

My Polio Story – Wilf Tiefenbach

UPDATE: Wilf and his wife Carole have moved to Winnipeg and Wilf is presently the Secretary of the Post Polio Network (Manitoba) Inc. Board of Directors and Carole is the President.

I was born on March 15th, 1947 in Regina, Sk. My family moved to Cardston, Alberta, my mother's birthplace, in the summer of 1947. About July, 1950, we moved back to Balgonie to farm my father's parent's farm. In 1952, I contracted polio. I don't remember how long I was hospitalized, but, after I was released from hospital, we moved into Regina in the winter of 1953. I, then, could be closer for the March of Dimes bus to pick me up, to go to Wascana Rehab for treatment on my leg. My left leg was very deformed from the polio. My remembrance of being in the hospital was not pleasant. I kicked and screamed when the nurse took me in, but I didn't win the battle. I started school a bit late, but soon caught up. I found it very difficult being different from other kids and not being able to run. I always wanted to be able to run and was never able to. I had surgery during the summer months, age 7, so I wouldn't miss school. I had pins put in my ankle and was fitted with a brace. From the age of 5 until 13 years of age, the March of Dimes bus would pick me up at school to go to Wascana. I hated it so much as it was terribly embarrassing. At age 13, I had my second surgery during Christmas holidays. I still wore the brace at that time. Spring of that year found me playing fastball. I couldn't run, but I sure got a handle on pitching. Upon entering high school, my brace squeaked when I walked down the hallway in school, so I threw the damn thing away. I continued playing baseball until 35 years of age, when my shoulder started to wear out. I must mention that I grew up in the North end of Regina, and because of my disability and my inability to run; I got into various scraps with other guys. I was the oldest of 10 children. We always had food to eat, but never in abundance. I started working at the age of 15 on a farm for 3 weeks, and then also helped my uncle paint his house for 2 weeks. The following year I started working for a Plumbing and Heating company for the summer months. I did 2 more summers after that. At age 18, I started my apprenticeship in the sheet metal trade, working in the construction industry. This work had been my way of life until retirement. I have worked on many buildings in Regina and surrounding areas, during the past 45 years. I started my own company, