

Volume 21 Number 4

Fall 2006



Post-Polio Educational Meeting

The Fall 2006 Colorado Post-Polio Educational meeting featured the following speakers: (Back L. to R.) Angel Johnson, Diabetic Educator for St. Anthony's Central Family Medicine, Dr. Marny Eulberg, M. D., Ann Huerter, Physical Therapist, (Front L. to R.) LeAnn Jensen, DVM, LAC, Acupuncturist, and Jeanne Ratchford. EMT. NCTMB. Massage Therapist.

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COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING AND POST-POLIO SURVIVORS

By Jim Oxley, Support Group Facilitator, Ft. Collins, Colorado

Can polio affect our memories? This question has been investigated for some time, but the scientific evidence is somewhat limited. In the 1940s psychologist Edith Meyer recognized that some post-polios (mostly children) had poor memories when it came to designing things and remembering pictures and images. The mechanism for this was unclear. In his book, The Polio Paradox, Dr. Bruno (2002) states that the right side of the brain, which processes images and pictures, can probably be damaged by the polio virus. He noted that many polio survivors have problems with the sense of direction, such as keeping a map in their heads of where they have been or where they are going. Surveys have shown that postpolios are super achievers, performing well as teachers, lawyers, doctors, scientists, political and business leaders. He emphasized that those people are not brain (Continued on p. 9)

In my opinion . . .

Some of the literature and research on the effects of polio speak to the impact on our cognition, our minds. Even before I read the literature about the effects of polio, I was aware that my memory and my recall were not as good as when I was younger, and I worried about it, having concerns that I was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia. After having read the polio literature and having some understanding of what was probably happening with the polio overlay, I would mention it to some of my friends, who are near my age and older, and their responses surprised me, because they, who were never diagnosed with polio, were experiencing some of the same "problems." As a result, I don't know if what is happening to me is the result of polio, or is the result of normal aging or, if those friends had polio as children and didn't know it!!

Probably, the cause doesn't matter as much as my attitude about the decreased mental functioning, real and potential, and about what I can do to keep my mind as sharp as I can as long as I can. So, I get my rest, eat protein, do crossword puzzles, keep lists and reminders, keep an active social life, take classes, and now, work with a group of great people to put out this quarterly newsletter. And, I try to keep current on the subject of aging, polio, and the mind, because I still am not sure about my future, both cognitively and in all aspects of my life.

This issue of the <u>Connections</u> discusses just those issues in the feature article. It also includes a copy of two articles from <u>Consumer Reports</u> on how to improve mental prowess. **And by the way...** shares how others polio survivors keep their minds active. I am sure that these suggestions are just a small list of what people do.

Lifelong learning is one way to keep our minds active. It provides not only cognitive stimulation but also affords a social outlet. It is also one of the best kept, relatively inexpensive, resources available to us. Hopefully, our information will open doors to those of us who have not been aware of what is out there. Dan Gossert and Jim Kneser are examples of two polio survivors who have, since retirement, not only participated in lifelong learning programs but have become further involved by teaching, facilitating or founding lifelong learning organizations.

One final thought on learning, we heard five great speakers at the Colorado Post-Polio 2006 Educational meeting on September 30. Over 50 people, a sold out audience, left with some very good, helpful information. The next educational meeting will be held in the spring of 2007. Watch for information on it, so you can join others in a great learning experience.

On another note, I hope you noticed our new masthead. Many thanks to **Chuck Malone**, a retired graphic artist and polio survivor for the beautiful job. Thank you, Chuck!

Margaret Hinman, editor

A special thank you to Oran V. Siler Printing Co. and Easter Seals Colorado for printing and distributing our newsletter.

Brain workouts boost mental prowess

Not long ago, scientists considered cognitive decline an inevitable result of aging. But growing evidence indicates that rather than sinking passively into foggy old age, you can take steps to help keep your brain sharp. Exercising the mind at any age may stimulate brain growth and help maintain robust mental function throughout life.

A June 2004 Swedish analysis of 13 population studies linked improved cognitive function and reduced cognitive decline with mental stimulation from leisure activities. Two years earlier, a large clinical trial funded partly by the National Institute on Aging showed the benefits of moretargeted mental training: A 5- to 6-week course in problem solving or speedy information handling yielded improvements that on the average would have reversed 7 to 14 years of cognitive decline.

