

*Diane Lemon was one of Polio Regina's founding members and she is also a member of PPN. Here is Diane's Polio Story.*

## **My Polio Story**

**By Diane Lemon**



In late August, **Diane was awarded the YWCA Woman of Distinction award in the Wellness category for all her volunteer work in Health in 1989.**

Later, in 1996 she

was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sport Hall of Fame as a Builder, for her 43 years of volunteer contributions to synchronized swimming.

1957 I was a teenager of 15 years, helping my older sister Kay move from her house when I developed a sore back and neck accompanied with a severe headache. I had gone swimming a few weeks earlier which was probably the source of contact with the polio virus. The Sabin and Salk vaccine were available but my father refused to allow me to be vaccinated since an aunt had died from a vaccination.

I was admitted to Indian Head hospital and then immediately transferred to the Isolation ward of the Regina General Hospital. I stayed there for one month. Lonely and feeling very much like a germ who was avoided by most staff, it was a difficult time. Physiotherapy was a very painful experience which consisted mainly of leg stretching. The next step was to be moved to a four bed adult ward. Many in my room were undergoing electro convulsive shock treatment and would have bizarre behaviour afterwards which was very scary. Visiting hours were from 2 to 3 o'clock only and coincided with Physiotherapy treatment which meant my parents could only visit on weekends. My wonderful treat each weekday was a visit from Auntie

Laura who would be allowed to come to the ward 10 minutes before visiting hours started. Each day she brought the Leader Post, Seven Up, a donut treat and a small amount of Bridge Mix candy. To this day I am addicted to reading the Leader Post and Bridge Mix!! Unfortunately I cannot find good candy any more. Many of the nursing staff were quite abusive and rough when transferring me since my legs were completely paralyzed as well as my abdominal and back muscles. Because of this weakness I had to lie flat even to eat meals.

In those days back rubs were part of the protocol but mine consisted mainly of dousing me with rubbing alcohol twice daily and leaving me shivering in a soaking wet hospital gown without much rubbing. After 3 months I was fitted with a back brace and allowed to sit up. I was moved to what was called Wascana Hospital then in November and allowed to return home at Xmas.

My father felt very responsible for me contracting polio so did a wonderful job of building exercise equipment and arising early each day to conduct assisted exercises with me before school as well as after school.

I was able to attend school on crutches. In one year I had made a good recovery. I was able to walk with no limp but could never run again. I have never had any resentment towards my father regarding my contracting polio. He thought he was acting in my best interests. In Grade 9 I had skipped our curling team at Regionals in Swift Current but after polio, curling was not possible. Curling was definitely in my blood so I became an avid fan, attending Canadian curling events and International events. The world curling championship was named the Silver Broom then.

It was wonderful to cheer on Canada at 16 world events which involved travelling to Scotland, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, United States and parts of Canada. I was fortunate to be in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1980 to watch Rick Folk win the Worlds, the last time Saskatchewan achieved this award!!

Having been born and living all my life in the small Saskatchewan town of Sintaluta, I was aware only of the standard professions of nursing (my oldest sister, Bette, took nursing), secretarial (my other older sister, Kay, took a secretarial course) and teaching.



I was excited to consider Physiotherapy since it had been so wonderful for me. The doctors at Wascana assured me that I had the strength and endurance to undertake the program. The closest university offering the program was Winnipeg so off went the small town prairie girl to the big city. It was a wonderful profession and I was so lucky to obtain a bursary which covered all costs. I even could come home once yearly on the bus for Xmas!! When I finished the program in December 1962 I had no debt.

I started as the Director of Physical Therapy for the South Saskatchewan Hospital Centre in 1973. This included being in charge of the Physio departments of Wascana, The Plains and the Pasqua Hospitals. Prior to this I worked 10 years as Director of PT at the Regina General.



In 1978 as well as running the 3 Physio departments. I took on the additional role of Assistant Administrator at Wascana which meant I was also in charge of Speech Therapy, Occupational therapy, Prosthetics, Orthotics, Psychology, Recreation Therapy, Music Therapy, Social Work, Paediatrics and Exercise Therapy along with Physio. I continued in this role until 1990 when I became the director of Special Projects at Wascana Rehab Centre, a position I held until 1996.

