

Polio Health and Wellness Retreat

Body, Mind, Spirit

April 2013

Reflections on the Retreat

by Sylvie Cleret & Marc Adams, Port Elliot, SA



What a fabulous 3 days. Our feet still haven't touched the ground.

Sylvie & I arrived at the Stamford Hotel on the Thursday afternoon and were seamlessly registered and directed to our lovely room overlooking the Glenelg Pier. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring the beach and the local shopping precinct.

Thursday evening, everyone gathered for a lovely meal; to meet the other delegates; to hear Dr John Tierny, Gillian Thomas and The Hon. Steve Georganas; and to hear the ever present and effervescent Mary-ann Liethof. A delightful way to start the retreat.

Many choices of sessions were offered to the delegates; we all had to choose sessions prior to attending the retreat and this ensured that a maximum of 20 could attend each session apart from the plenary which were open to everyone first thing in the morning.

The plenary on Friday morning started with Ann Buchan, a "Neurophysiotherapist" from Unley Physiotherapy. Ann explained various diseases that have similar symptoms to PPS; some statistics on polio people; various health issues of polios; discussed pain and its management; reflected on the loss of motor neurons and the possibility of other neurons making new pathways to overcome the lost pathways; and also touched on gentle exercise compared to strenuous exercise stressing the adage "Conserve to Preserve" .

The next session for the morning was "Pain and Fatigue Management" by Dr Nigel Quadros, director of Rehabilitation Services at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Dr Nigel opened up a general discussion on central and specific pain, providing comment on various pharmaceuticals (mainstream and alternative). He then went into management of PPS, together with some of the other conditions that effect PPS such as carrying too much weight, etc.

Dr Nigel advocated "some" exercise by everyone even if it was only stretching, but keep to only a third of our maximum ability. The endorphins created by exercise bring about a "feel good" situation. He advocated soft massages, neurophysiotherapy and advised that if a patient was at the stage where referral was needed to a "Pain Clinic" in Adelaide then there was up to a two year waiting list.

He also believes that the term Post Polio Syndrome should be replaced with "The Late Effects of Polio", a term not agreed with by everyone.

Friday afternoon brought Adam Holden, Orthotist from "Orthotics Prosthetics South Australia" which is part of Repatriation General Hospital. His topic of "To brace or not to brace" was a great success as people looked at and discussed various braces and orthotics and compared them to their own as well as their experiences.

Adam's theme was to increase quality of life, safe mobility and preservation of existing musculature/joints as well as providing optimal function with minimal inconvenience.

The next session on Friday was "Understanding Aged Care in SA" by Lyndal Gerrard from "Access 2 Home Care". Lyndal discussed how home care and its access are about to change in that the various services are about to be centralised. Lyndal provided some contact numbers and advice and gave an indication how people are assessed currently for the various services.

The option after the evening meal was a movie "The Sessions" or free time. Whilst many saw the movie we opted for free time in order to absorb the daily events.

Saturday morning started with a buzz as we were treated to an address from Susan Hillier, Associate Professor of Neuroscience and Rehabilitation from the University of South Australia. Her topic was "Neuroplasticity". Have you heard about it, we hadn't? It means the brain is capable of change. It underpins the way we learn and the way we recover from brain trauma as well as how the brain processes chronic pain. Not only was the talk stimulating it was informative and positive.

Susan's theme was to get out there and do as much as you can, taking into mind fatigue, ability, etc. She advocated that we should be positive and not scared to do things, that we should pursue mental stimulation, not lock ourselves away but to create a purpose in our life.

Next session for the morning was "Mindfulness" by Georgie Davidson. What a fabulous follow up from the previous session. Georgie has been a professional musculoskeletal physiotherapist and yoga teacher who brings a holistic approach to health care.

By bringing to mind the present moment, the taste, the look, the feel, we can learn to appreciate life as it is now instead of stressing over the past that we can't change, nor control our future. By appreciating the now we can appreciate ourselves and the world we live in.

The first session for the afternoon was "Partnering Polio" a session mainly for the partners of polios. This session was run by Graeme Smith a partner of Joan Smith one of the polios. He opened up the group with a "tell your story and experience" from each member. This brought forth many strategies and coping methods and certainly showed everyone areas where they had to let go as well as how to introduce new ideas. Communication and negotiation skills were emphasised. A great session.

The next session was well attended. The subject was "Exploring Wine". It was well worth waiting for. A number of members from "The Amateur Winemakers & Brewers Club of Adelaide Inc" introduced the group to the art of beer and wine making.

Not only were we taught some of the manufacturing concepts and the appreciation of wines, we continually tasted the products. The wines tasted were superior to many commercial quality wines.

Everyone caught up at the evening meal and whilst eating were entertained by Simon Skinner a magician from Aces Magic Entertainment. He proved to be very entertaining with his tricks performed at people's tables. You could tell he was good by the stunned and delighted faces of the various people.

Sunday morning commenced with a talk from Professor Ian Maddocks, AM. Professor Ian is an Emeritus professor at Flinders University who is a specialist in palliative care and is recognised internationally for tropical and preventative medicine.

Professor Ian spoke on the subject "The Healthy Spirit". He related his experiences in Papua New Guinea where he was enthralled by the co-operation between members of the village where he stayed for 14 years. Not only was there co-operation but friendship, camaraderie and thought of the other person. This he regarded as a healthy spirit. Unfortunately as time has moved and Western influences felt, this "Spirit" has changed. Professor Ian commended everyone for being part of Polio Australia especially the retreat as it showed the spirit of helping and supporting each other.

Once again the next session supplemented the first. Bishop Bruce Rosier (Ret) introduced "The Gift of the Holy Spirit, The Comforter – Strengthening us in our Daily Life". The group was made up of people from many faiths but all showing an interest in their fellow man, all being guided by "The Spirit". Bishop Bruce explained his definition of The Holy Spirit and why. He quoted some of the Bible passages in particular from John's Gospel, quoting Jesus saying "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me." A wonderful way to finish the sessions.

Our final lunch where everyone could discuss the events of the last few days, to swap addresses and to say goodbye, but not quite yet – Mary-ann and her new choir were there to enthrall us with their virtuosity and talent. What a great show.

The only way to finalise these notes is to say thank you to Polio Australia in particular Mary-ann, Gillian, John together with all of the volunteers, but a special thank you to everyone who attended and made the retreat the success that it was.