

# POST-POLIO HEALTH

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[www.post-polio.org](http://www.post-polio.org)  
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PHI's mission is supported by its Membership.

**WE'RE  
STILL  
HERE!**

October 7-13, 2018  
[www.post-polio.org](http://www.post-polio.org)  
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## WE'RE STILL HERE! 2018 Essay Contest

October 7-13 marked PHI's 12th annual WE'RE STILL HERE! campaign, with the goal of increasing awareness of the fact that while polio may be nearing eradication, there remain millions of polio survivors across the globe. Survivors who, given the proper support and assistance, continue to thrive and live accomplished and fulfilling lives. PHI's annual campaign seeks not only to let the public know of these accomplishments, but also to make them aware of polio survivors' unique health needs and challenges.

This year's campaign encouraged survivors to write a short essay and help show others who or what has enabled them to thrive and show the world that THEY'RE STILL HERE, whether it be the support of family or friends, a piece of adaptive equipment such as a power chair or brace, modifications to their home, changes brought about legislation such as the ADA, or a local program that has allowed them to age in place. We wanted to hear how polio survivors have overcome the obstacles in their lives and gone on to age successfully with a disability.

### CONTEST WINNER "I'm Still Here"

***Diana Sprague***

Lakeland, Florida

In August 1952, at 11 months of age, I contracted poliomyelitis. My mother and I were hospitalized, and I spent my first birthday in the hospital. My family and sheer determination have allowed me to thrive and succeed. Family members said that my father was determined that my mother and I would walk again. Dad continued the physical therapy even though my mother and I would scream in pain. My older brother by five years became my champion. Bill pulled me around in his little red wagon and sled.

At age seven, I could no longer walk with aides, so surgery was done to lengthen my left leg. The surgery was done in early May 1959 and was experimental. All the ligaments and tendons in my left leg had to be stretched. While in the hospital, I decided that I wanted to be a nurse. After four months in late September, the cast was removed. My leg had atrophied and had no feeling. I was very disappointed

when I found I could not walk and had to spend several more months in a wheelchair.

My father purchased a sidewalk bicycle for me to ride for therapy to strengthen my legs. It had solid rubber tires, no air. This was difficult to ride since we lived on a farm with no sidewalks, just grass and white rock. The therapy continued with the bicycle until I turned 13 and was discharged as a polio patient. I received my first bicycle with air tires that year for Christmas. If someone told me that I could not do something, it made me more determined. My parents never treated me different than my siblings. I always found a way to accomplish tasks, though maybe not the traditional way. If there is a will, there is a way.



Diana Sprague

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My rehabilitation scholarship sponsor said that I could not be a nurse because I wouldn't last ten years. They insisted that I be a laboratory or x-ray technician. I declined the scholarship and continued my dream of being a nurse. I worked for 30 years as a nurse. There are still challenges on my journey of life, but I will face them with support of my family and determination to keep going. My nursing education is a valuable tool for me and others. Yes! We Are Still Here!

## **FIRST RUNNER-UP**

**"I'm Still Here"**

***Mary Herness***

Whitehall, Wisconsin

The year was 1951, late August, when the polio epidemic was rampant across the country. I was a 13-year-old farm girl living near Pigeon Falls, Wisconsin, looking forward to being an eighth grader at our local school. When flu-like symptoms progressed to a frightening diagnosis of bulbar polio, my life changed drastically!

An ambulance rushed me from Eau Claire to Madison, Wisconsin, where a vacant iron lung waited. Thankfully, oxygen and intravenous feeding helped me survive without an iron lung. After months in hospitals undergoing therapy and making adaptations, I returned home and to school.

