



THE LIGHTHOUSE

Shining light on post-polio health

Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association,
Inc

P.O. Box 14355 Savannah, GA 31416

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The President's Message

Our first "live" meeting in over two years on July 23 brought together twelve members. The Hilton Garden Inn made us all feel welcome and comfortable as we enjoyed a delicious Summer Lunch. Casi Rainwater Fisher and her daughter, Maria Leonard, drove from Warner Robins! Penny Smith and her friend, Peggy Tuten, traveled from Brunswick to be with us. Ann Chance and her daughter, Ashley Sauls, came in from Pembroke. Sidd Foster came from Pooler, and Richard Graham came from Springfield. Jo Anne Hardyman crossed the Savannah River from Beaufort to join us. Sandra Bath came in from Georgetown, and Doyle Foxx drove into town from Pooler to help us all have a wonderful time. I only drove twelve blocks and really appreciated all the special efforts made by the others who came together full of enthusiasm and news to share. The atmosphere felt like a long-anticipated family reunion. We remembered our past presidents and their extraordinary service to CEPSPA over the past 25 years. The 2009 calendar group picture challenged us to recall names of old friends; ten of the 24 people shown had passed away. Even as our membership decreases over the years, we continue to add new members who find us through Post-Polio Health International or our website or a friend. Certainly, polio survivors are still here!

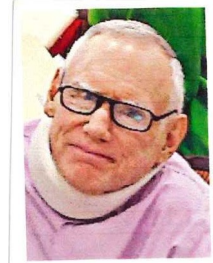
I enjoy wearing my CEPSPA membership lapel pin when going out. It attracts attention from strangers who ask about it; they want to know what happened to my arm also. I'm shocked at the number of people who do not know what polio is. Our vaccines have done a wonderful job of eliminating polio cases in the United States since 1954, but polio is still a threat to those who failed to get immunized. In helping others remember polio as it was, we honor ourselves. In helping others know it for the first time, we help future generations avoid its crippling menace. Sometimes it feels like we have only just begun to teach the public and professionals about the dangers of polio. We must use every opportunity to share our stories. In this issue of *The Lighthouse*, **Robbie White and Terri Dunnermann** are spotlighted with their own stories.

It is with a heavy heart that I share the sad news of Terri's death last week while in Atlanta. She served CEPSPA as treasurer and corresponding secretary for several years. Her husband, Michael, also served with her as secretary and photographer. Funeral plans are included in this newsletter.

*A member survey project is underway.
Please respond to letters with postcards if you receive one.*

My Polio Story by Robbie White

Speaker at CEPASA's 18th Anniversary...



I feel a little strange speaking to this group, as if I am speaking to the choir; we are all overcomers—not only physical barriers, but other people who try to place us in a box, based on preconceived notions of what they think we cannot do. For example, all through elementary school I could not finish timed standardized tests. I always left 10 or more questions undone. Therefore, my scores were lower than what they should have been, had I been given more time. The middle school guidance counselor made an incorrect assumption that I was not college material, so she recommended that I consider a trade school. My mother was furious, informed the guidance counselor of her own expectations, and stormed out of the office.

I was born in 1948 at Mercy Hospital in Charlotte, the second of five boys. My father was a High School Chorus and Band Teacher and a church choir director. My mother was Director of Christian Education at several Charlotte churches and later became an elementary school teacher. Throughout my life God has given me two strong women to be my advocates. I could not have done it without my mother and Anna.

When I was two years old, my father was working at Brevard Summer Music Camp. I apparently was bitten by a mosquito and contracted encephalitis. I went limp and Mother rocked me for two weeks. I had to learn to walk again. In the summer of 1952, I was almost four years old. My brothers were sick for several weeks before, probably polio. One day my father was out in the field with me, baling hay. I collapsed on the ground screaming with painful cramps and a high fever. Mother knew right away what it was. I was admitted to Mercy Hospital. I was placed in a small green room in isolation for one week. Mother told me that they could not visit me. She said Jesus would be with me. The nuns placed scalding hot compresses all over my body. It was a very traumatic experience for a three-year-old to go through. I had nightmares for years after. Mother retreated to the woods by the stream, yelling at God "Why Robbie?"

