



The Calliper Kids

Eleven Life Journeys of Polio Survivors

Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group

The Calliper Kids

Eleven life journeys of
polio survivors living in
Knox and the Yarra Ranges, Victoria



Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group

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The Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group thanks the following sponsors who have supported our endeavour's to increase medical and community awareness of issues facing polio survivors in Australia today. Their valued contribution allows us to provide this collection of stories and information, free to aged-care providers, medical practices, libraries and the polio community throughout Knox and the Yarra Ranges and beyond.



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FOREWORD

As a polio survivor and convenor of the Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group, I invite you to join our storytellers in celebrating the defeat of childhood polio through tenacity and determination. Many achieved careers, raised families and took on leadership roles – ordinary people who achieved some extraordinary tasks, just by living everyday lives. However as midlife arrives, we have to face the challenges of polio again and as our stories reveal, make significant changes.

We are truly thankful for the whole-hearted support of family and friends throughout our project, and to the businesses, Rotary clubs, local governments and individuals who are meeting the costs of publication. This allows us to provide the book to medical and aged-care providers and community groups in the belief that improved knowledge will lead to better access to appropriate services and support.

We say a special thankyou to the five volunteer writers who assisted some people in recording their stories. Thankyou to Pauline Baxter, Chris Baxter, Gayl Dobbin, Paul Dixon (now deceased) and Viv Williams, who patiently and diligently documented some wonderful true life accounts. Then we thank Anne Boyd for hours of editing advice and assistance, my husband Graeme Smith for his work on formatting, and Genuine Print for heavily subsidised publication. Villa Maria provided valued suggestions about managing the project, and Mono Unlimited assisted with publication advice.

We also thank Jane Henderson, previous physio at Polio Services, and Mary-ann Liethof, community officer at Independence Australia for their professional support. They introduce the stories from a clinical perspective which explains the challenges of polio. Independence Australia, our auspice body, supported our submissions for funding.

Thankyou, most importantly, to the polio survivors living in Knox and Yarra Ranges, who had the courage to revisit traumatic childhood experiences. The sharing of personal stories can be confronting as well as therapeutic and satisfying. We trust our readers will find them of interest.

Joan Smith
Project co-ordinator



Introduction

Issues of living with polio

By Mary-ann Liethof – Polio Community Officer, Polio Network Victoria

I look back to 2004 when I started as the Community Officer for Polio Network Victoria (a service of Independence Australia) and reflect on my total ignorance of the experiences and challenges faced by polio survivors. Not that this is really surprising, as I was simply representative of the wider community who didn't 'see' polio – even though I was socially well acquainted with one woman who used callipers and elbow crutches to get around. It never occurred to me that there was a story behind her condition. After all, we don't usually sit around discussing people's disabilities, especially if they don't bring them up first. It's usually made quite clear that they are really just getting on with their lives with a 'we all have our own crosses to bear' attitude. These days I see polio survivors in all kinds of places because I know what to look for.

Five years on, I have been taught much by the surprisingly large number of remarkable polio survivors I have met, and learnt to appreciate the stories that underlie their often fierce desire for independence. As you will read in the following pages there are many historical reasons for this, including the stigma and fear polio evoked during the epidemics and the fact that polio-infected children were often isolated from their families for long periods in overcrowded hospitals where there was little time for busy staff to provide any substitute for the love and emotional support most other children experience at that age. This period was often coupled with intensely painful rehabilitation sessions to help them recover mobility. Then there was the need to reconnect with family, friends and life back in the community following what could have been years in 'care'. Consider the young child's psychological capacity to process what many have described as a feeling of abandonment and/or of being punished. The result often manifested itself in a personality that was extremely self sufficient whilst constantly proving how 'good' they were at whatever they did – the quintessential 'A' type personality.

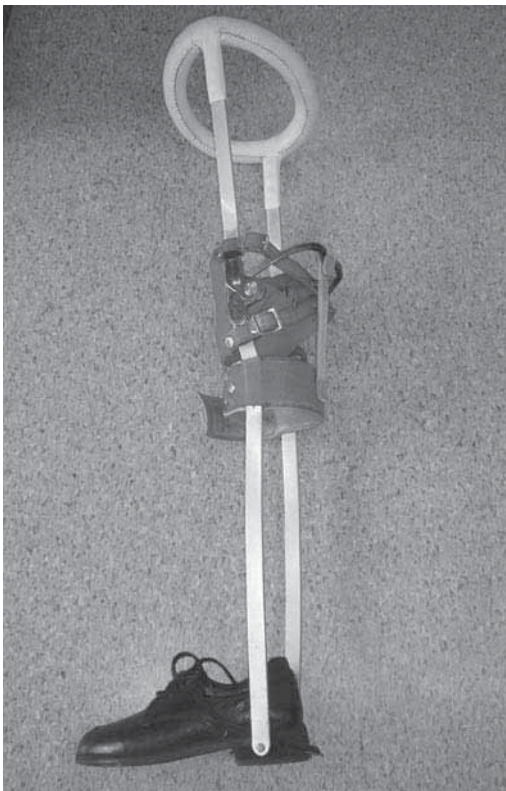
The more 'fortunate' people who contracted polio may have had less or even no obvious paralysis, in which case they were quickly back in the home environment. There were also numerous older children through to adults who had the emotional maturity to understand what was happening. Whatever the circumstances, all were infected by a virus that left no-one completely unscathed as it attacked motor neurons throughout the body. This is most evident many years later as polio survivors age and start experiencing symptoms such as new muscle weakness, muscle and joint pain, debilitating fatigue levels, swallowing and breathing problems, sleep disturbance, and an inability to regulate body temperature. These 'new' symptoms are known as Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) and come under the larger umbrella of the Late Effects of Polio (LEOP). As with many who have lived for years with a residual physical disability, most will also have scoliosis, arthritis and osteoporosis. They may also be overweight due to increasing difficulty with mobility, leading to diabetes and heart problems. All these are serious health concerns in themselves. Many polio survivors who attend a GP may be tested or treated for these conditions in isolation, especially if the subject of an early bout of polio is not raised by either party due to the general lack of knowledge regarding PPS and LEOP.

For many polio survivors, developing PPS can make them feel like they are experiencing the polio virus all over again. Although this is not the case (the polio virus is evacuated from the body within weeks of the initial infection), the memory of those early years can be quite traumatic for some, while the fatigue and gradual loss of mobility can severely impact on what may have been quite an active lifestyle. This is why Polio Support Groups, whereby polio survivors can share their experiences as well as their coping and management strategies, are so important.

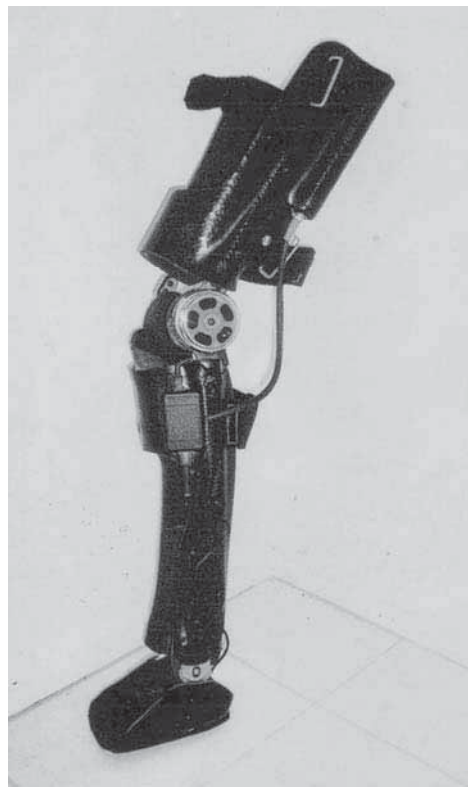
Many have had to make difficult decisions about their careers and/or mobility support, decisions that they were not planning for that particular stage in their life, if ever. Of course, personal relationships and the expectations of loved ones can also be strained when these changes occur. Discussions with people who have gone through similar experience can be an important reality check; they can provide positive reinforcement that there are various options. Support Group members also play a vital role in educating their local communities via talks at service clubs and providing information to their local health practitioners.

Although many people believe polio to be a disease of the past, there are many parts of the world where this vicious virus still infects hundreds of people every day. It is only through immunization that Australia remains polio-free. However, in this small world, wild polio virus is only a plane ride away. The stories you are about to read were written by people who did not have access to the polio vaccine but I hope they serve the purpose of reminding us of the importance of being informed and passing that knowledge on for all to share.

Callipers reflecting new technology



Traditional support calliper



Modern E-Knee calliper



Polio and its management explained

By Jane Henderson –former Physiotherapist at Polio Services, Victoria

Poliomyelitis derives from the Greek words ‘polios’ meaning grey and ‘myelos’ meaning marrow, referring to the fact that the disease results from the destruction of the grey matter (nerve cells) inside the spinal cord.

Poliomyelitis, which is more commonly known as polio or previously known as infantile paralysis, is an acute viral disease caused by an infection of the poliovirus.

The virus is spread from person to person through contact with food, water or unwashed hands that have been contaminated with the faeces of an infected person. The majority of polio infections occur in infants or children.

The virus replicates in the gut and is carried by the blood throughout the body. The majority of polio infections cause no symptoms. In one to two per cent of cases the virus enters the brain and spinal cord via the bloodstream. The polio virus infects and destroys the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, reducing or ceasing the nervous stimulation of muscles in the legs, arms, back, neck, chest, abdomen or throat. This results in muscle weakness or flaccid paralysis in any of these affected areas. Between two and five per cent of people who develop paralytic polio die. Death is usually the result of weakness or paralysis in the muscles that control breathing or swallowing. For those who survive with paralytic polio, half will have permanent paralysis.

Official statistics report that 23,575 Australians have been paralysed by the polio virus. However, it is believed by some that Australia has had 70,000 polio cases. There have been several large polio epidemics in Australia: one in 1938; another from 1946-1955 in which 1013 people died; one in 1956 and another in 1961-1962. Although a vaccination for polio was introduced in 1956, it was not widely provided until the 1960s, so many Australians continued to contract polio into this decade. Far fewer polio cases were reported in the next two decades, and by the year 2000, the World Health Organisation declared that Australia was officially polio-free due to a successful immunisation program. The last known case of polio in Australia had been in 1986. However, in 2007 Australia experienced a new case of an acute polio infection imported from Pakistan. This is a reminder to us all that Australians who are not immunised against polio are at risk of contracting polio even today.

The initial treatment for polio in the acute phase is to isolate the infected person, so as to prevent the virus from spreading. Being isolated from family and friends at any age is difficult, but for an infant or child it is simply traumatic. The infectious period ends after six weeks. However many children who had polio remained separated from their family for months or even years, in order to receive uninterrupted rehabilitation.

After the initial polio infection resolves, there is a slow period of recovery which generally takes one to two years, before the residual level of ability is revealed. The body works to regenerate nerves and improve the strength of the affected muscles. The degree of recovery is quite varied, dependent on the severity of the initial infection, the age of the infected person and the management received.

The management techniques for treating polio in the past ranged from detrimental, to no effect, to highly effective. This range was in part due to the variety of settings in which people were treated, be it at home or in hospital, and in the metropolitan or regional areas. It was also due to the lack of knowledge about effective treatments. Various management techniques were trialled based on theory, rather than on successful case-based experience.

The most popular theory was that weakened and paralysed muscles would recover if they were immobilised and given the chance to rest and regenerate. This led to treatments with splints, braces and callipers. The splints were used for bed rest. A common example was the Thomas splint: a leg splint consisting of two rigid rods attached to an ovoid ring that fits around the thigh. Body braces were used for posture and to prevent spinal curvature. Callipers were fitted to lock up the knee joints of weakened legs to enable a person to walk without their legs collapsing and to pick the foot up from the ground when foot-drop had occurred due to paralysed shin muscles. The polio client found these devices restrictive and often uncomfortable. The child with polio who was immobilised and confined to bed, and could not run and play with friends, commonly experienced this treatment as torture.

An alternative treatment to immobilisation grew in popularity as successful results began to emerge. Heat, massage and movement of affected muscles were first introduced by Sister Kenny. This technique saw children reaching a better level of recovery, in terms of movement, strength and function.

Polio is an acute infection, but the damage the virus does to the body, even after rehabilitation and recovery, leaves a lifelong condition of impairment. Many people who had polio in childhood recovered to a level which enabled them to function independently. Many were able to walk, run and even play sport. This functional level remained constant for decades, but in the third, fourth or fifth decades following the initial polio infection, the level of function began to decline. The reason for this deterioration is multifaceted. It is in part due to the age-related changes that everyone experiences: decreased muscle strength, degeneration of joints, reduced bone density, and the effects of gravity on posture. It is also due to the effects of living with the impairments of the past polio. The weakened muscles have not supported the joints optimally, which puts the joints at risk of wearing out. Functioning with reduced muscle strength, altered posture, and unequal forces through the body over the years leads to secondary conditions such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis. These secondary conditions, resulting from the impairments left by the initial polio infection, are called the Late Effects of Polio (LEOP).

A few decades after their initial polio infection, some people with past polio suffer new symptoms which cannot be explained by the Late Effects of Polio or by any other condition. These new symptoms include new muscle weakness, pain and fatigue. This set of symptoms is termed Post Polio Syndrome (PPS). It is not known why or how PPS develops, but there are several hypotheses. The most common theory is that the nerves that were not destroyed by the initial polio virus have worked much harder to stimulate the muscles to function. These nerves have worked over 100 per cent, to compensate for the loss of stimulation by the nerves that were destroyed by the polio virus. It is believed that these hard-working nerves reach a point in time when they die off, ceasing their stimulation of the muscle and resulting in new muscle weakness.

There is no one treatment for the LEOP or PPS. Management needs to be multidisciplinary because each individual with past polio has different symptoms and each has a different level of function. The treatment needs to address the symptoms, maintain the level of function and prevent further deterioration. The best way to achieve this is for a multidisciplinary team, specialising in the field of polio, to assess and manage the client who is ageing with the LEOP or PPS. The treatments they prescribe involve moderate exercise, orthotics and mobility devices, hydrotherapy, energy conservation, techniques or devices to improve sleep, pain management and education in self-management and pacing. Where muscles are too weak to support joints, orthotic devices are required to enable the

client with post polio to walk without stumbles and falls. The management of the condition should also decrease the strain on muscles so as not to overwork remaining nerves and reduce the energy demand of tasks so as to minimise pain and fatigue. The client with post polio often finds it difficult to make the necessary lifestyle changes, such as returning to orthotic devices or using a more dependent mobility aid. It may remind them of traumatic experiences relating to their past polio or make them feel they have failed in recovery from their past polio.

The following stories provide an insight into the lives of people who have had polio. These people are now living in the Knox-Yarra Ranges region. They share their daily living with various symptoms and disabilities resulting from their past polio. They now wish to share with you these past memories and current experiences of living with polio.

Equipment from the past brings back childhood memories



Arm crutches



Thomas splint

Helen's Story

Contracted polio in 1945



I was born in 1941 the first of seven children, with two brothers and a sister born while we lived in McKinnon. It was close to Christmas in 1945 when my family visited cousins nearby in Ormond where the eldest child was sick. We were given strict instructions to play downstairs only. Without the elders knowledge we nicked upstairs to say 'hello', a harmless enough activity but with dire consequences, as Adrian the cousin was later diagnosed with Infantile Paralysis (Poliomyelitis) and never walked again.

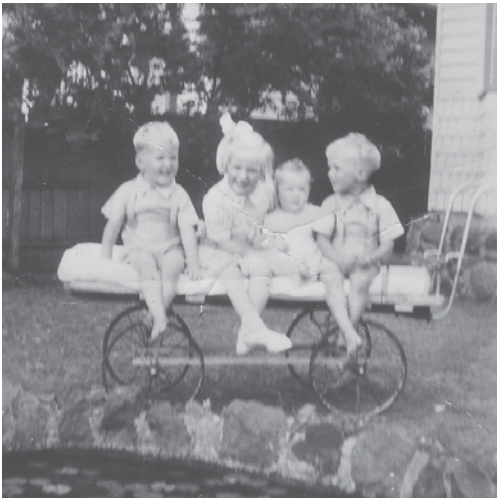
Within weeks I experienced a feeling of general sickness with headache, pain, a stiff neck and I was quite clumsy. I had fallen heavily on rocks surrounding our fishpond so bruising camouflaged the problem. On Christmas Day I woke and was unable to walk without falling over but I could ride my new bike. An ambulance trip finished at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Unfortunately as a four year old, I missed out on the visit from Father Christmas by a whisker. My stay was brief, but as I was paralysed in both legs and one arm, I was transferred to Fairfield Hospital for Infectious Diseases. The family was put under quarantine for three weeks; this was really like house arrest with the isolation. My brothers were aged two and a half and eighteen months and Mum was five months pregnant with my sister. My parents were given a diagnosis as Infantile Paralysis, now known as Poliomyelitis. My two and a half year old-brother Brian had also caught polio but was neither hospitalized nor left with any paralysis, but he has recently suffered Post-polio symptoms with weakness in

his legs. It was predicted that I would be in hospital for a lengthy period so I was transferred to Mt Eliza Orthopaedic Hospital.

My treatment was immobilization from the armpits to toes, lying on my back in a full length splint (Thomas splint) with legs apart and held by bandages. To keep me in place, I had straps around the chest and abdomen. Time-out was permitted for exercises (physiotherapy) and bathing only. Physiotherapy aimed at strengthening muscles that hadn't been weakened and at keeping bone structures straight. The notion of walking again was not a possibility. Patients' beds were rolled out onto the veranda to soak up the sun to keep our bones strong with vitamin D. This practice gave me a great love of the sun and luckily no skin cancers at this stage.

There were some challenges associated with polio. Bowel problems caused by lack of mobility resulting in the taking of unpleasant laxatives, such as paraffin oil and a diet of prunes, which I have never enjoyed since leaving hospital. Family contact was rare, as travelling by public transport from McKinnon to Mt Eliza was no mean feat for my parents with their very young family. Home-sickness became the norm, and beginning school was postponed indefinitely. My mother was pregnant with her fourth child, and my baby sister Clare was born in the April of that year of 1946. This necessitated me remaining under care in hospital until she was older, in total my stay was nine months. One consolation that helped ease the isolation from my family was the care and attention of the residing paediatrician, Dr McCloskey together with nursing staff. They even spent time brushing my hair regularly.

I finally went home to live with my family at last. I was enrolled at Yooralla School for Crippled Children in Carlton and transported each day in the little blue 'spastic' bus. A strict exercise regime, managed by physiotherapists from Yooralla continued, and I was still immobilized in the Thomas splint all the time. By this stage my right leg was atrophied with no muscles working below the knee and limited muscles in the thigh. My right foot (affectionately known as 'my little leg') was dropped and much smaller than my left one. In a general review by the doctors it was noted that I also had curvature of the spine. This was a puzzle as the Thomas splint was designed to prevent this occurring. Feeling very embarrassed I confessed to unstrapping myself at night and turning my top half onto my side. The doctor's solution was the use of a padlock! The chest strap was padlocked and my legs were placed scissored up and down for a period of time. That fixed me!



Helen shares her long pram with her brothers and sister

One very different experience was being able to lie on a long pram during the day. Now I could see more of the world and I could also have my sister sit on the pram with me. I was entertained by our pet dog, I played board games, cards and other games that could be managed lying on my back with materials on the chest. Shopping trips and visiting friends were new experiences which I enjoyed tremendously. On reflection, it was during this time that I learnt

many skills that would be useful in my adult life such as patience, listening, problem-solving and leading the pack by the tone of one's voice. Mind you, siblings would dispute some of that story; there were many dolls discovered headless and armless after my bossiness went over the top. My brother Kevin had some difficulty speaking clearly and became quite frustrated at times so I took the role of translator and saved the situation.

By the time I was seven years old regular physiotherapy had helped to strengthen my muscles. My arm and left leg had improved to about 'normal' functioning. The idea of never walking again and being lifted or pushed or carried around forever was never a permanent idea for me or my parents. My brothers attended St Kevin's School in Ormond and it was hoped that I would go to school with them one day. Being free at bath time gave me the opportunity, amongst the busy time of the bathing regime, to practise walking around the couch. I got the taste for freedom and became more and more determined to walk.

At one time my parents had well-earned respite and I had a great holiday at Yooralla Hostel in Balwyn. We were a small but feisty group of kids. One night after being splinted and tucked in as planned, we pretended to sleep and waited until staff retired upstairs. The ambulatory kids helped the others out of the splints and after carefully sliding onto the floor I found myself skidding on my b*m along what seemed a long corridor to the bathroom, where I had a drink and scooted back. I admired one ambulatory kid so much that I think I was in love at six years of age. Next morning the nurses were puzzled as to how we were ready for dressing so quickly. At that stage we were not able to rewind bandages and so slept free. We were never questioned and nobody volunteered any information. Phew!

My 'coming out' as an independent walker was wearing built up shoes, a full length calliper on my right leg, with a spring supporting my foot, at my First Communion celebrated at St Georges Church in Carlton. Other friends from Yooralla were not so lucky, as they were confined to wheelchairs. The Yooralla 'micks' joined in with the 'normal' kids from over the road both for instruction and for the event. This was a proud day for all my family. I was seven years old that October 1948. Initially my walking was not good enough for me to go to school with my brothers, as I would need to be able to walk a reasonable distance and use stairs and steps. Finally, against the advice of the staff at Yooralla I left.



Helen's first communion

They thought I would never survive in the real world and that it was an unfair expectation. But with no regrets by my parents or myself, I was enrolled in grade three at St Kevin's in Ormond with my brothers. Well it was tough! To get to school I was pushed in my 'pram' with my sister beside me, uphill to North Road to the bus stop. I then negotiated the bus and crossed a busy road to my classroom, which was on the second floor. I reversed the procedure to return home.

About this time Dad wanted to pack up the family and live in Queensland to have access to Sister Kenny and her methods of treating paralysis. Instead of moving away from a large supportive family, we stayed. My parents decided to see privately an orthopaedic specialist Mr John Jens. He provided my medical support until I was 16 years old. Physiotherapy was also provided privately, at great cost, at home. A key component was a hanging device on the back verandah where I hung from the neck for a set period each day to assist my back.

I had a spring fitted to my calliper to help lift my foot. Occasionally it would break but the Royal Melbourne Hospital provided numerous springs, which were stored in a suitcase for such emergencies. Common sense prevailed, and whenever the spring did break, I would be dinked home by an older boy.

It was then changed for a new one and I returned to school and continued my education as if nothing happened. This was fun and did not happen often enough for my liking. My back still gave problems and a full-length brace was worn around my torso to keep me straight for quite some time. The brace was very hot and sticky in summer and uncomfortable particularly when sitting.

In 1950 my parents were lucky enough to get a Housing Commission home in Burwood and I was enrolled in a new school. We returned the 'pram' to the hospital and I began a more independent life. I had to negotiate a bus, then a tram and manage a downhill walk of some distance to St Dominic's school in East Camberwell. The return trip uphill after a long tiring day at school was an effort, so the distance was covered in short spurts. I made the walk more manageable by taking frequent rests, leaning on suitable height fences.

My friends coerced tram drivers into waiting for me, so it was a team effort. This was a fabulous time for making new friends and learning new games, particularly hoppy and handball against the wall. I was also taught to 'run' by hopskip method to catch trams and buses. It is no wonder that the good knee is worn out now.

It was always impressed upon me that I got three times as tired as others and must rest each day. My physiotherapist, Miss Lamond, taught me the art of relaxation for daily rest. She visited once a week until I was about 12 years old, although the exercises didn't stop until several years later. Chilblains were a menace and I was always bandaged up to protect my legs from the cold in winter. Back-pain and posture when sitting were challenges at this time, so a special chair was built for me to sit in the classroom which supported my back in all the right places and I had a blanket for warmth during winter. Classrooms didn't have heating and there was no such thing as 'trackie dax' either, so warm thick hand-knitted socks were the fashion. My first operation was a lumbar sympathectomy which redirected blood through my veins and greatly assisted my circulatory system in my right leg. I also took huge calcium tablets daily.

My footwear was specially made lace-up boots, because my right foot was up to two sizes smaller than my left. The right boot also needed to be built up one and a half inches to compensate for one leg being shorter than the other. The support spring ran through a hole in the heel, called a ferrule, and connected to a calliper. Two callipers were worn when I was nine years old, with a full length one on my right leg and a short calliper on my left leg.

As my schooling had been interrupted, it was to be expected that I would be behind my peers academically and not functioning to my best ability. My grade four report at my new school indicated I was thirty fourth in my grade but by grade six, I was second in the grade 'by only two marks'. Who was it that said 'polio challenged' are determined people?



Helen with brothers and sister

Mum and Dad had a surprise for me when I was ten years old and finishing grade five. A baby sister was born on Christmas Day and that certainly changed any bad memories associated with Christmas for me. The following year on New Year's Eve a brother was born. This extended family gave me new responsibilities at home. Confidently, I left grade six for secondary school, with a few close friends from primary school as back up.

Siena College eliminated the long walk to and from the tram stop but presented its own challenges in walking between classes to different buildings and 'running' to catch the early tram home. Teachers were forever telling me I needed a walking stick to assist me as I leant heavily on my knee when tired. I didn't feel I needed one and continued to struggle with walking and fatigue. I had regular checkups with Mr Jens and I exercised, as in the past. I was also a keen swimmer.

Education was a priority at this stage to give me a chance of a 'future with a good job', according to my father. When choosing employment, teaching seemed a good option as it was felt the holidays would give me some rest periods. Year nine was a breeze and I collected Third Prize. I also became eligible for a Teaching Bursary with the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, which went towards my school fees. I did not have the option to work within the State system, I was deemed a risk factor because of my disability and for superannuation purposes. 1955 was memorable for another reason as my youngest brother was born on Mothers' Day of that year.

I was committed to teach but the road was rocky. The Intermediate Certificate exams were held at the Flemington Showgrounds a long distance from Burwood.

It was a two-hour trip by bus, tram, then train. Fun it was, but I missed on two subjects I was strong at and had to acknowledge fatigue as an issue for the first time. During my final year (year 11) my foot was stabilized. The bones were broken then fused together, but leaving some movement in the ankle. I was in plaster for four months and took two more painful months to learn to walk again. An end-of-year dance was a good reason to persevere and I made the dance walking without a calliper.

The next year, 1958, I attended Sion Teacher's College in Box Hill, as I had planned as a 16 year old. I was on my own now and monitoring myself. Mr Jens had dismissed me as being as well as was possible and not requiring any more operations. This was normal for polio patients. Now I could buy whatever shoes I liked but always had to stick with low heels. I had to buy two pairs because my feet were very different sizes! The unwanted shoes were thrown away. My local boot repairer built up the right heel and regularly maintained them because the slightest wear and tear caused back ache. My social life was fun, I enjoyed dancing, jiving in particular, and partying with the rest of my peers, though my parents often curtailed my social life due to my youth. They always insisted on a balance of rest and completing responsibilities in the home, as well as school preparations etc.

My teaching career spanned 44 years. I taught most levels in primary school with a particular love for prep students. 'Rocking' instead of 'walking' and leaning on my knee were just accepted things for me and for those I came in contact with. It was often said that children were ready to move on from prep to grade one when they asked me 'why I walked funny?' They had been with me for almost a year before they even noticed.

I was a late starter in the marriage game (1972) and actually married a boy who had shared my grade six year. (Paul has prompted me to include certain aspects in this story.) Doctors always said I would need to wear a calliper and probably use a stick if I was pregnant. We have two sons and I worked full time, close to the end of pregnancy both times and did not require a calliper or a stick. Fatigue continued to be managed by having afternoon rests whenever possible and occasionally I took 'mental health' days as I never seemed to get sick. I was forced to delegate more and more chores to Paul.

Teaching took a different direction when I was granted 12 months study leave to attend Burwood Teacher's College in 1980 studying Special Education. At that time our youngest was just three. After that, I left classrooms behind and took up

consultancy as a Special Education Curriculum Adviser to classroom teachers specializing in learning disabilities. Later I supported the integration of students with disabilities into schools. Fatigue and lack of parking spaces close to school offices were my challenges so I finished up at the Head Office in Melbourne. There I worked in two roles in Special Education until my retirement. My last appointment was as Deputy Chairperson in Special Education managing the additional support required for young people with disabilities within Victoria. This involved working with Yooralla Society and Scope Victoria in the provision of the therapies that I was so familiar with.

By now, education was different from when I was enrolled in a 'normal' school where common sense prevailed. Funding was now provided to integrate students and parents mostly felt an Integration Aide should be provided to assist students at school. This work was fulfilling but in a highly emotive environment where I learned that 'more is not always best'. We people with disabilities need to be resilient in managing our own needs, not always relying on the need as perceived by well meaning observers. We might have a disability but we do not need to be 'handicapped'.

In 1988 the late effects of polio began appearing for me as extreme fatigue, more pronounced foot drop and frequent tripping. Our youngest son was ill with a life threatening condition at the time, so my body was not a high priority. Later I required a cartilage operation in my 'bad' knee and following that, my surgeon referred me to Fairfield Hospital for Infectious Diseases for an assessment at Polio Services Victoria (1992). It was then I returned to physiotherapy exercises with management and a new orthotic prescribed to support the 'wearing out' leg and relieve the 'good' leg from overwork. This sufficed for a number of years. However I soon learnt that late age polio means upgrades and further supports are required to keep me mobile and enjoying life generally.

'Polios' were often told that we would remain stable after 'treatment' for the rest of our lives! I kept on managing family and life, in spite of a breast cancer setback in 2001. For me, managing the 'late effects' has also included walking with one stick, then later with two elbow crutches and a number of orthotics. All this has been under the guidance of at Polio Services Victoria: Darren, Jane and prior staff. In fact Polio Services and the local Community Health Service have become regular diary dates for me, helping me live with the ongoing effects. I retired from work in April 2003, but after a year I became part time Project Manager, assisting young people with disabilities to transit to study and /or work.

The late effects of polio have made orthotics very important as my mobility deteriorates. I have used an AFO, GRAFO and recently I graduated to a Horton Stance Control to give me a new lease of life, lessen pain and provide safer movement generally. I have had to learn to walk yet again, to manage a precision orthotic that at times has a mood of its own and at present requires frequent maintenance. But overall it is well worth it; modern science never ceases to amaze me. I have more freedom in some ways, such as walking longer distances, with less lower back pain. I can stand tall whilst preparing food and cooking in the home, enjoying recreation, and gatherings with friends and family. On the other hand I have less movement in certain aspects of my lifestyle such as gardening and walking on the beach.

So nowadays it is all about managing family, busy diaries and part-time work along with osteoarthritis, and the late effects of polio. But managing is what we 'polio kids' do well.





Joan S's Story

Contracted polio in 1952



My story begins some time in 1954. I am lying on my back under the canopy of green giants in our garden at 'Digger's Rest' in McAllister Road, Monbulk. Just beyond, I follow cloudy pictures scudding across the blue sky. The chooks nearby contentedly cluck and the sun warms the air. The day is filled with the scent of blossom on the plum tree. It is sheer contentment to be a five year old and once more at home.



Joan – before contracting polio

'Digger's Rest' was built by Grandpa some three kilometres out of the township. It was the house where Mum grew up. By the time I knew it as home it was considerably modernised, with linoleum on the floors, with timber lined ceilings and walls, and a radio. The indoor bathroom had a chip heater to provide our once-a-week hot bath before Sunday School. The open fire in the lounge room kept us snug at nights as, curled up on Dad's knee, I listened to the radio by the light of soft kerosene lamps. The kitchen always had a kettle simmering and the wood stove burning all day. In the corner stood the copper, the concrete troughs for washing, and that just left room for a large

wooden table and chairs. The pantry held the kerosene powered fridge which was supplemented by an ice-chest on the back entry porch. There was a meat safe under the tank stand which was also the frame for Dad's climbing beans.

We followed a path down the hill to the wood shed which also housed the chook food, sacks of onions, pumpkins, and earthy produce aromas. At the back of the shed was the toilet – a deep black hole that went down forever. It was encased in a long wooden bench with a stack of torn newspaper for wiping bottoms.

I suppose these images became cemented into my mind at the age of three, when I was desperately clinging to memories of home. It was 1952 and severe illness resulted in my admission with appendicitis, to the old Royal Children's Hospital. After a couple of weeks, my mother trekked into Monbulk to ring the hospital on the public phone to find out my progress. She was scolded about how serious peritonitis was and told it would be a few more weeks yet. She was beside herself at this startling news. Communication was not good in those days. After about six weeks, I was allowed to go home. I hadn't been able to stand in the hospital cot, but that was put down to my shyness.

A few weeks passed by at home but I was still pulling myself along the floor using my arms. Our family doctor in Belgrave announced I'd had polio – not surprising in the current epidemic. How devastating for my parents. They had already lost their second baby, now their third would be a 'cripple'. Cripple was the community term, not my mother's word. From that day she gritted her teeth, determined to make me 'normal'. I never thought of myself in any other way. Children are so accepting, and afterall, a disability only exists if it stops you doing things you want to. So at the age of three, my way of life took a sharp turn.

It began with intensive intervention by Dr Jean McNamara, a wrinkly old lady with hair pulled back into a wispy bun. We made weekly trips into the city by train from Ferntree Gully. Grandpa had an old tray truck which got us into Monbulk to the bus stop. Dad, it seemed to me, had little to do with my polio years, as I suspect was the case for most fathers. His job was to get his life back together after serving in Borneo during World War Two, and earn the family keep.



Doctor Jean McNamara
Photo source unknown

After a few months it was decided I needed longer stays in rehabilitation, if I was to make any real gains. So my young life took another turn for the worse. I was admitted to Hampton Rehabilitation Hospital, a very scary place. I was kept strapped and bandaged into a full splint all the time except when I was given excruciating exercises by the physio. She would stretch me and weight me down with sandbags. Even worse than the pain, I was stripped down to my undies for everyone to see. It was the same for all the other kids. I think the worst memories of those frightening days as a three year old have been buried deep. The brain has some wonderful strategies to ease the pain that life sometimes deals out.

Our parents were only allowed to visit once a week, but every day when I heard the train whistle, I hoped it was the one bringing Mum. Each time Mum visited, she would bring in eggs. On Sunday nights, those of us who had eggs would be served one for tea. I also collected heaps of coloured plastic bangles. I could count and name them all. Mum and other visitors used to bring them as presents. There weren't many options for toys in bed.

I did have one faithful friend in Hampton who gave me some solace. She was my black rag doll called Mammy. She was my only comfort and continued to share my intimate secrets until my teenage years. She had a delicious smell of her own and we could exchange thought messages even if some enthusiastic cleaner tidied her away into my bedside locker. The cleaners seemed to be forever polishing the floors, with huge machines, and our beds were kept totally smooth with starched pink or green covers hiding our splints.

Mammy and I were separated for a couple of terrifying weeks when I caught Chicken Pox and was temporarily moved to Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. No-one remembered Mammy and my non-stop sobbing for her was mistaken for cries for Mummy, and was dutifully ignored by everyone. Fairfield was a horrid lonely place of squeaky clean floors, smells of gas and disinfectant and scary shadows and shapes. A family friend sent in a pretty little plastic doll with a real wig and eye lashes, and arms and legs that moved. She was dressed in a hand-knitted pink layette, but I hated little Hetty doll all her life, because she was hard, cold and also smelt like Fairfield.

When I returned to Hampton and Mammy, life did not look so bad after all, except for the bed pan routine. There were also disgusting desserts of stewed quince or prunes and junket. I just couldn't swallow them, no matter how much trouble I got into.

