

# POST-POLIO HEALTH

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**WE'RE  
STILL  
HERE!**

OCTOBER 11-17, 2020  
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## WE'RE STILL HERE!

October 11-17, 2020, marked PHI's 14th annual awareness campaign. This year has been a truly challenging and stressful one for most of us. Our normal routines have been upended. The activities we used to enjoy have been closed off to many of us. Most of us probably haven't seen family as much as we would have liked—or even at all.

But polio survivors are a resilient bunch and we've seen many of you adapt with the circumstances. Maybe you pulled some chairs out on the lawn and chatted with the neighbors from a safe distance. Instead of attending your grandkids' birthdays, you celebrated on Facetime or Zoom. Maybe you picked up some takeout and had a socially-distanced picnic outside with a couple of friends. In other words, you found ways to stay connected, to remain visible.

For this year's "We're Still Here!" campaign, PHI wanted to celebrate that. We asked our members to submit a photograph and a few descriptive paragraphs about the ways you've found to stay connected with others during the pandemic. We were wowed by what many of you came up with and are proud to announce the winning entries.

### GRAND PRIZE WINNER

**Paul Jeganathan, Kirkland, Washington**

2020 marks 75 years since I contracted polio—fell ill on New Year's Day 1945, at the age of four and half.

On May 28th,  
I turned 80 years old.  
Yes, I'm still here!

We planned a big birthday celebration with international guests and a cruise to Alaska. Then COVID-19 descended and abruptly ended those plans. However, my wife and daughters organized an alternative celebration which was, in my opinion, a great success! Family and friends sent video greetings from around the world. It was meaningful

to hear from so many loved ones including my four-year-old great grandniece. My immediate family and I shared a dinner followed by curbside birthday visits where extended family drove by and greeted me from a safe distance. They dropped off gifts and received packets of delicious food prepared by my wife as party favors to make up for the fact that we weren't able to gather around a table as we normally would. I feel a great sense of gratitude to have celebrated 80 years of life, particularly when I consider the fact that I narrowly escaped death at the age of four. Hey, I'm still here!

This pandemic and resultant social distancing brings back memories of the decade-long isolation I experienced after contracting polio. Due to my diagnosis, I was denied access to school until the age of 14. I had to remain home, missing out on significant experiences: the learning, friendships and fun of school that other children my age enjoyed. Others seem to observe other parallels as well. After attending one of my presentations, a writer later reflected, "As I think about my own understanding of history in relation to Paul's lecture, there are some eerie similarities between the world of the mid-20th century, when polio had its day in the sun, and the

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early 21st century, when another invisible enemy evokes great trepidation.”

We’re still here. Despite the trepidation, doubts and fear brought on by the pandemic, opportunities for connection remain. I make a sincere effort to remain in contact with others with the help of modern technology and tools. I mainly stay connected with four groups of people: my family, my post-polio support group, my church family and the people in the organizations with whom I volunteer.

Keeping in close touch with family is of great importance to me. Professor Anthony Brandt says, “Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family.” How true! The only face-to-face connection I have is with my immediate family. One of my daughters came home from out of state due to the shutdown. My other daughter and her family live nearby, and I look forward to their weekly visits. Who can blame me for being happy to see and interact with my precious grandson?!

I also regularly speak with my siblings, all of whom are also senior citizens. Four of my siblings live locally and one on the East Coast. In pre-pandemic days, our calls were somewhat simple with the routine “Hello?” and “How are you?” but the pandemic has changed all that. We do not talk about the COVID as much as we did in earlier months; now conversations are longer and cover general health and welfare, updates on daily activities, and current events.

Talking about family history is something we enjoy immensely. Mainly, we try to piece together bits of information and construct a family story which none of us fully know. There is also always some gossip, banter and teasing. Recently, I prompted my sisters to write down various proverbs and sayings from our early years in India. This has been a fun activity that has challenged our aging brains! We correct each other, share what we have written, and laugh about the funny and not so clean ones. Most conversations with my siblings end with words of encouragement and a reminder that we all should have grateful hearts for the good health and financial stability that allow us to maintain a favorable quality of life as we age.

The folks in my local post-polio support group are, in many ways, my other family. I call them my polio pals. Keeping in touch with other polio survivors is something I prioritize. Although my calls to them are somewhat sporadic, they always result in satisfying conversations. I especially value calls with our group leader, a very dedicated, empathetic person.

