

“Bigger” than Polio

Sally (Stevens) Luck

By Olivia Harrison

Sally Stevens was born in 1931, in Yardley, Pennsylvania, where she lived right across from the Makefield Elementary School. She grew up with one brother, and had a relatively typical childhood.

She first experienced symptoms of polio at the age of 12, when she visited Lavalette, NJ with her cousins. In order to get away from Trenton, NJ, which was experiencing a terrible epidemic of polio at the time, Sally’s cousins had rented a house there with their children while their husbands were overseas. However, she and two of her younger cousins got sick, and Sally had to be driven home.

After being home for a few days, she had all the symptoms of Polio. The doctor came to the house, and she was told to rest. She stayed in bed for 7-10 days, and at one point got up to use the restroom, and collapsed (another sign of Polio). She would fall onto the floor, and could not get up without assistance, because her legs would not lift her. For the next 4 weeks, she had a hard time getting upstairs.

Sally was still experiencing weakness when she started 8th grade, and remembers vividly how hard she had to struggle to get on the school bus on the first day, and how the bus driver sadly offered no support. She also struggled physically in the school, because it was two levels and she was forced to take the stairs. Eventually, for the most part, Sally did recover. Her right leg remained thinner than her left, and her right ankle had limited motion. She wasn’t skilled in sports, her legs got tired after a lot of walking, and she fatigued easily. Sally had no idea that polio was the reason for all of this.



For high school, she attended The George School in Newtown, Pa., graduating in 1949; and went on to Randolph-Macon Women’s College in Virginia. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Chi Omega sorority, and received a BA in Psychology with a minor in Education. After graduating, she went home to teach for a year so that she could save enough money to attend graduate school. The next year, she went to the University of North Carolina and received a master’s degree in Education.

After receiving her master's degree, she got a job teaching 1st and 2nd grade in Atlanta, Georgia. At the time, her brother was enrolled at Georgia Tech, and she met friends through him, including her 3 roommates. The four girls rented a 2 bedroom, 1 bath, fully furnished apartment in Atlanta, where they paid just \$125 a month in rent, and \$4 for a cleaning lady once a week!



Sally joined the choir at Grace Methodist Church, which is where she met her soon to be husband, Ed Luck. (After serving in the Navy for 4 years during the Korean War, Ed had come to Atlanta to finish the last two years of his college education at Georgia State University). Sally and Ed were married in 1956. Two years later they welcomed their first daughter, Margaret. They moved to Knoxville, TN for 3 years while Ed worked for Shell Oil, and then moved back to Atlanta, where he became a furniture representative and travelled the state of Georgia. In 1964, they adopted their second daughter, 8 week old Ellen.

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Sally remembers that after a day of heavy walking while on vacation, she was unable to walk the next day, and had to stay behind while her husband and daughters continued the vacation. Even so, over the years, Sally and Ed did a lot of travelling with her manual wheelchair, making several trips to Europe, and even the Holy Land. They have been to 45 of the 50 states, and have taken several cruises.

1982, she remembers, is when people began “coming out of the woodwork” with Post-Polio symptoms. She was diagnosed in 1986, and joined a support group in Atlanta, which she found particularly helpful. By 1989, the year of her 40th high school reunion, she was in a motorized scooter, because her symptoms had progressed.

After Ed retired at 67, they wanted to move from Atlanta, so they sold their home and



moved to Sun City Hilton Head, Bluffton, SC. The next 12 years were like living in paradise for Sally and Ed. The whole community was extremely accessible. They were 20 miles from the beach and 20 miles from downtown Savannah, GA where they joined another very active Post-Polio support group.

Both Sally and Ed were very active in joining lots of clubs and enjoying all the new friends they had made. Sally and a friend started a support group called the Physically Challenged Active Adults and ten years later it is still going strong, serving all the people who moved to Sun City with disabilities. Their support group worked to get more accessibility

in the community, had a medical equipment loan service, and had lots of fun together.

Sadly, Ed was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and Sally needed more physical assistance, so their daughters insisted they move to Chattanooga, Tennessee so that they could be of more help to them. Currently, they live in a one story house, where Sally receives assistance with certain aspects of daily life. They miss their life and friends in South Carolina, but are happy to be closer to their daughters. Sally also continues to have a positive outlook on life, despite dealing with post-polio, as well as back spasms, and two very damaged knees. She is in a wheelchair full time. In spite of all the challenges, Sally says that her “worst handicap” is that because of a lack of understanding of Polio, she and others affected were often treated like they didn’t matter – as though they were invisible. . . .



Sally’s life is so much bigger than Polio. Together, she and Ed raised a family, traveled extensively, and have found ways to live full and meaningful lives. Without question, she has lived a life that matters.

