

# Forever on Stage

Survivor Muriel McCarthy Geigert

(Written by Helen Urban)



Muriel McCarthy Geigert was born in London in 1935. She is one of five children. She has three brothers and one sister. In 1940, due to the war time bombing of the city, her family was evacuated from London to Wales. Her father was away serving in the British military at the time. It was shortly after this, while her family was living at a boarding home in Porthcawl, Wales that her mother noticed something was wrong with Muriel's legs.

While trying to get her up to go to school one morning, 4 year old Muriel told her mother "my legs feel funny". Her mother got her up and she fell to the floor. A doctor was called and evaluated her using a series of pinpricks to her feet and legs.

They discovered she had no feeling in her legs or feet. They did not want the locals to panic about her ailment, which was called "Infantile Paralysis". Her family was quickly moved to another residence to live by themselves. Muriel's two brothers, ages six and one were not affected by the disease.

Her mother was determined that Muriel would recover. She rubbed her legs with warm cloths, warm oil and moved/exercised her legs over and over. Her left side was weaker than the right. Muriel remembers this being very painful but is thankful for her mother's relentless determination. Muriel stayed occupied during her recovery by drawing, looking through her mother's photographs and playing with a box of buttons. When Muriel watched her little brother learning to walk, the process fascinated her. It looked like fun, so she decided to copy his actions by getting down on the floor and pulling herself up supported by chairs and the sofa. She would move from one to the other and thus started walking! This set the theme for Muriel's life. She loves to have fun and has *never* stopped moving.

Even though there was still the threat of bombs, her family moved back to London. Her mother homeschooled Muriel and her siblings.

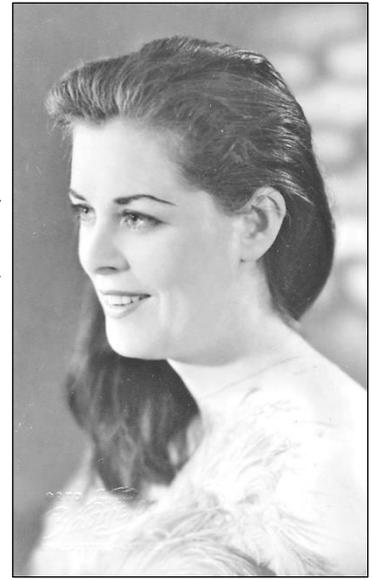
The polio left her with deformed feet so Muriel walked on the outer edges of her feet to compensate for it. Her very determined mother signed her up for dance lessons try to strengthen her legs and re-align her feet. In spite of her passionate efforts, her left foot was always too weak to do classical ballet. That didn't stop Muriel's determination to dance. She turned her focus on "modern" dance techniques. Her mother's foresight was an unforeseen blessing as dance would become a major part of Muriel's young adult life and would eventually lead to her meeting her future husband.

Her career in entertainment took off at the age of 15 when she went to work for The Bouglione Brothers Circus in Liverpool as part of an acrobatic troop. She learned



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to jump on and off horses as they rode around the ring. When the circus went on tour, Muriel returned home. Her father tried to convince her to go back to school but she wasn't interested. She wanted to perform! She found a job in a clothing store while she auditioned for various dance companies in her spare time. She eventually auditioned and was admitted to the Blue Bell Ballet Company in Paris. The job took her to Italy where she was required to die her hair blonde for the performances. For the next four years, she danced for Blue Bell Ballet in Italy and France.



After returning to England, she worked in films as an extra and eventually was hired as a showgirl for Ron Dillon and the Dillionaires. During the dance routines, she was required to leap from a staircase. It was during one of these leaps that she landed on her weak left foot which gave way. She ended up with a sprained ankle but continued with the show using an ace bandage. She successfully continued to work in London's West End Theaters while using added ankle support.

Muriel eventually joined the Combined Services Entertainment (CSE), the British version of the United Service Organizations (USO). In 1959, there was a conflict in Cyprus and 50,000 British troops were stationed there. She was sent to Cyprus with the CSE to entertain them. It was there during a party at the American base that Muriel met and fell in love with Daniel Geigert, an American Marine. Muriel stayed in Cyprus and got a job at a hotel as a dancer in the hotel's shows. They were married the following year on April 9, 1960. Shortly thereafter, Daniel retired from the military and they moved to the Olney section of Philadelphia.



Daniel worked in sales and Muriel worked for an insurance company. They were blessed with three children, Theresa, Paul and Maureen. Muriel stayed at home to raise her family. In 1972, they moved out of the city to Warrington, PA. Muriel

was devastated when she lost Daniel to a sudden heart attack in 1993.

Once her children were grown, Muriel decided to look for another career. She answered an ad in the local newspaper for a job at a golf club that had just opened in the area. She was drawn to the job through her memories of Daniel's love of golf.

After 17 years of joyful service to members and staff of the club, she retired in 2016. Some of the weakness that Polio left her with had become more significant and retirement was inevitable. Throughout her time at the golf club, Muriel's love for dance and theater would periodically shine through. On various holidays and themed events, she would



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dress in character. Some of her most notable characters were Betsy Ross, Madame Defarge (Bastille Day), Mrs. Santa Claus, the Queen of England, Ingrid Bergman (Casa Blanca), Miss Piggy (she gave ballet lessons), and Mickey Mouse (as the Wizard), and an Italian gentleman (handing out cannoli's). She was still entertaining and making everyone around her happy.

Muriel is happily enjoying retirement and loving life! She traveled to Paris with her sister and daughter in 2016. While there, she visited The Lido Theater where she performed prior to her two year dancing career in Italy and France; as a blonde, of course! She will be traveling to Italy this fall and hopes to visit some of the venues where she performed. Muriel is an inspiration to us all as she displays her love for people and life each day.

Nothing stops Muriel Geigert from living her life to the fullest . . .

Not even Polio!



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Pennsylvania Polio Survivor's Network

<http://www.papolionetwork.org/survivor-stories-from-the-keystone-state.html>