Everyone in the ward was in a splint. The Thomas splint was like a body skeleton shape made from giant meccano. It had canvas slings laced at various support areas. Perspex side panels stopped me turning my head and leather straps held me in place. They went across the knees, hips, chest and forehead. First though, my feet were bandaged into plaster casts which were in turn bandaged onto the footplates. After some months of alternating exercises and full time splinting I was sent home to live on a long trolley made by Grandpa.

This brings me back to where my story began in the garden, lying splinted on the trolley. So long as I was home, life was good. My bedpan was now made from an old frying pan, and my trolley stayed in the lounge room where I slept at nights as there were steps in the veranda leading up to the bedrooms. Some mornings I awoke in despair because I had wet the bed. Getting into serious trouble from Mum soon stopped that little naughtiness. Apart from the toilet indignities, I didn't really mind trolley life, especially when Mum pushed me out into the sunny garden. In fact, I had some great adventures on the trolley. Mum and Dad bought their own block of land further down the hill. I would be pushed along the dirt road to our block, for a family working bee to clear the bush. There'd be picks, rakes, slashers and the axe attached to my trolley as well as a frying pan to cook lunch over a camp fire – never to be confused with 'my' frying pan. We'd go clanking along the road, tools and attachments swinging beneath.

At the block, bull ants went into a frenzy as the scrub was cleared. They always found us children, left playing on a rug near the cooking fire. Mum came to the rescue, dabbing the bites with blue-bag, normally used to bleach the washing. We also learned that the sap from bracken fern tips helped soothe the burning sting, and there was no shortage of bracken. We soon treated the bites ourselves.

When the area for the house was cleared of bush, the men had to level out a site for the building. A neighbour lent us his horse to pull along a scoop. It worked much like a bull dozer. It had two long handles for steering and the horse did the pulling work. Dad led the horse and Uncle Tom walked at the back, steering the scoop. It looked so funny to us kids when the scoop hit some underground roots. Dad and the horse kept going, the scoop tipped forward, catapulting Uncle Tom into the air.

Other adventuresome days were the occasional outings we had, if there was suitable transport. The Connor family, who were friends with Mum and Dad, owned a ute. One day on a trip to the beach I lay in my splint in the back of the ute with the other kids sitting around the sides.

I also remember watching from my trolley as streamers and balloons were hung around the ceiling for Christmas. That year we each got a wooden doll's bed. Mine was the middle-sized one and fitted Hetty. Mum would put the bed across my chest so that I could play while lying down. This worked well until one day a large huntsman spider ran out of the doll's bed, and into my bed. While I screamed, Mum searched my blankets and splint, but nothing was found. That was another black mark for Hetty and I wouldn't have any more close contact with her again.

Every day Mum made my special drink – an egg-nog with milk, vanilla and a frothy top. The milk was delivered to a billy left at our front gate. Mum boiled it up and scooped off the cream. The grocer came each week to deliver our groceries, and we always had a vegie garden and lots of fresh eggs. At a nearby farm Mum often picked peas and strawberries. I was parked under the huge pine trees that divided the paddocks. We often got extra vegies from there too.

Just when I was so happy being home, Mum got pregnant again. It was back to Hampton for me because she couldn't manage me and a new baby. This time I learned to walk using crutches and long iron callipers. The nurses would sometimes take me for little walks outside to see the bright flowers, geraniums I think. I was also allowed to help them roll up bandages in the day room. There was a clever machine where we threaded the bandage, ties first, round some thin bars. I turned the handle until the long calico bandages were rolled, and then slipped them off into a wire basket.

I was very fortunate to meet Miss Dillon, the teacher. Although I wasn't old enough to be included in the official school program, Miss Dillon let me join in. Mum has told me that's when I decided to be a teacher. The medical staff said that would never be possible, but it was always my dream.

So, back home again I went, and this time the splint was on my own bed and just for night time. I had new found freedom with callipers and I soon managed well without crutches. A physio came to visit our house every few months to show Mum what exercises I had to do. My mother's determination to make me normal saw me on the wooden kitchen table every afternoon. She stretched my legs until I cried and then some more until my sister would beg her to stop. Somehow that was just all part of my life everyday for years to come – unfair, undignified, painful, but hey! Just do it!

Finally I was allowed to go to school. I was a late starter but soon completed two years in one and caught up with the other kids my age. When I started school, Grandpa had to build me a special upright wooden chair. It had the usual array of straps and blocks to hold me in place, and a table attachment for me to work on. My older sister had to come in at the start and finish of each recess to change my callipers – short ones for sitting, long for playing outside.

The year I began school was the year polio vaccinations became available. I had to queue up for the jab with everyone else. From then on, whenever we went to the zoo, Mum would tell me how much I owed to the monkeys because they provided the vaccine so I wouldn't get polio again. In middle primary school I was allowed to sit in a normal desk but Grandpa had to fit an extra wide seat for more support, and check the correct height. In winter time I wore a long zip up lamb's wool legging over my calliper. With the open fires in the classrooms and the hot cocoa provided by the Mothers' Club, I stayed warm at school. Most days we walked to and from school. By now our new house was finished. We had to walk uphill in the morning, but it was easy going home. Frosty mornings were a challenge – getting up through the track in the bush led to lots of backward slides. My calliper was fitted with a spring to provide extra lift. I was always breaking it which meant another trip to the splint shop.

Our new house had electricity and room for an inside toilet. As we couldn't afford the toilet we had an outside pan toilet at the top of the steps through the garden. It was between the shed and Grandpa's bungalow. We felt scared at night going up there so we all went together. As soon as we were told 'bed-time' it was 'bags first for the toilet' or 'bags first for the lolly jar'. First for one meant last for the other. I always thought being second for both was the best option. No spookies could grab me from the front or back and I also had a fair chance at good pickings from the lolly jar, which was stored in the kitchen overhead cupboard.

As children, we walked just about everywhere – holiday jaunts to the forest, Nathania Springs for picnics, or to the local bus stop. Grandpa had a car by then, a Vauxhall Wyvern, but we only got a lift if it was raining hard.

We owned a few blocks of bush uphill from the house. On weekends when our jobs were done, we were allowed to play as we wanted. There was a large hole where a giant gum tree had blown over, roots and all. Judy scrounged old timber slabs and cardboard and laid them over the top to make a roof. We chopped steps down into one corner and set ourselves up in our underground hidey with drink

bottles and biscuits. The only problem was the mosquitoes stirred up by the fresh earthworks. The tree trunk itself formed an exciting walkway up to the branches which doubled as our lookout and also made great 'galloping horses'. We got dirty, bitten and grazed but it was such fun.

There was an old sawpit in the bush where the men sawed up logs to be dried out for firewood. I loved the smell of the engine as the belts slapped around, driving the chugging saw through the wood. We always had great bonfires on Guy Fawkes Night. Money was found for a few fireworks and there was always a supply of old clothes for us to make a Guy for the top of the fire.

Christmas time was just magic. First of all, Mum took us into the city on the train, to see Father Christmas on Myers' Rooftop. Then as the hot summer days brought Christmas closer, Dad would find a suitable pine tree along a roadside or in a paddock and would bring it home in the back of the Shire truck. Most people got their trees from the bush if they lived in the country. As the delicious pine smell added to our anticipation, we helped Mum with the decorations.



Wearing a short calliper on the weakest leg

At last Christmas morning arrived and we got on with the excitement of opening presents. We didn't have much money so Mum and Dad gave us just one parcel each – we then relied on Father Christmas. Each year we got a few special books, a tin of lollies, hankies, jigsaw puzzles, nuts, colouring books, nice soap or bath salts and perhaps perfume. Our Christmas stockings were finished off with a huge lolly walking stick. We usually got one special gift each year, like a beach towel or a lace petticoat. One year we got a doll house to share; one year a tent and another, a swing.

After a special lunch of roast pork and Christmas pudding with silver threepences in it, we often set off for a beach picnic tea. Ricketts Point was our usual destination to try out new towels or kickboards.

At the end of the holidays, the newsagent would make up our book lists. I loved every minute of Primary School. I had good kind friends who have re-entered my life in a number of ways over the years. I was never given special treatment, and my teachers allowed me to have a go at everything.

Throughout our days at Primary School, Dad was on the School Committee and Mum was on the Mothers' Club. The women raised the money and the men decided how to spend it. The annual school show grew to become the Monbulk Horticultural Show. Many of the local growers put on huge floral displays. We had a lot of new migrants from Holland who established farms around the Dandenongs. Every time I smell lilies I am reminded of those days. Our family put heaps of entries into produce, floral arrangements, cooking, sewing, craft and school work, and every year we won prizes for nearly all of them. I still treasure all my prize cards. Dad won a purple sash for the Best Exhibit in Vegetable Section, and another for the Best Lily. Mum used to spend months beforehand making items to sell on stalls.

Dad worked for the Lilydale Shire where he drove trucks and a grader. After work, one of his jobs was to chop the wood for our slow combustion stove and the open fire. Apart from chopping wood, he occasionally had to chop off a chook's head. He would get one of the chooks from the pen at the top of the paddock and, carrying it by the legs to the woodheap, chop off its head. The chook sometimes escaped and ran around with no head. When it stopped, it was hung on the clothesline to drain, before being plucked, gutted and made ready to roast. The smell of the feathers was disgusting. It was quite a few years before I enjoyed eating chicken. I could never like eating rabbit for the same sort of reason. The clothes lines were handy to the wood heap. They were made from fencing wire strung between posts, with a Y-shaped branch to prop them up half way along.

By grade six, I was wearing just one short calliper. I starred in crossball at the school sports, and I was always chosen in rounders and softball because I could really slog the ball. At first I was allowed to have a runner, but I didn't need that for long.

I also learned to play basketball, (now called netball) and managed well wearing sandshoes for sport. I played goal shooter and became the Captain. Every Saturday Mum and Dad would drive the whole team to the match. That was before seat belts and the seven of us piled into the car, sitting on each other's knees.



Joan as captain of basketball (2nd from left)

One sport I detested was swimming. The doctor said it would be good for me. Mum took me down to Belgrave pool on Saturday mornings. It was outdoors at Belgrave and freezing cold. The swimming teacher would get us all wet and shivering in the water, then we had to lie on slatted bench seats to practise kicking. I could barely move with shivering cramp. I never did learn to swim properly, I was too cold to relax and breathe. The dressing room was always dripping, so the clothes got soggy and it was hard to pull them on over blue shaky limbs.

During my primary school years, I began to spend holiday times as a live-in patient at Lady Dugan Red Cross Home in Malvern. At first Mum stayed with me to catch up with physios and do a complete review. I loved going to Lady Dugan, it was a beautiful old mansion with a huge staircase. A large carved wooden bear at the base of the staircase held a flame (electric) to light the way. The walls were hung with huge paintings and I always imagined the previous grand life that had taken place within its walls. Before this I had only read of such grand houses. Matron Ditchburn was a kind lady with a smile just like the face on the Sunshine biscuits and a huge white veil. All the nurses and sisters wore veils and pinnies, but when they were going out at night they would sometimes say goodnight to us in their best clothes.

Meals were announced with a huge gong which we took turns to ring. We all went to a dining room to eat and the food was so good. We also had our own private supplies of fruit, lollies and biscuits, which we kept in our lockers. As we got older we were allowed to share our own rooms with just one other person, and we became good friends, plotting against the physios. Miss Fussell ran the physio room, but I usually had someone else to set my program. All physios were called Miss something. I never knew a married one. Under their starched white coats, with silver dots in the buttons, they wore pleated skirts, jumpers and beads.

All the polios shared Lady Dugan with the spastic kids. Everyone was allowed to use those words then and no-one got upset. At night we were allowed to watch television in one of the downstairs wards. The two big wards downstairs were otherwise reserved for the kids who couldn't get around. Television was still quite a novelty and many of the kids didn't have it at home. After we watched the 'Mickey Mouse Club' the nurses brought in the tea trolley and we had supper of Ovaltine and two biscuits before getting into our night splints.

I was usually in Lady Dugan for my birthday during May school holidays. I would get called to the office to speak to Mum on the phone. The phone was in a wooden booth just outside the office. We didn't have a phone at home so it was such a special treat and so grown up. Often there would be a parcel in the post with lots of beautiful stamps on it. Apart from the daily session with the physio, we had a ball. Entertainers would come and put on little shows on the big front veranda. There was always a lady in a sparkling little suit with poodles doing tricks, and often a clown or magician. Each afternoon we would hear the clip-clopping of horse hooves as the cart delivered bread to the surrounding mansions. Out the back, near the annexe, was a craft room where a Red Cross lady came twice a week. We learned really special things like leather work and basket weaving. The congested little room had materials spilling out of every available space. Even the smell was exciting. The glues, leather, lambswool and cane held such promise for us.

Another job done at Lady Dugan was the fitting of new plasters and adjustments to splints and callipers to allow for growing. Getting new plasters was something I always found daunting. The process began with a number of old stockings peeled onto my legs. Next a felt strip was sewn around my ankles. The rolls of plaster were soaked in warm water and the physio wound them round and round my legs, layer upon layer, shaping my feet as they went. As the plaster began to firm, lines were drawn down the side fronts where the piece had to be removed. The part I hated came next. Using a sharp knife blade the physio cut through the plaster. I could feel every knife stroke pushing in and every time I expected to be cut. The plasters were plied off my legs and left to dry. My legs felt cold and rough as plaster splashes and the old stockings were removed. Over the next few days the plasters would be re - fitted, scraped and finished off.

The good thing about wearing plasters to bed was that Mum put them in the warming oven of the combustion stove before they were bandaged on. That added to the feeling of security and support to help my worn out legs recover for the next action packed day.



During my early years at Upwey High School, I did away with my last calliper. It seemed like such freedom, but somehow that created its own challenges. Sports teachers had no understanding of my situation. To all appearances my legs were almost the same size again, and there was really no limp. I found compulsory cross-country running around hilly Upwey so difficult. Gym work was hard, especially vaulting with no spring to my step so high jumps, and hurdles terrified me. I never felt I could complain. I just had to do it, that's life! Another consequence of no calliper was that walking to the sports oval was very difficult. It was a steeply sloping bush block which was crossed by the pathway. It caused my feet to tip sideways uncontrollably. The warmth of the sheep skin legging was missed when we constantly changed classrooms and buildings between periods and I developed severe chilblains over the back of my weakest leg.

Joan at high school calliper free

At the age of sixteen, I stopped growing and finally said goodbye to my night splint. I then began wearing a back brace during the day to stop me from drooping over when I got tired. I felt very self conscious about it when we had dancing lessons. I wondered if the boys could feel it through my school blazer.

It was in my teens that I actually felt different from the other students. I continued to have to wear sensible school shoes which I felt restricted my social life no end. Previously, the calliper had given me acceptable permission to wear school shoes all the time. But now, without popular footwear, I felt my clothes looked so daggy. So while friends and sisters stepped out in small heels and pointy toes, I often chose to stay home.

My pocket money was hard earned. In order to pay for my uniform and books, I took on many after-school and holiday jobs. In winter I picked wild heather from the bush to send to market. I cleaned bulbs, packed vegetables and prepared packing boxes. At the end of the year we were allowed to skip school if we had a job to go to, or to study for the exams. I did the rounds of the farms, picking cherries at Silvan, then raspberries, strawberries and other cane fruit from the

Camms factory farms. I would set out for work at about five o'clock. I would have earned heaps before it got too hot and before most of the other casuals arrived. Mum joined me after she got the younger kids off to school. We were both good pickers and competed against each other in fun.

Using my hard-earned money I finally bought myself a pair of pretty shoes when I was about sixteen. They had long pointy toes as well as a tiny narrow heel and made from beautiful copper metallic leather. They were the perfect accessory to my orange coat and brown hat for Church wear. I can't believe I made myself walk in them, for the journey on foot was all bush track and gravel footpath. I had to watch where I placed every single step to avoid large stones that would have sent me teetering over. By the time I got there my legs ached and I was sure people looked out from every house window I passed. I prayed I didn't look as stupid as I felt. My next effort with shoes was when I was a bridesmaid to Judy. Mum and I managed to find a court shoe that had a sling back, but the heel was quite wide. I managed that fashion much better. Those pink shoes served me well for the next few years.

During high school, friendships changed each year as I was promoted to higher achieving and subject specific groups. It was a time of change at home too, when Grandpa died. Bedroom accommodation was becoming tight as my brother grew up and needed his own room. I moved into Grandpa's bungalow up the back. Wouldn't you know it! The toilet was now in the house.

While at High School I became a Patrol Leader of Blue Wrens in Monbulk Girl Guide Company. The Scout hall was on Silvan Road, so it was a long walk home in the dark, but my younger sister or a neighbour kept me company. I continued as a Captain in Basketball in B Grade, playing every week. We won district Best and Fairest a number of times. I also took on the role of President of our local youth group, helping to organize coffee shop, youth teas and the annual picnic to Mordialloc Beach. The older ones of us organised beach games and races, and the adults who came along provided the picnic food, usually sandwiches and cakes. In year 12 I earned enough pocket money to go on a school trip to Alice Springs and proudly conquered Ayres Rock.

As school days drew to a close, I looked forward to some independence on becoming a 'grown-up'. Somehow I emerged from Matriculation (year twelve) with a Studentship to Burwood Teachers' College. Teachers' College provided me with three wonderful years. Everything we learned made sense and the other students seemed to be my sort of people – whatever that was. We were addressed

by staff as ladies and gentlemen. Sporting options were such fun – archery, folk dance, trampolining and I took Health and Physical Education as a major, along with Art and Literature.

My polio past hovered in the background and I still made some day visits to Lady Dugan. I was at last under the care of a doctor who treated me as a real person, not just a study object to be discussed. Dr Hopkins had kind eyes and seemed more like an uncle. I think a few of us fell in love with him. At the end of my first year in College, he suggested I undergo a tendon transfer. I was old enough to make my own decision and well enough insured to pay. Mr Berryman was the surgeon and when the exams were over, I presented at Epworth Hospital. I awoke to find my leg completely encased in plaster inside a frame under the sheet. Not so bad, I thought, until a few days later I had to stand. I was sick and faint with pain and despaired of ever being able to stand again. Mum called to pick me up – she actually had a driving licence and a Belmont in those days. I had to crouch over on the back seat to get home without being sick. Once home I soon regained my skills with crutches and by the time the holidays were over, I was able to travel, with crutches all the way to College on public transport.

I had to return to Epworth to have the plaster and stitches removed so that physiotherapy could begin. I wasn't looking forward to that because my leg was getting extremely sore again. When they removed the plaster, they found the whole area was infected because the stitches were a bad batch. After removing them, to my grimaces, redressing and replastering I was given a cast with a stopper underneath so I would be able to walk on it and give my arms a rest. By the time it had all finally healed it was past optimal physiotherapy time and the whole exercise turned out to be a painful mistake. For the first time I realised that doctors were not always in control.

However, back to College, good friends and social success. Boyfriends arrived and there were balls, theatre nights and eating out. In my third year I moved into the residence at the College grounds and that allowed me to join two suburban Scottish Country Dancing Clubs. With practice every Tuesday and Thursday nights and a dance almost every Saturday, I was very fit. I would dance every reel and jig and became part of the demonstration team. The swirling kilts and lively music just put me on a high for the entire night.

After completing Primary Teacher Training, I did an extra year of Infant Training and looked forward to the practicum placements in schools. It all felt so right.



Graduation day at teachers college



Wedding day bliss

During my third year in College, I met Graeme, and knew that I had found my husband as well as a wonderful career.

My first teaching appointment was at Kallista Primary School. We managed to find a flat in Kallista for \$11 a week. Graeme had just finished his final year of apprenticeship. We were almost broke but blissfully happy, somehow finding enough second-hand or free items to furnish our little hide-away.

When baby Mark arrived our lives were complete. By the time he was seven months old, money and my studentship dictated my return to work. My appointment was to Upwey Primary School. I now needed to get my driving licence. Graeme was given a work van so I had the car to go to work, first dropping off Mark for the day at care. It was a terrible parting for me each morning to leave him crying with some-one else. Nothing could have ever prepared me for how much love I would feel for my baby. How ever did my

mother get through my hospitalisation for months at a time? After trying out a few carers, I came across a lady with whom Mark was immediately comfortable. I think I felt almost as bad to see he could be so happy with a stranger. I suppose I feared he might love her just as much as me, but of course I was wrong.

So we both enjoyed our days enormously, and really valued our happy times together at night, weekends and school holidays. Soon Graeme and I had saved enough to buy a block of land in Sherbrooke, where we built our first house. The land cost us \$1,500. The home we built in Sherbrooke was on a typically hilly scrubby site. We did all the decorating and landscaping ourselves.

During school holidays, my sister Glenys and I, with our three toddlers, would go up to Olinda. The Forestry Commission was clearing land to plant the arboretum. We went there to collect rocks that had been churned up with the machines, and left at the rough roadside. My little Datsun 1200 boot would be filled with rocks, and back seat filled with kids as we scraped home down the hill to Colston Avenue. After many trips, we had collected enough rocks to terrace gardens across the hill below the house. There were plenty of nights then, when I actually wished I still had my splint to sleep in. Still, a little exercise never hurt anyone, and the garden looked beautiful.

Time for another visit to Lady Dugan. With toddler in tow, I felt so proud to have proven those childhood doctors wrong. I did become a teacher, and a mother. 'Well done Joan, you have your career and your family. You won't need to see us again'. I was free at last!

My years of primary teaching proved to be everything I'd hoped for and more. It was such an honour and privilege to be a part of so many children's lives and help shape their way into the future. It was also rather awesome to know that parents trusted me so completely.

When he turned eight, Mark joined Cubs, and Graeme and I became leaders. We stayed with 1st. Kallista until Mark completed Venturers. My ten years in Scouting provided me with a whole new sense of fellowship and spirituality, particularly in the outdoors. I loved our hikes, camps, and bush adventures and really enjoyed the team approach to all we did. I learned a lot about leadership skills, as Akela and then as Group Leader. We were involved most nights of the week and many weekends with camps, competitions, and Leaders' meetings. The three of us made life-long friends in Scouting.

Our many experiences in the CFA., since joining in 1970, and especially in the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, also helped me appreciate the resilience of the human spirit, when people work together in teams.

In the early 1980s we built our second house, this time, in The Patch. Again we did all our landscaping. I often got the job of mixing cement while Graeme installed the sleepers to terrace our steep block.

At that time, I was involved in an Integration Program, a pilot project which included a little boy with severe disabilities, who was enrolled in my grade Prep / one. While my instincts and teaching experience allowed me to give him a reasonably good start to school, I was unable to find help within the existing school support services. Children at his level were outside the parameters of the school experience. One day, we were visited by a health team who came to see the program. They had previously worked with these children. Imagine my surprise to discover that one of the visitors was Miss Fussell, and she had not changed one little bit. She remembered me by my maiden name.

I applied for study leave to complete the Graduate Diploma in Special Education, to find the answers I needed. I was granted two years part-time leave. I specialised in the stream of Intellectual Disability, as that was where I identified my knowledge gap. My three days of teaching were spent at a nearby Special Developmental School which was just transferring from the Health Department to the Education Department. It seemed a great opportunity to get the practice to complement my study.

I was in shock for the first few weeks of arriving in my new school. The transition for me and for the school was a challenge. In fact, it posed an exceptionally steep learning curve. Many of the students, particularly the older ones, had not previously been considered educable. They all had intellectual disabilities deemed to be severe to profound. Many also had severe physical, communication and behavioural disorders. Many had developed typical institutional behaviours. This was certainly going to require a lot of research, determination and creativity. I at least had those tools in plentiful supply. In just a few days my students and I had sussed each other out. I knew who would bite me if I dropped my vigilance, who would run out of the room and how to predict outbursts of violence. I began to feel more capable of assisting eating, administering medications, and managing incontinence. Having mastered the basics of keeping students comfortable, I could give my thoughts to the task of

teaching. I was realising how cruel and disabling some conditions were. I was very lucky to have had only polio.

I became co-ordinator of our off-campus section, at the nursing home. We had the most fragile students from five years old to early twenties. These young people had never been offered full-time schooling – it was thought rather pointless. Our school building was an old house with little room to manoeuvre 24 wheelchairs or trolleys.

While age-appropriateness was very important, by far our strongest focus was to address the rights, dignity and privacy of our students. Practices such as unscreened enemas, the public comments and discussions about private matters, mixed ages and genders in wards, were just a few of the aspects I found most uncomfortable. Institutions everywhere seemed to be staffed by well-meaning people, simply implementing the generally accepted practices of the day. Thank goodness systems have moved on.

During my time at the nursing home campus, we found it hard to accept the deaths of quite a few students. Many of our children were so physically damaged that eating and often breathing were difficult. I'm sure that for some, it must have been a relief when suffering ended. Our main concern focused on those who were left in the same ward, those who never had the opportunity to grieve or to be counselled. I wrote a story, presented in tactile form, to facilitate discussion about death. It was a helpful tool for talking about each loss. Students and teachers would also make up a floral wreath and place it in the garden. Sensory activities were a meaningful way to teach many of the children.

As we worked with the young people from the nursing home, we discovered some remarkable skills. By trial and error, we managed to find tools that allowed most students to communicate and participate. Electronic and remote switch access was trialled. I wrote submissions that resulted in the purchase of much needed equipment.

One morning each week, I would arrive early for a bus-driving lesson so that we could use our school-owned buses for excursions and community programs. We had two hoist buses which required drivers with an endorsed licence. Somehow I got through and regularly drove for the nursing home group.

I was eventually promoted to the position of Principal. Some changes can only be made from there. One of my ongoing campaigns was to change the way therapy

staff worked. I constantly reminded them we were a school, not a hospital. Their role was to assist the students' participation in the school program. Therapy or treatment was not the end goal. Above all, they had to afford the students the dignity of a non-disabled age peer. I could not accept that it was necessary, for example, to have a 14-year old stripped to undies for treatment on a classroom floor. I remembered my own undignified childhood experiences.

As the school gained talented and professional staff, curriculum development continued. It became recognized as a leading school in special education. The leading teachers and I were constantly invited to provide professional development sessions to other special schools, universities, and mainstream schools. Our curriculum and related documents were sought across Australia and overseas.

A proud achievement was winning the state-wide School Citizenship Award for our initiatives in setting up a Reverse Integration Program with the nearby Secondary College. While some people had misgivings about the value of this for our students, I could see the evolving benefits for the non-disabled young people. After all, they would be the future doctors, teachers, town planners and welfare workers who needed to know the issues the community creates for those living with disabilities.

One of the concerns I have always held about the world of disability, was the intrusion into families lives, be it by medical or educational practitioners. For the child of course, there was no privacy; every move, every behaviour, was noted and analysed. The focus was always on the dysfunctional bits – what could be changed or fixed. I suppose my own experience coloured my views. I always took care to explain to parents that disability labels and worst-case scenarios equalled better funding. This was the opposite to my personal philosophy of focusing on the positive and finding ways around the impairment so it doesn't become a disability. The system constantly confronted families with disability and its consequences, as if normal rites of passage were not distressing enough.

In becoming Principal I inherited a large project. For some years we had been working towards building a hydrotherapy pool. Fundraising had resulted in \$60,000 in the bank. Not bad for a smallish school, but nowhere near a pool. I formed a 'Pool Group' of people selected for their skills to come up with a plan and costings. We visited many facilities before arriving at our proposal. After much submission writing and local cost savings, we completed the project in five years, debt free, at a cost of nearly \$400,000.

While teaching days were full to overflowing with so much to learn and so much to be done, there was another equally fulfilling aspect to my life. I was still a wife and a mother. Over the years, we enjoyed some wonderful trips, including caravanning adventures around Australia, exploring China, New Zealand, Thailand, and South Africa's game parks. We still talk about our self drive days at Kruger National Park.

Life at home embraced many special celebrations. Our home was the venue for whole family celebrations – the fortieths, fiftieths, Mum and Dad's seventieths, their golden anniversary, Mark's twenty-first, Christmas dinners etc. After Mark's marriage in 1993, our household returned to just two of us once more. Our first grandchild was born in the exciting year of 1995. What a wonderful feeling to be grandparents and to find that the new baby is bonded to you in family love. It just seems to be inherently so.

August of 1997 was a terrible month. Graeme was diagnosed with bowel cancer. We had only a few days between shattering diagnosis and surgery. While the surgeon was confident of achieving a cure, it was a long road with lots of steep hills to climb before life got back to anything near normal. At last we got Graeme home and he picked up his life again. Every day until the following February, I had to clean and pack his wound. All of this went on as well as my usual workload at school. My mum's comment was, that it was just as well it happened to us, because I was used to that sort of thing. I'm sure she meant it as a vote of confidence, but it was no consolation. Tube-feeding a student had little bearing on managing life together after cancer. In fact dealing with other people's reactions was something we both found difficult. Some people didn't know what to say, and stayed away. For some years afterwards, people would say to me 'Hello Joan, how's Graeme?' It got to me some days and I was occasionally known to reply 'He's fine, and so am I'. I never realised the weight of responsibility borne by a carer, and the lack of any recognition for that role.

In the February after Graeme's cancer, I had a hysterectomy. I couldn't put it off any longer as the pain would not allow me even to lie down at night. It turned out to be rather more than expected, due to vast areas of scarring, and involved some bowel surgery as well. I can only put it down to my childhood peritonitis. The surgeon expressed amazement that I ever became pregnant, so I guess Mark was a bit of a wonder baby. After a week I was home and had five more weeks to recuperate both from my own surgery and from Graeme's cancer. I had been totally exhausted since the start of August.

As the year 2000 approached, everyone busily prepared for the next century. The world of technology went into a frenzy of concerns about data bases being lost and automatic pay systems and power supplies failing. There were endless media articles featuring events of the closing century and much nostalgia for the past. We spent New Year's Eve at Bermagui, as we had done over the past few years. The change of century came and went with fireworks and champagne. The lights didn't go out, the computers didn't fail and the new century was much like the day before, but with a world-wide hangover.

Early in the year of 2000, I developed very uncharacteristic headaches which were diagnosed as viral meningitis and I had to have a few weeks off work, but it took a couple of months before I could return full time.

I could not believe I was so fatigued. For some reason I just couldn't find my usual amount of energy for the new day. I began feeling a little frail – tripping or slipping over too easily, usually at the most embarrassing times. I was forgetting details, especially people's names, and I felt I had made a few bad decisions. I could not cope with the weather – it was either too hot or too cold.

I hadn't even managed our holiday very well. Sand, steps and steep terrain were becoming impossible to negotiate. I no longer enjoyed my life on our steep property in The Patch. For the last few years I had been on a fitness campaign, taking brisk walks after school with a few staff. We strode around walking tracks or pounded the hilly little footpaths around the township. I even pushed myself to walk around the steep hills of Olinda to try to build up my strength. It seemed the harder I tried, the less able I became. My legs ached unbelievably. What was happening to me, to the superwoman I'd come to know and demand of myself?

I decided to take some long service leave to rest. I'm not sure why or how it happened, but I chanced to see a State-wide PolioNetwork Co-ordinator listed in our Shire Directory. I didn't think anyone was left in the system that had anything to do with polio anymore but it seemed worth a call in case it would be relevant to me. I needed a referral to see one of only two available specialist doctors, so I fronted my G.P. His response was 'When do you think you had polio?' I gave him my story. I had never thought it relevant before – it was very ancient history. The day arrived to visit the specialist. I was very nervous and took a friend with me. Was I being a time waster, or was I going to hear bad news? I was relieved for a start to be greeted as a friend. My next surprise was that he knew exactly what I was experiencing, and how I felt about it.

On hearing his diagnosis of late effects of polio, or post-polio syndrome, I think I felt great relief that I wasn't just losing the plot or imagining my symptoms. It does help to have a label, whatever it might be. He then began to offer suggestions about what I could do. First priority was to rest, and consider my lifestyle, work future and also an ankle / foot orthotic. The latter was the easiest to tackle, being a straightforward practical action. I followed that up very quickly. Mum's true reaction was probably well masked, but she just joked that I was used to that, and it shouldn't be a problem. Same old Mum! It would have been nice to have an arm around me.

The more difficult decisions involved lots of thinking and weighing up of alternatives. It was so hard to decide what actions I needed to take, never mind what actions I could accept. I began fact-finding about my financial options, living and working arrangements – all the biggest and most important elements in everyone's lives.

My first enquiry was to the superannuation board. I didn't actually think I had a disability, let alone being able to convince anyone else. Perhaps I looked a little more desperate than I imagined, because the advisor didn't hesitate about what actions I should take. First thing was to convert my current leave to sick leave. I had accumulated over one and a half years so that wasn't a problem, and bought me some time to see if I could build up my strength.

The real issue for me, though, was leaving the school in limbo. Everyone else had to move into acting positions, and I felt I was messing them around. My staff kept trying to reassure me but I still felt really bad.

I found some consolation in the fact that my senior staff had all worked very closely with me in a team approach and we had a shared vision for the future of the school. I knew that what I had started would continue into the future.

The other big consideration was finding a more suitable place to live. We had built a split level house to suit the steep block, so even indoors I had to clamber up steps many times each day. Graeme didn't hesitate about looking at the housing market. I think he was more ready than I was to make a move. Neither of us, though, was ready to leave the Dandenongs, family, friends and associations. Some agents had a very unusual definition of flat property and we wasted a lot of time looking at places totally unsuitable. Finally we left our criteria with a number of agents to see what would turn up.

One day we had a call from an agent who had just listed 'Jindalee' in Kallista and thought we should take a look. The block was almost level, with a brick veneer house with three bedrooms and a study, and two living areas. That's where any similarity to our requirements ended with a full stop. Spoutings hung off; there was no garden; the front flooded with blocked drains; no central heating, no carport and any attempts to paint inside were done so poorly they were just awful. But there was potential, that's for sure, and it was in Kallista.

I wasn't totally convinced and the work ahead was mind boggling, but the price would allow us to sell and buy, and have enough left to fix up Jindalee debt free. So we did it! We put our house on the market and sold it quickly. We had to live in a rented caravan at Mum's place until the moving day in April, as we couldn't negotiate settlement dates to suit.

Renovations began from day one with drastic tidying at the front of the house. First indoor job was a new kitchen as the existing one was unusable. I had booked the kitchen company for the day after we moved. I cooked in the laundry with a toaster, frypan and microwave for three weeks, but I just had to get out of that caravan. They are fun for holidays, but not for living in fulltime.

While our kitchen was being built, Mark and Graeme moved walls. Windows were added, dark cork ceiling covered with plaster, floors and cupboards were scrubbed, and carpet shampooed. A carport was purchased, drains cleared, spouting replaced, rubbish cleared away until we could see more clearly what we should do next. Over the years since our move, we have painted, re-covered floors, hung curtains, re-built the ensuite, installed ducted heating and added a garden / bar-b-q room.

At the same time we embarked on our garden layout. It is still being refined, but I just love it. Graeme retired later in the year of our move, so we have enjoyed working together to put our plans into action. The hard work is all done now and we enjoy many hours in our bit of paradise. We sit in the garden room, listening to the birds and make more plans for little improvements. We do take time to smell the roses, and other flowers. We planned all our renovations for easy maintenance and we can manage well with short bursts of energy, and careful choice of tools, fittings and equipment.

In April of 2002, I finally had my retirement function. I was relieved that at last the school could move on with new appointments. Staff organised a Sunday afternoon tea at Kenloch Restaurant. I was glad Mum and Dad could join with friends and colleagues. When a friend remarked to Mum that she must be proud of me and my achievements, Mum shrugged and said she was proud of all her children. No chance of swelled head with Mum and Dad around. I gave my heartfelt thanks to staff and the school community for being so accommodating to me over the last eventful couple of years.

Jessica lends a shoulder to lean on at Joan's retirement



It would have been unbearable without their compassion. I already missed the hugs of support from close friends on staff that had kept me going through difficult days. I felt my life had come full circle, beginning and ending with disability, but also a sense of contentment. Nothing we do is without its lessons, and if we can turn them into something positive for others, then all the better were the lessons. So ended my school days.

Lots of time now for looking after myself, pursuing new and easier hobbies and lunching with friends. With afternoon rests and time to read my favourite author, life was becoming pretty good and I learned not to feel too guilty that others still went to work. I did miss the social life of work, but not the politics or the hectic pace. When I turned 55, I felt at last I could really enjoy my retirement. I had reached the age when I had planned to leave work and so felt no more guilt in that direction.

One of the ways to better manage life with a disability is to join a support group. I discovered there wasn't any such thing in our locality. With help from PolioNetwork, we held an information session. I encouraged all my family to attend and hear what was happening to me and why. It was the first real opportunity for family members and me to say how we felt about the past. It was also helpful for my family to hear other people's experiences. I hate to talk about my health problems because I feel like I'm just complaining.

As a follow-up to the information day, I contacted interested people and set up the Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group. We have continued to meet monthly and now produce newsletters and provide all manner of support to each other, and not just to do with polio. We have made new friends and enjoy lots of social activities as well as gaining valuable strategies. In managing the group and producing newsletters, I feel I am not wasting skills developed over my working life. I have decided the more people who know about post-polio, the better life will be for me. To that end I have written my polio story for the local papers and been a guest speaker to a number of groups.

In 2002, Mum passed away. That was a terrible time for all of us and meant me becoming a carer for Dad until he also left us in 2007. They were very hard years. But fortunately, life moves on. We now have three special little girls to enjoy in the way only grandparents can.

So my story winds up for now, with me lying on my back under a blue sky, with tree canopies barely swaying. New life bursts through the soil with a showy display of colour. I relax on my sun lounge in our garden room for my afternoon rest, basking in the glorious warming sun. Turtle doves and the neighbour's chooks make contented sounds. Chattering rosellas visit the seed tray. The sweet perfume of honeysuckle wafts through and a soft cat, Rosie, curls into my lap. Tinkering sounds from the shed give away Graeme's latest project. For now, life is just perfect at home, in 'Jindalee', in Kallista.



Betty Fussell

*Physiotherapist known to many polio patients.
She worked at Lady Dugan Red Cross home for
many years.*

Betty passed away in August 2008.

Joan Mc's Story

Contracted polio in 1936



I was born on 27 February, in the winter of 1930, in Staplehurst, in the county of Kent, England. Kent is known as the Garden of England, and is also the home of the hop-fields and oast-houses. At the time of my birth, my mother, brother and I lodged in just two rooms. Due to the Depression, my father was working as a cowman in Yorkshire. After a while, he managed to get employment as a dairy-man / cow-man at a small village near Ascot, in Berkshire.

‘Cheapside’, as the village was called was just outside the Ascot Gate of Windsor Great Park. At first my father lodged with people in the farm cottages but then heard of a semi-detached house that was available for rent. When I was six months old, we were able to join him there. It was certainly far from being a grand house – with three bedrooms, and two rooms downstairs, a larder and a cupboard under the stairs, an outdoor scullery and of course an outside lavatory. The outdoor scullery housed the brick, wood-fired copper which heated our water. We had a tin bath and the luxury of a gas cooker. This arrangement though was an extreme inconvenience in winter, with constant rain, ice and snow. But it was the general standard of housing at that time and at least we were together as a family.

We soon settled into village life. There was a pub, a school for infants, a shop with a post office and a chapel, in fact just a typical small village. The local bus went to Windsor and then back to Bagshot four times a day. Each week my mother would cycle to Windsor, five miles away, to buy our weekly grocery

items. My older brother Joe was at school when my brother John was born. I would go up to the school longing to be allowed to join the other children. The teacher would take pity on me and often let me join in.

By this time, Dad had progressed from delivering milk by pony and trap, to driving a nice new van. He was a smart, well - turned out sort of man, and was very proud of his van. He worked seven days a week and his only time off was his ten days of annual holiday, which was always spent in Kent, visiting my maternal grandmother. My Dad's mother had died when he was just ten. We stayed at great aunt Poll's house and spent all day in the hop-fields, picking hops.

In 1936, there was a very bad epidemic of Polio. Most people didn't realise that it was silly to take your children amongst crowds during an epidemic of anything, so unfortunately we did what we had always done.

We went hop-picking in crowds and crowds of people, mainly Londoners. With so many people congregated together, many fell victim to the virus, possibly partly due to the poor sanitation. By 14 September I was a very sick little girl with severe flu-like symptoms, and was diagnosed with Poliomyelitis, or Infantile Paralysis as it was known then. The doctor prescribed sandbags to keep my legs rigid and said to keep my brothers away from me.

I lay many lonely weeks in my tiny bedroom, in a state of semi-consciousness, until one day the doctor said, 'We'll send her to a nursing home.' At first, I was admitted to the Royal Victoria Nursing Home. This now strikes me as being a bit risky and it's lucky that I didn't infect other patients. I stayed there until February in 1937 then I was sent home to bed once again. My childhood was a lonely one as my school friends seemed to be afraid of me. After all, I'd been ill and now I couldn't walk and couldn't go to school. I then saw an orthopaedic specialist at a clinic at the King Edward VII Hospital, where it was arranged that I would be sent to the Wingfield Morris Orthopaedic Hospital at Oxford.

All of this was very frightening for a timid six or seven year old child. I was allowed home until all of this could be arranged and I spent six months sitting in a large pram supplied by the Red Cross. If the weather was bad, I stayed in my bed which had been brought downstairs into the sitting room. When it was fine I was able to be in the front garden and see people, and even be pushed to the next village to go shopping.

The village people were kind and would stop and say a few words. One bright spot during that time was when my brother's friend, Jack, would call for Joe. Joe wouldn't be ready on time, so Jack would come and play draughts or ludo, snakes and ladders, or something like that with me.

I was admitted to the Wingfield Morris in August. I had to stay there for twelve months, and only saw my mother once a month, and my Dad not at all. It was another very strange, sad and lonely time for me. The Wingfield Morris was a very large hospital, with only one Polio ward. The rest was for Tuberculosis, bones and joints. I remember there was a boys' ward, a girls' ward, men's ward, women's ward, X-ray department, operating theatre and a gymnasium. The building was all in a single story, so it stretched a long way. (I've probably left some out, as we weren't able to wander around and see it all.) The hospital routine kept us busy. As well as all the sessions with physios, we had swimming and water exercises. The daily exercises in the pool were not a happy experience. I had always been taught to be afraid of water because of the very large ponds in my Gran's and Aunt Poll's garden. The school education program was the basic three R's. The craft lessons were quite intensive. Each year a sale of craft work took place, so the patients had to make the items to sell.

We tackled all sorts of things really. We learned leatherwork, making lampshades, cane work, embroidery, needlework, and even split-can work. I remember we girls made a full set of tablemats in cross - stitch. Some of the boys made footstools. We must have made a very good contribution to the hospital funds. The work also taught me that if someone else can make something, so probably, can I. Even today, with my husband's help, together 'We can'.

I was beginning to use my leg when the war broke out in September 1939. When the wounded troops started to come home from the various war zones, there was no longer room in hospitals for long term patients, so we were allowed home. I was put in a calliper and learned to live my life as it was going to be from then on and in time, I was able to do most things that others could do. I returned to school and, thanks to our village school teacher who had kept me supplied with lessons while I was at home, I was really quite up to standard.

When World War II began, I remember Mr. Chamberlain saying those horrible words 'We are at war with Germany'. I was terrified! I can remember looking up into the sky expecting paratroopers to come dropping down, machine guns at the ready. I wasn't at all reassured when Dad got out his shot guns and cleaned them. He also got out his sword walking stick and cleaned and sharpened that. To finish

this poor little scaredy-cat right off, he dug an air-raid shelter in the garden. So did most of the men in the village.

An anti-aircraft gun post was positioned just inside the park gates and so we were ready for Hitler to do his worst. We were only 25 miles from London, so when he did do his worst we could see it all. Windsor is a garrison town, and the Germans had a few goes at that too. In fact, there was a direct hit on one of the castle walls. Fortunately, it had no real effect, just chipped the rock walls.

In December of 1941, when America joined the war, they built a large camp for the Eighth Army Air Corp along the other side of our village. They requisitioned a mansion at the lower end for the officers and our life changed dramatically. Our quiet little village became anything but quiet.

In 1941, my baby sister had been born. She was a joy to me, a beautiful baby in troubled times and she grew into a delightful child. In 1945 life began to return to normal. I had left school and managed to get an apprenticeship in hairdressing which I loved, but it was very hard work. My long-time friend Jack had also gained an apprenticeship as a carpenter and joiner, at which he proved to be quite talented. Jack and I stayed good friends, both attending the village youth club each week, sharing at least one game of something together. When he turned 18, he had to go into National Service. He chose the R.A.F. and was assigned to go out on the Irish Sea, dumping various armaments, explosives and ammunition. He was stationed on the west coast of Scotland. While there he started writing to me, just friendly letters about my family, the village, the things my brothers did, and I replied in a similar vein, believing him to be lonely.

Meantime I had finished my apprenticeship, and gained my credentials in London. I stayed in the same salon, and worked my way up until I became manageress. I frequently found that I had to work 60 hours a week, which was not unusual in those days. After two years Jack finished his service and came home. We each went our separate ways, both too old for Youth Club. Sometimes I would see him in our village pub, and we exchanged a few friendly words.

My older brother, Joe, married and after a long wait, was allocated a prefabricated home. Jack still called in to see him occasionally. One evening Joe's wife said, 'We're going down to see Joe's mum. Do you want to come with us Jack?' That was how our friendship was renewed.

We had been going out together for sometime and had talked of the possibility of marriage. One evening we were in the snugery of our Pub when the Postmaster walked in and said 'Here, when are you two getting married?' Jack replied 'Third of April!' Oh dear, drinks all round, wasn't it! I told Jack, 'I'll have to get home and tell Mum – this old sweetie will have it all around the village by morning, and you'd better tell your Mum'.

Well you'd never seen two more unhappy women in your life! I could understand Jack's mum a bit. She told me, 'I don't want to see Jack having to push you around the streets in a wheelchair, like Bill Parsons does his wife'. I must confess to being a bit naughty and said 'He won't have to'. She said 'Why not?' to which I replied, 'I'll buy him a car'. Huh, on the money that I had, we'd have had to push the car. As for my mother, well, I really believe that I was too useful at home for her to want me to leave. There wasn't much that I didn't do, even with my calliper. I managed housework, ironing, dressmaking for her and my sister, and knitting for the whole family. Another bonus was that my clothes fitted her, albeit a little more snugly than they fitted me. You name it; I did it, even to sawing logs for the fire. I was too useful for my own good.



Our wedding day

In spite of all the disapproval, we married on 3 April 1954 in our local Church, with a honeymoon in Devonshire. We moved into a very, very tiny rented cottage and were happy together. We thoroughly enjoyed walking and spent a lot of our leisure time in the Royal Parks, including Windsor Great Park, around Virginia Waters, Smith's Lawn where the royals played polo, and in Sunninghill Park which was to have been Princess Elizabeth's home until the house burned down. It was eventually re-built for the Duke of York.

In April 1956 we brought our lovely baby daughter, Diana home. She was the first of three children. Diana's birth coincided with the discovery of the polio vaccine. She was a very good baby, and we enjoyed walking her in the pram, five miles was quite usual.

After we'd been home a few weeks I had a visit from one of my old customers who said, 'If I come to your house will you do my hair?' I explained that I didn't have the facilities, but agreed to set it for her. She said that was quite acceptable to her. She did not feel happy with the girls who replaced me in the shop so I agreed. She was the first but others soon followed and I had a nice little business. It also helped to stop me feeling lonely.

Jack worked for long periods on the other side of Windsor Park, cycling seven miles each way daily. He would often come home on a Saturday lunchtime and say, 'I met the Queen and her house party out riding as I came home'. She would always reply to 'Good Morning Ma'am' and I did wonder if she thought he was one of the employees. His Uncle Harry worked for the Royal Estate and one day was sent out to rescue the Queen Mother. She had gone walking in her customary high heels and had got stuck in the muddy drive. She managed to climb up onto the bar of the fence, and Uncle Harry was sent out with the tractor. Plucky soul, she climbed onto the tractor and came home in style, although it was a slightly different style to the vehicle she usually travelled in.

My Dad had always impressed upon us the need to look after our money and pay our debts. I lived according to his doctrine; so, one evening when Jack came home I was able to say to him, 'Guess what, we've got a thousand pounds'. We felt so rich. Jack had helped so many of his mates, when they returned from the war, to build their own homes, using their gratuities that had built up during war service. But National Servicemen didn't get any. Jack had always said that he'd love to build us a house. We started looking for a piece of land, which was like looking for gold dust. Then a friend told us, 'Mr and Mrs Cummins are going to sell part of their garden'. Wow, couldn't be better - top end of Cheapside, so not too far for us to go to work on it. The cost was only seven hundred and fifty pounds.

We bought the land, paying in cash, and paid the solicitor. He wasn't cheap, but we had saved hard. When it was time to apply for a mortgage we were virtually laughed at. More saving and lots more working followed. When Jack began building, we were fortunate to be trusted with credit and to have good helpful friends. Jack worked hard on the house in his so-called spare time, after a day's

hard work and all during weekends. I would go up to the site with a flask of hot food and light a fire for him. I was there, helping him up on the scaffolding or working on timbers on the ground, sanding, painting or holding 'the other end'. If he was there, so was I, a fact that I was very proud of. It took us three years to complete the house, but it belonged to us alone, not the bank, not a mortgage company – us. It was a lovely little house, much admired by all. The things I learnt from working on the building set me up for the future. If I was confronted by anything difficult, for instance, walking a hundred steps down to a beach, or years later when the children wanted to go up the pole and chain ladder at Point Leo, it was a challenge, but I knew I would somehow do it.

Shortly after moving into our little house, Sharon arrived. That time was a worry to us because of the Thalidomide babies being born. But we were lucky and baby Stuart followed in 1965.

By this time, Diana was learning to ride. Her instructor was the groom of the Royals' polo ponies, so she spent many a Saturday at Smith's Lawn watching the polo. The language that she picked up from the guards and others was shocking. When I commented to her, she just said, 'Oh well, Princess Anne says it', which to me implied; it's good enough for the Queen's daughter, so it's good enough for yours!

By now, my brother and his family had settled in Australia and were writing enthusiastically about how good life was there. In 1968 we decided to emigrate to Australia in order to give our rather clever daughter a chance to go to a good university. Places in England were very few and far between. We sold our little 'Red Maples' house, so that it wouldn't be drawing us back home.

Our shipboard travel conditions were extremely sub-standard, with pipes leaking through the ceilings, and none of the crew spoke English. To top it all off, when we arrived in Melbourne, we found that the shipping company had lost all of our belongings, including Jack's trade tools. We thought it couldn't get any worse until we discovered the bank had lost our money as well! What a mess! Fourteen years of hard work all gone.

Here we were with three children, aged 12, 6 and 3 and nothing else. I couldn't even get a hairdressing job because my credentials were not recognised. I got a job doing housework just to feed us.

Finally, after six months, we heard that our belongings had been taken to a Fremantle bond warehouse. Coincidentally, soon after, the bank contacted me, informing us that our money had been found – six months to the day. There was no explanation, no apology, and no interest on the six months they'd held it. We were just so glad to get it back. I'm probably being overly suspicious, but we have heard of several others who had similar experiences.

Now we could buy a house in Mulgrave. We were almost back to normal. Unfortunately the school was a mile away, and across the very busy Wellington Road, so I had to walk the younger children the mile each way, morning and afternoon.

Now that Jack had his tools back, he got a job in the city working on large projects. The accident rate was shocking and he had to start at 3a.m. I begged him to find a different job. One day he had a close shave with an apprentice in a trench which collapsed. Jack pulled the boy out just in time. The foreman's comment was 'You'll have to get used to doing things the cave-men's way here'. A few days later Jack was offered a job on the Westgate Bridge but before he could give an answer, the partly constructed bridge collapsed.

We had to find a safer way to provide for our family. We decided on a retail shop, 6a.m. until 9p.m. seven days a week. We didn't make a great deal of money, but it fed us and we were there when the children came home from school each day. After three years, I was exhausted. The minute my bottom touched a chair, my eyelids would droop, but I couldn't do a thing about it. We decided to sell up and took a holiday.

We had no intention of going into another shop, but when our holiday was over, a good opportunity arose. It was a post office, milk-bar and self-service grocery shop. The theory was that I would run the post office, Jack, the milk-bar and Diana, the grocery shop. Yes, I did run the post office and also worked everywhere else that was needed. We set a limit of three years, and then Jack returned to woodworking.

When this happened I was just 'Mum' running the home and helping with homework. Jack built us another larger home but a few years later as the children left, he again built us a smaller one.

The rest of my story seems rather simple after our hard early years, although we have had our share of health issues as we aged. Jack has managed to overcome a

perforated duodenal ulcer and prostate cancer. I had the usual middle-aged women's trouble resulting in a hysterectomy, followed by a small breast cancer which was removed.



The family gather around Joan

Our two daughters and four grandchildren all have degrees or double degrees. Our sons-in-law work hard in their own successful businesses, and our son is a top awarded tradesman. We are proud of them all.

I admit to struggling nowadays, with symptoms including extreme tiredness and extra aches and pains, which I am told could be post-polio syndrome. But I am 78 years old. I have been dragging a calliper and a high

boot around for most of those years, many of which would have challenged a person with full physical abilities. Could it possibly be just old age? Whatever it is, I know I couldn't manage without Jack's help, so kindly and willingly given over a lifetime.

Sometimes we look back to our time in England and remember the bright spots. There was the pageantry of the Royal Procession. There was the natural beauty and the bluebell glades. The golden carp swam in the early morning sun, and we looked down from the bridge onto masses of waterlilies. We remember our visits to Windsor to see the soldiers in full dress.

We both thank Australia for the opportunities it has given to our family. My life has been a long one, full of challenges, adventures and wonderful memories. It has most of all been a happy one, thanks to that lad that used to come and sit on my bed when we were children – my friend, my husband, my Jack. Thankyou Jack.



Jo-An's Story

Contracted polio in 1934



That particular night I had gone to bed feeling strange. Earlier, I had thought there was a dead duck in the corner of the living room and studiously avoided looking there. Having got to bed with the curtains drawn back and the window wide open I looked out at the indigo sky with its bright twinkling stars. I wondered at what lay beyond our world. It seemed that one of the stars was much brighter than the rest. It appeared to be moving towards me; it was almost upon me when I felt an icy finger on the back of my neck. I promptly fell asleep.

Next morning my mother called me three times and burst into my room saying, 'You are the most inconsiderate child, for Heaven's sake get up, I have an important engagement this morning, and I will be late.' Before she finished speaking she realised there was something wrong. She fetched the doctor, who immediately diagnosed poliomyelitis! I could not speak, but my first thought was, 'I won't have to go to school and face the invincible Miss Jones.' My polio experience was, in my estimation, the most important and motivating experience of my life. Everything else pales into insignificance. It was to become the foundation stone of my life.

At the nearby hospital, in Guildford, England, the nurses and doctors were caring. They looked after me with well-meaning efficiency. However, they had one small, but important, trait and that was to treat me as though I was not only physically incapacitated, but also mentally diminished and deaf. On one memorable occasion, they were discussing my case management over my

seemingly deaf body, the outcome of which was, 'Well, we have no more iron lungs available, so she may as well go home to die.' This important decision was relayed to my parents, with the comment that I would not live to see Christmas. Arrangements were made to send me home.

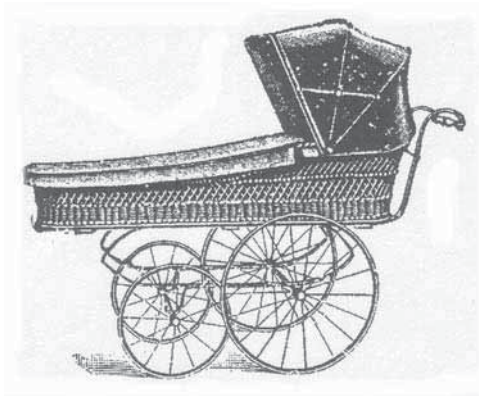
In the hospital there was no preferential food and drink, and allergies were unheard of. Even today, I have an aversion to cocoa, which, delivered with a skin of milk on top, is revolting. I am allergic to milk. One day in desperation I knocked the drink over with my left arm, where there was some movement - much to the displeasure of my carers! My other aversion was to brandy; I cannot drink brandy. I was always given a generous helping when they thought I was going under for good.

When I arrived home, my mother installed me downstairs in the front parlour, a room usually reserved for VIP visitors or meetings of the local socialist cabal. The idea was that I would not be too much trouble for my ailing mother, who by this time was enjoying some notoriety as the mother of '...that poor girl.' Christmas festivities were planned for the end of October, as of course, I would not be there in December. This was not to be, because I raised my voice and quite definitely stated, 'Christmas will be held on December twenty-fifth or not at all.' Down came the paper chains and tree and peace reigned at last. My medical practitioners in the hospital had severely underestimated my will power and that of my local female doctor, Dr Grantham, my aunt Doris and a Mr Phillips; together we worked on beating the odds.

The next three years were spent in a state of suspended animation. I could not walk; I did not want to talk. However, thanks to our cockney neighbour Mr Wright, who made me a reading stand, I did read. I read everything. Historical, geographical, literary tomes, that would defy the most receptive and intelligent of professors, and pornography, were smuggled in by friends. It is to this reading that I owe my broad and flexible view of life. In this age of computer literacy, there is still nothing like reading a good book.

I often go to bed with friends such as Michael Caine, Ray Barratt and others. Books are the stuff of dreams. Being computer literate, I can get the best of both worlds and I love it. The delightful Mr Wright gave me a set of four leather bound Cassel's Magazines dated from the late 1800s; they were priceless and included many first editions such as Jules Verne. My father, in my absence overseas, gave them away, much to my disgust; they were the greatest books I have ever owned.

My mother soon became bored at being the self-sacrificing parent, and Aunt Doris and Uncle Bert in their beautiful MG car collected me. Aunt was of the 'black dress' fame - she had turned up at my mother's wedding in a black dress, much to the disgust of my mother. By this time my aunt had become aware of my mother's shortcomings, although she always defended her. She said that my mother had a rotten childhood, which I found hard to understand, knowing how kind my grandparents were. I had the feeling that mother had put another spin on her childhood to get sympathy. At aunt's spacious home life always seemed to be exciting, with fast sports cars that raced at nearby Brooklands. At this stage aunt had no children of her own and spoilt me rotten.



Bath chair or spinal carriage

In the summer, I lay out in the garden in a bathchair or spinal carriage (as illustrated here). The cost of this magnificent perambulator was approximately £20 to-£30 and was complete with side and foot hinged, strap, C-springs and back elliptic spring. At the front, the upholstered carriage cloth and spring, with stuffed horsehair frame mattress, approximately to six feet in length. Smaller sizes could

be made to order and supplied through the health scheme that was available at that time. I believe contributors paid sixpence per week for hospital and any necessary equipment.

During the week, I played host to another similarly afflicted girl who lived on the nearby Council housing estate. Eileen was a companionable girl from whom I learnt a number of interesting items not least of which was swearing! Eileen's parents, who were not socially acceptable to my family, had passed on some intriguing anecdotes and habits to Eileen. Unlike me, she had no inhibitions; she shared this wealth of knowledge freely with everyone.

My aunt, who happened to be the most broadminded person on this earth, used to laugh heartily at Eileen's peccadillos and would say to me, after Eileen had returned to the bosom of her interesting and adoring family, '...she is a bright little thing, but, don't believe everything you hear...' My mother, on the other hand, after a Sunday visit was shocked that her daughter was exposed to such crude language and threatened to take me home, much to my consternation. However, commonsense reigned and mother realised her days of freedom would be numbered with my return so she left me in peace.

The days and months passed in blissful unawareness that new moves were afoot to bring me back to the bosom of my unenlightened family. Through my mother's social connections, the swimming instructor at Charterhouse, an English Public School perched high on the hill above our home, was interested in rehabilitating me in accordance with the then infamous but now famous Australian nurse, Sister Kenny.

Mr Phillips approached my parents offering the facilities of Charterhouse Swimming Pool and under his supervision try to work my body back into more normal condition.

When my mother made a flying visit to put the proposition before us, I refused outright to return and she returned home very relieved. However, 'The Force' was against us, and mother could not ignore the pleas of both Dr Grantham and Mr Phillips. So I returned home to undergo intensive water therapy and exercise. Mr Phillips was fantastic and I was happy when I realised nearly every day would be spent at the swimming pool. In the summer, we went to the 'Jinny' a part of the river Wey that had been turned into a swimming pool, originally for the students of Charterhouse but later for lesser mortals than those privileged Charterhouse students. There were changing rooms for males and females, very basic wooden structures with a tin roof. Along the side of the river was a concrete walkway. The west end was approximately six to eight feet deep graduating down to the middle section which was at times only two feet deep. The water deepened again towards the east end and at the bend in the river diving boards were fixed. Here the depth was nine to twelve feet. The water was often freezing but invigorating. I loved it!

Mr Phillips used to walk me up and down in a sling-like contraption on the end of a very strong pole for hours on end. His perseverance was incredible. It was not until I was in my late forties that I realised, just how much time he had voluntarily given to me. When you are young, you take everything for granted. In the adjoining town of Godalming, there is a park by the river called the Phillips Memorial Ground. One day I asked Mr Phillips if it was anything to do with him. To my surprise he answered, 'Yes, it is a memorial to my son; he was the wireless operator on the Titanic' His son aged 25 had stayed at his post until the ship sank. Overwhelmed at this sad piece of history, I realised that my helper was very old by my estimation.

Godalming was the first town in England to have public electricity; it was also, in bygone days, famous for its wool. Strange that it takes a serious illness to bring

alive the immediate surroundings. I certainly learnt more about my locale while an invalid than any school could teach.

After some 30 months, I was lying in bed one morning when I noticed the bedclothes at the bottom of the bed seemed to be moving. The first thought, in my vivid imagination, was a snake in the bed. I screamed and my mother ran in. She was not too pleased and demanded to know what on earth I thought I was doing. I told her there was something moving in my bed, she quickly retorted, 'Don't be silly it is only your toes'. The import of this statement hit us both at the same moment and the bedclothes were thrown back to reveal two sets of wriggling 'pinkies'. We could not believe our eyes! A call to Dr Grantham began the long and painful journey back to walking. Mr Phillips was congratulated on his perseverance and the swimming lessons continued with additional walking lessons. Finally, at the end of six months, I was permitted to go back to school for half a day in the afternoons.



Calliper free at last – Jo-An (r)

One of the less desirable features of being on my feet again was the fact I had to wear a diabolical full-back brace; this stretched from the base of my neck to just below my bum. It was like a fifteenth century torture contraption with steel bars down each side of the spine and a wrap round laced up device, to hold it firmly in place. Imagine what it did for my self esteem! I wore this contraption until one very hot English summer, when I decided enough was enough, I took off the brace and threw it in the dustbin. I was aged about 30 at the time.

For my first Christmas, after my recovery I desperately wanted a bicycle, but my parents would not hear of it. However, at one check-up visit, the wonderful Dr Graham asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I told her '...a bicycle...' She said, much to my mother's consternation, 'What a wonderful idea. It will build up the strength in your legs.' Therefore, I had my first bicycle a bright blue New Hudson, which became my pride and joy, giving me more freedom to explore the countryside.



*Me on my pride and joy
'The Blue New Hudson' my swimming
clobber attached under the saddle*

I became quite proficient and in my early teens used to cycle regularly to the coast. Sometimes I accompanied my father on his trips around the countryside.

I started back to school as a part-time pupil, attending afternoon sessions only. My reading stood me in good stead with English, history, geography, French, art, etc. However, my maths was abysmal. I could barely make two plus two equal four. In those days, maths was arithmetic; mathematics was an entirely different and logical form of calculation. Today, maths covers all types of calculus. Unluckily for me, there were no calculators or computers, not even an adding machine; no videos, no TV, nothing to make learning interesting.

Most of the time we spent listening to a to a teacher droning away at whatever boring subject was on the curriculum for the day. The only bright spot on my horizon was science, which I enjoyed, and history.

Silly and almost pathetic incidents come to mind. School years were not without their moments. Not content with nearly blowing up the new science block, I proceeded to taunt the luckless science teacher by shooting balls of paper off a ruler during class. When one such missile hit him squarely in the forehead, he decided it was time to do something. He threatened to detain the whole class; they must stay behind and write one hundred times, 'I must respect my teacher.' So I had to own up and was duly marched out of the room to stand in the hall. However, bored with this I went off to the library and curled up on the floor at the end of the room to read a book. Unfortunately, nobody checked when locking up in the library and I was left a prisoner. Panic reigned at home. The police were notified of my default; they searched the school inside and out, but did not check the library. The next morning and desperately 'wanting to go', I banged on the door. It was opened by Deputy Head who nearly fainted with relief at my being found unharmed. The police probably had very red faces for missing the library in their thorough search. Again, I suffered no repercussions; luck was certainly on my side.

Over the school years I did all the usual rebellious things that children do, such as running away and having the police and wireless (radio) advertising for any sightings of this delinquent child. I had a great time. I packed some food and spare clothing into my saddlebag and off I cycled. I thought of going to Aunt Doris, however, after my last escapade there I was not too sure of the welcome. So I decided that my old home, Spring Cottage, with its tree house, would be a haven for me. I headed towards Dorking on a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining, the birds singing and I felt on top of the world. Eventually I arrived at Spring Cottage, which I had to admit was looking a bit worse for wear. Nevertheless the Kellys welcomed me with open arms and invited me to partake of dinner with them. I had hoped this welcome would extend to offering me a bed, but no such luck. Bidding the Kellys a fond farewell, I set off down the forest track to sleep in the tree house. Fortunately the tree house was still there and I spent a blissful, if rather Spartan, night in my old haunt. Next morning I was up with the dawn and down to the stream to wash and brush up, invigorated by the feeling of freshness and freedom.

I spent the next day exploring my old haunts such as the Stephen Langton pub. (My father had managed this pub many years earlier.) Then I went on to Leith Hill where the countryside is so beautiful. I remembered the day I spent there with my grandmother on one of her rare visits from Geordie-land.

Meanwhile back at home my mother and father were beside themselves with worry and had enlisted the aid of the neighbouring police superintendent to find me. Wireless broadcasts and newspapers predicted dire consequences for my adventure. I decided I would return to Farncombe. I could make my way to the beech woods beyond the river Wey and stay in a tree that I had once made into a make believe palace of my own. However, my nocturnal wanderings took me through an alley short cut, where a school friend lived. She was at the gate and we stood chatting as she was oblivious of what I had been up to. Then to my utter disbelief I spied my mother walking through the cutting. I threw the bike into the hedge and jumped after it, daring Mollie to tell my mother where I was on the pain of death. Before Mollie could get indoors, my mother asked if she had seen me. Mollie, being a truthful girl, could not answer and looked utterly terrified. In the meantime, my bike was slipping back down the bank. I tried to grab it but to no avail. I watched in horror as it slipped down in slow motion to land at the feet of my mother. She in turn was astounded by this piece of luck. I scrunched myself back into the hedgerow, but again to no avail. My mother called, 'I can see you ungrateful child.' Slowly I came out, defiant to the last. With one arm, she grabbed me; with the other she seized the bike and marched me off home.

I was mortified! Worse was yet to come! The police, threatened to put me into a home for wayward girls, interrogated me, and so it went on. Much to my torturers' chagrin I was not in the least repentant. They called the local Vicar; he was the last person I wanted to see. I had left Communion classes because of his petting and groping. As usual, no one believed any of us girls when we tried to explain our seeming lack of interest in religion. Some years later the truth came out and he was retired and left the village.

My introduction to the inequity of gender also came to me during my school years. A senior girl and boy at the school were accused of being caught kissing in a nearby copse. The boy was reprimanded and allowed to stay on at school while the girl was expelled. The injustice of that decision still haunts me. I went out of my way to befriend the hapless girl; she was true beauty and eventually became a model, whereas the boy achieved nothing of any consequence.

My parents, in a fit of generosity, decided after much pleading from teachers, to reward me for my hard work in recovering from polio. I should go on an educational tour of Europe! This was great and I had a wonderfully adventurous time. On arrival in Bruges in August 1939, we toured the famous Belfry and somehow I managed to set the bells ringing, much to the consternation of the residents of that wonderful city. It was an interesting time; the Pension where we were staying was full of German guests. With hindsight, they were probably members of the Fifth Column, presumably, sussing out Belgium, just prior to the declaration of war.

Evenings were quite boring and bedtime was 7.30pm. This did not go down well with a few of us. I discovered that if we got out of our bedroom window we could get across the roof into the street, so for the rest of our stay we used to disappear every night to meet up with some young locals. I made a particular friend, Paul, who lived at Bidderstraat 42. We swore we would write to each other when I returned to England, but war came and that put an end to a possible romance.

Another memorable incident was when we were on the Orient express, or some intercontinental train, which had double glazing and a slot just in front of the glass. I was jiggling my passport up and down in the slot when it suddenly disappeared, lost and gone forever. I then had the unpalatable task of telling the teacher in charge what had happened. For the rest of the journey I had to walk in the centre of the party so I could slip through customs unchecked - that was until we tried to board the ship for home. The dockside was in chaos because many

people were trying to get to their homes or leave the country. It was obvious there was going to be a war. The examination of passports was a thorough procedure, except of course for my nonexistent passport. Everyone tried to explain the loss but to no avail. A courier was dispatched to the British embassy for confirmation of authenticity of my identity. I was detained in a small room, while my school friends boarded the ship. Just as the ship was about to leave, an all important gentleman, complete with the mandatory bowler hat and briefcase, arrived with the necessary clearance and I was hustled on board at the last moment. I am not quite sure what would have happened to me had I been left behind.

After the Declaration of War in September, I used to sit in my beech tree hideaway and fantasise that if I had been left behind, I might have become a hero and been executed like Mata Hari. On returning to school, we had to give a presentation of events that impressed us on our journey through Europe. I turned up at school armed with all the booklets, catalogues, etc., obtained throughout the visit. I was looking through a particularly interesting art catalogue when Miss R, the French teacher, descended on me like the wrath of God and tore the catalogue out of my hand. She told me I should not be looking at such disgusting pictures and statues! I tried desperately to tell her that I had obtained the offending material during our tour of the art gallery but it was no good. She threw the catalogue into the fire. In those days, with no such thing as central heating, Miss R would stand in front of the fire with her skirt hitched up, warming the whole of her body, and blocking off the heat from us lesser mortals.

We girls were destined, according to the education authority to become nurses, cosmeticians, hairdressers, secretaries, etc. I did not intend to be categorised in this manner; I was going to be different. To this end, I studied in the evenings at the local tech. school and gained a Diploma in Commerce & Business Management. How I got through the accountancy section I will never know, but I came through as a fully fledged accountant. I felt that this and my Certificates for Art, History, Geography, Housewifery and a multitude of sports certificates should stand me in good stead; it appeared that I had received a good all round education.

If I had my time over again, I don't think I would have pushed myself to excel in a variety of sports such as high jump and hurdles. Swimming was okay, but I believe my current Post Polio Syndrome was aggravated by the excessive need to become the best at any sport I undertook. No Paralympics in those days!

My mother had wanted me to take up dressmaking, because of my inclination towards design and art. I made a fantastic cigarette box with a 1930s flapper on the front. Much to my chagrin, the art master retained it as an example. Anyway, I always wanted to be different, and my somewhat erratic approach to education stood me in good stead later in my career.