The strategies taught in that course may have produced some of those gains, but mental exercise itself probably the In animals, mentally contributed, too. challenging activities provoke the growth of new cells and new connections in the brain. Other studies indicate that the human brain They've also found can regenerate. anatomical differences between adults who regularly engage certain brain centers and those who don't

How to Hone Your Brain

People of any age who want a memory boost might try experimenting with mnemonics, a technique that uses associations to link information. (For example, the acronym ROY G. BIV helps you remember the colors of the rainbow.) The University of Texas at Austin offers an overview of mnemonics at *http/www.utexas. edu/student/utlc/makinggrade/mnemonic*

.html. Courses in mind- or memory-training may help, though it's not known how long improvements last. The most important step is to cultivate ongoing, enjoyable mental pursuits, each of which may be especially useful for specific skills. Here are a few examples:

- Memory and learning. Memorize favorite poems or songs, learn to identify birds, or memorize new dance steps.
- **Concentration.** Play computer games, chess, or bridge.
- **Planning.** Design your own Web site, plan a garden, or organize a fund raiser.
- Language. Join a book-discussion group, do crossword puzzles or word games, or learn a new language.
- **Spatial relationships.** Learn to draw, take a pottery class, or play board games.
- Reaction speed and manual dexterity. Play ping-pong, tennis, or a musical instrument, or assemble jigsaw puzzles.

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Thank you to those of us who organized the September 2006 Post-Polio Educational Meeting: Gloria Aemmer, chairperson, Jeanine Ellison-Fisher, Marlene Harmon, Joan Kostick and Woody Trosper.

Dan Gossert: Lifelong learner

By Margaret Hinman

"Keeping an active mind is not dependent on your physical abilities," says Dan Gossert. Dan keeps his mind active by participating in one of the two life long learning organizations in the Denver metro area, organizations that meet the needs of people over 55 who want to keep intellectually sharp without going to college or without getting a college degree.

In addition to taking classes at VIVA! (Vibrant Intellectually Vigorous Adults!), which is part of the University of Denver and affiliated with Elderhostel, Dan has also volunteered as a facilitator for them. Facilitators are the class leaders, helping their peers to discuss and learn about topics of interest to them. Dan, like most of the facilitators, is not an expert in the areas he facilitates. He just wants to learn more about the subjects.

Dan's facilitating interests lie in the areas of history and literature. Included in the several classes he has facilitated are a course on Willa Cather and one on the Transcontinental Road using the Stephen Ambrose Book and one on Early Denver using Clark Secrest's book "Hell's Belles." He admits that although he enjoys facilitating, it does take a lot of work. However, the knowledge he gains and the personal interactions with other learners is worth the work.

Dan also volunteers one afternoon a week at the Westminster Public Library working with a program called Speak English. Dan is also a polio survivor, getting polio at sixteen, in 1951. When he came down with polio, he was working at a drivein theatre, where, among his other tasks, he cleaned the restrooms. This is where he thinks he got the polio virus.

He spent nine months at Colorado General Hospital (now University Hospital), including a month in an iron lung. He finished high school by doing home study.

As a result of the polio, he has always worn a long leg brace and has used a crutch since 1975, when post-polio syndrome began to manifest itself; Dan has experienced increased weakness in his right leg and had to return to a locked knee brace. To cut down the chances of falling, he has, in recent years, begun using an electric wheelchair almost all of the time.

Dan, the oldest of nine children, had a younger brother who also contracted polio, but two years after he did. The impact on his brother was much less severe, only affecting the lower part of one leg, and he had a full recovery.

"Polio never slowed me down. I have always felt I was able to live a full life. I didn't see it as limiting opportunities," says Dan. Before he had polio, Dan thought that he would go to college for a couple of years and then become an Air Force pilot.

Of course, polio changed those plans. Dan did go to the University of Colorado, where he concentrated in the social sciences and got his teacher's certificate.

