



1 November 2017

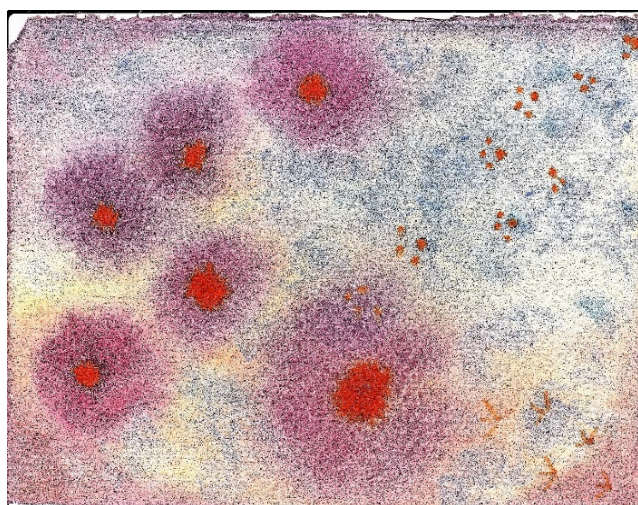
**Dear Polio Australia, especially Maryann, Rachel and Paul**

**Thank you for the wonderful experience** of the Polio Australia Health and Wellness Retreat over this past weekend. When I saw an email with one vacancy left for a female share room, my subconscious decided for me. As it turned out, my roommate was Sandra from near Cairns who I'd met but not known before. It was a mutually delightful pairing and sharing.

**Hallow'een weekend was my 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of polio, my reason for coming. I was 14 then and lived in a town near the capital of Ohio, Columbus. After two days of increasing illness then unsuccessful raps on my knees by my doctor, I was whisked off by ambulance to Children's Hospital in Columbus. My brother, then seven years old, told me recently how disappointed he was that the ambulance/hearse did not have its sirens going! But I'll never forget its flashing red lights as it raced the miles to the hospital - they replay in my mind as I write. In hospital I lay in foetal position for the spinal tap that confirmed my doctor's assessment – POLIO. It must have been a Tuesday as the hospital intercom began preliminary reports of Dwight D Eisenhower's presidential election results. And so it began.

**I had two concerns about attending** the retreat: 1) whether I could actually get on and off the airport shuttle up the coast from Brisbane airport to Marcoola without damaging injured muscles, and 2) whether I would collapse in overwhelming compassion, recognition and grief when meeting 69 other 'polio people'. For the first, there were actually *two separate vehicles each way* between the airport and the resort but no lasting damage. And the second concern simply did not happen. Compassion, yes. Recognition, absolutely. Grief, never. Everyone was so inspiring, so interesting, so welcoming. My overriding memory is how much others struggled as tiny children, hearing what many went through, seeing how beautiful they are, and acknowledging how very fortunate I am.

**Paul Constable-Calcott was extraordinary** and a marvellous beginning! He obviously inspired me at some deep level because these two small watercolours I did on Saturday morning came out with similar themes!



Journeys



Spiral Journey

**Dr Neala Milburn was excellent**, comprehensive and understandable, and I'd love to have a copy of her talk. The Mobility session was useful for my own question about walkers but especially for the insight it gave me

into the concerns and battles of others more severely affected. My Physio consultation was useful although we had to touch very generally in the session and Healthy Eating reminded me of what I know and aim to practice but also emphasised the need to check product ingredients to avoid nasties, which I will. Negotiating My Aged Care by Rhee Duthie was brilliant. She's an exceptional presenter with a wonderful manner and highly knowledgeable. This session speeds my quest to see where I stand – or rather, wheely-walk! The film Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks was astonishing, important, disturbing and very powerful. I will now read the book, thank you! And we're only half through the weekend!

Investigating the Healthy Mind by Corey Jackson and his follow up session were high on my list to attend and they did not disappoint. I'm working with a counsellor on these issues right now and have some basic understanding but I feel more confident now and will persevere. I missed part of Write Your Story but the excellent handout is a fine resource. I do a lot more generally applicable. Live Love Life Colourfully was a hoot! Helpful and just plain fun, lots of laughter!

Spirit, the opening session on Sunday, was intriguing, a lively bundle of personal experiences of all things spiritual! Introduction to Buddhism fed my long-term interest and will be followed by meditation practice at the Buddhist Centre in Cairns and/or on my own.

**And so I thank you for that marvellous opportunity** to learn among such wonderful people, to share questions and experiences, to evaluate my own responses, feelings, needs and strengths. I come away with the knowledge that while polio has most certainly shaped me, it does not define me.

I am **also deeply grateful for the extremely low cost** of the event. I wonder if we attendees paid even one tenth of the actual cost? And Maryann, I absolutely love the Cambodian bag. I did from the moment I saw it on Thursday? However it happened that I have it, be assured that I treasure it!

Gratefully

Julia Volkmar



Spirals