During this period, I met my first boyfriend and we spent all our spare time together; we played tennis, or at least he did. We rowed a boat on the river Wey, climbed the Punch Bowl at Hindhead, and generally had a wonderful time. I will always remember one evening when we were watching the Aurora Borealis lights. It was a magic night and I again wondered what was beyond our world. We were good friends enjoying each other's company; sex did not even enter into our minds, and it was a fabulous time. He wanted to fly and eventually joined the RAF. He crashed and was killed while performing with the RAF display team in Canada. His wife and I worked in close proximity at the time and I wanted to comfort her during this terrible period. However, for once, I showed some discretion and kept my distance.

During the latter period of my education the shadow of war was hanging over us, though the talk of going to war against Germany confused most students. We had learnt that the Nazi regime was a shining example of recovery from the misfortunes of the First World War and the economic disaster of the Great Depression.

During this period, the Second World War was declared. Who, from that time, can ever forget the events leading up to the Declaration of War? There was Mr Chamberlain, stepping out of a plane, proudly waving a piece of paper and declaring, 'Peace in our Time'. The problem was that Hitler didn't keep his side of the bargain; inevitably we ground on towards war.

The war marked the end of my youth and heralded the age of my independence. Sadly life would never be the same and I sped headlong into the unknown. Without the war my life might have been a lacklustre event, but as it turned out, there was never to be a dull moment. So I came to the end of my early years. I will not bore you with the trail of failed marriages, but concentrate on the positive aspects of my career. Space does not allow me here to give the whole story of my adult career. I tried some clerical jobs having gained my Diploma in Commerce and Business Management, but soon applied to train as a nurse. As you can imagine, I got up to my usual pranks, but I made my way happily for a while until I had to go home to look after my mother.

I married young, during the war – a big mistake. I gave birth to two children, then left my husband and returned to work. This time it was a clerical job with a local company manufacturing aircraft and marine safety equipment. After six months or so I was transferred to sales administration and took to it like a duck to water!

My work took me all over the world and it was my privilege to meet many interesting people including Yuri Gagarin, Valentina Tereshkova (Russian Astronauts), Molotov, Harold Wilson, George Brown, and most of the famous aircraft and marine designers of the time, together with many famous and some infamous politicians. I enjoyed a fabulous experience flying with the World Champion Aerobatic holder. Flying upside down in a Zlin over the Surrey and Hampshire countryside is something I will not forget.

I have always believed you have to have faith in the product you market and I personally tried and tested the products myself, so I could give an honest and factual presentation. At first, I believe my success came through the curiosity of the men I had to deal with, as they were not used to a woman negotiating technical equipment. However, their curiosity soon changed to respect. Throughout my career I visited nearly every country in the world, during a time when a British Passport meant something. Sadly, I do not think that type of freedom to travel will return. Public relations became an important part of my career and I was the first woman executive to participate in my own right at many air shows and exhibitions.

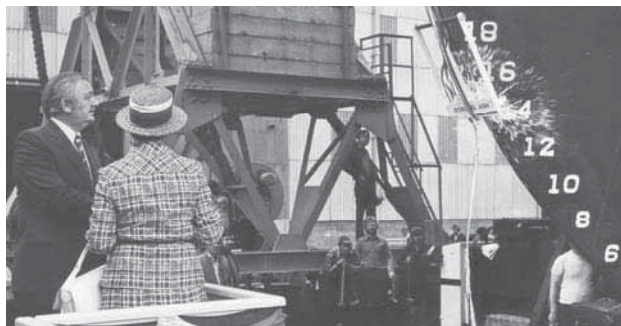


Jo-An on a rescue trial



I just can't help myself – Here I am getting my hands dirty at the controls of a Skyvan at the first Biggin Hill Air Show after World War Two.

There was no equal pay in those days. I was earning a mere pittance compared to the men who worked for me. They were supplied with vehicles, whereas I had to buy my own, so I had to put on a show of, 'Any thing you can do I can do better.' I purchased a Jaguar that originally belonged to Mike Hawthorn the world champion-racing driver. It was in British racing green and my pride and joy at the time. Eventually I resigned from the company, registered my own consultancy business, and enjoyed some success in promoting companies involved in the offshore oil business.



Jo-An launches an off-shore supply vessel the 'Stirling Ash'

Although my career had been very active and I still swam 1000, metres a day, I had a problem walking and sometimes quite unexpectedly fell down, very embarrassing. Unexpected pains in legs and arms often restricted my movements. A consultant diagnosed this as the result of a diving accident, but I felt that there was another explanation as the pains were deep seated. My GP was of the opinion that I was still suffering from the effects of polio; he told me that, in his opinion, I had Post Polio Syndrome. Nevertheless, I carried on as usual.

Finally, I decided to retire, but that did not last long. My voluntary work as secretary to the Tunbridge Wells & District Hospital caught the eye of the cardiac consultant who invited me to work for him on a part-time basis. I accepted and enjoyed the challenge even though my experience as a medical secretary measured zero. I continued to work for him until I left to migrate to Australia.

*One of Jo-An's charitable activities in 1989
– a swimathon for Angliss hospital*



My arrival in Australia brought about another change of career. I became CEO of an alcohol and drug recovery centre. As well, I continued with voluntary work as a public affairs specialist. During which time I travelled to Japan and China, promoting Australian goods and services, and supporting my husband in his work.

In the meantime, walking and standing was becoming extremely painful. My GP said it was arthritis. Later she diagnosed the problem, as polymyalgia and prescribed cortisone which did not agree with me at all. After a further five pain-filled years, I was admitted to hospital on a regime of reducing the cortisone. Apparently I did not have polymyalgia, but I did have diabetes type two and it was agreed that I had Post Polio Syndrome. I took insulin twice a day until I had a reaction to it, then gradually reduced the dose until I became insulin free. Now my blood glucose level is normal and controlled by diet and exercise. I continued swimming, but walking became increasingly difficult. I was forced to use a walking aid.

In 2004 disaster struck. I had an anti-flu injection which paralysed me within three hours. The condition lasted for six months. Now, thankfully, due to exercise, (moderate this time round), and swimming, I am able to lead a reasonably active life with the aid of wheels. I had to learn to walk again, though with difficulty and I am unable to stand for more than a few seconds. The pain is persistent. Unfortunately, I react badly to analgesics, and cramp is another debilitating issue. Regrettably, I no longer have any pain free time.

It is strange that there is so little research into, and knowledge of the late effect of poliomyelitis. Awareness of Post Polio Syndrome is essential if GPs are to avoid misdiagnosing the condition. Presently, I continue my work in public affairs, assisting in the production of newsletters for a number of agencies. I serve on a number of committees. I advocate strongly for the aged and disabled, an area where I have an obvious stake. I am so grateful for the technology that enables me to continue to work with organisations all over the world. Even so, the cost of technology equipment is becoming prohibitive for the many aged and disabled persons who were the pioneers of such technology.

As I look back over my life I can say that polio was my motivator and action is the key to success.



June's Story

Contracted polio in 1956

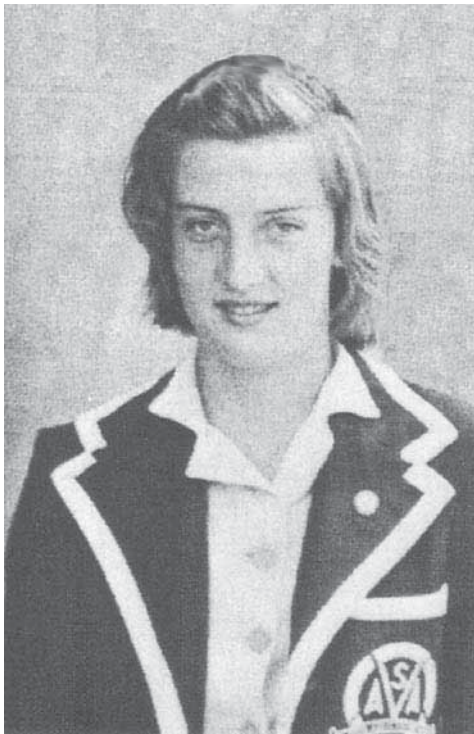


My quest to learn about life and what it is all about began when I was told that there was no Santa Claus! This came as a big surprise to me. Until then I had eagerly placed biscuits and milk ready for Santa on Christmas Eve; believing that this would help him on his journey to distribute toys to the children of the world. I was devastated when told that he did not exist. If Santa did not exist, what could I believe in? Was there a God? Had Jesus lived? Later there were questions about the world and the people who live in it. I was eager to find out about different ways of living life and the reason things happen in the way they do. Looking back on my life, experience is a great teacher and certainly taught me a few things about life in general. Polio was one of those experiences.

My polio was of the 'bulbar' type affecting the body around the face, mouth, tongue, and throat. When the disease struck, I was about 27 years old and travelling overseas. While realising that my symptoms indicated a serious illness, I had no idea that it was polio. It was at least another two years before a diagnosis of polio was given. But my life was not really affected very much in earlier years. Only now, in the later years of my life, have some symptoms returned and it is necessary to take more care when eating and talking. What follows is my story; it includes the polio story in detail but is not limited to it. The way I see it; my life has been an ongoing adventure and polio is a small and episodic part of that unfolding adventure. It certainly hasn't ever stopped me from doing anything I wanted to do.

Throughout my life I have been fortunate to be able to combine nursing with other physically and culturally challenging endeavours. There was little doubt that I would become a nurse; as a child a lot of my play had been about hospitals. Two cats, one obliging and the other somewhat unimpressed, were put to bed on the veranda under a beach umbrella and ‘nursed’. The nursing side of my life story was recorded in ‘Nursing Notes’ Volume 12, number 2. The editor came up with the title ‘Swimming champ, adventurer and nurse’. The title gave more importance to swimming than was justified, but it is certainly true that I have managed to combine nursing with travel and adventure throughout life.

After leaving school, my ambition to become a nurse became temporarily conflicted with an ambition to represent Australia at the Olympic Games. I postponed my entry into the Alfred Hospital for three years to pursue a swimming career; the objective was to try to win a place in the London Olympics. It was pretty exciting at the time; I broke several swimming records (including the under-16 100-metre Victorian breaststroke) and travelled to competitions and exhibition swims all around the country.



*June proudly wearing her
‘Victorian Swimming’ blazer*

The competitions were particularly exciting and I even got to wear the Victorian Swimming Association blazer. But there could only be one winner in those days. I came second at the Australian championships, which were the trials for the Olympics. But only the winner had the privilege of representing Australia. During that period I was certainly keen to win a place in the Australian team; but reflecting on it all now I doubt that I had the ability and drive to win. So my swimming career came and went without trace during my late teens.

I was certainly keen to become a nurse. But, from an early age there was also a strong but unrealised desire to see the world and experience new places; luckily (as it turned out) the two could be combined. In 1950, just after my 21st birthday, I started three very happy years of training at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. But once the initial training was completed the 'wanderlust' definitely took hold. I became increasingly determined to combine my career in nursing with a desire to experience life in other countries.

The first opportunity to see somewhere outside Australia came with the realisation that I could do my midwifery qualification (obligatory for nursing in remote places) in New Zealand rather than the Women's or Queen Victoria hospitals in Melbourne. So I headed off to the Obstetric and Gynaecological Hospital, Corwall, New Zealand. As it turned out, that decision changed the course of my life, sending me down a very exciting path. As much as I loved general nursing I detested maternity, it just wasn't what I wanted to do in life. Nevertheless, it had to be done in order to practice as a nurse anywhere in the world. In those days New Zealand ran a six month initial maternity course with a further 12 months of practice and further six months of midwifery training. The hospital was housed in an old army hospital with an extremely long corridor along which we 'travelled' from our 'Quarters' to the wards.

Towards the end of this initial part of the maternity course, I was accepted as a member of an 'all-girl crew' to sail for six months around the South Seas. I was absolutely elated! It all happened quite unexpectedly in an odd set of circumstances. I had met a girl on the ship going across to New Zealand. She was older than me and we had remained friends. Towards the end of the initial stage in my course we went to Kawau for the weekend. There was an opportunity to return to Auckland on a launch. As we were going back to port we saw a yacht that was becalmed and the crew asked if we could tow them. The guys on the yacht threw the rope over but it didn't land where it was supposed to and got caught around the propeller. That meant that the launch couldn't use the motor! So the long and short of it was that we cut the rope and eventually the now 'non-becalmed' yacht towed the launch to its berth in Auckland! I arrived back at the hospital at the end of my night duty! Anyhow, that was my introduction to the world of sailing. I caught the 'sailing bug' and things took off from there.

About two weeks later, a fellow trainee and I were walking along the corridor for morning tea after our lecture and she said: 'Hey June! How about coming on a yacht trip with me?' So that's how it happened, just three weeks before the final exam. So as you can imagine not too much study was done! My friend took me

down and introduced me to Captain Tom and his wife Diana (who, as it turned out, became a life-long friend to us all). I was very thankful that they accepted me as a suitable person! They already had four girls and a male. Captain Tom decided that five girls would make a better balanced crew – I'm still not sure why! They waited until after our exams; so I had about three weeks to get money over from Australia and buy some summer clothes. If you ever tried to buy 'out-of-season' clothes in Auckland during the Easter holiday in 1954 you will know how difficult that would be. So in the end I had to quickly make some suitable yachting wear.

I passed the exams and three weeks after the first meeting with Captain Tom we set sail for the Pacific Isles. The trip was to take in Tonga, Fiji, the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) the Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia and Norfolk Island.

The yacht was a Brixham trawler, built for North Sea sailing; it was ketch-rigged and owned by an adventurous English couple Tom and Diana. I'm still amazed that they were prepared to take on five very inexperienced females. At least we had some useful training between us; one doctor, two nurses, a stenographer and the youngest, at 21 years, had some sailing experience. The yacht trip was one of the most fantastic periods of my



June, (far right), as a member of the 'all-girl crew' in the main cabin of the 'Arthur Rogers'

life. Those six months were wonderful. It was all incredibly exciting. It is hard to explain the joy of sailing. The life of people in the sailing community is just a totally different way of living. It certainly helped that we got on so very well together. Tom and Diana had sailed out from England. They had come through Panama and had undertaken geological soundings at some point on their travels. Their stories were fascinating and we all felt good to be part of it. Also we were totally dependent on one another and the crew worked as one, that in itself was a great experience. There was a lot to learn and everything was very exciting. When we went into the ports around the Pacific we met lots of other sailors. In one place, Pebbles (David) Rockefeller had just sailed in, but at that stage I

didn't even realise who he was. Sailors, when coming into port, become part of the sailing community; every person is part of the whole. It really is amazing.

Years later, the story of Tom and Diana's sailing life together and how they settled to raise a family on a tiny isolated Island in the Pacific was recorded in a popular book called *Faraway* written by Lucy Irvine and published by Doubleday/Random House in 2000. References to the 'All-Girl Crew' are scattered through the book. I was given the pseudonym 'Cathy' in the book.

When I reflect on it all, I think the sailing experience gave me the opportunity to develop myself as a person. From being very shy and scared to death of men (although you wouldn't think so today!) I became more confident and sure of myself. The girls had reunions and we all remained lifelong friends. Our friendship with Diana continued after her husband Tom died.

My illness came on quite suddenly when I was on a ship travelling to Japan. I think I was about 27 years of age at the time. A friend and I were going to travel to Kashmir on my return to Singapore. I was headed for Hong Kong to find out how Australian nurses could get registered there as well as find myself a job. But of course my 'wanderlust' took me on the longest possible route! So in the meantime I was on a Dutch Cargo ship with about 35 passengers heading for Japan. After leaving Okinawa en-route for other ports in Japan I became unwell. The main symptoms were difficulty in swallowing as well as slurred speech and also the side to my face had fallen.

One of the ladies on the ship was the wife of the Commodore at the Naval Base at Yokohama in Japan. She said that I had better go home to her place when the ship came into port. On our arrival at Yokohama they transported me to her home at the naval base. I hadn't actually realised just how sick I was. But she told me later that she was wondering what she was going to do with the corpse the next day. Everyone showed a lot of concern. The naval doctor was asked to come and see me. But he was leaving the next day and, apart from noting that my speech was slurred (an observation we had already made!) he just left it at that. So no diagnosis was made at that time.

After a few days it became clear that I was, after all, going to live, so I started planning to go to Singapore and then back home to Australia. On the ship between Japan and Singapore on my way to Australia I remember that I didn't care a darn about eating; probably because it was so difficult to swallow. Everyone was very kind. The Chief Engineer on the ship used to take me to his

cabin to eat because I was having such difficulty and it was embarrassing for me to eat in the dining room. My tongue was certainly not working properly when talking and eating, nor were the muscles in the side of my face. It was also difficult because the little 'trap-door' at the top of the windpipe wasn't working very well either; so food would go down the wrong way causing coughing, spluttering and embarrassment in social situations. Even when I arrived in Singapore I was not well, but certainly better than I had been on the naval base. I had to wait two or three weeks for a ship from Singapore to go back home to Australia. So I just took myself off to a little country place and waited there until the ship was due to sail. By the time the ship arrived I was feeling a little better. But waiting for the ship was certainly a difficult time.

I was relieved that they were prepared to take me on the ship from Singapore. It took a month to get home to Australia and this was a good thing because it gave me a chance to recover and reflect on what had happened. I had no idea how long the symptoms would take to subside. In retrospect, the experience brought home to me that the facial and neck muscles all affect the gullet in swallowing. It was such a very useful learning experience for a nurse and made me realise how difficult it must be for people who have a stroke or any other condition affecting their swallowing. I think the experience did make me a more empathic nurse.

It would have been about two months after the onset of the illness before I finally arrived in Western Australia and then I travelled by train to Melbourne. It took three days and two nights to get there. On returning to Melbourne I guess I was still recuperating and certainly not as strong as I had been before the illness. I was sent to Koo-wee-rup in Gippsland which was a great place to work, without the heavy demands of a city hospital. The matron was superb and I worked at that hospital for four months.

My adventurous spirit returned. In 1959 I was getting ready for work in Kenya, but I planned to take six months to get there! I had planned to go first to South Africa for a couple of months via India and then by sea to Kenya. This is when I talked to a doctor on board the ship who, after hearing my story, said that he thought that my illness had probably been Bulbar Polio. This was the first time a diagnosis of polio had been made and it was two years after the initial symptoms.

1960 saw me in Kenya. I worked for the British Colonial Service as a General Nurse. I went first to Mombasa and then to Nairobi. After the first week or two in a general medical ward at the George VI Hospital (the major Government Hospital) a more urgent need for a nurse arose. There was a polio epidemic in

Kenya. They wanted staff at the polio unit (which was attached to the Infectious Diseases Hospital) and I was sent there. It was here that I realised that the doctor's diagnosis on the ship a few weeks earlier was undoubtedly correct.

The age distribution of the polio patients was interesting: the young were mostly African, the middle-aged mainly Indian and the older people tended to be of European origin. It was certainly a fast learning curve for me. Respirators, mainly the old 'Dragar' whole body type respirators, came from all over Africa. It was just great to see the co-operation between countries in response to the polio outbreak in Kenya. The whole of Africa co-operated. If they had a respirator in Cairo and a need arose in Nairobi they would send it there because that's where the epidemic was. The equipment was pretty basic by today's standards. Patients would be put in what was really just a box called the 'Dragar', with their head sticking out. That was the only way in those days that they could keep the patients breathing. Some respirators were clamped onto the chest to mechanically facilitate breathing for four hours at a time. I guess it's the same as we do with CPR these days, but with rather more primitive equipment. Some patients would be on this equipment for a very long time; sometimes for life.

The kids tended to have the 'skeletal' type of polio. The newly arrived adults, mainly a middle aged group, usually went straight into the respirators because their respiratory muscles were affected. Seeing young teenagers at the hospital with polio was very distressing. I was at this hospital, polio nursing, for four months.

It was much later, when I returned to Melbourne to do further nursing training that I visited Fairfield Hospital (about 1965). There were still remnants of the old respirators at the Fairfield hospital from the past epidemics we had in Melbourne. The patients used to play musical instruments, run businesses and all sorts of things from their respirator at Fairfield. They had themselves very well organised. It shows that humans can be very inventive in all kinds of circumstances.

I was keen to proceed in the course I had set for myself with the British Colonial Service in Africa. The Service sent me initially to an African reserve of 94,000 people as the sole European nurse. From the beginning, I greatly enjoyed my work and life in Africa. There were plenty of challenges to my own cultural expectations and these presented a steep learning curve for me.

Our work was in 'preventive medicine' and I became more and more involved and committed to community nursing. We worked as a team. I often worked with the Agricultural Officer and sometimes the District Officer or Health Inspector would come with us. The team was really an assembly of appropriate expertise for whatever work needed to be done. Problems were often initially identified from the Village. If we observed any malnutrition in the area we would decide to go and see what was happening there. The agricultural expert would look at the production line of the crops, the District Commissioner would make sure things were working in his section and we would check the houses. It would have been wrong to impose on Africans, European styles of housing. The Kenyan houses were perfectly good and appropriate for African conditions. But improvements in the African houses were sometimes required. For example, houses there didn't always have chimneys through which smoke could escape; so people developed eye conditions and respiratory problems caused by the smoke. We didn't want to change things to be more European, but just to make things better for people and prevent disease.

Africa is no stranger to extraordinary weather conditions. Excessive rainfall caused the water level in Lake Victoria to rise eleven feet; causing widespread inundation of farming lands. Farmers and their families were forced to flee to higher ground. They were placed in camps in close proximity to one another; this was hard for them to cope with because it was so different from their normal living and working conditions out on the farms. Flies were a big problem because of the chain of disease they caused.

Camp hygiene was imperative and I was sent to this camp to maintain the best hygiene that circumstances would allow. My main concern was that the pit latrines were correctly used! To achieve this end I visited the camp daily and worked with the 'headman' to clean up the area. The camp was kept extremely clean by the Africans and I received a (somewhat undeserved) very high commendation from the third highest ranking government minister, not known for his liking of Europeans.

We had an excellent African doctor and I spent a lot of time with him and his wife on the reserve. An amusing aspect of this relationship was that just before I received another posting I was asked by the doctor if I would accept the position of his 'number one wife'. He assured me that his present wife was prepared to stand aside in rank for me to join the family. As I have never been inclined towards wifely duties, I most graciously declined!

My next Kenyan posting was with the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMRF). Flying with the AMRF could be quite exciting. When flying after dark on a 'medical emergency' into Nairobi airport our arrival was announced over the radio and other aircraft were asked to clear the way for us. Our plane, a small twin engine Aztec, ran along the apron between the large overseas planes. One felt, at the same time, very insignificant but also very important!

My work with the AMRF was very challenging and I certainly learned a lot in the process. The Foundation had a flying doctor service, a radio/telephone link up with outback mission stations, mobile medical clinics and a very sophisticated educational section, mainly related to public health. The organisation was founded by plastic surgeon, Michael Wood, with Oxfam support. His area of practice stretched from the Cape to Cairo and as far west as Lambarene (Albert Schweitzer's leper colony and hospital). Schweitzer showed amazing acceptance of life in Africa; he allowed dogs, chooks and pigs to wander through the hospital wards as they do in normal village life!

On one occasion two of the casualties in a medical emergency were very young boys who had been emasculated by raiding tribes. Although it was never acknowledged, phallic worship was still practised at the time by these tribes and possibly still practised today.

Our work was, in the main, conducted from a very large van. This served as our mobile clinic and was well set up with medical supplies to meet all eventualities. One of our tasks was to visit 'Maasai manyattas' to try and work out the most appropriate health care for these fascinating and regal nomadic people. The biggest problem was that a large part of our driving was through bush country and the van was not of the four wheel drive type. We spent an inordinate amount of time digging ourselves out of bogs!

We were seconded to Save the Children Fund to do research on the nutritional health of the people. Part of our task was to compare the city/urban and mission station dwellers with those living in rural areas. It was interesting to observe that the rural dwellers were infinitely healthier than the city/mission population. The people living in rural areas were of course living off the land and had retained most of their traditional customs and food habits. Unlike the city dwellers, they were not eating processed white bread or spending their money on bicycles and transistors rather than food.

As I look back on that time, one memorable event in particular challenged my cultural and philosophical beliefs and made me think about life in general. We were flying from Nairobi to the south of Lake Victoria. We had taken off from Wilson Airport (the small plane airport) and flew very low over the Nygong hills, leading to the Rift Valley and the savannah lands of Tanganyika. It was while flying over the Savannah, and undoubtedly influenced by reading 'African Genesis', I felt transported back a million years in time. Since then, time has never had the same meaning for me and my beliefs about human life and its beginnings were changed forever.

My time in Africa covered the periods before, during and after independence of all three East African states: Uganda, Tanganyika and Kenya. In the later stages, I became more and more aware of the changes occurring. It was a historically important time for all of these countries. Roy, an American doctor, and I were in central Tanganyika, at a place called Dodoma, at the time of their coup. Their President disappeared for four days and no planes were allowed to fly over Tanganyika at that time. But for us life went on much as normal for most of the day on which the President was ousted. However, as the news filtered through, a meeting of world organisations as well as Government representatives occurred that evening at the hotel in Dodoma. This was a wonderful gathering and a very memorable occasion with the Africans and Europeans all sharing the same concerns. But life soon got back to relative normality for us. For the time being that is! The changes occurring had an impact on us all. Because African countries were achieving independence from Britain they were in no mood to receive ongoing help from a colonial power in the form of The British Colonial Service or any other organisation. So my contract with AMRF was terminated. This was the first of many redundancies that were to occur during my life!

Holidays away from professional responsibility allowed some recreational travel with friends. Often there were as many adventures on these trips as during work related travels. At the end of my first African tour I joined two other nursing friends for what turned out to be a very exciting journey through many countries. The VW beetle we drove to Cape Town was sent to the UK by ship. In the meantime I spent several months touring through South and North America. I later reconnected with the car and another friend from Sydney in the UK and set off on a four month trip overland to India. In those days it was fairly common and perfectly safe for women to travel through the Middle East. We were at all times treated very well. Every time we came to a border post we were confronted with the inevitable customs procedures. After a while we began to

regard this as a good experience and took it in turns to go in and present our collective documents so that we could share the wonderful hospitality of the Arabs. We could always look forward to a cup of delicious Arab coffee, cake or other tasty edibles, at these stops along the way.

The requirement for an exit visa caused the greatest problem. We arrived at the Iraq/Iran border on Christmas Day to be told that we needed an exit visa to leave Iraq. Four New Zealanders were also required to wait for a visa. So there we all sat, sharing and eating our Christmas fare collected from all the countries we had visited en route. We also shared the food with the dutiful border official, much to his enjoyment. Four hours later we were on our way to Tehran, where surprisingly, visas were not always required. For example, my friend Val and I had visited Babylon, wandering all over the ruins without being asked for a visa, whereas our New Zealand friends had been turned back the day before. The difference may well have been because we visited on a Friday, a day of prayer, when all the officers had other thoughts on their minds.

The very helpful London Automobile Association strongly advised us not to travel through Afghanistan en route to India. This was because of the long three to four day delays being experienced at the border crossings. Even after permission had been given, a mind change by an official was possible and had, on occasions, resulted in a bullet in the back; so we quickly sought an alternative route. This meant travelling through the desert of Baluchistan to Quetta. Accommodation had to be found often in places where people were not accustomed to visitors. One night we stayed in the zero star hotel Redex, named by some wag of an Aussie. The sheep were moved out and the six of us squeezed ourselves and sleeping bags onto the floor along with the chooks. There was no complaint – it was very cheap!



Hotel "Redex" in Baluchistan.

And so it was that we eventually reached India. Driving in India in those days (the sixties) was not the nightmare that I'm sure it would be today. After Val left me in Delhi I had to drive to Bombay to put the car on a ship. I had the company of an Indian man and two German lasses as far as Agra (place of the Taj Mahal) but from there I had to drive by myself to Bombay. Not far out of Agra the horn 'packed up'. I panicked because the horn was considered to be such an essential instrument in getting the bullock carts to move over so that the car could pass safely. To my utter surprise, once the horn failed, the bullock drivers moved their carts over of their own accord well before I needed to pass!

After returning home to Australia and becoming qualified for what I had already been doing in Africa, I ventured to New Guinea. My posting took me to Rabaul for four years and Lae for one. After one year I was sent to take the place of the Principal of the School of Nursing in Lae while the previous occupant completed her teaching qualifications at the College of Nursing, Australia. Then, after twelve months, I returned to Rabaul as Principal. After nearly two years in that position it was decided that there should be a male Principal because a female Principal could not be expected to deal with the increasing number of male students! I was informed later that they lived to regret that decision! This posting to New Guinea turned out to be the last in which nursing and experience overseas would be combined. It was time to come home to Australia.

In 1972, after the experience in Kenya and New Guinea over the previous 18 years, I felt daunted at the prospect of life in civilization and a job at Hamilton Russel House, the private wing of the Alfred. I am sure that they only accepted me because I wore an Alfred badge, but things worked out quite well. After three months I was sent to undertake a Cardiac Nursing Course and had to master all of the technology that had been introduced during my absence from the country. Later, I moved to the School of Nursing at the Alfred for the last 15 years of my working life as a nurse.

During that period of time, the shocking events in Cambodia were exposed to the world and a group of medical people from various disciplines met to discuss what they could do to help in this situation. As an outcome of one of those early meetings, Robyn Anderson, a nurse teacher at the Alfred, and I were elected to the committee. One of our roles was to coordinate training camps for those volunteering to help in the many disaster areas around the world. The Health Emergency Workers Group (HEW) was formed. An Officer from the Department of Foreign Affairs met with Dr Jan Fraillon and me for the purpose of forming the Australian Overseas Disaster Response Organisation (AODRO). But the

Australian Army had similar ideas and were in a better position to take on these responsibilities; so we gladly handed over that role to more proficient organisers.

All of these events were the start of another exciting phase of my life. I represented the Health and Emergency Workers Group in the planning stages of AODRO, which meant three monthly visits to Sydney until AODRO was closed down by the Hawke Government due to financial constraints and inactivity. If global events, necessitating the need for international cooperation and support in more recent years, could have been foreseen, that decision may well have been different.

After transferring to the School of Nursing in 1976, I undertook a Diploma in Nurse Education in 1977 and worked in the School until the final student left in February 1993. And so it was that I left the Alfred Hospital after many years of a rewarding and happy working life.

One door closes and another opens. In retrospect, it seems like a natural progression (after being involved in so much disaster practice at the Alfred as well as overseas) to move on to the Fire Service. But when the Ash Wednesday bushfires came in 1983 little did I know that this event would change the course of my life once again.

On my return to Melbourne I had bought a house in the Dandenong Ranges and lived there permanently from 1980. An event like the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, gives rise to strong community minded feelings and a desire to help. It provided the impetus for me to do something to help my community. The Sunday



after Ash Wednesday I took myself down to the local Fire Brigade and joined up. I didn't really believe that I could be of much help. As it has happened, they not only trained me as a fire-fighter but later appointed me as Secretary of the Brigade, a position held for thirteen years. Later, I was appointed President. I also became Secretary of the Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association for our region. It was a great honour to be awarded a National Medal. This was one of the most rewarding periods of my life.

June receiving the National Medal

What happened was documented in the publication 'From Bell to Siren' a historical reflection of the Kallista – The Patch rural fire brigade to celebrate 75 years of Service. It was published in the year 2001 and I have included excerpts below:

Women have always been welcomed to join the Kallista Fire Brigade and their valuable work in communications and Ladies Auxiliary was highly regarded by the Brigade. 'On the 20 February 1983, a female of a different mould presented herself to the brigade. While acknowledging the excellent job that women in the ladies auxiliary' of the brigade undertook, along with that of communications. Her agenda was to become an active fire-fighter, not ladies' auxiliary', the Captain and Secretary were starting to wonder whether this woman was for real. Did they have to change their male ways if she stayed and really, did they want her to stay? But it was recognised that as a nurse she was able to bring expertise in burns and knowledge about the effects of heat on the human body; giving a greater understanding of human suffering encountered on that fateful Ash Wednesday'. (Excerpts: 'From Bell to Siren' pages 62 to 63)

'Worse was to come'. In 1985 June Cabena was nominated to be Secretary. 'Stunned silence greeted this nomination. If a female were to become Secretary then the last bastion of male dominance, the monthly meeting, would be invaded by the opposite sex, meaning that many things had to change. As there was no other nomination, the advent of female entry to this previously male sanctum was complete'. Several years later in 1993, June was appointed to the position of fourth Lieutenant and 17 years after joining Kallista Brigade she was appointed as the first female President. This position carried a heavy responsibility as well as being a tremendous honour. (Excerpts 'From Bell to Siren' page 62)

About eighteen months after leaving the Alfred I was asked to coordinate the Country Fire Authorities (CFA's) critical incident stress program. The next seven and a half years were a great challenge and a wonderfully rewarding experience. During my time with the CFA I met an Argentine Psychologist who planned to visit Argentina and train a group of fire-fighters in critical incident stress management. My travel program coincided so we arranged for me to fly to Bariloche and assist her in teaching the program. A week in the beautiful Bariloche area, living in the village and being part of a fire brigade from a different country was a superb experience. But that time away coincided with fires back home. When the 1997 fires occurred I was far away and watched them on Bariloche TV!

In looking back on my time with the CFA, I think of it as a very challenging but greatly rewarding period of my life. I saw so much change in those years in the service and now it is considered fairly normal for females to be fully fledged members of the Brigades.

Of course there had to be a final redundancy! And this occurred a few years ago when I was retired from the CFA. It turned out to be a good thing in many ways because I am now happily enjoying retirement in the hills.

I've been fortunate to meet some wonderful people during my adventures around the world. There were several strong and notable women who I identified with and who probably had an influence on my own life in one way or another. They each provided wonderful examples of female independence and a love of adventure.

As I reflect on the impact of polio on my life, I think of it simply as being 'a bit of a nuisance'. My attitude is that whatever you get in life, you get. It hasn't stopped me from enjoying life fully and hasn't deterred me from going wherever I wanted to go and doing whatever I wanted to do. I just accepted that Bulbar Polio was what I had had and got on with my life. When you are young and your muscles are 'tuned' the symptoms are not so bad. At least that was my experience.

More recently, since getting older, I've become aware of why I have the problems I have. But any impact of these difficulties is just an inconvenience. If I'm going to choke at the table then it just happens and that's that. I certainly have difficulty if I eat and talk at the same time. If I'm not concentrating when talking I may start coughing and spluttering. Recently, I have become much more aware that these symptoms are related to the bulbar palsy I had all those years ago. But you can't change what has happened; so you just have to get on and live with it.

In terms of the influence of the polio on the decisions I've made in life, it had no influence whatsoever. I was always fairly independent, (often rejecting social norms about how life should be lived) and with a strong sense of adventure, and I had the life I had quite irrespective of the polio. The experience undoubtedly contributed to the development of my personal philosophy of life. Both bad and good things happen in life, but how the individual interprets the experience contributes to whether knowledge and understanding can be gained from the event or not. I believe that things happen for a purpose and it's up to us to find

that purpose and learn from it. Having polio certainly helped me to understand and be more empathic with patients who had diseases affecting speech and eating. I've learned that people can make a bad situation worse by being a victim of it or blaming others for it. Or we can transform a bad experience by learning from it. That's probably why I've led such a wonderfully fulfilling life. I'm thankful that my own personal philosophy of life, now strongly influenced by eastern philosophy and all of the experiences that I've been lucky enough to have, was given a nudge along its course by polio. Today, as we record this story, my family and friends are important in my life. Travel continues to be important and I am planning a trip along 'The Silk Road' from the China side next year. Even the friendships made on the yacht all those years ago have been maintained, although four of the group have since died. My New Zealand friend, Liz, died two years ago. I was with Liz when she first met the man who would become her husband. In a couple of weeks I'm off to New Zealand to attend his 80th birthday party and to have another holiday there. New Zealand was the country where my first big adventure on the yacht started. Life always gets better and better in my book, but I doubt that a huge new adventure is on the cards this time round!