The market for teachers was very tight when he graduated, so he found a job as a case worker for Adams County Social Services. *(Continued on p. 10.)*

Jim Kneser: Lifelong Learner

By Jeanine Ellison-Fisher

"I used to love physical exercise, but exhaustion doesn't thrill me any more and it comes with a week of recovery . . . If life hands you lemons, make lemonade . . . Now, life is about searching for new and exciting efforts to keep mentally alert. The new and the fresh help keep the gray cells working . . . I want to highly recommend that people who are watching their physical abilities diminish, seek out the mental world that is out there and can be pursued, and it is tremendously enjoyable." These are the words of Jim Kneser, co-founder of the Colorado Academy of Lifelong Learning, and a polio survivor.

The Academy for Lifelong Learning is where he finds intellectual activities that have very successfully replaced the physical activities that were previously so important in his life. His volunteer work at the Academy provides many opportunities to fulfill his ambitions and keep him excited about life.

Jim contracted polio at age four in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the 40 years after his recovery year, he enjoyed a supportive family, joined into athletics at school, never felt any negatives, and just kept going in a very active, normal life. Jim always believed that he could work hard and that belief created his success, so he banked on working hard and took on the challenges. He married, has two children, has both undergraduate and graduate degrees, chose to be an economist as his profession, and traveled the world doing mergers and acquisitions, getting by on very little sleep. . very, very little sleep! He played tennis and loved his work.

He contracted polio in July 1950, probably at a wading pool at his elementary school which was permanently closed that same year after a number of children came down with the disease. His home was quarantined for a period of time and his parents, who were not allowed to visit him in the hospital, reported that other families gave them a wide berth while he was contagious and in the hospital. In the hospital, in a children's ward which treated contagious polio cases, he was treated with gamma globulin shots and hot packs (He still finds that heat on his legs makes them feel much better). He experienced the loss of use of his legs and muscle atrophy in his legs, arms, and back. Back home by Christmas that year, but with little leg strength, he gradually regained the use of his legs and by the time he started Kindergarten he was fully recovered.

Then, in 1990, when Jim was 44, he started to notice symptoms which he now realizes signaled the onset of post-polio syndrome. Attempting to push his energy levels often resulted in extreme inability to concentrate and focus. His physical decline was rather dramatic, again suffering muscle atrophy in his legs, arms and back. Exercise often resulted in cramping and torn muscles, and significant loss of energy. The more he pushed himself the more he lost his ability to concentrate and focus. His remedy was several days of bed rest, gradually learning that pushing himself either physically or mentally was futile.

Over time, he found that sometimes even lengthy bed rest didn't restore much energy. (Continued on p. 8) 6

Life long learning in Colorado

There are many kinds of low cost educational opportunities in our communities. They can meet the needs of a wide variety of interests and are mostly handicapped accessible.

Community recreation centers and senior centers offer a variety of programs, including educational programs and arts and crafts. Senior centers also have social activities. Access to these resources is located in the blue pages of the phone book, usually listed in the city section.

Peer facilitated learning programs associated with Elderhostel meet the needs of senior citizens who want intellectual stimulation with other mature persons. The classes offered are low cost, peer led or facilitated and do not require tests or papers. They meet during the daytime, during the school year, usually each class meeting for two hours one day a week for the term. They also offer some social activities.

There are two such organizations in the greater metro Denver area:

- The Academy for Lifelong Learning-www.academyll.org. 303-770-0786. The Academy, P.O. Box 371318, Denver Colorado 80237-Classes meet at Hampden and Colorado. Terms start in September and in January and run from two weeks to ten weeks. There is a membership fee. Classes cost from \$35.00 to \$65.00. Scholarships are available.
- VIVA!—University of Denver, University College, 303-871-3090

www.du.edu./programs/VIVA!,

Classes meet on Cherry Creek Drive South. Quarters start in September, January and March and run for eight weeks. Cost--\$100 per quarter if taking one class and up to seven classes. Scholarships are available.

These are <u>some</u> of the colleges and universities that offer low cost auditing by non-degree seeking senior citizens. *Editor's note:* Other colleges and universities under the direction of the Colorado Regents may also have similar programs but we were unable to find them on their web sites. A suggestion would be to contact either the registrars' office or the tuition office at those schools.

