean on my friends. I returned to Radiology four hours a week as a volunteer. As time progressed, my right leg (my "good" leg) became swollen and painful. My orthopedic surgeon suggested orthoscopic surgery which was not a big deal. Unfortunately, I but I ended up with a Staph infection. I spent six days in the hospital and left with a port in my arm and two months of infusions with visiting nurses coming twice a week for blood checks.



During my "Post-Polio Life" I had the chance to travel. I was able to visit Hawaii, Alaska

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and Europe with friends. I have been blessed. Now I live alone with my cat Boots. I read, watch TV (mostly thrillers) and belong to Netflix for movies. (I got my love of movies from my dad who was a projectionist). I am able to get out for lunch and shopping with the help of a small rollator which I also use at home.

Even with my experiences with Polio and Post-Polio, I have had a good life. I am so grateful to be a member of this organization due to Joe Randig, also a Butler resident and polio survivor.

I hope that the polio vaccine will touch people everywhere and eradicate this disease.

Flo Black, Butler, PA