Next I took on a position in Public Health where I opened and set up the Al RITCHIE Health Action Centre. After 11 years there I retired. In total I worked full time in Health Care for 44 years and 4 months.

In 1986 I saw an article in the Leader Post which had been taken from the Edmonton Journal. It described a new syndrome "Post-Polio Syndrome" in which polio survivors were experiencing weakness decades after the acute episode. Dr. Feldman in Edmonton was holding clinics for diagnosis and treatment advice. I believe he travelled to Saskatchewan to conduct clinics and some from Saskatchewan travelled to Edmonton to see him.

I took a cane with me in 1989 when I traveled to the Orient but left it in my luggage since it was not needed.

In being proactive, I became a member of the Saskatchewan Association of Post Polio (SAPP) in approximately 1989. I do not have the date of the origin of the establishment of Polio Regina but was involved early on and with another Physio, Heather Flegg, conducted education sessions. I am sure some current members will know when it started. Soon after, I found difficulty climbing stairs and slowly developed increased weakness. About 2007 I needed a cane and in 2014 this moved to two. For any distance I use a walker.

For some time I was involved with Polio Regina. I took a hiatus due to being involved in many volunteer ventures. This included 26 years conducting education courses for the Saskatchewan Arthritis Society. I volunteered for the Saskatchewan and Canadian Physiotherapy associations serving on both Boards--The Canadian College of Health Leaders and the Saskatchewan Association of Health Service Executives, as well as serving as president for The Saskatchewan Gerontology Association. I also volunteer for the Al Ritchie Health Action Centre. This volunteer service occurred while I had a heavy workload and was raising a daughter.

Dr. Bruno says most polio survivors suffer from a Type A personality always trying to prove we are capable of doing whatever a "normal person" does.

Since I could only watch curling after polio, I dived literally into water sports. Swimming had always been a love of mine since Dad taught me to swim when I was three.

When I started work as a Physio in Regina I took all the Red Cross levels, Royal Life Saving up to Distinction, National Life Guard, and Scuba Diving and then fell in love with Synchronized Swimming.

I was involved with Synchro as a beginner swimmer, coach, board member, judge then in 1968 obtained certification as a Canadian National judge and International certification in 1989. This volunteer work took me to 3-4 swim meets across Canada yearly, plus gaining

International status in 1989 meant travel yearly to countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Malaysia and United States. The highest meet at which I officiated was the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

I should have been designated to judge at the Summer Olympics in Beijing in 2008 but suddenly the male dominated International Synchro governing body moved the retirement age down to 65 from 68 so I missed out by ONE year. A huge disappointment!!

Travel is a passion of mine which I inherited from my father. I was very privileged to be asked by 2 different bosses to travel overseas to recruit Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists. The countries I travelled to were Scotland, Sweden, Hong Kong, Australia and twice to London England.

My holiday travels have taken me on an African Safari in Tanzania and Kenya, the Galápagos Islands, Ireland, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, Panama, Columbia, Costa Rico, Russia, Hungary, Aruba, Jamaica, Germany, Austria, Holland, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Greece, England, Scotland, Dominican Republic, Chez Republic and Mexico. Up until 2 weeks ago my travel map indicated I have explored 34.18 % of the world however I have to update it to include provinces, counties and states to regain this percentage since the rules have changed.

One of the greatest gifts that has enriched my polio journey and has allowed me to still function as a contributing member of society is the support of my daughter, Kirsten. She has been there for me from the time she was a little girl. She knew instinctively how to help and friends often commented that she anticipated what I needed her to do for me before I asked whether it was running down stairs, lifting something, or other chores. I am forever grateful to her for the constant love and support.

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Later, in 1996 she was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sport Hall of Fame as a Builder, for her 43 years of volunteer contributions to synchronized swimming. She now fills her volunteer time with Kidsport Sask and the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan. Her daughter's 2 sons, age 12 and 14 are speed swimmers. Diane's son-in-law, Mike continues the aquatic family theme by playing water polo. After playing at a high level while attending University, he managed to bring together a team in Regina which in the early 90's won the National Championship!!