

## Going Forward . . . She Does Not Yield

By Nancy Moffett



I grew up in East Greenville, a small town in Montgomery County, Pa. In 1950, at age six, I came down with a high fever and a stiff neck. Mom called our doctor. The next thing I knew, I was alone in an ambulance bound for a hospital at the other end of the county. My memories are sketchy...weeks in isolation, where nurses and doctors wearing face masks came and went...hours with steaming hot packs on my legs. I'll never forget the smell of wet wool. I also remember the awful pain of the spinal tap that confirmed the polio diagnosis. No wonder we polio survivors are so brave and fearless.

My mom, two sisters and brother were quarantined while I was gone. No one remembers for how long. When I came home, I couldn't walk, so I scooted backwards across the floor on my bottom and learned how to do the same coming down the stairs. I was small enough that Mom could carry me up the stairs. Visits from therapists resulted in hours on the living room floor lifting my legs with weighted shoes on my feet. The fronts of the shoes were cut open so I wouldn't outgrow them, and more weights were added at each visit to increase resistance. I also spent time in a rehab pool doing more strengthening exercises. Months later, these therapies allowed me to take my first wobbly steps. We were told that I was now "back to normal." I never needed crutches or braces.

I missed 2nd grade, having to do schoolwork at home between the teacher's tutoring sessions. Instead of playing with my schoolmates, I learned to love the books that helped me forget those painful exercise sessions. After I learned to walk again, I spent many hours skating up and down the sidewalks of town, again on the advice of the therapists. As I grew, like many survivors, I put polio out of my head and felt just like any other kid. In high school, I loved to jitterbug; and my friends and I spent many hours walking to the movies and other places in town.

I married young, as many of us did in the early 1960s. During the next decade, I raised two children, scrubbed floors, painted walls and sewed curtains for my first home. If I suffered bouts of fatigue, I chalked it up to running after toddlers and doing housework. After divorcing in 1976, I worked full-time, took college classes at night and played single-parent to my daughters. On weekends I discoed and dated into the night. My legs and body carried me well through those busy years.

After buying a two-unit home in Bethlehem, Pa., where I worked as marketing assistant for a local bank, I met my second husband Jeff. Lucky me to have fallen in love with someone who had the skills needed to fix up my old house! We've been together ever since...33 years and three renovated houses later.

After the kids left for jobs and college, I had planned to finish my college degree, travel and had even begun writing a book...things I had put off while the girls were growing up. Unfortunately, that's when the first symptoms of post polio began. Leg twitches, fatigue, feeling weak and tired. An article in The Allentown Morning Call on post-polio led me to the Good Shepherd Post-Polio Clinic, where electronic probing showed muscle and nerve loss in both legs. I was told to expect anything from leg braces to eventually needing a wheelchair. "Cut back your activities." "Get more rest," the clinic doctor recommended. Another piece of advice was to start swimming, rather than walking or doing other weight-bearing exercises. As we all know, "conserve to preserve."

One of the most helpful things I did during this period was to join the Lehigh Valley Post Polio Group. By connecting with other survivors and hearing from experts, I learned to accept and adapt to PPS. I began swimming several times a week, which I continue to do to this day.

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In 1992 I took time off from my career to finish my Associate's degree from Montgomery County Community College. When I was laid off from a job as Marketing Manager in 1995, Jeff and I talked about my options. It was becoming impossible to get the kind of jobs I had done before without a four-year degree. So, I spent the next year at Moravian College, finally earning that Bachelor's degree in English I started working on 20 years before. From there, I worked for six years as the Corporate Communications Editor for Rodale, Inc., Emmaus, Pa., publisher of Prevention and Men's Health magazines. However, due to PPS, it became more and more difficult to work full-time; and in 2002, I left the company to start a freelance writing business. I wrote features for The Morning Call, a builders' association magazine, and most recently, Lehigh Valley Marketplace magazine.



After Jeff retired, we finally had time to do the traveling we'd always dreamed of...the Grand Canyon, Colorado, Yellowstone, Zion, Maine...we made sure we got to see these beautiful American landscapes. Although I can still walk, that's limited to short distances. When I take my grandkids out to museums and other destinations, I use a walker; for longer walks, a cane; and I love my travel scooter, which works perfectly for airports and national parks.

After a bout with cancer in 2014, I decided to stop writing and just enjoy life. I read; cook; spend time with friends, our three daughters and five grandkids. I've learned to take each day as it comes.

I like this quote from Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses," which I think applies to all polio survivors:

Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.



That's always been my goal...to keep on going and not to yield!