When my family came back, I was covered with blisters from head to toe. I told Mother that Jesus was standing at the foot of my bed, probably a near-death experience. I was placed in a ward with a number of beds and noisy iron lungs with children's head sticking out. I lay flat on my back, paralyzed for six months. I stopped eating, so they had to feed me

intravenously. Grady, my black orderly, was the only person who I would allow to feed me, and he worked on night shift. The doctors did not think I was going to make it. I stopped speaking to my parents. I felt like they had deserted me. I would turn my head when they came to visit. Mother felt like I needed to be home. Dr. Jacobs, my orthopedic doctor, would not hear of it. He said I should stay in a few more months to get exercises. Mother did not think I would make it that long, so she went to my pediatrician, Dr. Moore, and told him she was going to take me home. He agreed to talk to Dr. Jacobs who reluctantly agreed, only if Mother would take two weeks to learn my exercises. Mother told me I could leave in ten days, and of course, I did not understand that, so I still was not speaking. When she got down to three days, I could understand that, and I began responding to her. When she came to pick me up, I was not dressed. The nuns said that I would not let them dress me. When Mother got me home, she could not fill me up.

During visits, Dr. Jacobs would not speak directly to my parents. "Robbie, tell your mother to put some color in your cheeks," or "Robbie, ask your mom so and so." Mother got so aggravated that she quit going with my father. On the way to the hospital twice a week to do exercises, I was like a broken record. "Are you going to bring me back?" Over and over again. My mother paid my six-year-old brother to play with me by my bed. I had to learn to walk again, but I did not want to take a step. I said I want to be like a monkey in the tree. Mother had to yell angrily at me to make me walk, "You're not a monkey!! !"

We went to Warm Springs once or twice a year. I was walking and running by first grade. They placed me in a handicapped class seven miles away in Charlotte with a taxi for transportation. The teacher taught me to speak. She placed her hands in my mouth to teach me the correct positions of my tongue. By second grade I was overjoyed; I was allowed to go to school with my brother. I rested for an hour every day on the principal's sofa, probably arranged by my mother. I did not mind that; I got to see everything going on in the school. I hated the old-fashioned huge desks with ink wells that followed me through elementary school and set me apart from other students.

By junior high I had graduated to an army cot in the janitor's closet. As a teenager I had three operations on my legs. The first one was to stop the growth of my right knee. The second and third were on my left ankle for muscle transplants and fusion of the ankle joint. I could climb mountains and go on ten-mile hikes, probably too much for me. By my thirties I was using a cane, and by my forties I was using a wheelchair. See my blog on how I lost weight and overcame sleep apnea and acid reflux by eating differently.

(<http://acid-relief.blogspot.com>) I received a BA in Psychology and my education courses. I taught in Yemassee, South Carolina, remedial reading and math and later computer, for forty years and am still a fulltime teacher. Since 1990 we have had hundreds of students typing thirty or more words per minute and going on to get college educations and good jobs. This is from an area that is 90% black, 90% poverty, and low educational level.

Anna, my wife, is from the Philippines. She and I were pen pals in 1984. I proposed over the telephone. She said "Are you sure?" She came to the U.S., and we were married in 1985. We have two sons, Nathaniel, 28, who was salutatorian of his senior class, and Benjamin, 27, who was valedictorian of his senior class. Both are Eagle Scouts, and both graduated from Clemson University. In 1976 I was 28 years old I felt God was calling me to a mission. I had two possibilities in mind. One was to start a Boy Scout troop, and the other was to teach reading in prison. I could not decide what the Lord wanted me to do, so I prayed about it, and it came to me that whichever door opened to me first I would take. The next week the principal invited me into his office with the scout executive and asked me to start a scout troop and be a scoutmaster. I was scoutmaster for 30 years. We had the first integrated troop in the district and probably in the council, back in the 1970's. I had the first classroom computer in Hampton County in 1982. I learned to program in basic, selling programs to schools all over the U.S. and Canada. Now I have 70 Apple computers. To get these I wrote around \$500,000 in grants directly. Indirectly I helped write over \$2 million in grants for the school and district.

In 1972 I started illustrating my favorite lullaby, The Pretty Moon, in watercolors and also the 23rd Psalm. The original paintings sat in a drawer for 30 years. Several years ago, I self-published them. If anyone would like to see or purchase them, see Anna afterwards. I also have The Pretty Moon on the Apple app store for the iPhone and iPad for 99 cents. I plan to do more when I retire. As I said at the beginning, I could not have done it alone. "Behind every great man is a better woman."