June in her Kallista garden

Story recorded by Chris Baxter

Marlene's Story

Contracted polio in 1953



In a way my story is not about growing up and living my life with polio because that's not the way it was. In fact I didn't think about polio much at all until quite recently. After Mum died in May 2006, I was cleaning out a cupboard in the family home. I discovered an old abandoned roll of plaster-impregnated bandage and my quilted sleeping bag for my weakest leg. That made me wonder what impact contracting polio at the age of 18 months had on my life. It also triggered an earlier memory of finding a tiny plaster cast discovered then discarded some years ago. Oh the things mums keep!

These simple rediscovered things brought back memories of cold winter days sitting on the kitchen table with my legs stretched out in front of me. Beside me, the wood stove was burning brightly for warmth and hot water. The hot water was to soak the plaster strips the visiting physiotherapist used to make my plasters. The plasters helped stretch my muscles while I slept. The hot water also provided cups of tea to share after the plaster process was finished. The idea was to keep my legs growing at the same rate by bandaging the splints on every night. Some of the physios were very gentle. There were others I was very wary of – dreading their approach with scissors at the ready to cut off the dry plaster.

I was born in August 1951 at a small bush hospital in Leongatha, South Gippsland Victoria. Dad said that the night I was born it snowed, an unusual event as it didn't snow again for 18 years. A Methodist church was later built on the site of the hospital and it was there that I married my husband Richard.

The same site now has an I.G.A. supermarket built on it. My parents took me home to their farm in Meeniyon situated about half way between Foster and Leongatha. It was a mixed farm with dairy cattle, chickens, pigs and sheep providing a good living for the growing family. Just as well, because I was to become the middle child of five siblings.

The father of my two older brothers, Graeme and Brian, was wounded and died during the Second World War in Bougainville New Guinea. My mother married my father after the war when Graeme was three years and Brian was 18 months. They had a further three girls, me and then my two younger sisters. Wendy was born in 1954 and Sharyn in 1956.



Dad with Pilot and Dolly tending the farm

One of my earliest memories is of looking out the farmhouse window and seeing my mother feeding the magpies with stale bread. I can also remember the sight of Dad ploughing the paddock with the draught horses, Dolly and Pilot. He didn't have a tractor in those days.

In many ways life was wonderful growing up on a Gippsland farm in the 50s. Dad slaughtered his own livestock so there was always plenty to eat. Lamb was plentiful and we always had a Sunday roast which was cooked in the wood stove whilst we attended church. Sometimes the meat would be raw and sometimes very over-cooked; this was dependent on the whim of the fire in the stove. All this fare was supplemented with dairy food, eggs and Mum's home grown vegetables. We never went hungry and at Christmas there was roast pork with all the trimmings.

Dad would hang the carcass of the animal he had slaughtered in the shade of a tree covered with a cotton bag. When it was bled and ready to eat, he would bring it in and put it on the kitchen table for my mother to cut up. I can remember picking at the raw suet, much to the concern of my parents but the doctor told them it must have something I needed in it. In the early days my mother even rendered down the fat from cooked lamb to be used later for cooking, making pastry among other things. Olive oil was unheard of in those days! Sometimes after a Sunday drive and picnic at San Remo there was crayfish for a special treat.

There were always chores to do on the farm; fetching firewood, and collecting eggs at the same time as we fed the chooks. We took a billy of milk from the cow shed to the kitchen and helped with the cooking and of course did the dishes. Once a year we took the 'smokos' up to the hay contractors during hay season. This consisted of Mum's home baking and a billy of tea packed into a big basket.

There was always something to care for on the farm. Sometimes tiny, wrinkled, pink piglets - the runt of litters and the size of your hand, were brought in by Dad for Mum to keep warm in a box by the wood stove, which she used as a form of humidicrib. At first we fed them with eyedroppers and as they grew bigger with a baby's bottle. One day the local doctor came to visit and suggested putting a drop of brandy in their milk. One piglet got the hiccoughs which made us laugh, but the piglet later died. I sometimes wonder if it was the brandy that killed him or if that particular piglet was too young to survive anyway. Mostly though, our piglets survived and only the weakest remained to become family pets.

One pig called Pinkie got up to a fair bit of mischief as he grew. Two young boys, who were visiting the farm one day, continually teased him. My mother repeatedly asked them to stop but they ignored her. Pinkie waited patiently and when the boys were leaving for home followed them out and nipped their ankles as they walked up the path. Not much sympathy was handed out to those boys!

Mum loved to plant flower seedlings and on one occasion I remember her amusement as the pig tried to 'help' in the garden. As she planted each seedling she would hear a grunt and look up to see a recently planted seedling in Pinkie's mouth. He would gently pull them up and then grunt to show mum how helpful he was. After that he got locked out of the flower garden.

Pinkie would escort us to the gate on the mornings we went to school and, just like the dogs, run to greet us when we returned. In fact years later, on the day my husband-to-be Richard arrived home to meet my parents he was greeted by the barking dogs and, you guessed it, the 'oinking' pig running up the path.

We bottle fed lambs as well, and one spring a young friend came to visit and wanted to feed an orphaned lamb which we were hand rearing at the time. He had no idea what to do and asked us. We told him teasingly that half way through the bottle he would need to lift the lamb to his shoulder and pat it on the back to burp it. Off he went with the bottle of milk while we watched in near hysterics as he proceeded to carry out our instructions. He did not find it at all funny. Dad decreed that any baby animal hand reared by us could not be eaten by us. He was

of the opinion that they would oink and baa from the plate so needed to be passed on to the next door neighbors. A wise man my father!

Of course we had cattle dogs which my father trained himself. There was Browney and Rusty, who I believed died of a stroke. Browney was one very clever dog and a great help to Dad on the farm. One Thursday, returning from Leongatha in a new car purchased only that day, we could see Browney on the crest of the hill waiting for the car to come around the corner. This was his signal to have the cows waiting at the gate ready for Dad to open it and let them through for milking. On this occasion though, Browney was not budging. He didn't recognize the car and so all of Dad's whistling, calling and beckoning went unheeded. No way was that dog obeying commands from a 'cattle rustler'. Dad continued for some time trying to coax Browney to do his job. We all had a go at convincing him to come down the hill. He would come a little way then sit on his haunches, and then the whistling and coaxing would start again. After lots of encouragement Browney finally realized the new car was part of the family.

Browney was the dog that I grew up with and as he got older he became deaf but we all knew when a thunderstorm was on its way. Browney would rush past us into the house and straight under the bed. This was the only time he came into the house; he wasn't a house dog, but rather a working farm dog. In later years as he grew older he slept on the mat at the back door. We would give him a gentle bump with our toe to indicate he needed to move to allow us access and he would oblige. After he died this ritual was sadly remembered and missed on the nights we would get home late from the local dances.



*Marlene needed a helping hand
after contracting polio*

In the summer of 1953 I was too young to realize it, but my life was about to change dramatically. The polio virus was uncontrolled at that time, striking down young and otherwise healthy children indiscriminately. At the age of eighteen months I contracted polio and was sent off to the Fairfield hospital, isolated from my family and my community for about five weeks. From there I went to stay with my paternal grandparents in Turner Street, Camberwell, for approximately three weeks. Eventually I was able to return home to the farm with both legs in callipers.

Fortunately, the polio vaccination was discovered in 1956. I don't remember much from that early time. However I do have a vague memory of returning to the hospital at the age of five with my mother for a check-up. My recollection is of long dark corridors with wainscoting and highly polished boards.

Doctor Hopkins, based at Fairfield hospital, was my polio doctor. I had others but I don't recall their names. In the later years my appointments were transferred to Leongatha hospital. Each year he would measure my height and put a mark on the door. There were lots of other marks on the door, so I assume he had quite a few patients in the area. He would also monitor the length of my left leg which was $\frac{3}{8}$ inch shorter than my right. When I was older he advised me to 'get a nice sit down job'. I ignored that boring but well meant advice and eventually became an apprentice ladies hairdresser instead.

The resourcefulness of my country community meant that solutions were found to any problems which arose from my coming home with specific physical needs. My Auntie Glad Kinnish was recruited to sew special wide legged pants to cover my callipers and allow the use of a lambs wool wrap to keep my legs warm. Sadly she made these from black watch tartan purchased on one of our trips to Melbourne and not the plain blue material which I longed for. Mum knitted green jumpers to match the black watch and dressed all of us girls the same. Despite this small disappointment Auntie's help and creativity were truly appreciated.

My worst effected leg had a tendency to get very cold at night through lack of movement. Auntie Glad made a padded sleeping bag which fitted my splinted leg to keep it warm. The leg warmer was found in the farm house cupboard many years later.

She also sewed a bodice with lots of hooks and eyes down the front attached to a sheet to keep me flat in bed. This meant I had to sleep on my back whereas my preference was for tummy sleeping. Bed time was quite an ordeal with a nightly exercise regime to stretch the muscles. Next the plaster splints the physios had prepared, were bandaged on to each leg. Nice warm pyjamas, a hot water bottle and a story read by Dad helped soften the experience.

Original leg warmer along with old plaster bandage.



A big specially designed pram was my only means of getting around at first. It resembled a flat bed trailer and languished for years in the back of a farm shed after I no longer had a need for it. Usually there was only one shopping day a week. Market day for us was every Thursday. The whole family would hop in Dad's car and drive to Leongatha to socialize and purchase our weekly needs. Sometimes we bought fish from the fishmonger which was up the alleyway beside Bair's hotel. A kind lady called Mrs. Scarbossa always had an all-day sucker for me. Dad says it was always a great big one. Mum would be terrified that I would choke on it because I was lying on my back in my Thomas splint, strapped into the pram as part of my therapy.

Once a year Mum and we three girls would catch the 6am steam train to Melbourne to buy our 'Sunday best'. We stayed in Preston with our Aunty Marj, Uncle Ern and cousin Robyn. After reaching the city we would catch a tram out to Preston and then a bus, which dropped us just down the street from their house. For us country kids the highlight of the journey was always the tram. We also visited all our other city cousins. I especially remember the year we purchased some white boots for me to wear on Sundays and special occasions. I was thrilled mum let me wear them for some photos to be taken before the left heel and sole were built up and callipers attached.



Marlene out for a shopping day

The physiotherapist visited me at home on a regular basis to check on my progress and give advice on specific treatment and exercises. I don't remember her being paid so I assume the government covered the expenses. She never went away empty-handed though. There were always some eggs, home baking, scalded cream or a bunch of flowers grown by Mum. In fact anything plentiful on the farm at the time including, in autumn, wild field mushrooms collected by me. Out in the middle of our paddocks they sometimes grew as big as dinner plates.

All the children in the family rode horses and my two brothers even rode to Meeniyah primary school, a small two room building. Times had changed when

I went to school and I was driven by car. That was made possible by a car pool set up with neighbours. Many children in the neighbourhood rode and had their own horses. I remember going on various explorations around the local area after meeting up in the town of Meeniyan three miles from the farm. On other occasions we would take our lunch and ride off to the local footy match.



Marlene at play in her new calliper

When I first went to school the teacher wanted to protect me from damaging my legs and stopped me playing sport, dancing, swimming and gross motor activities in general. But I had grown up with four siblings amidst the rough and tumble of farm life and playing the little lady did not suit me at all. Mum and Dad understood my frustration perfectly and explained that I could do anything as long as the calliper was put on again at the end of the chosen activity. If anything was to happen and I injured myself my parents said they would pick up the pieces. The only time this happened was in fifth grade on a cold wet winter day. Because of the weather an indoor time table had been announced. We were playing a game of

colours where you had to run and you guessed it, I slipped on the wet floor and broke my arm. Dad came to the rescue as promised and took me to the doctors, leaving behind a sow who had just delivered 21 piglets, to fend for herself. Believe it or not this is a true story!

After my parents had spoken to the teacher I was soon climbing trees, playing allies, learning to swim at the Meeniyan hotel/motel pool and hanging upside down from the monkey bars with the rest of them. I played football and cricket with the boys and by bowling underarm I discovered I could get them out quite easily. As I got older I played netball too. Sometimes it hurt a lot after the game but I never told anyone in case my parents stopped me playing. I just did it, and didn't complain, in case I missed out!

Generally I was treated the same as all the other children in the class. I can only remember one occasion where I was made fun of by another child. The teacher

Mr. Gordon intervened and due possibly to the respect and affection this student had for him it never happened again. By the time I moved on to high school there were four classrooms at Meeniyan primary.

Life continued to be lots of fun back at the farm. My brothers made a sled which we rode downhill on the wet grass. 'Stop, stop' we would scream, careering down hill at break neck speed but of course we didn't really want it to stop at all. As we got older Brian, ever the mechanic, built a go-cart and that was fun too and of course worked even when the weather was dry.

I don't remember us kids getting into much trouble at home as youngsters. I do remember though on one occasion the boys were late home from school because they had been mucking around by the river. They were supposed to be home each afternoon in time to help Dad with the milking. Well, that day, they got to a vantage point on the farm where they could see Dad. They thought they were so late that he had finished the milking himself. They started crying even before revealing themselves to Dad, anticipating his anger but he was amused by their premature crying and they received only a mild tongue lashing from him.

In South Gippsland in the 50s and 60s there was always plenty of rain. The dams would fill up and in the wet months surface water lay around in the paddocks too. As kids we were warned about 'Granny Green Teeth' who supposedly lived in the dams and water troughs. We were warned to keep away from water or she would get us. These stories were obviously meant to make us wary of water and ensure our safety around dams. The childish interpretation of course was much more fanciful with Granny Green Teeth being seen around every corner. Our imagination went wild so that we thought that weeds growing in puddles could be her; the frogs croaking became her voice and the indentation of the cow hooves in the soft soil where water had gathered, could also be possible hidey holes for this fearsome creature.

When my daughter Carrie was young not only did she believe in the existence of Granny Green Teeth but she thought everyone else did too. One day at school she was chatting to friends about Granny when to her embarrassment, they began to laugh uproariously. She returned from school that day furious with us for not having told her the story was only family folk lore.

One year the rain was so heavy that in parts of the farm there were areas where 12 inches of mud had gathered. On our way to catch up with Dad one day we got stuck in a patch of mud and had to yell for him to come and rescue us. Dad

thought it was hilarious that each time he would pick us up it would leave our gumboots behind in the thick, sticky mud. Eventually though he carried us all to the safety of higher ground.

During school holidays, living in the little old farm house we had lots of city cousins to visit. Mum would cook huge roast lunches complete with apple pies, roly polys and unreal fresh cream from the dairy. We would eat sitting in the old buggy. It was great fun with heaps of cousins around and no adults to check on what was going on as they were all stuck indoors eating like grownups! In one of the bedrooms in the old timber farm house the foundations had sunk on one side. It was great fun to unbalance the props for the beds in order to tumble our unsuspecting guests just as they settled down for the night and thump!

When I was 16 and working as a hairdresser we moved into a 'brick vanilla' house which was built on the other side of the farm house fence. It was set in a garden Mum had designed, planted and tended for years prior to the new house being completed. Now we had an electric stove, hot running water, an indoor toilet and the choice of a shower as well as a bath which previously had been our only option.

Holidays saw us being packed into a car and caravan to travel Victoria and on one occasion to Adelaide visiting family and friends along the way. Our holidays away from the farm all took place during the May school holidays before the cows had calved and did not need to be milked.

Christmas school holidays would find us at the beach in between milking times or on a particularly hot day after milking in the evening. This was a special time to have a picnic dinner as a family. There was no bitumen in those days so we would rattle over the dirt roads. Waratah Bay, Cape Patterson and on occasion Inverloch were our choices of destination. I remember swimming then shivering for the rest of the day, unable to regulate my circulation.

Our church and school picnics were also held at these beaches. We had fun with the maypole and the merry go round at Cape Patterson. These were big steel constructions which have since disappeared. No doubt they would be considered too dangerous in children's playgrounds these days. Those early holidays and outings fostered in me a love of travel and keeping in touch with good friends.

Visiting Dad's parents and family in Camberwell was quite an expedition as we always seemed to need to stop either to be car sick or have a 'wee wee'. This

sometimes made the journey a lot longer than the two hours that you would expect it to take between home and Nana's. It was exciting to walk down the main street of Camberwell and purchase a lolly or an ice-cream as a treat and then inspect the fire station with the trucks in all their red, gleaming splendour.

I caught the school bus at 7.40 in the morning every weekday. It had to go the long way around picking up students along the way and eventually ending up at Leongatha high school. We had to wind our way around the hills towards Dumbalk and on to Mardan before finally reaching Leongatha in time for class. I used to feel sorry for the 'preppies' who were starting their schooling at the catholic school as we never arrived home until 4.45 in the afternoon, at the earliest. Often the little children were fast asleep long before they reached home.

During road works one year, the bus slid into a roadside bank, and because the doors were pushed up against the bank we were all trapped inside. Rex the driver looked after us and helped us escape by climbing through the back window. The next day the owner of the bus lines tried to blame us kids for mucking around in the bus and taking Rex's attention away from his job. For once we were not mucking around, so felt quite aggrieved by the unfair accusation.

I met some great people at high school who I can still count as my friends. I still see them on occasions when I visit Leongatha. I was voted in as Molloy house sports captain in form two. Sorting out the teams for one sports session I found I was a team short for tennis. No problem, I thought. The solution was to enlist my friend Sue who was also in Molloy. We found out very quickly that we knew nothing about tennis but having the enthusiasm and energy of youth we sent the ball over the fence more than over the net, much to the disgust of our opponents. I also played hockey for a while which I loved, but found I would twist my ankle on the uneven ground more often than not. I gave up hockey but I continued to play netball up until quite recently.

Our social life as teenagers revolved around the local Meeniyan dance. This was a truly community affair with dads acting as bouncers, mums doing the cooking and our next door neighbour, Tommy Nolan acting as the doorman. I am barely five feet tall and at one of these dances some wag asked me to dance and then got down on his knees to dance with me. Hilarious I don't think!

People came from near and far to attend these dances even as far as Melbourne. In the summer 'surfies' would drive up from the surf beaches for supper. Sandwiches, cakes, tea and coffee cost 50 cents and that included entry to the

dance! When I was 13 or 14 years old, it was all old time dancing. In later years we had rock and roll bands. These were all local bands and weren't paid as far as I know. In those days you didn't get paid for lots of things but did them because you wanted to. At holiday times the dances were so well attended that there was no room for dancing – only room to stand at attention side by side. Various community groups profited from dances held each year.

Teenage years were fun and relatively free from any major dramas. My brothers took me to visit their friends on a church camp in Inverloch where we ran the 'Camp Mother's' knickers up the flag pole. We had lots of fun collapsing tents by removing the pegs, loosening the guy ropes, and causing general mayhem.

In 1970 I met my husband Richard Wookey. I was 19 and Richard was 25. We met at a wedding in Meeniyan. The bride was my friend Florence, a fellow hairdresser from Leongatha, and the groom, Christopher, a friend of Richard's from 'the hills' (the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne). We had both been invited singly to the wedding and were seated next to each other. He asked his friend what my name was. After being told it was Marlene Tuff, Richard quipped 'and is she tuff?' 'Tuff by name but not by nature' was my family's reply.

After the wedding I had another occasion with family and friends at a twenty first birthday party in Hampton Park. Richard decided to drive me there and home again to Leongatha. From then on Richard came down on weekends and once during the week. He helped Dad with the milking and at one stage thought he might like to become a farmer but changed his mind in the end.



We married in 1971 in Leongatha and our first child Douglas was born in 1972. Then Desleigh was born in 1976 and finally Carrie in 1979. Douglas and his partner Kelli have two girls Taleisha and Breanne. Desleigh and Adrian have Ambah, Billy, Adrian (AJ) and twins, a boy Kane and a girl Ellika. Carrie and Darren have Cada, and their second is due in 2010. That will be nine grand children, not bad hey?

Richard and Marlene tie the knot

During the years when our children were young we were kept busy supporting their mainly sporting interests. I was the secretary of volleyball, scorer and taxi for their numerous commitments of basketball, swimming, netball and Brownies. I also became involved with the Upwey fire brigade helping out at fund raising cake stalls and the annual jumble sale. Early in our relationship we went to the Upwey fire brigade ball. This was a widely attended community social event held at the Upper Ferntree Gully hall, a weather-board building situated in what is now the Maxi car park. The men all wore suits and ties or their brigade uniforms and the women wore long ball dresses with elbow length gloves. I was enticed to enter 'Belle of the Ball' and won the event. I was unable to continue on to the next inter-brigade level of 'Belle of Belles' because I was married by then and pregnant with Douglas.

During the children's teenage years I played basketball with their friends' mothers. We weren't that good and didn't win many games but had the distinction of attracting the biggest cheer squad in Knox and surrounding district. Richard and I also played volleyball for a number of seasons. With friends Helen and Colleen, I also learnt line dancing. This was great fun but a little daunting sometimes when you ended up the only one facing the wrong way in a long line of dancers. Basketball, volley ball and line dancing had to go in the end when work and study commitments increased.

These days I find we support the grandchildren's interests as we did our children's, swimming and dancing among other things; just whatever is 'in' and popular with them at the time.

When I met Richard I also met the Upwey crowd. Central to this group were the mates Richard went to school with and their wives. We still maintain a strong friendship group with them, camping twice a year at Mansfield and taking it in turns to organize annual Bed and Breakfast weekends away in October.

As the children got older I began to believe there was a new career out there waiting for me. I have always found children to be fascinating little entities and thought that was the direction I should take. I was invited to do some emergency relief work at a child care centre and nearby kindergarten. I accepted the challenge and eight years later in 1995 I was encouraged by new management to enroll in a Certificate 3 which I successfully completed. I went on to gain a Diploma in Childcare Studies in 1999. In 2007 I completed Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment. That increased my skills with computers to the point

where, to my knowledge, there are several unfinished documents floating around in Cyber-space, lost and destined never to be sighted again.

I don't believe having polio as a child has held me back in any way or stopped me doing what I wanted to do, but I don't deny that physical endeavors have become more fatiguing for me as I have aged. Richard and I share a love of the outback and have travelled extensively together and with friends. We have driven up the Oodnadatta Track, the Old Ghan and the Tanami Track. We have travelled as far as Broome, Coopers Creek and Innaminka. We have pitched our tent in some wonderful places. In one place the dingoes howled during the night from cliff tops surrounding the camp site - an unforgettable experience and quite eerie in the middle of the outback with only a flimsy tent to sleep in.

Through all our travels Tanami the bear has tagged along. He has had his picture taken many times, in many far flung places and got himself into some strange situations too. He's been caught peeking through toilet block windows, spying in other peoples tents, climbing the Bourke and Wills dig tree just out of Innaminka and worst of all sleeping in someone else's sleeping bag. He didn't get the chance to climb Uluru (Ayres Rock). It was raining at the time and he didn't want to get his fur wet. One of his favorite journeys was through the country surrounding Broome. I travelled to New Zealand a couple of times on my own to see my friend Gillian. Tanami didn't go on these trips though he was left at home to keep Richard company.

Many of these holidays have required long walks from car parks on rough tracks to view landmarks. Up until recently, I have managed the rough terrain well with adequate energy levels. These days on long treks I am finding it increasingly more difficult to keep up with the others.

As well as travel, I like to spend any spare time in the garden or sewing and doing craftwork I have difficulties balancing this with full time work in childcare. We are fortunate to have an on-site van down at Waratah Bay. We spend many holidays and weekends down there enjoying the social life in summer and the solitude and peace in the winter.

In 2000 my friend Florence saw a notice for the polio network advertised in her local paper The Leongatha Star. When she told me about it I was curious and wanted to learn more. My search for knowledge had also been triggered by finding out in my late 40s that I should have been ticking the disability box each time I filled out a form. Prior to this my knowledge of polio consisted only of

what my parents had told me and general hearsay about the condition. After ringing the network I was put in touch with Joan Smith and subsequently assisted her in setting up the Yarra Ranges Support Group. Since then I have attended regular meetings and learnt a good deal more about polio.

No one can foresee the future or can say what lies ahead for a polio survivor. I may even have to accept the use of aides if it means I can maintain my mobility and well being. It may even be necessary to look at a change of address. A flatter block of land with a smaller garden to maintain and no steps or stairs to negotiate, may help me to preserve energy levels and ensure that I have sufficient stamina to continue to enjoy my favorite activities. Other changes may be required such as looking at alternative employment, reduced hours or even early retirement. Perhaps that 'nice sit-down job' which Doctor Hopkins originally advised may have to become a reality. I hope I can be compliant enough to accept and act on the advice of the polio professionals and support groups as they try to assist me make the transitions and adjustments necessary.

In the meantime I depend on the understanding and support of family and friends and their willingness to slow down a little so I can continue to share life's adventures with them. I never want to feel that polio has held me back in any way whatsoever. I want to continue to live a fulfilling life without regrets or disappointment for what might have been or if only...



Marlene with early friends and helpers

Story written by Pauline Baxter

Ursula's Story

Contracted polio in 1951



I'm so tired. It's not fair. I work all day, I have to earn a living, and I try so hard. I am paid six dollars an hour for cleaning an insurance company office – it's not worth it! I have done all sorts of cleaning jobs for ten years, working in park facilities, libraries, toilets, and office buildings with my husband Peter helping me. Now I am sitting in my car, my day finished, and I can't move. The pain is so bad I just sit here and cry, cry, cry. I cannot drive home just yet, my legs hurt too much. It shouldn't be this hard. What is wrong with me? I pray to God.

So how did I get here? It's the year 2006, and I'd been working as a cleaner; doing hard physical tasks, for ten long, exhausting years, ever since I and 140 others got their marching orders as part of 'budget cuts' in 1996. And so ended a job I had been good at for thirty years. I had worked in the same job at the Revenue department since I left school - from 6 June 1966 to 6 June 1996; that must be some sort of omen! My goodbye gift was a taxi ride home. Thanks Ursula. You're welcome Jeff.

But I got on with life. My parents always told me 'Be thankful for the things you can do and have, and get on with it. You can find a way to do whatever you want'. They always supported me; they were wonderful, caring and sensible role models.

Let me go back, way back, so that you can understand who I am and how I got to be where I am today. My earliest memories are at about age two and a half, when I was admitted to Fairfield infectious diseases hospital for polio. My auntie, who was a nurse at Fairfield recognized my symptoms and called an ambulance. I was taken to Fairfield, and stayed for 18 months. There was very little contact with my parents; they were discouraged from visiting, and absolutely no one else could visit. 'Don't come visiting and upsetting the child', that was the attitude of the times. Luckily my auntie was there to look out for me, so at least I had someone. I talked to my 'dreams' all the time, when I was in pain, or lonely, or sad. My imagination was my only company at times. Was I talking to God even then? I don't know.

Mum and Dad were not encouraged to see me often, and doctors explained nothing. Just do as you are told, we know best, don't ask questions, the child will be upset by visits from family, best to leave things, we're looking after her, we know better than you.



It's good to be home with a friend

Home from hospital at last with callipers, braces, plasters at night, lots of pain, treatments, visits to the hospital and doctors. The Royal Children's hospital then was in Carlton. The waiting room to see the specialists was a long corridor, full of wooden benches, where we would wait and wait and wait, forever it seemed, for our name to

be called. We would then go into one of the many doors to see the doctor. That went on for week after week after week. My father worked for the Herald Sun newspaper, I think as a proof reader, and he worked night shifts so that he would be available to take me to therapy and appointments.

I spent a lot of time with my grandmother too. She lived at Surrey Hills, not too far from us, and she would take me to Sunday school and church. Next door was a neighbour, Mrs Rowlands, who had a daughter the same age as me and she used to include me in lots of their outings. Her daughter and I shared the same birthday, and I'm sure she often thought that polio could have affected her daughter just as easily. I remember trips with her to see 'My Fair Lady' and 'Swan Lake'.

So even though I had a rough time, with lasting effects, I was happy. I saw myself as just another kid on the block. I had the best parents who took me everywhere and helped me participate in all sorts of activities. They never molly-coddled me or pampered me. They always encouraged, and supported, but let me know I needed to be strong and determined to succeed. They even had me take my turn to mow the lawns at our home. This resulted in a neighbour ringing and complaining. If it happened these days he probably would have rung Social Services!

There were holidays to Queensland, in the old Austin car. The seat would be folded down to make a large bench for me and my stiff, sticking-out legs in their callipers. I kicked my family a lot, but not on purpose. It must have been hard in those days for my parents to drive all that way with me and my brother (younger by 18 months) and to give us those wonderful holidays.

School years were a mixture for me: I started at Bennetswood Primary school, but was soon transferred to Alamein Special (now called Ashwood), where I was in a class of enormous diversity of abilities and disabilities. The Special School bus picked me up. This probably alienated me further from the kids in my neighbourhood.

I had a hearing impairment, vision in one eye only, and of course the obvious physical problems. But I was walking, sort of, with the aid of sticks and callipers. At least no wheelchair, but I'm sure that teachers probably looked at these problems and wondered which one to tackle first.

I have always had trouble making and keeping friends. Friends would come, and then go. Why was this? Perhaps because my parents took me everywhere and did things with me. Perhaps it was my quiet personality. Perhaps it was something to do with having polio. Did people think they could catch it? The polio certainly stopped me from going out to play and making friends in the neighbourhood as ordinary kids would do. But people say that if you can count your true and good friends on one hand you are lucky.

One memory from my teen years was when I had to go into Frankston hospital for surgery to correct my feet. I had a long stay, and sometimes we would be taken on 'outings'. One such outing was to the beach (lots of fresh air and sunshine does wonders for the recovery you know!) I collected crabs and smuggled them back to the ward where I put them under other kids' pillows. Did I ever get into trouble! Still it shows I had a sense of humour and a sense of fun.

After Ashwood I went to Box Hill Technical School from 1960 to 1964. At Box Hill Tech we were taught lots of skills needed for the jobs it was expected we would get in offices or factories.

From 1965 until 1966 I attended a centre in Toorak called COONAC. This was a facility which prepared students with disabilities for employment. It was like a rehab day centre, and I would be picked up by a Government-funded taxi, which was shared by three or four students. The subjects were often 'life training', with core subjects like cooking, office work, budgeting, banking, and hospitality. There were also subjects like car mechanics, or factory work, such as packing. I received a \$20 per week 'wage' and a \$10 travel allowance. It was here that I made two really good friends, both hearing impaired. I was a bridesmaid for one of them, so in a lot of ways my progress through teenage years was a very 'normal' one.

It was from COONAC that I got my first full time job that I kept for 30 years. I worked hard while I lived with my parents. They made sure I went places and did things; the races, the pictures, swimming, and church functions.

A pleasant family outing to the beach



In 1969, when I was 21, my parents and I went on a world tour on the Women's Weekly Cruise. I had saved up some annual leave, and I took six months on half pay instead of three months on full pay. Dad had Long Service leave, so off we went. We went to Guam, Japan, Hawaii, USA (San Francisco to Santa Barbara), through the Panama, Europe, and the UK. Europe and the UK were part of a 23 day bus tour, and we saw so much! From London we flew to Barcelona, and were there just after the terrible gas truck explosions that killed many. So, tragic things happened even then, in far away countries. We headed back to Scotland and Wales, and then cruised around Africa. My father was born in South Africa so that was very special for him. On that cruise Mum and Dad were on C deck, and I was on A deck with three other single girls. One friend, Denise, is still in contact with me, although living interstate. When I was in Sydney for a conference I gave her a call, and she screamed, 'Why didn't you tell me you were

coming to Sydney? I'd love to catch up with you'. Maybe I'll get back to Sydney or she'll come here sometime. Life passes so fast, how easy it is to lose touch in our busy world. What a great experience that cruise was.

On board I played quoits and was quite good; I was part of a team. There were all the usual on-board activities, and my Dad would make sure I had the opportunity to take part. My friends and I enjoyed all of those activities so much.



Proud parents on my wedding day

After returning home I resumed work and life in general. An important part of my week was the Moorabbin Town Hall dance, and I drove there in my brand new Hillman car. Mum and Dad were predictably a bit nervous, but as they had encouraged me to be independent they could hardly complain! It was there that I met Peter, and we became a couple. Soon we married, and settled into wedded life, working, and paying the mortgage.

Am I lucky? Yes there have been lots of times I've thanked God. Like when my daughter was born. I was blessed, even though for a time she took the wrong path as many teenagers do. But now she is my dear daughter and has given me two beautiful grandchildren, Bailey and Mirrabella. Thank God also now for polio vaccination so these babies will be safe. Yes, lucky.

I also know how lucky I am to have Peter; he had a heart attack and I nearly lost him. I need him more than ever now and I'm so, so glad he's still here.

I am lucky to have had my parents; my greatest support, my best friends most of the time, my playmates, my supporters, my strength, my guardians.

I'm lucky at the moment. I can drive again after not being able to for a while. And my work now is of the voluntary variety, but at least I am still working!

When Melissa was two I joined the local Salvation Army Church at Ferntree Gully, and to this day have support and wonderful friendships from there. Three other ladies and I call ourselves the 'Four Musketeers'! I still volunteer in the

Salvation Army op shop whenever they need me. I have been doing this for over seven years now.

I also have connections with 'Women Aglow', a Christian group. This introduction came about when a friend from church, June, took me in hand after the loss of my job and said, 'Come on Ursula, you need to get out and meet some like-minded people; people who will accept you, care for you, include you in great activities, and support you in times of need'. We meet once a month at Nunawading, and for special occasions. Once a month we also meet in somebody's home for a Bible study session. Recently I went to Western Australia with 32 ladies from Aglow, and this was a memorable experience, although it truly showed me that I can no longer manage entirely on my own. Being out of my 'comfort zone' of home really emphasized the amount of help I sometimes need.

So that is much of my story and we go back to where I began; the year 2000, and I cannot go on working terrible cleaning jobs...

I am in pain constantly. I am so tired. I can't do things I should be able to do. My leg is swollen, purple, cold, so bad; overwhelming feelings of exhaustion and pain. I am in a bad way, and I have no idea why. Then my friend sees it and insists on writing to a doctor she knows. When he sees me, he refers me immediately to Dr. Steven De Graaf, a specialist in polio and its late effects. He has lectured all over the world, and is one of very few who is beginning to understand what is happening to me and many others who suffered polio as children. He puts me immediately into Caulfield hospital. He knows exactly what is happening to me, even though at this point I don't understand it.

While I am in the hospital my daughter is at another hospital having a baby, and Peter has a heart attack. He calls an ambulance but is near death and nobody knows where I am to contact me. What a mess, what a worry! Finally I am contacted, and told, and I can telephone Peter and talk to him. I stay two weeks in one hospital while Peter is in another.

So, at Caulfield I hear the diagnosis of post-polio, and begin to understand that my life is about to change dramatically once again, and that the changes will not be welcome or easy. Of course I'm worried. But thank God again that my friend wrote her letter and that this chain of events followed. Now I know why I feel so bad, why my body was failing me, why I had pain, pain, pain. (I could have done

without Peter's part in the chain of events however). It would be better if this wasn't happening to me, but at least I know WHY. I have information about the changes that will affect me, and the support of new friends who are experiencing the same thing, or who understand the changes in my life. I begin to understand that my struggle to work long and physically hard hours was increasing my problems.