- Colorado School of Mines—303-273-3200—Tuition office has information—62 years and older, up to 3 hours per semester, no cost, space available basis. Class choice may be limited to non-lab classes.
- Mesa State College—970-248-1020—Information available at the registrars' office—Senior Passport to Education—60 years or older, undergraduate classes only, space available basis. No lab classes. No fees or tuition.
- Metropolitan State College—303-556-8342—Metro Meritus program— Information available at the Center for Individualized Learning, CN 106—60 years or older, no cost, space available, no lab classes. Program available on all Metro campuses.

- University of Colorado at Boulder— 303-492-1411—Koenig Alumni Center, 1202 University Avenue, Boulder. Senior Auditor program. Over 55, regularly scheduled daytime classes, tuition-free. But, there is a cost of \$60 per semester unless you join the Alumni Association for \$45 for the year (non-alums can join). Then the cost is \$5.00 per class.
- University of Colorado at Denver— 303-556-8427—Office of Enrollment and Student Affairs—60 years or older, no tuition. Limited to classes that do not use special equipment and no computer classes. Space available, instructor permission.
- University of Denver—303-871-2360—Special Services Office, Mary Reid Building, 3rd floor. \$25.00 fee per class, permission of instructor. Some classes not available.
- Western State College of Colorado— 970-943-3045—Vice President for Academic Affairs, Taylor Hall 221— 60 years or older, space available, nocredit, no cost.

Another resource in Fort Collins that might be of interest for people in that area is the Aspen Club, offering courses, seminars, forums and travel trips. Some offerings are free; bus trips cost but are handicapped friendly.

Thank you from the <u>Colorado Post-Polio Connections</u> to the following volunteers who have made this newsletter possible: Marilyn Baham, Jeanine Ellison-Fisher, Dr. Marny Eulberg, M.D., Delores Glader, Nancy Hanson of Easter Seals Colorado, Marlene Harmon, Margaret Hinman, Richard Johns, Barbara Lundstrom, Chuck Malone, Jim Oxley, and Woody Trosper.

And by the way...

Here are some suggestions that other polio survivors have used to maintain their cognitive ability and keep their minds active.

- Verbal activities—word searches, crossword puzzles, reading, writing, "places please" puzzles (numberless crossword puzzles).
- Mathematical activities—Sudoku, managing personal and family finances.
- **Intellectual pursuits**—studying a chosen topic for a year and reading all about it, teaching others.
- Keeping physically active—yoga, walking, doing regular exercise.
- Eating to keep the mind sharp—having protein at every meal.
- **Computer** activities—research, surfing the web, games.
- **Board and card games**—bridge, cribbage, rummy, chess.
- Volunteering—reading for the blind and/or handicapped, church activities, writing and editing the <u>Connections</u> newsletter, Master Gardening, RSVP.
- **Socializing**—eating out with friends and having stimulating conversations.
- **Family**—Staying connected with family, especially parents, children and grand children
- Scrap booking, genealogy.
- Woodworking—making furniture.
- Art and craft activities.
- Reading the newspaper and watching the news on TV.
- Quilting
- Using reminder aids—keeping lists, sticky notes, etc.

(Continued from p. 5)

Now, he takes at least one very hot bath each day for his legs and he drinks a special sports drink to help with cramping and pain. His symptoms have continued to worsen along with mild foot drop, diminished ability to concentrate, loss of manual dexterity, swallowing problems, temperature sensitivity, and muscle pain. He has learned to manage his condition with only occasional overuse mistakes.

All things considered, Jim is a very positive person, feeling he has been very lucky in life. He does not consider his polio to have diminished his ability to enjoy life and he is adamantly determined to continue with that attitude through the mental stimulation provided by his involvement in lifelong learning.

Jim is proud of his role in founding and participating in the Academy for Lifelong Learning whose mission is to provide the highest quality of intellectually stimulating classes at the lowest possible cost to members. It offers classes ranging from fine arts and literature to foreign policy, history, and economics. In addition to regular classes, they offer social events for members and also a "lighter" series of classes that are of shorter duration and less academic. Jim says, "Life long learning requires not a certain intelligence, but rather a curiosity and a willingness to pursue that curiosity."

And, just as Jim loves to learn, he loves to facilitate. He has led over 20 classes with over 1,000 class members attending his economics series alone. He believes that attending and leading classes have contributed to his ability to stave off the general mental atrophy that comes with age and any particular mental losses that are associated with polio.

He believes that there are many benefits that flow from learning for the sake of learning. As learners in this type of organization, older persons can participate according to their own wishes, and many of the gifts of this life long learning come from sharing many years of life experience.

As a skilled facilitator, he has been able to guide many lively and stimulating discussions with the high quality of the participants. "People mention books I've never heard of," he says, "and it can create rabbit paths of wonderful activity," both for the facilitator and the class participants.

heard of "orphan Have vou diseases?" No? Jim explains that there are orphan diseases, diseases that researchers only look into *if* the discovery of drugs for them results in the ultimate market making enough money to make the search worthwhile. "So, since POLIO is on its way out. We may be it. There is little motivation on the part of researchers to look into researching post-polio specifically . . . A few people like Dr. Eulberg are dedicated to focusing on the disease, and, we can borrow from the spinal injury people and sports medicine."

All in all, Jim says intellectual and social activities offered at the Academy have very successfully replaced the physical activities that were previously so important in his life. He has found that work at the Academy provides many opportunities to fulfill his ambitions and keep him excited about life.

Cognitive functioning (Cont. from p. 1)

damaged but have likely experienced some damage to the brain.

Most of us, who have had either nonparalytic or paralytic polio, report that fatigue is the most common symptom of our condition. Also, this is one of the factors used to diagnose the Post Polio Syndrome. According to Dr. Donald Peck Leslie (1997), in some of the surveys, fatigue was increased or triggered by physical exertion in over 90% of the cases studied and by emotional stress in over 60% of the cases. He states, "It is important for polio survivors to distinguish between physical tiredness and the decreased endurance they associate with new muscle weakness, and what it called 'Brain Fatigue.' This is characterized by problems with attention and thinking. Between 70% and 95% of polio survivors reporting fatigue complained of problems with concentration, memory, attention, word finding, maintaining wakefulness. and thinking clearly."

Dr. Henry Holland (1998), a polio survivor himself, has written much about brain fatigue and states that many of the above problems usually disappear when the person is well rested.

With modern diagnostic techniques such as the use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), researchers have confirmed what Dr. D. Bodian found over 50 years ago—that the polio virus damaged the brainactivating system. Today, MRIs reveal white spots in the activating systems (the gray and white matter). They were found in over half of the post-polios examined who had fatigue, but in none who did not express the fatigue symptoms. Similar, but larger and more spots, are seen in the brains of Multiple Sclerosis victims. Also, according to Dr. Richard Bruno and colleagues, two hormones, CHR and ACTH, are brainactivating chemicals; it is thought that too little of them might also contribute to brain fatigue.

While this information is interesting makes sense, most doctors and and researchers in the field still regard the findings as theoretical. Dr. M. J. Matheson wrote in 1995 that the late effects of his polio brought an awareness that his concentration was diminished and that he wasn't thinking as clearly as he once did. He recognized from his studies and those cited above that "the first step in treating the concentration, memory, disorders of attention, word finding, staying awake and thinking clearly is to deal with the fatigue. Energy conservation, work simplification and the proper provision of rest periods throughout the day are the treatments of choice in dealing with post-polio fatigue."

None of these sources addressed how to treat memory problems, except to reduce work and emotional stresses and get rest. We know that "serious memory loss is not an inevitable part of aging or an unavoidable part of growing older," according to Dr. C. E. Barber of Colorado State University. His treatise on age-related changes in memory is a great summary on how memory works; what research has shown on memory as one ages; the effort involved in remembering; how memory can affect one's selfconfidence and self-concept; how memory is affected by anxiety, fatigue and stress; and how to improve or maintain memory.

Though Dr. Barber doesn't address these topics in terms (Continued on p. 10)

(Continued from p. 9) of a person afflicted with post-polio, one can relate to his suggestions. The section on improving and maintaining memory is especially appropriate. He lists 10 steps to remembering something:

- 1. Plan to put forth effort
- 2. Eliminate distractions
- 3. Focus attention
- 4. Relate it to something you already know
- 5. Organize information
- 6. Write down main points
- 7. Link main points together
- 8. Relax, take your time; be patient
- 9. Plan, use external aids to assist recall
- 10. Practice recalling information

In summary, two of the references below are recommended reading. Also, note that there aren't any recent sources of information or research on memory as related to post-polio survivors. Such studies are difficult to conduct since the number of subjects is small and getter smaller and it is difficult to form a control group of nonpolios.

