

Martha (Marty) Loudder Resilient from her Head to her Toes

I contracted polio in Amarillo, Texas in October 1952, when I was 3 1/2 years old. My brother, Stan, who was a year younger, also had similar symptoms, but fortunately he never developed paralytic polio. No one in my family knows where I might have contracted the virus. Upon diagnosis I was flown by private plane to McBride Bone and Joint hospital in Oklahoma City. I stayed in a large polio ward for about six weeks, receiving physical therapy, including the Sister Kenny water treatments.

During the acute phase, my arms and legs were both paralyzed, but the use of my legs returned pretty quickly after a few weeks. I still couldn't walk, but I learned how to play with my toys using my feet. I recovered some of the strength in my left arm, but my right arm remained paralyzed. By the time I left the hospital I could walk well and use the lower part of my left arm. I was fitted for braces that supported both my arms and kept my back straight. I don't have very accurate memories of this time because I was so young, so most of my recollections about that time come from accounts of my family members.



Stan and Marty – together again after her hospital stay.

I don't have any childhood memories of feeling like an invalid. My parents continued the warm water treatments followed by stretching exercises for all my limbs for several years. My younger brother constantly acted like a little brother, and we played a lot even though I was limited in what I could do. My parents were very protective, and I was never really asked to do anything that would be difficult for me. In fact, they discouraged me from any rough and tumble play with my brother. But that didn't deter either of us when they weren't looking! I wasn't completely defenseless - he loved to recall that I could pinch a blood blister on his leg using my talented strong toes.



Stan and Marty having their "in home" Sister Kenny treatments.

I was anxious to start first grade. I learned to read when I was four by looking at the words in children's books as my mother read to me. When I was in first grade and learning to write, my paper kept slipping around on the desk because my right arm could not hold it down. My parents knew that when I was in the hospital, I had learned to use my feet to substitute for my arms! My dad brought home one of the little desks from my classroom, and he built a device that had a clipboard clip on the top of the desk that was operated by a pedal on the floor that I could push

with my feet. I also taught myself to write with my feet and discovered I could do far more with my legs than walking.

I had to wear the braces until I was 12, but overall, I had a very normal kind of life. I was never bullied by kids or made fun of. I was very lucky to live in a place where that was just not acceptable behavior for anyone. That same year, my parents took me back to the McBride hospital to have surgery on my left thumb because I had no opposable thumb muscle (I was unable to "flex" or "rotate" my thumb). The operation was highly successful and I had very good use of my thumb and fingers for most of my life. They are now weaker due to PPS.

I loved school and excelled at it and planned to go to college. The Texas Rehabilitation Commission pays for tuition and books for disabled students to attend college. In my first

interview with my state counselor, he asked me what I would like to do when I finished college. I told him that I would like to teach, but he said that would not be physically possible for me. He told me to find another career. (I wish I could find him now and tell him I taught for over 35 years!)

I loved going to college and everything I took was my “new” major. I was interested in everything. In the midst of it all, I married my high school sweetheart and had a son. I could change a cloth diaper using one arm and my feet! I took an accounting course simply to get some knowledge of business and fell in love with it. After four years I had a degree in accounting. I was one female in a group of about 250 males. It was 1971 and though I graduated in the Top 10%, no accounting firms would hire me because I was a woman (an action that was not illegal at that time). They said it straight to my face! Finally, a state agency hired me and I stayed there for a number of years.

My husband and I divorced. I remarried a man with three children and we’ve been together ever since. His precious children call me “Other Mother.”

Fast forward . . . I decided in 1985 that I wanted to pursue a PhD and teach at the university level, so I started graduate school at Arizona State in 1986. After graduating, I joined the faculty at the Mays Business School, Texas A&M in 1989. I became a Senior Professor in Accounting and served as Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies from 2006-2018. I retired in May 2021.

While I was in Arizona, I started noticing some serious fatigue in my left arm while typing or using a calculator. I just blew off the increasing weakness until I read an article about PPS and how it was just being recognized as a real thing, but without a known cause. I found that a large hospital in Phoenix had opened a free clinic to study and treat polio survivors experiencing new symptoms. They did a thorough exam, that included many specialists, to rule out other causes.

Once properly diagnosed, therapists helped me learn how to use my remaining muscles in smart ways to slow further damage. They built a sliding wrist rest for me to use at a keyboard and recommended low-effort steering for my car. These strategies helped a lot, but learning how to read my body for warning signs of fatigue was very difficult after a lifetime of believing in “no pain, no gain.” I work hard to maintain what strength and flexibility I have in my legs and core muscles. I have a knowledgeable personal trainer who is very careful never to let me work my muscles to a point of overuse.

I love fishing. My son taught me how to fish on our back-yard pond with a regular casting rod, and then the next thing I knew my husband had ordered me a six-foot fly fishing rod. I always wanted to learn how to fly fish. I knew it would be hard, but, I wanted to learn. How do I fly fish with only minimal use of one arm? I use my legs and my feet. It’s a lot harder for me to fly fish than it is for most others. Even so, I realize that if you persist at something you really want to do, you will eventually be able to do it well enough that it will give you great pleasure – even if you have to do it differently than other people.



Marty and George with their blended family.



Stan and Marty – fishing buddies.

Martha (Marty) Loudder (continued . . .)

Polio has enhanced my creativity because I have to figure out how to do things differently from everyone else. I became a certified scuba diver at age 40, and recently started to do art, a latent talent that I never knew I had.

Making the video "[Toe to Toe with Trout](#)" with Orvis was quite the adventure and one I wouldn't change.

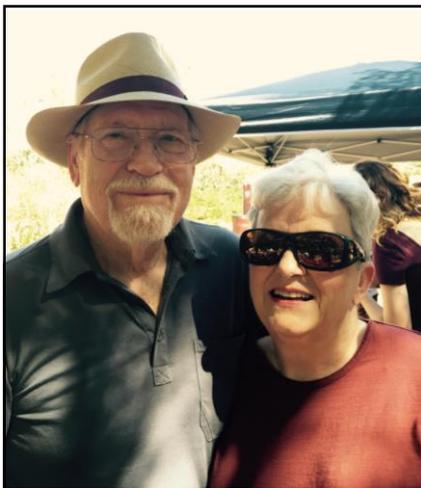
It's probably no surprise that I don't tolerate anyone saying they can't do something. If I can learn to do it with my feet, you can learn to do it with your hands.

A trait that I have learned over my life is resilience.
You don't ever give up.

Martha L. Loudder, PhD
Sr. Professor of Accounting (Retired)



Marty reels in a Brown Trout by using her feet (with guide Marcus Rubbo).*



Marty and George



Marty and her son Brent *



Scuba diving with George



Stan and Marty – happy in her new braces.



Marty's artwork: Paint Horse in Charcoal

* Photo Sources: News.Orvis.com and Marty Loudder