Life has slowed right down; everything is slower. Is it the polio effects? Or perhaps age has a little to do with it as well. Whatever it is, I find it hard to accept. So my journey through this life continues; not perhaps as I would have chosen, but I think my parents would have been proud of me, and that makes it all worthwhile.

I always remember that God is with me, and Mum and Dad are with me, and I should smile for the things that I have achieved, and can do, and have experienced, as well as those things I can still enjoy, like watching the footy. Go the Hawks! – that's one great thing about the year 2008!

Story written by Gayl Dobbin





Vera's Story

Contracted polio in 1918

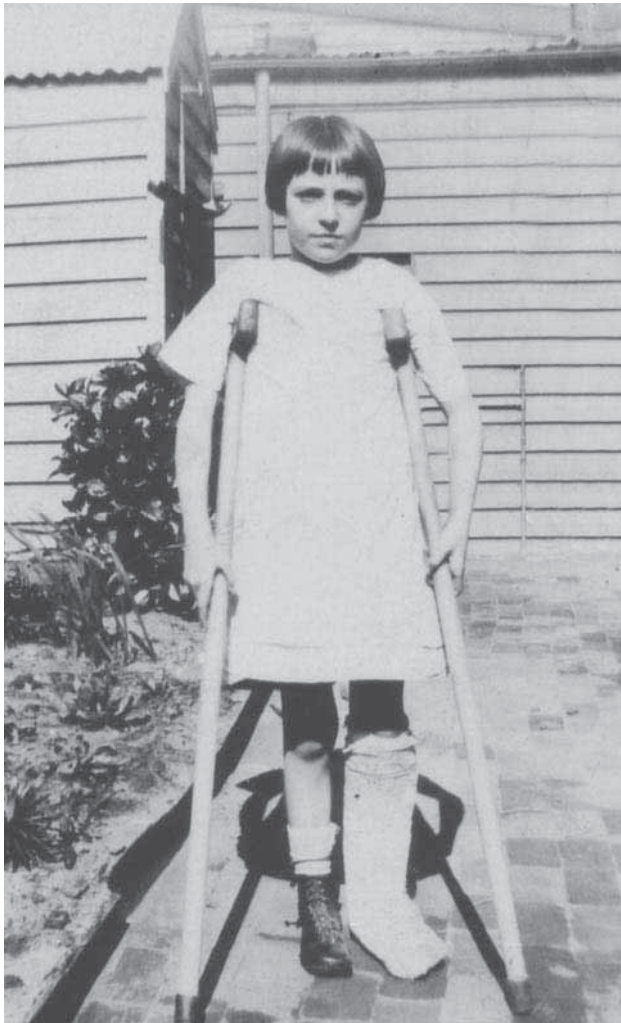


My mother Vera Williams (nee Wright), was just 18 months old when 'infantile paralysis' was diagnosed in February 1918, which was just a few days after the birth of her baby brother Harry. According to her sisters Lizzie and Elsie, who were teenagers at the time, they did not expect their little sister to survive as other children in the area had died. Vera told of the time when the 'bad fairy' kept pointing at her with her finger which was a flashing light. If you were hit by the light you died, so she had to keep moving to avoid it. One wonders if this was a near-death experience as seen through the eyes of a child. However, her fighting spirit and will to live were quite evident and she did survive although with significant physical damage to her legs, arms and back. Later Vera felt that she had deprived her newborn brother of their mothers love and attention. 'I pushed him off the lap' she said, although the sibling bond between Vera and Harry was very strong throughout their lives. The entire close-knit Wright family which had no relatives in Australia, was involved in Vera's struggle to survive and thrive.

Over the next 14 years Vera endured numerous operations, none of which were successful. The physical scarring remained evident for the next 80 years. Dr Upjohn tried to rectify the previous operations but all to no avail. Standards of medicine, surgery and nursing at that time can only be described as barbaric. Pain relief was virtually non-existent for children although Vera's parents gave her brandy at really bad times. No consideration was given to children's psychological well-being. Parents were not permitted to stay with their children.

Visiting was restricted as Matron was definitely in charge. Vera certainly developed an aversion to white coats due to her painful experiences. If anyone, even a hairdresser, appeared in a white coat, Vera took flight – albeit slowly and with clanking of her callipers. This fear remained with her forever. The stories of life in a children's hospital are definitely from another age.

Parents were required where possible to provide breakfast (such as eggs or cereal) for their children – otherwise gruel was standard fare. Apparently the kids avoided nasty medicine by holding it in their mouths until the nurse moved on, then spat it into their face-washers. Food was shared around the ward by being thrown from bed to bed.



Vera on crutches as a child

In another ill-fated attempt to stimulate the paralysed limbs, electric shock treatment was tried. It was experimental at the time and its only result was deafness for Vera for the rest of her life and this became an increasing problem as time went on. Dr Upjohn was the leading surgeon of the time with consultations costing one guinea (one pound, one shilling) whereas the average weekly wage was barely one pound. The family was not well-off with John Wright employed as a gardener at the Botanic Gardens. In England he had been a Royal Marine – Light Infantry – and had no horticultural experience. To save the cost of a tram fare, Vera was usually wheeled in her pram for miles to the Childrens' Hospital with her sisters sharing the pram pushing.

All four sisters, including Sophie who was also born in Australia, were close despite considerable age differences. They remained close during their adult lives, with Vera caring for her widowed sisters Lizzie and Elsie in the 1980s and 1990s. Whenever someone in the family needed help of any kind it was always Vera who they turned to first, and she never let them down.

Three sisters in the snow 1937



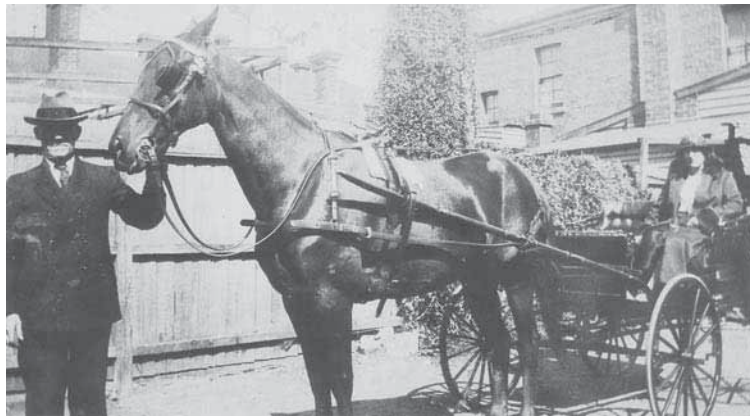
As Vera was hospitalised for lengthy periods of time, her schooling at Middle Park Central was intermittent. She was called 'Hoppy Go Kick' by the other children! But with supreme optimism Vera tried out for teams – such as the marching team, but never quite made it. Teachers at Middle Park were obviously skilful and compassionate as Vera was never the first to be eliminated from the team. Her optimism and willingness to try were maintained throughout her life.

Vera's father John Wright, had migrated to Australia with his wife Elizabeth and three older children Jack, Elizabeth and Elsie, from Portsmouth England in 1911. He was determined to give his youngest daughter Vera the best education he could. He taught her how to read and write and instilled a love of literature. John did not believe in immobilisation of polio-affected limbs and he taught Vera to swim to make her use her legs and arms. He also bought her a little handbag to encourage her to swing her arms. At home he daily massaged and exercised her limbs and despite dire predictions, Vera learnt to walk. She even had ambitions of becoming a ballet dancer and informed Dr Upjohn of this. Vera also told Dr Upjohn that 'If you hurt me, my father will comb your hair with a rake!' Unfortunately such threats did not improve the outcomes of his surgery.

Vera and her younger brother Harry were well-known around Port Melbourne where they swam around the piers and spent a lot of time at the beach. They were quite adventurous and swam out into the bay. On several occasions Vera had to be rescued as she did not have the strength and stamina of her brother. Harry would tell the seamen that he and his sister were starving and ask for food.

The seamen took one look at Vera and usually obliged with sandwiches and cakes. Harry was a big boy who always loved his food whereas Vera rarely had an appetite. As a result of their swimming activities and her father's massage, Vera's legs and arms were well-developed, unlike many polio victims of the time who had pencil-thin legs.

As an independent spirit Vera wanted to earn her own living. She became a kindergarten assistant. One of her tasks was to collect the children from their homes in the early morning and take them en-masse, holding on to a rope, to the kinder – similar to the walking bus we have today. Throughout her life Vera had a strong love of children and many people who were in unfortunate circumstances were happy to have Vera look after their children for months at a time. When a friend's husband left his family, the mother, Joyce Court, had to find a job to support her two young sons. The job she found was as cook at a timber-cutting camp in Healesville, so Vera looked after the two sons Garry and Ricky for many months while the mother built up her funds. Other women were keen to have Vera mind their children on a daily or weekly basis so that they could temporarily return to work. One child Susan was minded so often she asked Vera 'Am I your little girl, Vera, or do I really belong to Joan? Who is my mum?' Susan and her mum, Joan Baxter, remained life-long friends of Vera and her family.



Cole King, buggy and Vera's parents

As a teenager, Vera successfully passed her mothercraft exams, but for unknown reasons the family moved to a dairy farm in Bayles. Here Vera developed a love of horses and had a horse (Cole King) and buggy which she drove into

Koo-Wee-Rup for shopping and church. Since she could not convince her horse to reverse, she 'parked' in the church grounds and drove out in a big circle. The horse knew the way home and trotted home quickly and obediently. Vera did not take to country life as she was too compassionate towards animals. Apparently favourite calves were hidden in her bedroom when it was time for them to go to market. When they did leave they had ribbons tied around their necks to show that they were special. This was the start of Vera's interest in animal welfare. She worked for many years as a volunteer for the Australian Animal Protection Society and was a long-term member of Project Hope Horse Rescue. Vera led an active social life and loved ballroom dancing, not quite her childhood dream of ballet. The Cora Lynn hall on Saturday night was a great favourite. Later when the family returned to Melbourne she went dancing at Leggetts Ballroom and the Palais de Dance. Because she wanted fancy outfits for dancing Vera decided to obtain higher paid employment. She became a labourer doing piece-work at various factories including rubber trimming, assembly of electrical components, and work in an iron foundry. It was here that she made life-long friends, Blanche Phillips and Audrey O'Shea. Vera missed out on several jobs when the employer saw her walk and decided not to employ a disabled person. So she developed strategies to avoid having her legs and feet on show; she would arrive early and be first in line at the employment window. Once she had the job she was never dismissed because she was a hard worker. She had an excellent work ethic and did not expect or receive any special treatment. Her parents now also returned to Melbourne, and ran several shops – fruit and vegetables and milk-bar, corner stores, in which Vera also helped before and after work and at weekends. She was a friendly person who related well to others and had a good business sense.



Bathing beauty at Sorrento

Vera was a spiritual person who attended various Christian churches and Bible study groups. She became a Sunday School teacher and enjoyed the church picnics to the beach. She entered a 'Bathing Beauty' contest at Sorrento and won! She kept her feet hidden in the sand. She remained interested in religion throughout her life. Her Bible provided comfort in difficult times. In later years, her friend Joyce McCabe visited each week for lunch, with Bible study supposedly being the purpose of the meeting. They sure loved to chat!

Vera met Gordon Williams at a dance and was pleased that he came from a staunch Salvation Army family. As a quiet, gentle person Gordon was the right man for Vera. He did not smoke or drink or even swear, but was interested in horse-racing. He really wanted to become an apprentice jockey, but that was not appropriate for a Salvation Army boy. Instead he became an apprentice book-binder and over time became a master craftsman, the best in the trade. However, he always maintained an interest in horse-racing and regularly enjoyed a small wager.



Vera's wedding day 1938

They married in 1938 when Vera was 22, and set up home in Brunswick. Gordon's family were not in favour of the marriage and openly said that he should not marry an invalid as she would always be sick. They also found it difficult to cope with her brightness and outgoing personality; even worse – she wore lipstick! Vera was determined to show them they were wrong, and she succeeded. When Gordon's mother Mabel came to stay for three months each year, she was always happy and contented and reluctant to move on to stay with her other children.

Vera continued working until their first child Kathleen was born in 1942 at Sacred Heart Hospital, followed by Vivienne in 1944. This was also the year that Vera's much-loved father died whilst in the Australian Army. John had put his age down by 20 years so that he was able to enlist. He was actually 73. Like father like daughter!



Kath and Viv as kids

Vera and Gordon moved to the wilds of Springvale in 1946 with family life centred on the children. Apparently I was a rather difficult child with a determined streak and a mind of my own, unlike my sister who was easy going and placid. We were and remain, like chalk and cheese. Vera was a devoted wife and mother who saw that all our needs and wants were met despite a limited budget. She knitted, crocheted, sewed, bottled fruit and vegies, kept chooks and was a talented floral artist – all to help the family budget. Vera passed on her fighting spirit to her children who were encouraged to achieve their goals. Both daughters took on family responsibilities from an early age – shopping, dusting, vacuuming, sweeping, and gardening – so that life continued as usual even if Vera was suffering poor health. On most occasions if Vera could not walk or stand she would crawl around the house attending to chores. Her pain threshold was very, very high. As children, my sister and I thought everyone had a Mum like ours, she was wonderful although embarrassing at times. If parents were invited to the school our mother always came. Usually she was the only parent who came to the classroom during Education Week. We also had to convince her not to kiss us goodbye in front of the other school kids. Since we lived quite a distance from the school, and had to walk along Springvale Road and across the railway line, our mother walked us to and from the school. There was no footpath in those days so Vera lobbied the local Council, Dandenong at that time, and ultimately, a footpath was constructed. The councillors who responded to Vera's challenge to push a pram along the side of the road found out how difficult it was. We had a lot of fun walking to school – singing songs, reciting the times tables, spelling and if it

was raining, jumping in puddles. When the rain poured down and caused flooding we took off our socks and shoes and walked home barefoot, including Vera. We both remember when our Auntie Elsie visited and was wearing high heeled shoes. We had never seen anything as strange as they were not like our mother's shoes – we thought that high heels were hilarious.

My sister and I often reminisce about our childhood as we now realise how good it was. Vera was a good money-manager and carefully balanced the family budget. She loved lay-bys and paid off toys for Christmas throughout the year. Christmas was always fantastic, it was the only time of the year that we ate chicken as it was so expensive. We loved decorating the Christmas tree and each year Vera purchased more decorations. We ended up with a vast collection which is still used by the next generation. The family tradition of getting together at Christmas continues. One of my earliest memories is of Christmas in our new house at Springvale. I remember the boxes of belongings, rolls of carpet and tinsel. That year my sister and I were given dolls' prams – they were great! The other children in the street were really envious of the prams, especially the McKenzie girls who each received a balloon as their only gift. Vera was like the Pied Piper, for children always filled our home. We used to listen to 'Kindergarten of the Air' on the radio with Mum leading us in the activities. The group of kids participating grew quite large and Vera loved every minute of it, as did the kids.



Rosebud holidays

As children we went for holidays to Rosebud where we rented a cabin on the foreshore. Vera and the girls stayed for several weeks whilst Gordon joined them at weekends. We all had a marvellous time, mostly on the beach, playing with all the other kids. On one occasion my adventurous spirit took me too far out into the water and I almost drowned, but obviously was rescued. In another incident my sister fell out of a window and broke her arm. My parents decided that we needed a safer place to holiday, but no other destination seemed to have the same atmosphere or magic as Rosebud.

We also remember the royal visits of the 1950s when Queen Elizabeth II came to Australia. We were among the thousands who patiently waited, waved and cheered as the Queen passed by. Vera was fascinated with the Royal family, perhaps because of having British parents. At Coronation time our house was festooned in red, white and blue. We were so excited and enthusiastic you would think the coronation was about to occur in our lounge room. Vera always had photographs of the Queen and royal family on our mantelpiece as if they were members of OUR family. I still have these photographs but they are not on my mantelpiece. She was delighted to see Princess Diana and Prince Charles during the bi-centennial celebrations in Sydney.

Our mother did not want us to be 'country-bumpkins' so once each month, in our best clothes, we visited our Auntie Elsie in Port Melbourne and often went to a movie which we called 'the pictures', and ate at a restaurant. We had good table manners and knew how to behave properly in public. Our mother ensured that we had good shoes and a warm coat – usually they had been on lay-by. We were taught that if you could not afford it, you waited and put it on lay-by. You always lived within your means. Both my sister and I have effectively organised our finances as adults without resorting to credit, due to our early training.

Because of her on-going interest, Vera sent both of us for ballet lessons but neither of us wanted to continue. Kathleen took up tennis which she continued to play until later life whilst Vivienne practised music. Our interests were encouraged and, despite some reluctance, we attended Sunday School for many years. After harassing our parents for years, in 1956 we were finally allowed to get a dog. 'Rover' was a spaniel who certainly added a new dimension to our life. He cost 30 shillings and although we knew nothing about training a dog we had a lot of fun as Rover led us a merry dance throughout the neighbourhood. Rover was well-known in the district because he created mischief wherever he went. Of course it was Vera who had to go and collect him – after he had killed the neighbours' chooks, or dug up a vegie garden, or had been hit by a car and injured. There was no fence capable of keeping Rover contained, he was a real Houdini. When Rover died in 1964 the whole family was devastated. Since then our family has always included at least one dog, but none have been as interesting as Rover. As Vera was at home for most of the day our dogs have always attached themselves to her. During the 1990s I brought home from the Animal Shelter an old Chihuahua with heart and leg problems. 'Pippa' immediately became Vera's dog; sat on her lap when possible and guarded her ferociously. It was virtually impossible to touch Vera without being bitten by Pippa, who in fact outlived Vera.

Every Sunday the extended family including brothers, sisters and their children, descended upon the Springvale home. A visit to Vera's father, in the cemetery, was always part of the day. Vera loved having the family around her, the more the merrier, with Sunday roast dinner and scones and salad for tea. Vera's cream cakes and sponges were very popular. On Friday nights Vera went by train to her sister Lizzie's in Port Melbourne so that she could help in their fruit and vegetables shop on Saturday mornings. In lieu of wages Vera was given enough fruit and vegies to feed our family for the following week.



Vera and Harry 2002

Over time the family dispersed but Vera maintained contact with them all, especially brothers Jack and Harry who lived interstate. She was a prolific letter-writer, not just to family members but also to relevant authorities on social justice issues, particularly involving children and animals. Vera supported mission stations throughout the world and directly assisted orphan children at St Rose Mission in Lesotho in Africa, through the Sisters of the Holy Name, who became her life-long friends. Each month for over 20 years, Vera sent large parcels of clothes, shoes, toiletries and basic necessities to the orphans at St Rose. Special items and toys were included for 'Patrick' who was the favourite of both the Sisters and Vera, and I sponsored his education and living expenses.

One skill which Vera could not master was riding a bicycle. She seemed to have no sense of balance. So, when she was 40 years old, she decided to learn to drive a car. Driving lessons made her a very competent driver but she experienced considerable discrimination in obtaining her licence. Over time her feet began turning under so that she was walking on the sides of her feet. She was told by the local police that 'crippled women should not drive'. She failed her licence test several times. Vera was never one to give up. With an appeal to the Police Commissioner she was tested again in another location and succeeded. Apparently the local policeman was severely reprimanded and hopefully changed his attitude towards people with disabilities. Vera purchased, second-hand, a little red Fiat 500. Now she was able to go wherever she wanted, regardless of foot problems. We have many happy memories of trips to Kilcunda and Phillip Island with the soft-top open, the wind in our hair and a top speed of 35 miles per hour. We were King of the Road! As we lived near Sandown Car Racing track we used to joke that the little red cars zapping around the course were Mum in her little red Fiat. Some gullible people believed us as Vera tended to like speeding. However, she only received one infringement notice in all her years of driving. Vera later upgraded to a Fiat 600 – red of course!



Vera's red Fiat 600

Kathleen and I had a happy and full childhood. We were well educated and established our own lives. Kathleen wanted to become a laboratory assistant but all the employers specified 'male'. We were brought up to believe that we were as good as anyone else. With Vera's help, Kathleen applied for a boy's job and was successful. She continued lab work until her retirement. I was the first family member to go to university and continued to live at home where I was totally pampered. I graduated from Monash University with a Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Education and commenced a successful 38 year career in education.



Vera with 2 of her grandchildren

Vera was delighted to become a grandmother when David, Kathleen's first child, was born in 1967 in Papua New Guinea. Vera loved him dearly and they maintained a close relationship until her death. She spent a lot of time baby-sitting her three grandchildren – David, Christopher and Rebecca – and was pleased to be involved in their lives as both children and young adults. Vera was also very proud when she became a Great Grandmother to David's children – James, Georgia and Madeline. She was known as 'Old Grandma' to her other great grandchild Benjamin who lived next door in Emerald. Recently Kathleen commented 'I hope that Mum's genes come out in my grandchildren'. If so, they are sure to have happy, successful and interesting lives.



*A very proud
Vera with grandson
David at his wedding 1995*

In the 1970s Vera met a wonderful orthopaedic surgeon, Dr Stanley O'Loughlin. She was in Dandenong hospital with a broken hip which she had walked on for three days before seeking help. Ultimately Dr O'Loughlin operated on Vera's feet with great success although the recovery process took almost a year. He effectively repaired the failures of the past by straightening her feet. For the first time in her life, Vera's legs and feet were pain-free and she commenced her overseas travels. She wanted to visit England to see where her beloved father came from and to see the places of his stories about 'home'. With me for company, Vera made several trips to Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, USA, Hong Kong and New Zealand. She enjoyed travelling, both in Australia and overseas, but was always pleased to return home to her extended family. One highlight of her travels was to be on board a ship on Sydney Harbour for the very memorable bi-centennial celebrations in January 1988, exactly 100 years after her father had enlisted. The 'Tall Ships' reminded her of her father's 12 years in the Royal Marines. He enlisted in 1888 when he was 18 years old. His original discharge certificate was one of Vera's treasures, and now is one of mine.

Vera liked to tell the story about visiting her friends, the Coulton family, in Tamworth. She flew to Sydney and then had to change to a smaller plane to Tamworth. It was stormy and raining heavily and the plane was late. Two air hostesses escorted Vera on board and the plane took off immediately. An hour later the Captain announced 'We will be landing in Brisbane in five minutes'. 'Brisbane', exclaimed Vera, 'but I'm going to Tamworth!' Meanwhile the Coulton family met Vera's suitcase which arrived on time in Tamworth. Vera spent the night in Brisbane and the next day flew to Tamworth. Whilst waiting at Brisbane she was called to the check-in counter every half hour just to make sure she hadn't disappeared. The airline informed us that they often lost luggage but rarely passengers!

In 1986 Vera celebrated her 70th birthday, with family and friends gathering at daughter Kath's home in Boronia. It was a wonderful day, often fondly recalled in later years, especially as many of the participants are no longer with us.

A big blow and out went the candles



Vera's husband Gordon died unexpectedly from fungal meningitis in 1988. Vera sold the family home in Springvale in 1990, as she could not cope on her own and so she moved to Belgrave to live with me. The house was always alive with Vera's visitors from far and near. Although there was an emergency system in place at the house, Vera did not use it. Instead she would crawl to the phone, ring me at work and tell me of the current disaster such as 'I think I've broken my leg. Can you come home?' Sometimes it was a broken leg, but also hip, fractured skull, broken hands and other calamities. Vera also continued her volunteer work helping unwanted animals.

When I retired from paid employment in 1998, we moved to a property in Emerald where we established Emerald Mist Alpacas. Unfortunately Vera's health was rapidly deteriorating with multiple problems including blood-pressure, eye problems, diabetes and heart concerns. Falls became more common and hospital admission frequent and the ambulance officers became our friends. Then, for the first time, she had difficulty breathing with numerous bouts of bronchitis and pneumonia. She gave up driving, due to increasing weakness in her legs, and very reluctantly accepted wearing a calliper on her left leg and using a walking frame for stability. She felt she was too old, frail and afraid to have any further surgery and her health continued to decline. It became virtually impossible to leave Vera alone, so friends were called upon to 'Grandma Sit' on many occasions. Information from the PolioNetwork seemed to indicate that Vera was possibly experiencing the effects of Post Polio Syndrome and this affected her confidence. She felt that she had beaten polio as a child, had endured its physical effects for over 80 years, but did not have the strength or willingness to sustain further long-term affects. She virtually gave up and no longer had the will to live. Increasingly, she talked about her father and was sure of his presence. Much of the care I provided was attributed by Vera to her father. In her mind she was again a young girl. I was just a nurse – certainly not her daughter.

The final year of Vera's life was very unhappy for us all due to her increasing dementia as well as her usual problems. She became a mere shell of her former self. The mother who had given me such a wonderful life and who shared so many adventures, no longer existed. Vera passed away, Bible in hand, on 27 October 2004. In painless peace forever now, and no doubt reunited with her beloved father.

Story written by Viv Williams - daughter

Ron's Story

Contracted polio in 1949 & 1952



Prickly shivers crawled up and down my spine. My hair bristled as my head filled with scents and sounds of long ago. I felt weak and trembling as I entered the old Fairfield Hospital. I was shocked to find that childhood ghosts could still penetrate my mind and body at age 69. I had gone to the hospital to take some photos before it was handed over as a TAFE campus in 2007. The experience reminded me just how many demons I have conquered in my lifetime, but the emotions are all still there. My time in Fairfield with polio so many years ago had been very traumatic.

I entered the world in Newport, Melbourne, on 2 February 1938, the second son to my parents. It must have been a disappointment to my father when I was not the girl that he so badly wanted. One of my earliest memories was of my father taking me out with him. I was usually hoping that he would take me to the beach but Dad would meet up with his friends and we would go to the hotel for a couple of drinks. Visiting the pub happened often.

The first time that I can remember my father taking me there, I got thirsty and asked for a raspberry drink. Some time later when I asked for a drink my father lifted me onto the bar and I had to sing to the people in the bar before I could have one. They all thought that I was pretty good so this was to happen every time that we went to the hotel.

I spent some years in Williamstown living with my grand parents and loved it. I had a dog called Sandy and spent a lot of time with my grandfather and the dog.

Pop would take me and the dog for walks down to the beach. My grandmother liked gardening and I used to try and help her but I think that I was more of a hindrance. We moved to Lang Lang, a country town where Mum and Dad bought a house. Not long after we moved, Mum gave birth to a daughter. This made my father very happy at last.

At the age of five I fell very ill and my mother took me to the doctor. He said that I had appendicitis and I needed to go to hospital to be operated on. The hospital was in Wonthaggi which was about 40 kilometres away. I didn't get many visits from my family because we had no car and there was little public transport. It was quite traumatic for me to be left in the hospital, watching my parents leave. I don't know what they used to cut my stomach but I now have a whopping big scar from the operation; it makes me wonder how big the scar was when I was a child.

At the age of six I went to school and from day one my school life was terrible. Even at that age I felt that I did not fit in with the other kids because I was the smallest in the class and was the last to wear long pants. Then I had another stay in hospital to remove my tonsils. I remember that it was very painful but one enjoyable thing about it was getting all the ice-cream I could eat. There was also the fact that I didn't have to attend school. At school I wanted to be liked and part of the class but I always felt that the class did not want me. I did not want to learn anything because I didn't want to be there. I tried to be funny so the others would like me but that didn't happen often. It was in the early months of school that I heard about the boys going to the outside toilet for a competition. The toilet block had a tin urinal half way up the wall with a paling fence around it. The boys would stand up to the urinal and compete to see who would be the first to pee over the top of the fence. I wouldn't try in front of the other boys and waited until they had gone, then I tried. Of course this was pretty hard with me being so small.

My mother would take me to school each day but as soon as the bell went I would go home thinking that it was home time, whether it was morning play, lunch or afternoon play and Mum would have to take me back. Whilst at school I did everything I could to be a nuisance hoping to attract the attention that I needed from the teacher and the other kids in the class room. I tried to get the strap even though it really hurt. I wanted to get it more times than any other boy so that at least I had some achievement.

One frightening part of schooling was being the kid picked on by the bullies. Some of the boys would give me a very hard time. I had a fear that they would kill me because I can remember them putting a bag over my head and I could not breathe. Luckily they took it off before I passed out. Sometimes I was told by other boys that they would be waiting for me on the way home. There was a mound between the school and my home which was called the fighting mound where the bullies used to wait to belt me up. I used to plead with them to let me go because I couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag. I can still remember crying every time they belted me. I was living in fear all the time not knowing when it would happen again. This continued for a long time but I never told my parents. If I went home and there were any marks on me from the belting I would make up excuses to tell Mum and Dad. This was the beginning of my life as a lonely person. I spent a lot of time on my own fishing in an old creek just a short distance from our house.

At age ten I was diagnosed with Scarlet Fever and sent back to hospital. It was worse than last time. As before, I could only see my parents occasionally. When they could visit they were not permitted to have any physical contact with me due to the disease. All they could do was to look through a glass window. Imagine the fear; imagine not knowing what was going on and the thought that my parents had abandoned me. Because of my previous experiences in hospital I knew that they would only visit for a short time because they lived so far away. I can remember crying and screaming, thinking that each time they left I would never see them again. Upon release from the hospital I had to have a full immersion phenyl bath which stank. This was supposed to be the only disinfectant that would work. I told them that it wasn't necessary but they insisted. I knew what phenyl was because the man who collected the toilet pans used it to wash them out. I did not want to go in the bath but a couple of nurses picked me up and dunked me under the water. I came up spluttering. On the way home the people who had driven Mum to collect me wound all the car windows down to try to remove the stink. After arriving home the copper was heated up so I could have a proper bath to try to get rid of the lingering smell. Just thinking about that bath still makes me sick today.

I began to be sent to other people's homes. Most of the time that I was away from home I wasn't attending school either. The adults were all called aunts or uncles. I now know that most of them were not directly related to our family but at that time everyone called their parents' friends Mister or Missus, aunt or uncle. I, of course didn't know why I was being sent away. Perhaps I was a pain even at an early age to my mother and father though I never asked them why.

One couple who lived on a farm were like my foster grandparents because I spent so much time with them. I enjoyed my time there. If I woke early enough I could go down to the milking shed to help get the cattle ready for milking. I would spend a lot of time in my gum boots just walking in all the cow muck and getting dirty. I loved the smell of cow manure. I could never master the art of hand milking the cows though. The few times I tried, I could not get any milk from the cow and most times the cow would kick the bucket over so I gave away trying. At the top of one of the paddocks was a water well and every couple of days some one had to go and get the water for the shed and the house. I was always asking if I could go too. Before anything could happen the draught horse had to be fitted with all its gear for the day's work. It was harnessed to a wooden wishbone with a 40 gallon drum strapped to it. We would go up to the paddock with the horse and get the water from the well using a kerosene drum on the end of a winch. When the water was winched up it was tipped into the drum. I always wanted to be able to walk behind the horse and hold the reins. The water was taken to the milking shed and bucketed into the water tank. It took many trips to fill the water tank and then the house tank had to be filled.

At the milking shed there was always milk to drink at the separator. One of my jobs was to watch and make sure that the milk would not overflow out of the milk can. One time it did overflow because I went to watch the cows being milked! I was in a lot of trouble then because of the amount of milk lost. After milking I would give them a hand to take the milk cans on a wooden wheel barrow out to the road for collection by the milk truck.

As I got older I still visited the farm. One time there I tried smoking, because every man smoked. I thought that gum leaves wrapped tightly in newspaper would do because I could not get tobacco but all it did was to burn my throat and create a lot of smoke. Unexpectedly my father visited the farm. I was having a smoke in the outside dunny (toilet) and he was looking for me. I could hear him calling me but I did not answer. He must have seen the smoke billowing out over the top of the dunny door and through the nail holes in the corrugated iron. I can remember him knocking on the door so I ran. I had a head start because of all the smoke coming out. I earned a whack with the razor strop, a strip of thick leather used to sharpen razors, for that effort.

Our milk was delivered by horse and cart. We would leave the metal billycan out each night. In the morning I would go out to collect the filled billycan. I always thought it would be a good idea to see if I could spin the billycan over my head without it spilling. Of course the handle came out of the can and the milk went

everywhere. The green grocer and the baker would deliver their goods in the same manner as the milkman. I would often get into trouble when I collected the bread because there was a loaf called a 'high tin'. It was tall and had plenty of soft bread showing. I would pull out large quantities of bread to eat then have a lot of trouble trying to hide what I had done. One of my other jobs was to walk the street after the carts left and collect the horse droppings for Dad's garden with a shovel and a broom.

My father worked on the railways as a ganger and I would go with him some mornings to inspect the railway line for any problems before any trains travelled on it. We would go to the railway shed and roll the hand trolley out onto the line. We sat opposite one another on the trolley; one pushed the handle while the other pulled. He would have to inspect half of the distance between two towns. Sometimes he would take me with him before I went to school. Other times we would gather old railway sleepers to use in our stove, the open fire and the copper for washing clothes. We used to travel miles to get the old sleepers. We'd collect and stack them on the flat bed trolley. To move the trolley we had to put two poles into the wheels, stand on the tray and push the poles up and down to get the wheels turning. We would then take them back to the railway yard. We did not have a car or a trailer so we used our wheelbarrow to transport the sleepers home. Then we cut them into small lengths. This meant hard work because the cross cut saw we used was about 6 feet long. Dad would be on one end and either my brother or I would be on the other. Then the wood was chopped up small with an axe and carried to the laundry, which we called a washhouse, in the back yard.



Ron helps collect wood and manure from the bush paddock

When the water in the copper was hot Mum would wash the clothes. My job was to heat the water in the copper and for us to have a bath. When Mum had finished washing, the clothes were put through a hand roller to wring the water out. When it was bath time we would heat the copper and bale the hot water into a kerosene tin that Dad had put a handle on, like a bucket. He would carry it from the outside laundry into the bathroom and pour it into a tin bath for all of us to use. We would take turns in the bath. My sister would be first, and then myself, my brother and my parents would be last.

Like other children, I went to Sunday school. I wanted to go so that I would get three pennies from my mother for the collection plate. I put one penny in the collection plate and used one penny at the local milk bar playing the pin ball machine. As my father worked for the railway I would know when the trains were coming through the town, so I would put the third penny on the railway track. I put my ear on the track so that I would hear when the train was coming then watch the penny being flattened by the engine wheels.

Once again, I was sent to someone's house in another country town. I used to spend a lot of time watching the birds in their large aviary. I thought that it should have more birds in the cage so I asked them how you catch birds. They said, 'You put salt on their tails'. So one day I let all their birds out of the cages thinking that I could put salt on their tails and catch them again, along with some new birds. Of course this did not work and they lost all the birds.

I had lots of experiences as a country kid. I helped out at the local slaughter yards, learnt to ride a horse, helped the grocer with his home deliveries, enjoyed playing in the bush and kept up the wood supplies to the house and the newspaper supplies for the dunny, but I always felt a loner. One day I went to school and was told that one of the boys had lost all his hair through the night. He did not go to school for a while and I did not blame him because no one wanted to be his friend and they thought it was very funny to call him Baldy. I did not think it funny so he and I became friends.

I think I was about nine years old when I was approached by a man and taken to his house to hear music. While I was there he sexually assaulted me. I was too ashamed to tell anyone. He told me that my parents would believe him if I was to say anything, but he got caught with another boy and so I got found out too. Although the other boy and I were the ones abused, we had to go to court as if we were the ones in the wrong. I will never understand why my mother did not stand up for me more than she did. I know at the time all this was recorded against me.



*Ron aged 12 before
contracting polio*

We moved to many different country towns with my father's work on the railways. Not long after one move, at the age of 12, I woke up to find that I was partly paralyzed. My mother called the doctor and it was hospital again. I was taken to the Wonthaggi hospital by friends because my parents did not have a car. There I was diagnosed with polio. They put me in a room on my own because they thought I would be contagious to other patients. It was awful. Again, the hospital was a long way from home and with no transport it was hard for my parents to visit me. Although this was not a new experience for me, I was still frightened.