(Written in 2015)

My Polio Story (Told with Love)

By Terri Dunnermann

{1953-2022}

Speaker at CEPSA's 18th Anniversary



My name is Teri Dunnermann. One of the statements in my baby book was "We weren't very impressed, but we took her home anyway." That was my mother's sense of humor. She would need that in the years to come. Three names were put into a hat: Penny, Pam, and Terri. I can thank my brother for my name. He drew out Terri. That was in 1953. At the age of two, living outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I came downstairs in my grandparents' house where we lived with a limp and a fever. Not really complaining, my mother felt that the condition warranted a doctor's visit. That was in 1955. I am not sure of the time frame, but I was hospitalized soon after. The diagnosis was polio. I was in quarantine from then on for the next three months. At which time I was in an iron lung to help me breathe. The worst part for my family was they could not sit with me or hold me. My mother was devastated. I had an ah-ha moment a couple years ago when we were around the iron lung with CEPSA, and it dawned on me the reason why I could never tolerate blouses, turtlenecks, or pullovers around my neck. That was because my head was left out of the iron lung, and the collar was tight around my throat. To this day I cannot wear anything tight around my neck. My father owned a hardware business and was very dedicated to being the provider of the family. My mother was everything else. My brother, Marc, who is four years older than me didn't seem to mind whether I was home or not, and to this day he has not much to say about that time. He was too busy keeping my mother busy with his shenanigans. At the Pittsburgh Children's Hospital, Doctor Jonas Salk was in the basement perfecting the serum that in 1954 had been given to approximately 440,000 children. I also was one of his guinea pigs. My claim to fame.

Unfortunately, there are no known records left from the hospital for my treatment. When it came time to leave the hospital, I had learned the song Davy Crockett and was having fun with all the attention from nurses as well as older kids in my ward. Especially the boys. I did not want to go home. But upon arriving home my mother was instructed to do exercises with my legs 4 times a day for many months. Out of all those times she missed one session and had my grandmother do it. My mom felt so guilty for missing that one time.

The second floor of the house had a staircase landing that was open to all the other rooms. So I was tethered to the post, and I could watch my mom go about her duties of caring for the rest of the family. In the kitchen she would be cooking up simple meals, she would do laundry and change the sheet on the beds and such. But I was never neglected. With the special shoes and the leg brace, I would just sit and amuse myself. Eventually I was able to walk with the brace. I don't remember much about that time. I got out of the brace and goofy shoes and after all the follow-ups were complete, at age 18, I was free of polio.

Or so I thought. Post-Polio Syndrome was not in my wheelhouse at the time. I did not know anything about it until finding CEPASA. I also did not know that the name for the polio type I had was bulbar. Finally, just a month ago I found another name for my status. I was and am a passer. No one would be able to tell I had polio at one time. You would not know I ever had polio. I was "normal." The only thing I could not do was walk on my heels. Such a small price to pay.

I lived a fairly normal life growing up. I attended college and graduated with a double major in Psychology and Sociology. My first job was to live with and work with eleven adult retarded women. That in and of itself was another education. In my years I have learned many things. I learned to do stained glass, open and close a grocery store, worked as a job coach for handicapped adults, supervised foster care for mentally ill adults, and worked for Hallmark, Nabisco, and Wal-Mart. Michael and I moved a lot all over the United States in our 32 years of marriage. Each place brought on new challenges.

I am not only the treasurer for CEPASA but also for my painting group which has 15 members. I am involved with my church, and I am in service to the soup kitchen in Richmond Hill each week. We cook, chop, and dice food and deliver meals for around 330 people in the area. Though now in my condition, I only make it there when Michael takes the day off. But, I will be back. I love music and I love to sing and dance. I love to swim,

Jazzercise, and I even won awards for playing racquetball. Now, my mobility has started to fail me.

Finding the group, CEPSA, has been an eye-opening experience. I knew nothing about PPS, but it is all making sense to me now. Aging, along with PPS, has finally caught up with me. I am young at heart and always try to have a smile on my face. What you put out into the universe is what you get back. If you smile, a smile will come back to you. Positivity will guide you if that is what you put out there. If you say you are only okay, your whole day will be just okay. Instead, say I'm great, fabulous, super, that is what your day will be like, all day. I believe God still has a plan for me and I will fulfill that plan as God sees fit. Thank you for your attention, and love to you all with heartfelt gratitude. *(written in 2015)*



Love and thanks to you, Terri, for all the ways you enriched our lives with your presence. Rest in peace.

Terri Dunnermann's visitation will be Tuesday, August 30, from 6:00-8:00 at Carter Funeral Home, 10512 Ford Avenue, Richmond Hill, Georgia.

The funeral mass will be held Wednesday, August 31, 11:00 in St. Anne's Catholic Church, 10550 Ford Avenue, Richmond Hill, Georgia.

Thank you to our financial supporters in 2020-2022

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*Thank you to our friends in the **Boca Raton** Polio Group who offer us their excellent ZOOM meetings on the second Thursday of each month from 12:00-2:00. Join us from the comfort of your home/office. If we do not have an email address for you, just send me a note with an email address from a family member who won't mind sharing their computer with you occasionally. **Maureen Sinkule**, their president, welcomes polio survivors from all over the country and Canada. Download Zoom, "join a meeting", and follow the prompts.*

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