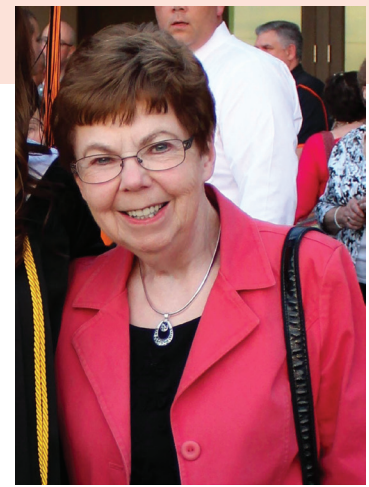
Helpful people were key to my survival. My daily farmer parents were supportive, making countless sacrifices and helping keep my attitude optimistic about future plans. The teacher prepared the students for my return to school. Those schoolmates became "first responders" helping me. They carried my lunch

tray, picked up dropped pencils and even hoisted me up from unexpected falls. Friends remained friendly with no fear of contracting polio from me. Relatives sent cards and gave encouragement. Our pastor changed the confirmation date so I could participate.

Years later, my husband would be understanding of my physical limitations and assist in helping design our home to fit my needs.

The diagnosis of polio did not change me or my goals. My type-A personality helped, never doubting my goals to attend college, become a teacher and raise a family. The qualities of optimism, self-direction, commitment and the feeling that anything is possible prevailed. Although I was bitter at first about why I had polio, this changed later to openness without blame.

During my post-polio years, I have altered several aspects of my life. Routine chiropractor visits, comforting therapeutic massages and regular appointments with a family practitioner are vital to my wellbeing. I've had a hip replacement, prolapsed bladder repair and cataract surgery. As a direct result of the bulbar polio, my swallowing and choking problems must be dealt with daily. Tough meats, seedy fruits, vegetables, nuts and spicy or overly sweet foods all cause bouts of choking. I eat slowly, chew foods thoroughly, and crush pills. Exercise for my heart problems are a daily requirement. Yes, they're all unwelcome sacrifices, but I'm still here!



Mary Herness

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***PHI's mission is to enhance the lives and independence of polio survivors and home mechanical ventilator users through education, advocacy, research and networking.***

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Notify PHI before you move by calling 314-534-0475  
or email info@post-polio.org, and tell us your old  
and new addresses.

### **Away temporarily?**

Send us your second address and dates you will be there  
and we'll do our best to send you newsletter.

Now that I am 80 years old, I continually have to adapt. Currently, I am a widow, mother of three sons, grandmother of ten and a survivor of a serious heart attack. Why am I still here? I remain committed to goals in my work with genealogy, with unending desire to keep learning and with a love for family and friends.

## SECOND RUNNER-UP

### "Leg Bone"

#### **Rita A. McGovern**

Lombard, Illinois

"Don't forget your leg bone, Gramma!" I was visiting my son and his family, and my five-year old grandson came into the guestroom in the morning to wake me up to play. "But I have to get dressed," I told him. "I'll be downstairs as soon as I can." That's when he reminded me to put on my leg brace (my "leg bone" to him). He and his twin sister loved to take turns



Rita McGovern

wearing it when I took it off for the night.

They had to hop because they couldn't bend their knee since it covered them from heel to hip. They thought it was a hoot!

When I was five years old, my mother asked me why I was walking funny. When my father came home from work, she asked me to walk for him. I went to bed that night, and the next morning when I awoke and put my feet on the floor, I collapsed to the ground. My right leg wasn't working anymore. I was diagnosed with polio but didn't know that at the time. All I knew was my mother

was very angry with me because I couldn't walk. I overheard her ask my aunt why this had to happen to her. I learned to hide my disability whenever possible and to excel in any activity that didn't involve the use

of my right leg (Honor Roll, Student Council, Class Officer, etc).

I was diagnosed with post-polio syndrome in 1981 and pictured my future in a wheelchair. But thanks to a wonderful orthopedic surgeon who has managed to keep me mobile by surgically reconstructing things inside my ankle and foot and a skilled orthotist who has fabricated various AFOs through the years to adapt to my changing outside limb, I am walking tall and proud.