We share news from members of the group, discuss plans for the future, and exchange ideas for activities when the pandemic is over and we can come together again. Even with our aging and post-polio challenges, we’re still here.

I also stay connected with my church family, which is very important to me. We have online worship every Sunday and Bible Study every Wednesday. During the pandemic, volunteers make weekly calls on Thursdays to senior citizens and other church members who are considered vulnerable. I welcome these calls which are a great way to stay in touch with my church friends.

I also stay connected through my involvement in the church’s Disability Inclusion Ministry. We communicate often to discuss matters concerning our work. I also correspond with the Men’s Fellowship leader to plan our annual retreat in Spring 2021 and to recruit volunteers for a non-profit I support.

Volunteering provides a wonderful way to stay connected with my larger community. I started volunteering when I was in my twenties and over the years it has grown into a true passion, so much so that I coined the motto, “I Am Restless to Serve.” Two organizations to which I’m committed are Bridge Disability Ministries and Solid Ground.

Bridge Disability Ministries is a non-profit based in Washington that is classified as a provider of essential services and their work has continued during the pandemic. In fact, it’s more critical now than ever. I stay in contact with their staff, other volunteers and the board via Zoom. Besides regular business, we also enjoy small talk and checking on each other which helps reduce the sense of isolation. I helped with their annual fundraiser held in September, which kept me busy and connected. I am also involved in a project where volunteers prepare and deliver care packages to our clients, many of whom reside in care facilities and are experiencing increased isolation due to pandemic-related restrictions. Making phone calls to these volunteers allows me to engage with my community.

Solid Ground is one of the largest senior volunteer networks in the nation. As an RSVP Ambassador (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) I’ve had to modify how I work with them during the pandemic by trading in-person opportunities with Zoom meetings and emails between volunteers and staff. Regular updates on Solid Ground’s activities keeps me inspired and helps me grow my volunteering network. The interactions I’ve had with

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the exceptional people at these organizations have been energizing and meaningful in the midst of an otherwise isolating time.

I am thankful I've found ways to stay connected with others during these strange times which would be impossible without my family and my various communities. I am deeply satisfied with how I'm staying involved and engaged. Inevitably, I ask myself what I can do better and how long I can keep doing it. Trying to find answers to these questions is not easy, and I tell myself to keep going as long as I can. I remind myself that the journey from 1945 to 2020 has been long and arduous, but not impossible because I'm still here. I'm certain I'm not alone in this sentiment and am sure many other polio survivors have experiences like mine—and that's why we're still here.

## FIRST RUNNER-UP

**John Nanni, Middletown, Delaware**

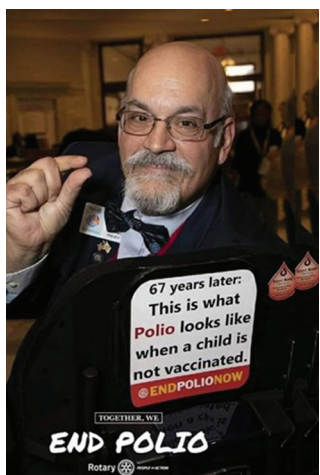
I am a polio survivor from the Class of 1953 (just months before the major Salk trial) at the age of ten months old. I was paralyzed from my neck down for six months. My mom did Sister Kenny's physical therapy on me. I walked a year later and played baseball, basketball and football in high school.

In 1992, I was diagnosed with severe post-polio syndrome. I now use a wheelchair for most of my mobility needs. However, there is very little I can't do; I just need to find a different way of doing it.

As Rotary District PolioPlus Chair, Board Member of the Polio Network of NJ/DE and Delaware State Architectural Accessibility Board Member, I have been keeping VERY busy during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Since early March, I have given over 30 Zoom polio talks—"The 3 P's in My Life: Polio, Post-Polio Syndrome and Rotary's PolioPlus"—to Rotary Clubs and Districts throughout the world, including England, Canada, Japan, Australia, Nigeria, Hawaii and throughout the United States—Zoom "trips" that I would never be able to make in my wheelchair in such a short time.

I also coordinated a major food distribution of rice. As the Rise Against Hunger Rotary Ambassador,



I found donors to purchase pallets of rice that were distributed to Food Banks and Food Kitchens throughout the Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania region. We were able to move over 15 tons of rice.