It was perhaps worse than previous times because I didn't understand what was wrong with me. I had not heard of any one else with polio, so finding out that they did not know how to treat me was worse. No one knew anything about polio in the country hospital and thought they could make me better by giving me penicillin injections every four hours for months. I was absolutely terrified of the injections because they hurt so much. I felt like I was a pin cushion. I will never forget the pain of those injections. I had what was then called a 'Tip Top' lolly box on the table next to the bed and I put a mark on the box every time I got an injection. Because of the travel required, I again could not see much of my parents and once again I felt abandoned. Most of the patients were all older than me. I don't remember seeing any one else in the ward my age. Being in hospital again brought back all the fears that I had when I was in hospital before. I was in the hospital this time for three months. It was long enough for me to fill the box with the marks of my injections.

I had few friends of my own age group partly due to having had polio and I know that my parents were also ostracized because of my polio. One of the times my parents visited me I overheard a conversation with the staff where my parents said that their friends would not visit them anymore because they did not want to catch polio. When they walked down the street people would avoid them. I thought that things were bad for me but it was as bad for my parents. People were very afraid of the disease. I survived without friends but probably that was my life for some years to come.

My days were all long because I never did anything in the hospital. I did not read and there was no TV back then. I was not allowed out of bed until just before I was discharged. I had trouble walking and standing but the doctor told my parents that my walking would get better in time. I was trying to cope with going to school but my last year in school was nothing short of a tragedy, trying to survive with the irons on my legs. The kids were cruel because they used to enjoy pushing me over and leaving me to get up by myself. I cannot remember having any school friends so I was glad when I left.

I spent my time working at the next door cordial factory. I also started playing around with alcohol and for a time I found that selling newspapers at the local hotel was a good way to drink any leftovers in the glasses. I worked in a garage in the spare parts department until I put a car that was on display through the front window. I tried to start it but it was in gear and through the front window it went. I can remember going to the pub to tell the manager what had happened, I told him that someone else did it, but I didn't know the person.

At the age of 14 I was stricken with polio for the second time but this time I was severely paralyzed. At first my doctor was not sure whether it was polio so he rang the government medical doctor in Melbourne. He was told to make arrangements for me to be taken to Melbourne by ambulance to see her. I was fearful again because I was on my own in the back of the ambulance. I remember the trip and looking out of the ambulance windows I could see the gum trees flowering. I can remember being very frightened because I did not know what was going to happen to me when we got to Melbourne. I was terrified that they might put me into a hospital in Melbourne and I would go through the same traumatic experiences. When we arrived they had to carry me into the building to see the doctor and I was surprised to see that the doctor was a lady. She confirmed what my doctor had diagnosed and then the ambulance took me to the Fairfield infectious diseases hospital where I was admitted.

I didn't know that I would have a lengthy stay in hospital. I was put in a room at the end of the main ward with only three other patients who were a lot older than me. Thinking back, the fear I was suffering made me feel I was no where near the age of 14 because boys of that age didn't cry. I can remember being absolutely terrified because of my past experiences of hospital and now I also had the fear of being paralyzed. The nurses came into the room with a device called a Thomas frame (an iron A-shaped frame). They lifted me up, laid the frame on the bed then put me onto the frame. I was bandaged to it so that I could not move. At the time they thought this was the only way for me to get better.

My bed was by a window and next to a pathway. I used to see a trolley going past and when I asked why the trolley went past covered over they told me it was going to the morgue with dead people on it. The three wheeler trolley with the dead went past my window many times. Out of the same window I could see lights in the distance. When I asked what they were I was told that if I misbehaved, I would be sent there. I was told it was a mental asylum or the 'Looney' place where bad people went. It must have been pretty terrifying to still remember it now. No wonder I had such a creepy reaction when I revisited Fairfield as an adult.

Each day we would be taken to the bathroom on a trolley for a bath. The bath was large and square. I was sexually abused by a male staff member that used to bathe me. I could not defend myself because I could not move. I could do nothing about it because of his threats to tell my parents that I was the one that wanted it. I was also scared that I would end up in the mental asylum because that's where he said they would put me. He made me feel that it was my fault and that no one would believe me. I thought that I must have been very bad because of my earlier childhood abuse.

Again, I never had many visits from my parents, or anyone else, because of the distance from my home in the country and I was very lonely. The others in the room were adults and always seemed to have visitors. After I was taken out of the Thomas frame I still could not walk so I had two half plaster splints on my legs. They were joined at the feet by a piece of wood so that I could not move my legs. This was not much better than the frame but at least I could move my upper body. I remember falling out of bed onto the floor so that I could see how far I could crawl. The physiotherapists would massage my limbs every day and sometimes my bed was wheeled to the verandah to get some sun. It was good because I saw other patients that were in the same situation as I was. One day they came and lifted me out of the bed and put me in a wheelchair for the first time. It was good to be able to get around. I thought it would be fun one day to upset the staff by starting at the end of the long ward and going as fast as I could in the wheelchair. I would then grab the wheels and see how far I could skid on the polished floor. I thought this was very funny but the staff didn't think so. This could have been a bit of a pay back for the hard times and the way that I was treated. I felt a lot better when I could get around in the wheelchair and go around the ward and also outside sometimes. I would go up to the ward where the patients were in the iron lungs. I don't know why because all I did was look at them. I kept asking the staff when I could go home and was told, 'One day'. I did not think that day would ever come.

Some time later I was fitted with two full-length callipers on my legs. I had to learn to walk wearing them. It took a lot of time for me to be able to walk, even stiff-legged. I felt when I walked I was like a waddling duck. Eventually I was told that I could go home. My parents' friends were to come down in their car to collect me, but realized that there would not be enough room in the car with the full length callipers that did not bend. That meant we had to catch the train back to the country. I felt terrible because I knew that everyone was staring at me. It was not long before I heard the name calling while we were waiting for the train and then trying to cope in the carriage with my stiff legs. I was so glad to get home. Because of the experience I had after leaving the hospital I felt very insecure and ashamed to go out because everyone would see the way I walked. I did not want to face the name calling that I knew would happen. When I did go out I would try to avoid running into people. Other kids called me many names like 'moron', 'spastic', 'cripple' and others because I could not walk like them and I struggled to cope with it all.



*Full length callipers that
Fitted into heels of shoes*

After being home from hospital for a time, drinking alcohol became my priority because in drink no one could hurt me. It was like being inside a bottle with the cork in the top. All I wanted to do was to ride a bike like other kids but I couldn't. I found it a struggle even to go to the cinema because I could not sit comfortably on the seats because of the callipers. It was very painful and difficult sitting in the seats with stiff legs. So when I did go to the pictures I would arrive after the film had started and leave before the finish so that I didn't have to face people. I wanted badly to do all the things that other boys did but I wasn't able to. The boys that I knew were going out with girl friends. I thought how nice it would have been to also have a girl but I had such a complex about my callipers that I didn't even try. That hurt me badly. Because of all the hurt I was feeling, I was determined to show everybody that in time I would walk without the irons and be normal like everyone else.

Again we moved, this time to a house in the city. The kids in the city were no different to the kids in the country and I just hated life because of wearing the

callipers. I was attending the Lady Dugan Home for treatment and started to feel the benefits from the physiotherapist's work. Because of the progress I was making I decided that one day I would walk like any one else. Because of my determination I was to spend many months walking up and down in front of a mirror until I could walk without a limp. Then I practised until I could do it without one calliper. I took many tumbles but each time I would pick myself up and start again. I continued to walk until I could remove the second calliper.



1953 – Ron discards callipers

I managed to walk without a limp even though my left leg was smaller than my right and I had clawed toes. Although I could eventually walk normally without the callipers, for a long time I felt that people were still looking at me. I was proud of my success but I had a bigger problem. I hated my body and certainly didn't want to wear shirts with short sleeves or shorts. As I became more confident in walking I began to participate in what my friends were doing and became interested in sport, never imagining that I would be able to join in. Later I was to be able to play tennis and golf.

I was smoking and drinking regularly and thought this was terrific because it made me different to the other boys in the town, in the church, and the local Boys Club. I went out of my way to be stupid. I suppose it was like when I was younger at school looking for attention. Although my walking improved my biggest struggle was continuing. Alcohol was becoming a real problem but I thought, 'Why not keep drinking?' With all that had happened in my life I thought I was owed something and felt sorry for myself. I certainly did not like the taste of alcohol but I enjoyed what it did to me. It made me a different person; made me ten feet tall and bullet proof. When I woke up the next day I would not know what had happened the previous day.

I joined a church youth club and sang in the choir. I have no idea why I decided to do that because it was very hard work trying to sing and to breathe the alcohol breath out the side of my mouth so that know one knew that I was drinking. I did not realize that people could still smell it, I always believed that I was hiding the fact that I drank. If any one accused me of drinking I denied the fact.

A series of jobs followed, and I lost them all due to my growing dependence on alcohol. There were the railway yards, apprentice painter, spare parts salesman and heating installer. I unsuccessfully attempted to join the ministry and the fire brigade. I became very devious in finding ways to drink, even injuring myself to get time off work. I began sleeping rough; sometimes in the Melbourne gardens or on the banks of the Yarra. I met people I could associate with, mainly older men, who were kind to me. When any of us had money we would share whatever drink we had. I had to do a lot of things I'm not proud of; conning, lying, stealing and cheating. It was hard work being a drinker.

I became involved with an Apex club for a while, and was involved in a project with two aborigines, Pastor Doug Nichols and Harold Blair. They were raising money to build an aboriginal girls' hostel in Northcote. My job was to collect the money when Harold Blair sang at concerts. I never stole from them, even though I needed money all the time for my drinking. I thought those two Aborigines were the finest people I knew.

I got married in 1960. I had met a wonderful girl, Judith, who was a nice, naïve Christian. She had money and I believed I could con her and play on my disadvantaged life, including polio. I wish I could remember more of my honeymoon at Mt Hotham, but I can't. When we moved into our first house I believed that life would be different, but I still needed the demon drink. I tried many jobs, but of course I lost them all. I resorted to working in the country so my wife wouldn't know about my drinking – or so I thought. When our first child arrived, I felt I had no living skills to cope with marriage, let alone being a father.



Ron and Judith's wedding day

We had an old station wagon big enough to put the pram in the back without folding it down. I thought it was a great joke. At one stage I did not have my wife's seat bolted to the floor and I suppose on many trips to Melbourne it was a bit hairy because she could have gone over backwards at any time. But I never worried doing 30-40 miles an hour on the highway going to Melbourne to visit parents.

Money was becoming short, and I could not even make the house payments. People in the street gave my wife food to eat to survive. Eventually we lost the house and then we had to move back to Melbourne to live with my wife's parents. Living with the in-laws would be a good thing because they could look after my wife and daughter and I could do what I wanted. My wife gave birth to our son, and eventually we borrowed some money and moved to the hills. I began to attend a doctor regularly with any complaint that I could think of. I thought that I was a walking medical journal so that when the doctor asked me what my problem was I could tell the doctor whatever complaint I could think of.

My wife never saw me drinking but she certainly suffered the effects. One day in 1966, aged 28, after a heavy day drinking, my doctor witnessed my violent attack on my wife. He then took me aside and told me that I was an alcoholic. He asked me if I was prepared to do something about it; I said yes. My wife was crying. He made arrangements for me to go into treatment in Adelaide.

On arrival at the hospital we were greeted by the doctor and told that I would be there for as long as it took for me to get better. I thought it was only going to be a seven week program. It was a shock to find that it might be a long time. My first room was very small, without windows and fitted with soft walls (padded cell) while I was drying out. After a time I was put into the main ward and told that I would only have one chance. The 12 step program of AA was and is today very important for me and reminds me that nothing can stand in the way of my sobriety. I slowly came to my senses when I started to get better and the cloudiness in the brain began to clear. I started to realize that my wife must love me a lot. I remember that she and the children often used to drive to Adelaide to visit me. After months in the hospital and daily working my 12 step program I was getting better. I felt that I was gaining confidence and learning living skills that I did not have as a drinker.

I was able to make a decision before going home that I would learn to love my wife. After I came home I can remember holding my wife's hand as if for the first time. I had probably held it before but had no feeling of what it meant then

but holding it sober was a feeling I find hard to explain. I felt a wonderful warmth, feeling her hand squeezing mine, putting my arms around her and giving her a kiss. This was the beginning of me experiencing true feelings towards my wife. I was also going to try to be a better father to my children.

When I came home I did not want to work because it meant applying for a job. This was foreign to me so I just sat and did nothing. I felt that I did not have enough confidence sober to do anything. One day my wife saw an ad in the paper for a position as a Childcare worker in a Boys' Home in our town and told me I had to apply. With my low level of education, how on earth could I go for an interview?

However, I did apply for the job and got an interview. I dressed up, even wearing a tie. I arrived at the Boys' Home and found there were a lot of applicants there for the positions. As the time came for me to be interviewed, my hands were shaking and my knees were knocking. I went into the room and was confronted by two men sitting at a table. I felt quite intimidated. The interview started with a lot of questions about my working and family life. After a while I was starting to despair, accepting the fact that I had no hope. I was sure they wanted an academic genius. One of the men wanted to know if I smoked and why I thought that I would be suited to the position. After a while I was asked about my drinking habits. I was able to say that I did not drink and, without thinking, said that I was a sober alcoholic. I was shocked when I realized what I had said but it was too late to take it back.

I can still remember the look on the superintendent's face but the other man had a different look. I believe that he could see I would have an understanding of the problems that the boys and their families had. I left the interview certainly thinking that I had no chance after seeing the other people waiting to be interviewed. I didn't want to go home and tell my wife that I had failed. What I didn't realize at the time was how much my wife supported me and believed in me. A couple of days later I was informed that I had the job. I then began to wonder how I could hold the job, let alone do it.

After a while, I knew that things were going to work out all right. The Boys' Home was a new venture and was situated in an old Elizabethan style two-story house. All the staff were new so I felt that no one else really knew a lot either. I didn't hide the facts about my childhood. The boys knew everything about me, so they also knew I understood them and their family situations. The home originally housed 28 boys sleeping in bunk beds. As time went by we cut the

capacity down so the boys had more room. We took the rubber mattresses off the beds and replaced them with inner spring ones. The boys were dressed with clothing from Pentridge Prison. We didn't want them in those clothes so we went to a local menswear store and they were dressed like any other children. All of the boys went to school, being nine to fourteen years old. We ensured that we spread them around, sending them to different schools in the area.

The boys were not angels but given the circumstances as to why they were in care, I understood. They were sent from the court under a 'Care and Protection Order', sometimes to protect them from their own parents. Some had truanted from school or had been in trouble with the law. At least at the Boys' Home they were fed, clothed and loved. They also had a large property to play in. The Department built a tennis court and a large shed that we used as a gymnasium. We had a very good staff ratio and the home was supervised 24 hours a day.

The staff on night shift had to make the sandwiches for school. That involved about ten loaves of bread each night. The sandwiches were so good that the boys would swap them at the school for cigarettes. I was told that my sandwiches were worth three cigarettes a sandwich. I know I shouldn't have been pleased about that but I was. We used to take the boys on outings as often as we could. If a boy decided to misbehave we would let the other boys know that the next outing may be cancelled because of someone's behaviour. The boys would soon sort that out amongst themselves. Our own children were allowed to go to the home whenever they wanted to.

My wife organized a yearly fete in the grounds of the home to raise money for an annual Christmas party and presents for the boys. My brother was in the police force and he organized the police band and Gendarme, the police horse, to entertain. Christmas was always a big event and we gave the boys some wonderful gifts. We also celebrated their birthdays as we believed that it was a children's home not an institution. One day a social worker came with a new boy. I was at my desk when she brought him in. She gave me his file, I just dropped it on the floor and proceeded to get a new file which was empty. I said to the child that I didn't wish to read his file. I told him that the empty file was the only one he had now, unless he gave me reason to look at the old one. My biggest problem was sometimes the staff. If a boy did something wrong, they would sometimes tell him that if he continued he was going to end up like his 'so-and-so' father. The child would get very upset if anyone spoke about his father like that, no matter what a parent had done. Only the child himself, had that right.

Sometimes, some of the boys would abscond. We would be worried and spend hours through the night looking for them. Eventually they would either come back of their own accord or be picked up and brought back by the police. These children's manners were better than the general population outside of the home and were respectful to all the staff and my wife. Everything was Mr or Mrs and please and thank you. It was always a pleasure to take the boys anywhere.

During the years working at the Boys' Home my wife and I, after talking it over with the family, started fostering pre-adoption babies. We absolutely enjoyed every minute of this. We collected the babies from the hospital just a couple of weeks old, some times two at a time. The babies, for the time that they were with us, would be just another child in our family. The boys at the Home loved the babies because some of them, being in care, did not get the chance see their parents' new babies. We could give the worst boy in the Home a nurse of the baby and it would just melt him. Eventually the time would come for the baby's mother to decide whether to keep the baby or put it up for adoption. If she decided to sign the papers we would then take the baby to a home where it would be handed over to the adopting parents. In the early days we would take the baby around the back and then it would be given to the new parents. We never got to see the adopting parents. As time went on there were changes and we could then meet with the adoptive parents in our home. They would visit a couple of times to bath the baby and find out anything that they wanted to know. It was always a delight to meet all the adoptive parents. Sometimes we would be asked if we wanted to see the children later. We told the parents that it was up to them because once they go home with the baby, it is their family. Some parents remained in touch and we've even been invited to some of the 21st birthdays.

Whilst at the Boys' Home I was involved with the local fire brigade and saw many major fires in and around the Dandenongs and other places. I enjoyed the camaraderie of the firemen and had a lot of fun at the station. We also had some harrowing experiences at the fire fronts. At one fire I was overcome with smoke and was taken to the hospital. We would sometimes have to go down dead-end tracks where it was very hard to turn around. There were times we could have been caught in the fire.

On 17 May 1979 at the age of 79 my father passed away. I was away for the weekend when I received the news. I got into the car and drove on my own for about three hours. All the way I was trying to think of the good times I had with Dad but I could not think of many, because I had not been around him a lot. I can

remember going to the races with him though and I enjoyed that. One time when he won a race then realized that he had thrown away the winning ticket into a 44 gallon drum. It was almost empty so he grabbed my legs and tipped me upside down in the drum to retrieve it. I still remember the good times when I was quite young and I believe that my father raised me to the best of his ability. My mother continued to live in the same house and I would visit her but found it hard. She could not understand why I could still not drink when I had been without it for such a long time.

Unfortunately I did not see what was coming at the Boys' Home. The Department decided to review the children's homes. I had reached the pinnacle of my career by becoming the Superintendent. I did not have good qualifications on paper, so I lost the job under the new system, when a person appealed against me and won. I had a break down resulting in shock treatment. My wife tells me that she and my daughter fought that suggestion but in the end they agreed because it seemed to be the only thing that might make me better. I had 38 shock treatments. I cannot remember anything of my stay in the hospital until I began to slowly improve. My wife and my daughter took me out on day leave for a meal to the Arts Centre. When the meal came I started eating the meal with my fingers. I believe that my wife was horrified but my daughter told her not to react and the other people would think that I was an eccentric artist. After my stay in the hospital I could not go to work. I didn't want to meet people or do anything. I did not return to the Boys' Home and not long after it was closed down.

My wife bought a florist shop and asked me if I would help her in the shop. That got me meeting people again, although I could not cope with working situations. All this was in 1985. Judith's parents had to go into a home as they aged. I don't think they really wanted to go but my in-laws were the easiest going people. I called them Mum and Dad. We would visit regularly from the florist shop and they were fortunate to have a room where they could be together. One night we went to visit them and Dad was in a wheelchair. We asked what was happening and they said he is just going to the hospital. We didn't think any more about it because he did not look too bad. We went with him to the hospital and said good-bye to him not realizing it would be our last good-bye. He passed away that night. Mum remained in the Home and was moved to a small room. We continued to visit Mum and take her out when we could. My own mother went to the doctors for tests and they showed that she had cancer. After the doctor gave her the news she went into her shell. I believe that she started to will herself to death. I told Mum that I loved her but there was no meaning to what I said. I unnecessarily blamed her for everything that happened to me during my life.

It wasn't until one of my children said something and I replied that we did the best that we could, that I realized that Mum and Dad did the best that they could with a bugger like me. I have told my parents in my prayers how sorry I was for what I had thought of them over the years.

Judith's Mum became very ill and was admitted to the Box Hill Hospital. She passed away one morning while we were home. We had been at the hospital for a long time. I missed Mum Ward very much because she was about the only other person apart from my wife that fully understood me and I can never remember her ever saying anything bad about me. What I do know is that she always had a lot of faith. Life became different because we both missed our parents. I don't know why I had to wait until then to have a better understanding of my own parents, probably because now we are the older generation.

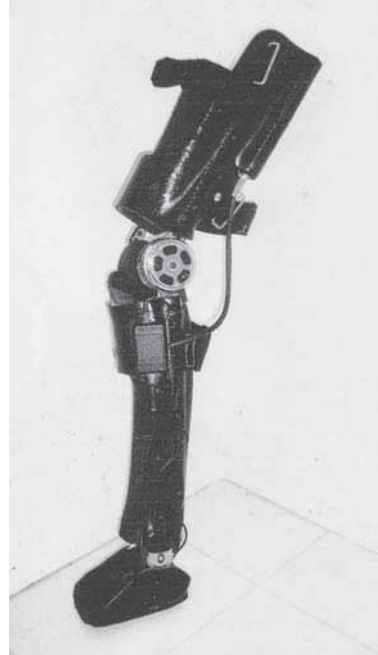
I worked with Judith in the flower shop until it was sold when we planned to enjoy life more again. We had always travelled and wanted to do more. Unfortunately, I realized that my body and my 'polio' leg were getting weaker and I was losing my muscle. Being the person I was, this was not going to stop me doing the things that I always did. Knowing what I know now, I was overworking my body. I started attending St Vincent's hospital in 1995 as a client of Polio Services. I was feeling tired, my muscles were getting weaker and I was in pain.

I am now 70 years old and suffering from the late effects of polio. Over the last 13 years I have been under the care of Darren Pereira of the orthotics department at St Vincent's Hospital. During that time the wasting in my leg has got a lot worse. For ten of those years I had to wear a half calliper to give me the support I needed as I could not support my weight any-more. Then in 2004 I needed two crutches to enable me to get around safely instead of tripping or falling. I was facing the fact that I would eventually end up in a wheel chair because I was walking like a monkey. From Polio Services I was referred to Dr Valeri Tay at the Centre for Clinical Neurosciences & Neurological Research at St Vincent's Hospital. After many tests they found that I was suffering from the late effects of polio. I thankfully was referred again to the orthotics department at the hospital. Darren said that there was a new appliance called the E-knee It was a knee/ankle/foot orthotic (KAFO) that would probably be suitable for me. The only problem was the cost of \$8,500. This amount was beyond my means but I belong to the Blackburn North Lions Club and with other clubs in V1 and Australian Lions Foundation, they raised the money to pay for the E-knee.

I was fitted with the E-knee in 2005. It was assembled from a brace that was made by Darren. At the time it was the only one in Australia. The brace consisted of a foot sensor that linked to a small rectangular box below the knee (the controller). This sent a message to the round cylinder on the outside of the knee, a ratchet that is controlled to allow the knee to either bend or remain locked. This project has been an ongoing exercise as I have had to learn to walk again without the aid of crutches. It has been a lot of trial and error. Darren has been absolutely terrific with his patience and concern for me.



Ron shows his new orthotic to Elsie



2005 – Australia's first E-knee

The KAFO has allowed me to stand tall and straight for the first time in a long time. It has certainly helped my self esteem and my confidence, because I now walk tall and my wife looks up to me. I had to learn how to walk with this new invention and straight away I knew that it was going to be something very beneficial for me. My physiotherapist told me that I had to learn pelvic thrusts. I couldn't wait to get home to tell my wife about the pelvic thrusts. This ensured that my hips worked in line with my walking. It's hard to explain the emotion I felt when I walked without the support of the crutches again.

Nothing seems to happen easily. During the first 12 months of wearing the calliper we started to have problems with the inconsistency of the sensor under the foot and I was not coping with the ratchet noise that the calliper made. At times I wanted to throw it away, but it was worth persevering to have my self-esteem back and to be rid of back and hip pain. I had been on my feet for a minimum of 15 hours a day and enjoying life. If I stood for a long period of time,

the leg would lock. This enabled me to distribute my weight evenly on both legs; otherwise I had a tendency to put more weight on my good leg. About 14 months ago Darren heard of another calliper in America called a Stance Control calliper. This new model is mechanical but it serves the same purpose as the previous one. This calliper is also the first in Australia and I was fortunate again to be the first to be fitted it. The orthotists say that it may be suitable for some accident victims, slight stroke patients and, of course, polio patients. Perhaps it may be suitable for people with slight cerebral palsy also.

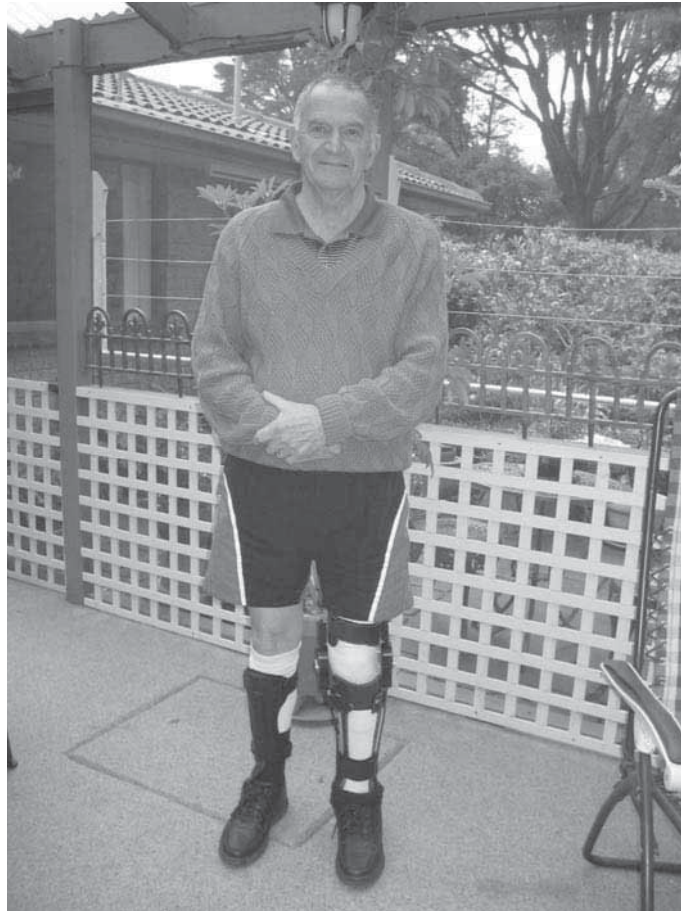
There is never a day goes by when I don't think of the people who are worse off than me and realise how lucky I am. I am very grateful to the Lions Clubs. I am also privileged, as a peer supporter, to see other clients being fitted, and share their joy and tears as they take their first independent steps. I continue to support them after they go home. Over the years my body has been suffering and wasting. I still attend the post-polio clinic at St Vincent's Hospital and belong to the Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group.

I still have the same determination as I did when I was young, getting the callipers off my legs for the first time. Because of my early life I was probably destined to help others and I have done this through service to the community. I have been a member of Lions for 16 years and a cabinet member for 14 years, holding various positions. Judith and I belong to Lions at Blackburn Nth Inc. and have held leadership roles at a district level and had the honour of being the district governor. I am very proud to have won a number of awards, including a progressive Melvin Jones award. My other voluntary work includes roles in the floristry industry. Although I can no longer participate in sport because of post-polio, I am an avid spectator. My new stance control does allow me an occasional game of golf. I also enjoy travelling, meeting people and experiencing new things.



*Ron receives his
Pride of Australia Award
2007*

What an exciting time and how proud we were when my wife and I walked our daughter down the aisle on her wedding day. I know my daughter was not crying, but I can remember having tears in my eyes because I was so proud to be her father. Then we had the joy of being at the birth of our first grand-daughter. My son also presented us with a grandson and grand-daughter to share our love of life. I know that with the grace of God and the fellowship of AA, my grandchildren will never see me drink.



2009 – Ron ready for action

My future is to continue serving the community through Lions and through drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, and to continue being a peer support to other polio survivors.

Story written by Paul Dixon (Deceased) and Joan Smith



Marjorie's Story

Contracted polio in 1945



Near the end of August in 1945 I passed my exams as a mothercraft nurse. For my last two days at the Methodist Babies' home in South Yarra I thought I had the flu. Knowing that Matron wasn't at all happy if nurses reported sick, I battled on. To get home I had to travel by tram, train and bus to Mt Dandenong. I had a heavy case of my belongings to carry; each time I alighted from a vehicle my left leg showed signs of weakness and I was glad to get into bed as soon as I arrived home.

The next day the doctor diagnosed polio and suggested we asked my uncle, who lived in Surrey Hills and owned a car, to take me to Fairfield Hospital. Dad had a truck but that was too hard for me to get into. Fairfield Hospital had its own ambulances, but the doctor feared they might not send one to Mt Dandenong. I had to be carried to the car, because it was quite a distance along a narrow garden path. It wouldn't have been a problem for an ambulance trolley. Apart from my arms, I was helpless. They lifted me into a light cane chair and managed to get me to the car. When we had travelled as far as Box Hill, my uncle had to stop at the police station to request extra petrol coupons. We still had the restrictions of wartime rationing of petrol, clothing and food.

It was lunchtime when we arrived at Fairfield hospital and the wards men were away at lunch so two nurses linked hands to form a seat to carry me in. I wonder why they didn't have a wheelchair, as I was unable to sit without support by the

time I had arrived. I was relieved to be in hospital where I thought they would know how to treat me. I spent six weeks in Fairfield.

My parents were advised to ask Dr Jean McNamara to look after me, and she was anxious to get me out of hospital before I stiffened up too much. Two maiden aunts who lived next door to a district nurse, offered to look after me with the help of Sister Malseed. So I was sent by ambulance, complete with my newly fitted double Thomas splint, to Auntie Ada and Ruby's home at Bristol Street in Surrey Hills.

The following Saturday Dr McNamara and Mrs Frost, later known as Dame Phyllis, came to examine me and decide on my treatment. Dr McNamara wore a black dress and hat and looked as if she had been cooking in her kitchen. She also carried a spanner in her hand; all she needed to adjust splints.

We needed to buy a large three-ply wooden board, polished smooth on one side, for me to exercise on. I also needed a wheelchair so I could be taken to the bathroom for hot saltwater baths. Dr McNamara lent us a wheel bed so that I could be taken outside in my Thomas splint. Mrs Frost came twice a week to give me exercise and Auntie Ruby helped me on other days. My aunts were photographers and had an agency for the State Bank. They had their studio at the back of their house so there were plenty of people coming and going. I especially enjoyed seeing the wedding parties come through for their photos.



Marjorie and friend at Kooringa - 1947

After about 18 months I went to Kooringa rehabilitation centre in Malvern. They took polio patients from the country and were a convalescent home for Service girls. I stayed four months and then went home to Mt Dandenong. My brother worked at home on our small dairy farm, so he was able to help me with exercises.



Christmas at Kooringa -1947 – Marjorie 2nd from left

In May of 1949 I flew to Brisbane with an aunt who was returning to her job as a companion to an elderly lady. My aunt had been in Melbourne for a holiday. I went to do light duties such as mending and sewing at a children's home in Cooparoo. I was hoping the warm weather in Queensland would make it easier to move but although the winter weather was lovely, I didn't notice any difference in my ability to move.

I had only been at Cooparoo a few weeks when I was contacted by Reverend and Mrs Ward of Cleveland, who had a five year old daughter with spastic cerebral palsy. Nothing was done for spastic children in Queensland at that time, so an aunt of the little girl, Margaret, brought her to Melbourne to see Dr McNamara. She fitted Margaret with splints and suggested that I might be able to help when she returned home so I went to live with her family. As Margaret had a twin sister and a younger brother there was plenty I could do besides helping with Margaret's splints. I was treated as one of the family and enjoyed my stay there. We went to fetes in the churches of the parish but Mr Ward went alone to Russell Island in Morton Bay off the coast from Cleveland. This happened once a month and he came back with fresh vegetables and tropical fruits, given by the people in his parish over there.

While in the tropics I had to look twice at the moon to make certain it really was the moon. It was so silver! The sea and sky are such a deep blue compared with down south, but I'm quite satisfied to live again in Victoria with its more subdued colours.

I travelled home by bus for Christmas, intending to return, but Mrs Frost invited me to stay with her. She persuaded my father to buy me a car and sent me to Port Melbourne each day to learn dental nursing with Mr Frost. For several months I helped in the Frost household with their three small daughters Elizabeth, Pauline and Christine, the baby. I enjoyed making clothes for the children. It was a happy family and I always liked being with small children.

Mrs Frost told me how as a teenager, she asked her father for things she didn't really want, just to persuade him to give it to her. I guess it was good practice for later years when she asked the government to support her community work. A visit to Pentridge prison allowed her to see the poor diet the prisoners received, so her sister Nancy, a dietician, prepared a balanced diet plan for the cook to follow. This was accepted by the authorities and Mrs Frost's interest in prisons lasted all her life.

Finding time for Mrs Frost to teach me to drive was a problem, so I went home and my brother taught me to drive. I didn't go back to the Frosts but worked as a dental nurse in Surrey Hills. I again lived with the aunts who had previously cared for me during the week and I returned home to Mt Dandenong for the weekends.

In 1951 I met Ralph Currie, a farmer at Monbulk, and we were married on 2 May in 1953. We moved into our own house on the farm in October of that year. Our new home was complete except for inside painting; only the living room and bathroom had floor coverings and painted walls. At first, we didn't have mains power as we lived one and a half miles out of the township of Monbulk. I spent many hours sitting on the floor rubbing the floor boards smooth with sandpaper, then varnishing them. We got the floors re-sanded properly when 240 volt power was connected in 1956. Until then, we had a 32 volt plant which ran lighting and small appliances, but not heating. A 'Silent Night' kerosene refrigerator worked well, except for very hot days when it would defrost. I overcame this problem by putting a wet sheet right over the unit and keeping it wet. It worked much like a Coolgardie safe which had towelling sides kept wet with fabric strips hung from a container on top. The evaporation kept the contents cool.

The house was positioned so that the lounge and living room had a view over the valley to the mountains beyond, stretching from Toolangi to Gembrooke. A little of our view disappeared behind houses and trees but most was still there when I left in 2005.

We had three children and had a happy life until Ralph was diagnosed with cancer in 1990 and died on 19 January the next year.

I managed to live alone in our home for 15 years. For the last year at home it became increasingly difficult to walk even with a calliper that I'd worn ever since contracting polio; this was assisted in later years with elbow length crutches.

I woke on 15 December in 2005 to find I couldn't walk at all. Post-polio syndrome had caught up with me so I was off to Angliss Hospital for eight weeks for a rest. They taught me to regain some independence by using an electric wheelchair. I didn't think I would ever learn to drive it, and I did take one small area of paint off the wall in my room. Now I wonder why I found it difficult.

On 8 February I was transferred to Emerald Glades aged care residence where I have settled in quite well. I can move freely around my new hostel accommodation and go up the street on a sealed footpath. I am unable to take a single step but I can transfer from chair to chair, or chair to bed. This enables me to do most things for myself. Meals, laundry and room cleaning are provided in my new home.