Sixty-six years have gone by since the day I fell to the ground beside my bed, and next month I will be going to my twin grandkids' sixteenth birthday party. They might not remember wearing my "leg bone," but I certainly will. It was a life-changing moment for me because it gave me a reassuring perspective of myself. I am accepted and loved for who I am. I am a polio survivor and very grateful that I am still here.

## THIRD RUNNER-UP

### "Jonathan"

#### **Corina Zalace**

Niceville, Florida

Jonathan gives me freedom I never had before in my later life. I've suffered from polio since contracting it at age two in Indonesia. I was born into a Dutch family and lived there while my dad was working for the Dutch East Indies Trading Company. Polio broke out in 1950, and I was one of two children who got it. The other child died. After the doctor did a spinal tap and diagnosed me with polio, I was sent home for my mother to care for me, since there were no facilities in Indonesian hospitals to treat this disease or provide any aftercare. So, I was sent to a Dutch masseuse who worked on me with the wool packs, massages and electrical stimulation. Slowly I regained use of my left leg, but my right leg always remained mostly paralyzed. Somehow, I managed to limp badly along in my younger years, with the doctors believing that the more I used my right leg, the more function I would get back.

I had my first surgery at age five, and over the years I got worse with post polio syndrome. Using a right long leg brace and two Canadian crutches proved more difficult as time went by. After many more surgeries to correct my gait and straighten out my back (with a full C2-S1 fusion and 95 surgeries to date), I finally succumbed to a wheelchair. It brought me much freedom, but not for going places. I needed a special friend to give me the freedom I needed to be

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myself and allow me to do what I love most—travel. I needed to get out of my house and go places. I searched for my friend, and he was there waiting for me. He gave me the freedom I so desperately needed, and he is faithfully there for me. He is reliable and never complains. What a friend. I love Jonathan, my wheelchair lift van.



Corina Zalace

#### FOURTH RUNNER-UP

**"Mom"**

***Mary Ellen Stan***

Chino, California

Whenever I'm asked, "How did you survive?" the answer is immediate and emphatic ... "Mom!"

I contracted polio at age three, just a few months before the vaccine was released for use on younger children. From that moment on, Mom was my primary caregiver in all ways—physical therapist at home, chauffeur, provider, cheerleader .... We were a team!

As a kid, I took her commitment for granted, especially the chauffeuring until age 24, when I learned to drive. But one example of her dedication and sacrifice became clear to me many years later. When I was ten, the family lived in Kailua, Oahu, Hawaii. My doctor was at Army Tripler Hospital on the other side of the island in Honolulu.



Mary Ellen Stan

Corrective surgery was performed in February of 1963, and for three months my mom drove daily from our house to the hospital bringing me a comic book and my math homework (that was the only way I was allowed to pass 5th grade). She drove 36 miles round trip on the only route available back then—the Pali Highway—a winding road which, of course, meant nothing to me as a ten-year-old. Only once, due to heavy rain, did she fail to visit.

In 2000, my husband and I visited "the islands." We visited the places I lived, and we drove the same route my mom drove each day. It was only then that I fully comprehended the distance and driving conditions. Upon my return to the "mainland," I went to Mom and delivered the biggest hug to say, "THANK YOU." Tears were shed.

I've known enough people to know that not all moms make these kinds of sacrifices for their kids. Maybe it was because of her Missouri upbringing; maybe it was because she was a Marine Corps wife; maybe it was because she really, really loved me. NEVER in all our years together did she ever say, "Well, if it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be the success you are today."

During her final two years of life, I was honored to be her caregiver. There I was with braces and crutches pushing her in a wheelchair, and never once did I regret the effort to do for her what she had done for me—we were a team! And "I'm Still Here" because of "Mom!" ■

Information about prior campaigns can be found on Polio Place at [www.polioplace.org/category/blog-tags/were-still-here](http://www.polioplace.org/category/blog-tags/were-still-here).