## SECOND RUNNER-UP

**Mitzi Tolman, Lakewood, Colorado**

The Colorado Post-Polio Organization has been working hard during the pandemic to maintain contact and support our members. Support groups have met virtually, in person at a distance, and by phone trees. Dr. Marny Eulberg has continued to provide support in-person with individual survivors as they address their health concerns.

At the Aurora meeting in September we learned some adaptive chair yoga led by Gloria Shea, wife of Keith (polio survivor and group member). Gloria is a retired RN and taught chair yoga at the Aurora Center for Active Adults for many years. As a senior and wife of a polio survivor, she's been to our group and knows the levels of disabilities represented. It was fun and inclusive and everyone joined in. She gave me handouts to make copies of for our next meeting.

The facilitator safely served donuts with no one touching anything but their own. It was a fun treat.

## THIRD RUNNER-UP

**Angelia Armstrong, Smithfield, Virginia**

In the spring of 2020 the world changed. Many memories came back when this first began, and I have been thinking a lot about how this feels somewhat like when I was growing up with polio. The isolation, fear, loneliness and shock that something like this could happen again in my lifetime.

My career/work stopped in a day. I am a clothing designer/artist and teacher. When the COVID-19



virus hit, my state shut down pretty quickly. All the shows, teaching dates and events that were planned for my work were cancelled.

For a few weeks I did nothing, just kind of wandering around. My husband and sons were essential workers and did not have any changes to their work schedules. The situation became a huge stressor—trying to protect them/us from getting and spreading the virus.

But then I did what I always do—I started making plans for exercise, gardening and new creative work life. My garden was my safe place, even though recent back/leg problems have limited the amount of physical activities I can do. Friends and a garden group online have been a great resource for connecting with others. Local friends doing driveway plant swaps and chatting from the porch. Discussing weather, soil, insects and other garden issues in the chat group. Mainly, I have reinvented my career self once again. An update to my website ([www.angeliarmstrong.com](http://www.angeliarmstrong.com)) and new blog have given me new ways to meet and communicate with old and new friends, as well as a way to continue to make a living into the future. I am teaching new classes with Zoom and making videos for YouTube.

Another important reason I feel the world needs to know that we are still here is the current discussions the country is having around COVID-19 and the possible effects it will have on the future health of people who overcome the initial virus. It is too soon to know what this virus will do to the body as the infected children and young people grow older.

I got over the poliovirus when I was a child, but have lived my entire life with the stigma, pain and sometimes shame of getting sick. The physical disabilities as I age are only getting worse, and I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

I am happy to still be here and I am always looking forward to whatever the future holds. It seems that it is our nature as polio survivors to keep fighting and never give up.

#### **FOURTH RUNNER-UP**

**Lyn Glover, Gold Coast, Australia**

I have been the Facilitator for the Gold Coast Post Polio Network for 12 years now. We are under the banner of Spinal Life Australia here in Queensland of which I am a volunteer. We have Monthly Meetings and Quest Speakers, which I organize. I also outsource information on polio,



newsletters, e-newsletters and articles, which I take along to these meetings as well.

I have 40 polio survivors of which 25+ attend these monthly meetings. We are all so different. Some members have a visible disability and others don't, but we are all in this battle together. We have lost one member who was at a nursing home in this pandemic.

Gold Coast Post Polio Network are very upbeat and friendly. We care for each other, which is why these meetings are so important in accessing the community.

Our current project is collecting and recycling postage stamps and selling them to collect enough \$AUD for collared shirts with our logo to wear proudly at meetings, events and out in the community.

My Monthly Meetings were suspended due to the pandemic. My last meeting was in March. So Zoom, Facetime, Facebook, mobile and emails were my main contact with my Polio Family. I spent most days at home and only went out in the community for doctor appointments or shopping. I was able to catch up with both of my daughters and grandchildren as restrictions were lifted. I was also able to attend online church service every Sunday, which was a blessing. I also attended prayer group via Zoom on Thursdays. During the pandemic, my younger daughter got married, and we were blessed with the birth of a baby girl.

I still to date wear my face mask which my eldest daughter made for me. I also self-distance when possible, use wipes, and am very aware of my surroundings when I go out—being a polio survivor for now 62 years.

Memories I have of polio are the sound of the iron lung, being put in a cot with iron bars like a cage, my double Thomas splint, and only seeing my family once a week through a glass window. A yellow cross was put on my family's door to notify POLIO was present, that is why I wonder now what the future will hold for survivors of COVID-19. ■