I'm glad to be near Monbulk where the air is fresh. Friends from Monbulk can visit without too much difficulty, as does my daughter who lives in The Patch.





Elsie's Story

Contracted polio in 1945



I was born in Melbourne the only girl in a family of six children. It was during the worst economic depression in the world's history. Dad was among about a third of Australian workers who lost their jobs and remained out of work for several years. At the time governments provided no unemployment or other family welfare benefits. Soon after Dad lost his job, he and Mum had to sell their home and almost everything of value in it. When I was born in 1932 they and my three older brothers were living in a sub-standard rented cottage. They survived on the little income Dad made from selling fruit and vegetables from the back of a horse-drawn van. At the time poliomyelitis (polio) was commonly called infantile paralysis and was the most feared of all childhood illnesses. During a polio epidemic in 1937 I became ill and was diagnosed as having the disease. When I recovered with no apparent after-effects, doctors said I was immune from further attack. Mum and Dad believed this.

In those days up to 90 percent of Victorian children left school and went to work when they turned 14. This happened to Dad and Mum, so they would not allow it to happen to us. They hoped we would all go to university. That meant keeping us all at school for up to 12 years. They were staunchly practising Catholics but at the time Catholic schools received no state aid. By living frugally they could afford to send us all to Catholic primary schools but not to Catholic secondary schools where the fees were much higher. We would need to win scholarships. In Melbourne, the Catholic Church encouraged low income families to keep their children at school longer by offering a limited number of scholarships to parish

primary school leavers who hoped to go on to a Catholic secondary school. My elder brothers had succeeded in winning the much wanted scholarships. Primary schools then included years seven and eight. When I started grade eight in 1945 I made up my mind to win one also. I succeeded, and a week or so before Christmas was enrolled in the Catholic Girls College of my choice and was to start there in the New Year. I was then aged 13.

On Christmas Eve we embarked on a visit to the Royal Park Zoo in Melbourne. I woke up feeling a little unwell but told no one. I was waiting with two of my brothers to leave for the railway station when I suddenly fell down. I accused my brothers of pushing me over, they said they had not. I fell again on boarding the train but said I was OK so we continued on. I fell again when getting on the tram to Royal Park and was barely able to walk when we got off. I was obviously unwell. We stopped for a picnic lunch while Dad and Mum decided what to do. I could eat nothing and my head ached. I was sitting listlessly beside Mum when two of my brothers decided to cheer me up by giving me a ride on a nearby playground roundabout. When it started to move an electrifying pain shot from the bottom of my spine to the top of my head and the world exploded into blinding light. I let out a piercing scream and the rest of the family came running. The next thing I knew was lying semi-conscious on the examination table in our local doctor's surgery.

It was Boxing Day morning. The war had not long ended. Melbourne's already rundown medical services were strained to the limit in caring for hundreds of newly returned sick and wounded military personnel. It had taken almost 48 hours to find a doctor to attend to me. I had a violent headache. The doctor was talking quietly to Mum. I heard enough to know that I probably had Infantile Paralysis and had to go into hospital but I was too sick to care. The next thing I remember is being lifted out of a car and onto the train. The doctor had called for an ambulance to take me to the Children's Hospital in the city and was told none would be available until the next day. There was no choice but for Mum to take me to the hospital as best she could by train and tram.

I was too sick to remember much more until I woke up in the hospital's much overcrowded waiting room to the sound of Mum and a nurse arguing angrily nearby. The nurse was accusing Mum of being selfish and disruptive in seeking to have me seen out of turn. In fact she was trying to pass on our doctor's advice that I was probably in the infectious stage of poliomyelitis and should be kept away from all other children. When the nurse realised this we were quickly put into a nearby examination cubicle. I drifted back to sleep until I was roused by

two doctors who came in. When one gently turned my head to one side, the electrifying pain shot up my back again and from a seemingly long way off I heard him say, 'I'm sorry Mrs Johnson. It's definitely Poliomyelitis'.

We were then left alone while arrangements were made for my admission. When the door closed Mum burst into tears. This frightened me, I had never before seen her crying and distressed. Hoping to comfort her I said, 'Don't cry Mum. At least it's not Infantile Paralysis.' She responded, 'But didn't you know Poliomyelitis is Infantile Paralysis'? My world fell apart. I drifted back to sleep again until a nurse came in and told Mum she had to leave immediately. I was about to be taken to a ward and she was not allowed to go with me there. As she left Mum said, 'Don't worry I'll be back to see you in the morning.' At some time that night I woke up, flat out on a bare wooden floor in a long narrow room, with no idea of where I was or how I had got there. Unable to get up, frightened to call out for help, I stayed there whimpering until a nurse came to put me back to bed.

Mum did not come the next morning and no one told me why. Later I woke up to see a young priest standing by my bed. Mum called in on our parish priest to tell him of the day's events. Upset by what she had to say, he telephoned the young priest who lived nearby the hospital and asked him to inquire about me in the morning. The hospital allowed him to see me for a few minutes but all he could do was to comfort me by telling me why Mum had not come back. He promised to keep in contact with the hospital and pass on to Mum and Dad all he learned. His visit was the only one allowed to me for over a month.

I drifted in and out of awareness for what may have been a day or two or even a week or more. Meanwhile, endless tests revealed I could no longer sit, stand or feed myself. At some time I was taken away and equipped with a Double Thomas Splint, an awful looking contraption designed to hold my whole body firmly in place in bed. However it was nowhere near as fearsome as it looked and helped me to rest more comfortably in bed. Nevertheless I was upset that no one told me why I had to have it. It was my constant companion for over five years.

One morning a nurse came and told me I was to be transferred to the children's orthopaedic hospital immediately. It was about 40 kms away at Mount Eliza. I feared that Mum and Dad might not have been told of the move. When the nurse refused to check I began to cry bitterly and to resist as best I could, but to no avail. I was still crying when I was loaded into the waiting ambulance. Its crew did what they could to cheer me up and told me the best of what I might expect on arrival.

The Mount Eliza Hospital was located in attractive surroundings with a polio ward designed for the comfort of about 30 occupants. The boys' beds were on one side of a glassed-in nurses' station, and the girls on the other. All had their own bedside locker with the head of their bed close up to the long back wall. The area between the end of the beds and the front wall served as a wide clutter free walkway. The front wall was made up of a series of wide glass doors which allowed easy access to the attached outside patio. Every patient had an unimpeded view of the well-kept sloping lawns and gardens extending down to the foreshore of Port Phillip Bay and beyond. It was the only thing I liked about the hospital.

Patients were cut off almost entirely from contact with the outside world and saw little (and sometimes nothing) of their families. Siblings were not allowed to visit and parents could do so only at a set time on one specified Saturday afternoon of the month. Because most had no cars, parents had to rely on infrequent weekend public transport services, and might spend several hours travelling from suburban addresses to the hospital. On visiting days Mum left home early Saturday morning and did not get back until late in the afternoon or early evening. It was rare for both parents to be able to visit. Many had children too young to be safely left alone at home for hours on end. My Dad never visited, he was in the Army and rarely had weekend leave.

Patients in the polio ward ranged in age from about three up to fifteen years. There was a wide variation in their maturity and understanding, and in the urgency of their physical needs and emotional ability. In rigidly applying the one rule to all, the hospital ignored this. Patients were covered in bed only when it was cold. I was a sensitive, pubescent 13 year old girl from a conservative background. On being admitted to the ward, I was stripped of the pyjamas I was dressed in. I was re-clad in a skimpy white cotton bikini-type bottom and matching skimpy bra top which I hated; my protests went unheard. Instead I was told I had no reason to complain because all others in the ward were similarly dressed (except the boys who were spared the indignity of the bra tops).

I had been trained to accept some responsibility for my own well-being. I had an unusually low tolerance to ultra violet rays and knew if I did not soon move into the shade or cover up on hot sunny days, I would become badly sun burned and sick. Every day after breakfast the nurses wheeled us onto the patio where we were normally left until late in the afternoon. On the first overly hot and bright sunny morning after I arrived my skin soon began to burn and I asked a nurse to

move me out of the sun, telling her why. She would not to do so nor would others I asked. I was very obviously badly sunburned and sick and dizzy before I was wheeled back inside. I did not seek an apology and was not offered one.

At the beginning of the school year a primary school teacher arrived to help the younger children with schoolwork. I asked if anyone was available to help me with mine but nothing was done and I began to fear I would never catch up with my peers. After her next visit Mum contacted the Correspondence School. Within a few days I received the first weeks of its year nine coursework. But this was not as much benefit as it might have been. I was still unable to write or handle books and papers well, and there was rarely anyone available to help me.

Mum became increasingly concerned about my obvious depression and failure to improve and made an appointment with the doctor in charge. He advised I was unlikely to improve much more and would be dependent on others for life. Mum sought a second opinion from Dr Jean McNamara, a world-wide recognized authority on polio. I was soon discharged from hospital and taken into her programme. It was nine months since I had been diagnosed. I could now sit propped up in bed and spoon feed myself, but could do little more.

When I returned home I became ill with pneumonia and my new treatment regime was delayed until mid-November when a young and optimistic, highly competent physiotherapist arrived on the scene. On her first visit she announced she intended to get me on my feet and back to school. It might take a long time and would require our full co-operation but it could be done. She would treat me for an hour every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning. Mum was to observe closely and repeat this on the days in between. The object was to train the least affected of my muscles to carry much of the burden normally carried by the most affected. But first she had to assess their present condition. Under her instruction Mum converted our kitchen into a treatment area. I was then lifted out of bed and on to the kitchen table where the physio assessed the present state of my muscles and recorded the results for future reference, and all the while she explained what she was doing and why. By the time she finished I was totally exhausted but confident of her ability to bring about the desired results. This continued to be so until I was able to do without her help and returned to school.

I was much behind in my correspondence school work and very surprised when two of its teachers came to see me in December to tell me that in light of my primary school record and quality of the little work I had done, I was to be awarded one of the scholarships the Victorian Education Department then made

annually to the state's best performing Year Nine students. This raised my spirits so much that I was not upset by their advice to repeat year nine before going on to year ten.

The burden of my care fell mostly on Mum. Every week day she was out of bed by six o'clock to light the stove fire, attend to my toilet needs, and get the boys off to school by seven thirty. Most of Melbourne's catholic secondary schools and colleges were located an hour's train journey away. After they left she fed and bed-bathed me; made the house clean and tidy; and readied the kitchen for my treatment to begin soon after nine o'clock. In the balance of the day she busied herself with other household work while I rested and did my school work. As I improved the burden on her grew less but it was always heavy.

By the middle of 1947 I was able to attend to most of my personal needs and walk from room to room without help. However, when I stood up the weakened muscles in my back and abdomen failed to support my spine properly causing a Scoliosis (S-shaped curve in the spine) which had the potential to worsen and leave me with a permanent deformity. The best way to prevent this was to have a back brace made to wear when I was up and about. I did not fear getting this made. It was to be made of plaster of paris. It hadn't hurt when the plaster of paris casts I wore at night to hold my legs straight in bed were made.

It was different with the back brace. The process started with me sitting on a high stool almost entirely naked. A leather support attached to the end of a strap hanging down from the ceiling was fitted under my chin. My back was straightened by hoisting me up until the tips of my toes barely touched the floor. A medico then doctor manipulated my body until my spine was brought entirely into line. Then bandages saturated in wet plaster of paris were carefully wrapped around my body from underarm to hip and moulded into shape. Meanwhile I had to hang there motionless until the cast was dry enough to be slit up the front and removed. If I failed in this, the process might have to start all over again. I soon became stiff and sore and ached over. The pain was excruciating long before the cast was dry enough to cut off. When it was finally cut off it was left to dry out fully overnight.

The next day I was strung up again while the cast was put back on and checked for fit; after which I was let down enough to allow me to sit while it was inspected for any defect which might later cause painful pressure sores. It was marked where it needed to be trimmed down to prevent it digging into my body when sitting. It was then taken away to be lined with chamois; fitted with a

leather laced front to make it easy to put on and off, and glazed to strengthen it and prevent it from cracking. After that I wore it home hoping to God I would never have to have another one made.

My leg and foot muscles were now strong enough for me to walk but they tired quickly. That made me shuffle and be at risk of falling over my own feet. The solution was to wear custom made shoes with in-built supports. When I first wore them their weight anchored my feet to the floor. However within a month or so I could walk up to about a kilometre without becoming too tired to go any further. I could even manage a flight of stairs by myself provided the steps were wide and shallow and there was a handrail to haul myself up. In mid 1948 Dr McNamara decided I was well enough to return to school the next year but only as a school boarder. I was still too easily exhausted to cope with travelling to a day school.

I could get myself up and down a flight of stairs occasionally but had no hope of doing this several times in the day, every day. On rare occasions I could cope with being up and about for 12 hours but not every day. Nor would I be able to join in with all the normally compulsory boarding school activities. Finding a boarding school willing and able to take me in was not easy and it was late in December before we did so. It was unlikely to meet the scholastic needs of a girl aiming at winning scholarship entry to the University of Melbourne but it was all that was available to me.

It was registered as a year one to twelve Convent Boarding School and had an enrolment of about 130 girls. Normally most girls left school at the end of Intermediate (year ten), a few went to Leaving (year eleven). It was years since any had gone on to year twelve which ended in the Matriculation (university entrance) exams. Except for a small, inadequately stocked library, it had no specialist classrooms or other specialist teaching facilities. Its other buildings and site were equally off-putting. It was located on a steep hill and could be accessed only by a long, unpaved, winding drive or a long uphill path punctuated with several flights of unevenly laid stone steps. Although the exterior of its two-storied convent and boarding house building was impressive, the rooms inside were either badly heated or not at all; the boarding facilities were minimal and cramped for space. The classroom buildings were no better. There were no lifts anywhere and the handrails I needed to get up and down the many indoor and outdoor steps and stairs were non-existent or inadequate. Had there been any hope of getting in elsewhere I would not have gone there.

However where others saw insurmountable problems, Reverend Mother saw only challenges to be overcome with a little thought. I had to accept that the school was unable to offer me much (if any) choice in the year 11 and 12 subjects I studied. Without an Intermediate Certificate I was not legally able to undertake Leaving Certificate subjects. She would submit a copy of my proposed course of study, together with a report from Dr McNamara on my medical history, to the appropriate authority and have the requirement waived. She would discuss with Dr McNamara what the convent needed to do to enable me to get around without too much difficulty. I would not be held bound by school rules that asked too much of me. There was no need for my family to become involved in any of this. We were soon on our way home with a list of boarding house and school rules and an appointment to see her a day or two before the school re-opened in the New Year. By then Reverend Mother had achieved all she promised and, with the help of volunteer labour, had put into effect Dr McNamara's suggestions. It was now four years since I was diagnosed.

I had lived in an almost exclusively male environment for the last three years so at 16 years of age I could hold my own in discussions about football, cricket, motorbikes, politics and anything else that was then of pressing importance to young males; but girls' talk was a different matter. I was hopelessly ill-equipped to join in conversations about film stars, make up, boyfriends and how to catch and keep them, or when to get married and what to get out of it. To this day I feel far more at ease with a group of men than I do with a group of women. My obvious ignorance of what most girls knew and my very different ambitions caused my classmates to see me as odd. But since they were cheerfully tolerant of my oddities and went happily about trying to rectify my deficiencies, this was of no bother to any of us.

I benefited much from my two years at boarding school. My health continued to improve; I liked the company I was in, and without much trouble did well in the Leaving Certificate and the Matriculation exams. However my life was not entirely a bed of roses. Because the convent lacked the means to help me catch up in Maths and Science I could not reasonably expect to matriculate in either. I now knew I had no chance of entering any of the careers I once dreamed about. I was soon to leave school and enter the adult world. There was need for me to learn how polio might affect my future in the next few years.

In Dr McNamara's opinion I had improved remarkably and may improve further, but almost certainly not as much as I hoped. My abdomen and back muscles remained badly affected and I would always need some form of back brace.

There was nothing to suggest I was incapable of conceiving a child but if I did I might not be able to carry it to full term. While the child might well survive with no ill effects, I would need to take into account that the pregnancy would probably further weaken the damaged abdomen and possibly leave me wheelchair bound. All being well I would in time be able to do without build-ups in my shoes and walk increasingly long distances. But it was unlikely that I would ever be able to play social tennis, do ballroom dancing reasonably well, or learn to play the piano as I had hoped. I should be well enough to commence full time university studies when I left school but it would be longer before I could take up full time employment.

I performed better than average in the Matriculation exams and won a Commonwealth Government scholarship sufficient to cover my fees and other university costs but not much more. I could count on having free board and lodging at home but needed to earn money to pay my other living costs. With Dad's help I obtained a temporary position as a junior clerk in a city office to last until the university year started in March. If nothing else, it taught me I still lacked the stamina needed to do full-time work. I left home Monday to Friday at seven thirty and did not get back until after six o'clock at night. I travelled by train in grossly overcrowded carriages 20 or more years old and with floors so high above platform level that I could not get on or off in the normal fashion. The only way I could manage was to step on the train's running board; grab the handles on either side of the compartment door; heave myself in; and hope not to lose my balance as I fought to get a seat. In returning home I had the additional problem of getting back to the station without being knocked off my feet by the big crowds converging on it from every direction. Had I not managed to arrange to travel home in the guard's van I would have had to give up. It was the same with work where I had to arrange time off to rest. When March came I was too exhausted to take part in Commencement Week.

The university was located two to three kilometers from the rail terminus. Travelling there by tram was a nightmare. The tram tracks ran down the centre of the road and stopping points were unpoliced. It was up to passengers to look after their own safety while getting on or off. Getting on a crowded tram was worse than getting on a train. There was little to indicate I was physically disabled. I had to get a firm grip on the only hand rail and hoist myself up two high, narrow steps to get on board. Meanwhile other students rushed through the wide, open doorway without looking where they were going. My balance was bad and I was always at risk of being knocked over. Getting off was worse. If I fell getting in, as I sometimes did, I fell forward into the tram. But if I fell getting off, I was at

risk of falling forward into the path of passing traffic. After a couple of close shaves I decided to walk the distance except when the weather was bad or I was too exhausted to do so. I had to stop frequently to rest and it took a long time but was safer.

The university buildings spread across a large area. I spent almost as much time walking to and from classes as I did in them. The buildings I most used had several entrance steps but no entrance ramps or lifts. Seating in the lecture theatres was arranged in tiers and I always needed to climb up or down stairs to find a seat. The library was cramped and overcrowded and the seating not suited to my needs. I coped only by doing most of my study and research at the State Library. I arrived at the university as late as possible and left as soon as I could. I did well academically but only at the cost of being cut off from much of the mainstream of university life and its benefits.

I was too exhausted to work in the short breaks between terms but the university's Student Employment Service placed me in a wide variety of jobs during the long end-of-year breaks. When the time came to seek permanent employment I knew the types of work within my physical capacity and applied accordingly. But with one exception, my job applications failed, more than likely because it was assumed that polio made me medically unfit. Some letters of rejection actually stated this.

The Federal Government had introduced a scheme to raise the status of the Public Service by attracting university degree holders to its ranks. This was at risk of failing because those who made the appointments generally valued seniority (years of service) over academic qualifications. To counter this the Public Service began offering recently graduated degree-holders well paid positions not normally held by graduates. This later advantaged the graduates if and when they applied for advertised positions more in tune with their academic qualifications. I had no difficulty in obtaining one such position. However, when I applied for advertised positions requiring my qualifications I was unsuccessful and always the stumbling block was that I had suffered from polio. In deciding to look elsewhere for a position, I contacted the State Library of Victoria. It advised that to be a professional librarian I should be accredited. To do this I would need to do a recognized accreditation course. I enrolled in an evening class and meanwhile remained in my existing job.

Some time later I was on my way back to work after lunch when I spotted an Education Department notice on a Treasury Building entrance door. It invited

would-be applicants for teaching appointments in Government schools to inquire within. I did and half an hour or so later emerged clutching a notice of appointment to a secondary school close to home. I was not quite sure how and why I got it. The principal's reaction was much the same when I arrived to start work the following Monday.

The school was a recently established boys' Junior Technical School, still in the course of construction and so more than usually difficult to manage. It was practice not to appoint women teachers to boys' only schools. The principal had applied to the Department to send him at least one urgently required experienced English/Social Studies teacher. They sent him only me, an untrained totally inexperienced young woman who had never been inside a state school before and knew nothing of how they were organized and managed! However the principal and most others of the staff were forward-looking World War Two veterans who went out of their way to help me overcome my deficiencies and avoid the pitfalls.



Within a few months I knew I wanted to make teaching my career. I was appointed as a temporary teacher and this could not be changed until I completed some recognised teacher training course. On the principal's recommendation, I was awarded a paid studentship to study full-time at university for a Diploma of Education in return for becoming legally bound to the department for three years.

Elsie's graduation day

At the end of the course I was re-appointed to the school as a permanent teacher. As such I was legally obliged to contribute to the department's superannuation fund. I had no objection to this until I discovered that the Superannuation Board saw in my polio justification to rule that I was permanently disabled before being appointed as a permanent teacher. If I later retired on medical grounds from whatever cause before reaching the statutory retirement age, my superannuation benefit would be reduced to not much more than half of what it would otherwise have been. If for some other reason I resigned before reaching the statutory age, I

would reap no benefit at all from my contributions but instead suffer a substantial loss. The board was obliged to do no more than refund the face value of my contributions, less a percentage charge to cover the fund's administration costs. When I resigned over 20 years later I was paid a sum amounting to only 90 percent of my contributions. In my experience the hidden costs of having had polio are much higher than commonly supposed.



Elsie – High school teacher in the 60's

Ten years after I was diagnosed I saw Dr McNamara for the last time. I had made no improvement for 12 months which indicated my condition had stabilised. While I'd not regained all that I had lost, I'd made a remarkable recovery. I no longer needed to use night splints and my body brace had been discarded in favour of a whale-boned surgical corset. If my back was not to deteriorate I would need to wear it whenever I was up and about. I no longer needed built up shoes. Most of the time I could wear ordinary sturdy walking shoes but no loose fitting or low healed footwear. Otherwise I would throw my back further out of alignment, with noticeably bad effects on my mobility and appearance. I was unable to hop, skip, run or jump; my back, abdomen, shoulder and arm muscles remained abnormally weak; but it might have been far worse. Dr McNamara's last piece of advice was that current research made it seem likely that within the next 20 to 30 years my condition would begin to regress. It might be that I would celebrate my fiftieth birthday in a wheelchair. Meanwhile I should go out and make the best I could of life. I have made this my aim ever since.



There was no point in continuing as a permanent teacher in any technical school. They were all single sex schools. Within the system I had no hope of bettering my prospects in an all boys' school. I did not want to teach in an all girls' school. As soon as I was eligible to do so, I applied for transfer on promotion to several co-ed high schools within reasonable travelling distance of my home.

Elsie at high school as Senior Mistress

I was appointed to the first on my list. This was a newly established school with about 200 pupils, all in years seven and eight. As the highest ranked female teacher on staff I became the senior mistress. A senior mistress role was akin to that of a modern deputy principal, school welfare officer, student counsellor and part-time classroom teacher rolled into one. However I quite liked the work and it allowed me sufficient time during the day to sit and ease the strain on my back.



Senior Mistress handing out prizes at school speech day

Meanwhile I was enticed into applying for a teacher exchange position in the UK. I was not expecting to succeed since I had not fully met the stipulated requirements. Nevertheless in mid-November I was on a P & O liner on my way to take up work in a Manchester Secondary Modern School for a year. Secondary Modern Schools were at the bottom of the pecking order in the UK education system and my English counterpart taught in one of the lowest ranked of these. It was located in one of the city's worst slum areas where student misbehaviour was far worse than at home and teaching loads much heavier. However I coped, largely because the Manchester Local Education Authority (LEA) was one of the best in England.

An LEA in the UK does much the same work as a State Education Department Office in Australia. The teacher exchange scheme had been established to enable participating teachers to broaden their educational background beyond what they could hope for in their homelands. The Manchester LEA took this very seriously. It organized for all exchange teachers to be released from their daily teaching duties on one day every week to take part in organised excursions not normally available to the general public. Added to this it arranged for me to spend some of

the year teaching in schools other than the one I was initially sent to. It also allowed me to have longer than the gazetted time for holidays without loss of pay so that I might travel as much as possible on the Continent.

With the help of my hosts, I bought a car at an exceptionally low cost soon after I arrived. Thereafter I travelled in reasonable comfort without the need to rely on public transport. One or more of my new acquaintances happily joined me on weekend and longer trips and shared the cost on terms that suited my needs. Generally this involved no more than handling my luggage and attending to other matters beyond my physical capacity. The year away also taught me that while I could never hope entirely to negate the residual effects of polio I could certainly reduce the impact of these on my life and have fun in doing so.

In the late 1960s increasing widespread teacher unrest in Victorian State secondary schools led to increasingly frequent state wide strikes. By 1972 I had had enough of the excess stress and strain of this and decided to move out of the State system entirely. I accepted the offer of a less financially rewarding position in a Catholic Secondary College where the stress was less and the all-round level of satisfaction much higher. I had only been there a few weeks when the school authorities offered me the opportunity to make a four month overseas trip, beginning in May, to obtain on-the-spot, up-to-date knowledge of curriculum trends in the USA, UK and Sweden.



*1974 Elsie was presented with
the freedom of Detroit city*



Elsie on tour in the Everglades

A few days before I was due to leave, and for no apparent reason, my right knee became so painful that I could barely walk. I sought medical advice. The doctor was not long out of medical school. No one had been diagnosed with polio in Australia for over ten years. He had little if any clinical experience of polio or

what might follow from it. He presumed I had suffered a recent injury to the knee. It was severe enough to warrant referring me to a knee surgeon. I decided not to act on this advice until after the trip. By then the discomfort was gone and I was walking reasonably well so I did nothing.

I had flown before and expected to cope reasonably well with the frequent flying involved. I was unpleasantly surprised when during the first leg of the flight to the USA the strain on my back caused me so much pain. When we stopped over in Fiji I considered abandoning the trip entirely. I would probably have done so if I had not been allowed to move to two adjacent unoccupied seats and stretch out except when the 'fasten seat belts' light was on. On several occasions before I arrived back I again had to seek help to cope with almost unendurable back, neck and shoulder pain. No one else on board seemed to be similarly afflicted. In spite of all these difficulties I completed the trip.

As time went on I had to accept reluctantly, that I was incapable of getting the exercise I needed from taking an active part in the usual socially played sporting activities. I satisfied the need by walking as much as possible. I tried joining in organized bushwalking but that proved too difficult and exhausting chiefly because it involved much scrambling over and around fallen logs and such like obstacles. Twice my companions had to choose between carrying me out to the road and into a car or leaving me stranded, so I gave up bushwalking. I was still able to cope with walking fairly long distances along formed roads. I walked the tracks in the nearby hills but was able to do so less and less as I found it harder and harder to cope with varying steep gradients.

There were other worrying signs. I became increasingly unable to write on blackboards without my right shoulder and arm aching abominably. I would lose my grip on the chalk. I could not stand for long without extra support. In classrooms and at social gatherings I was forever looking for a wall or piece of furniture to lean on to ease the pain in my back. I was a skilled motorist and preferred to change gears manually. I gradually lost the ability to change gears smoothly, and ultimately had to trade in my two year old Holden and buy one with automatic transmission. Within another couple of years I had to trade this for one equipped with power steering and brakes. Without this I would have had to give up driving entirely.

I consulted with doctors who decided I had no identifiable disease but was suffering from work related stress so I took three months long service leave to holiday and rest. A few days after I started leave I took a day trip with a friend to

Port Arlington. Shortly after we started on the return journey I had to ask my friend to take over the driving. My right shoulder and arm were aching too badly for me to continue. I visited a specialist the next day and he diagnosed a severely frozen shoulder arising out of some recent unidentified injury and saw need for surgery when the inflammation died down. When he examined the shoulder fully two months later he found the matter had righted itself. I returned to work greatly refreshed but my condition continued to deteriorate.

I was working in a school located on the side of a hill. Its buildings were mostly double storeyed and accessible only by steep paths and long flights of steps. I soon had to arrange for my workload to be reduced and for my classes to be relocated. By the year after my fiftieth birthday I was confined to teaching only in the ground floor rooms of only one building, and even that was too much. I took unpaid leave for the next year and spent it in considering my options and caring for my parents, who by now were in their 80s. I decided that if I were to continue working it would have to be in a school compatible with my physical needs. I obtained a position as Head of Senior School in a large Catholic College that operated out of single storied buildings on a large flat site. Even so I soon found the need to move frequently from one set of buildings to another exhausting. The level of my pain was rising. I had been in my new position for less than two years when doctors too young to have clinical knowledge of polio advised that if I did not retire entirely from work by the year's end I would most likely be wheelchair bound within five years. When an older, highly regarded back specialist with practical experience of polio confirmed their opinion I retired from teaching. The financial outcome was not good. The Catholic Schools' Superannuation Fund operated in a similar way to present day compulsory superannuation. The longer an employee remained working the higher his or her lump sum retirement benefit. In resigning ten years earlier than I had intended, I received a much lesser benefit than I had hoped for. However I managed to avoid applying for social welfare benefits by engaging with a trustworthy financial adviser and earning a small income from writing commissions.

My condition continued to decline; it became obvious that unless I soon renovated my home against the likely future I would not be able to continue living there. I engaged an architect to draw up plans and duly signed a contract with a builder. The next two years turned into a living hell. It occurred at a time when contractual rights seemed to work against the consumer. My actions to try to achieve what I thought was a fair outcome for me, cost much of my life savings. The whole saga caused my blood pressure to rise alarmingly and obliged

me to go on the invalid pension. Meanwhile I joined a group to lobby government to change the legislation so that consumers had better access to due process. I am proud of the part I played in achieving that goal. My blood pressure soon returned to normal and although my mobility continued to deteriorate it did so less than might reasonably have been expected.

Not long after the building job was finally completed my feet were hurting so much that I sought medical help. In about 1997 a surgeon removed the bones in two of my little toes and some time later the nails on my big toes. This relieved the pain but nevertheless I often had to resort to using a walking frame when away from home. In March 2002 my right foot failed to respond when I attempted to lift it off the accelerator when backing out of a parking spot in a crowded shopping centre. In the time it took before the car struck an immovable object, it did serious damage to four other parked cars as well as itself. Next day I visited a neurologist who referred me to an orthopaedic surgeon. He found need for surgery to correct serious spinal damage but classified it as non-urgent.

By early December I was in constant pain and could not stand for more than a few minutes at a time. When advised that surgery was to be delayed for probably a further year, a relative drove me to Emergency at St Vincent's Hospital where a leading neurosurgeon called for an MRI which revealed an urgent need for a laminectomy to be done on my lower spine. I was operated on within ten days and spent the Christmas and the New Year break in hospital before being sent on to a rehabilitation centre for two weeks. It was close on twelve months before I was finally discharged from there. Meanwhile the effects of post-polio and osteoarthritis were worsening. On the advice of Polio Services Victoria (PSV) I took to using a motorised scooter and walking frame to get around locally and when travelling by train.

In September 2007 a long-time friend was due to celebrate his hundredth birthday in Edinburgh, Scotland. I very much wanted to join in the celebrations, and remain for some time after but much stood in the way. My funds were quite limited but I could afford to go if I was careful in spending. I needed to fly business class and take my scooter. I would have to obtain not too costly accommodation suited to my needs. I would need someone to go with me to handle luggage and other such matters. If I failed in this, the trip would be off. This looked likely until my eldest niece decided to take unpaid leave from work and leave her husband and children to fend for themselves while she accompanied me. A travel agent booked a business class seat at what seemed to be an affordable price. This changed when the airline advised that while it carried

wheelchairs at no charge to users, it did not do the same for motorized scooter users. The cost was exorbitant. Again the trip seemed likely to be off. PSV solved the problem by finding a manual wheelchair for me to use while away. The birthday boy's family and the UK resident son of migrant friends solved the problem of finding and booking suitable accommodation.

A great way to explore steep places in Blenheim



In August the grumbling pains I had been suffering for some time turned out to be a stomach ulcer brought on by pain killers prescribed to relieve my osteoarthritis. The medication prescribed to deal with the ulcer worked its magic in time for us to set off as planned. It was only when we flew out of Melbourne that I truly felt sure that the trip was on. In the four weeks we away we had a ball; we were welcomed with open arms; the weather was unusually mild and we saw and did more than we or any one else thought possible.

Since then I have experienced increasingly annoying incontinence. The potency of the medicine prescribed to relieve my pain has increased. I now need to wear a lower leg and foot support to help me walk better. PSV is in the process of having my motorized scooter replaced by an electric wheel chair. Without this I would not be able to get out and about as much as I like. I do not know how much of my mobility problems are due to Post Polio Syndrome and how much to advancing age, but I do know that those who attribute it to advancing age are most likely wrong. When I see people much older than I am going on day trips and holidays that have long been too physically difficult for me to handle I know that. I also know from experience that outside of the actual sufferers few people know how high the hidden costs of polio really are. It is not just a matter of higher than usual medical costs; it is also a matter of very much higher holiday and travelling costs. It does not bother me that the general public do not understand this, but it does

bother me that the decision makers – parliamentarians and their advisors, bureaucrats and bean counters do not.

However on the whole I have enjoyed my life, and would not change it if I could. Had I not for a time lost the power to do so, I doubt if I would ever have come to truly appreciate the wonder and complexity of doing very simple things like lifting a spoon to one's mouth.





Volunteer Writers

Some story tellers chose to use independent writers to record their eventful lives. I called upon some past professional colleagues and friends who had impressed me with their skills, along with their empathy for people with disabilities. We applaud their work which validates the trust invested in them.



Chris has enjoyed an academic life, conducting much research, particularly in aspects of sociology and disability studies, and developed a wonderful empathy with people. She has been a lecturer at Deakin University, where I first met her as I studied Special Education. Recording June's story has inspired her to embark on writing her own memoirs.



Gayl recorded Ursula's story. Gayl is a dynamic and multi-talented retired Special Education teacher. During her career she provided huge support to families, especially young parents new to disability. She also used her creativity in organizing school concerts and Artists-in-Schools. She particularly loves sewing and craft of all sorts and has helped organize a major fundraiser for the Cancer Council.



Pauline continues an outstanding career in Special Education. She has used her experience and writing skills to document Charters, Policies, and Curriculum. She currently teaches Creative Arts. Pauline can always appreciate and promote others' points of view. She recorded Marlene's story, sharing a love of children, an appreciation of their needs, and a lot of laughs.



When Viv heard of our project she volunteered to write her mother's story 'Vera'. She has provided an interesting family perspective as well as an historical account of medical procedures some 90 years ago. Viv's writing reflects her admiration of the way her mother lived a full, loving life in spite of her painful disability. She has documented a story and tribute her family will cherish.



Paul arrived in Australia from England as a child. He trained as a teacher and went on to become a much-loved Principal at Mt Evelyn Primary school until his retirement. He married Marilyn, a Special Education teacher. Paul loved to fish, hike, bike-ride, cook and renovate. He had a down-to-earth manner, with a great sense of fun. He worked on Ron's story until his sudden, sad death in January 2009.



Glossary of terms

AFO	Ankle foot orthotic
E-KNEE	Calliper with electronically controlled knee action
GP	General practitioner
GRAFO	Ground reaction ankle foot orthotic
KAFO	Knee ankle foot orthotic
LEOP	Late Effects of Polio
PPS	Post polio syndrome
PSG	Polio Support Group – 17 Groups operate across Victoria



Further Information

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www.polionetworkvic.asn.au

Polio Services – at St Vincent's Hospital

Service Coordinator: Simon Mathieson

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We're still here !



Knox-Yarra Ranges Polio Support Group
2009