References used in this artlcle:

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Did you know? Visualization aids memory.

Painting mental pictures can help make your memory more reliable. A small study published in June 2004 in Psychology and Aging found that visualizing an important health task-testing blood sugar-made older adults 50 percent more likely to do it the next day than those who used other memory techniques, such as verbally repeating the task in advance. Previous research has shown that the same visualization strategy help with can everyday activities, too. So if there's a task vou have trouble remembering, try taking a few minutes the night before to form a detailed mental movie of when, where, and how you'll get it done.

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Dan Gossert (Con

(Continued from p. 4)

Then, taking advantage of the State of Colorado's recruitment program to get graduate social workers, Dan went to the University of Denver and got his Master's Degree in Social Work in 1962.

From 1965 until he retired in 1997, Dan worked for the Colorado State Department of Health and Human Services. He started there as a social worker consultant, administering developmental evaluation grants, a Kennedy era program that fostered early identification of children with developmental problems. (*Continued on p. 11*)

*Recommended reading

Dan Gossert

(Continued from p. 10)

After getting a degree in public health with a speciality in maternal-child health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1971, Dan became the director of the Handicapped Children's Program for the State of Colorado. In 1981, Dan then became the state Director of the Family and Community Health Services Division, a position he held until retirement in 1997.

Dan met his late wife, an occupational therapist at the Colorado Department of Public Health. She was an outgoing, intelligent and charming lady. She had a knack of putting people at ease immediately making them feel perfectly at ease. She was an avid reader and an avid fan of VIVA!, taking many classes since the second year of VIVA!. Dan says she was the light of his life.

In addition to his involvement with VIVA!, Dan has kept busy with other interests since retirement. He is the business manager for a homeowners association and he also indulges in his passion for opera by travelling to Santa Fe, New Mexico with a group of friends for their annual opera season each year.

In conclusion, Dan's attitude about life and having had polio can be summed up as follows: "You try to look for opportunities that you can do and do well. Looking backward and feeling depressed about it, in my mind, is certainly a recipe for making life much worse."

Improve or maintain memory

Here are some suggestions to help improve or maintain your memory:

- Increase your sensory abilities by wearing prescription glasses or hearing aids, if needed.
- Some prescription and over-thecounter medications can negatively affect memory, especially when taken improperly. Know what you are taking and what the side effects are.
- Take care of your physical health as some illnesses cause a temporary, but treatable decline in memory. Ask you doctor about the effects of the illness.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Get physical exercise, knowing that many of us are limited in the amount and kinds of exercise we can do.
- Keep mentally fit.
- Use external aids such as notepads, calendars, timers, lists and use them as helpers not as cheaters or crutches.
- Maintain a clean living environment and keep items in a specific designated location.
- Use context clues for recall. Think back about where you were, and what you were doing when something is not easily pulled from consciousness.
- Depression affects thinking and memory, so a competent mental health professional can evaluate and treat it.
- Alcohol can affect your thinking and memory.

Age-related changes in memory. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension fact sheet number 10.243. 3/96

This Is Your Newsletter-----

Colorado Post-Polio Connections is a newsletter by and for polio survivors, their friends and others who are interested in being part of our network. The editors and staff invite your contributions to the newsletter. If you have comments, articles, or suggestions for topics for future issues, please email us at post-poliocolo@comcast.net or write to us:

Colorado Post-Polio Connections Easter Seals Colorado 5755 West Alameda Avenue Lakewood, Colorado 8026

Please include you name, address, phone number and email address in any correspondence.

Our next issue will explore what keeping physically fit means for those who have had polio and post-polio syndrome. We need suggestions from you on how <u>you</u> keep physically active, taking into consideration the effects of polio and post-polio syndrome for our "And By the Way. . ." column.

A grant obtained by Easter Seals Colorado can provide to you a full range of high quality hearing services. For more information and a <u>significant</u> discount on hearing aids, call Nancy Hanson, 303-233-1666 x 237.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily constitute an endorsement or approval by the Easter Seals Society or the Post-Polio Advisory Council. If you have personal medical problems, consult your own physician.

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FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND OR HANDICAPPED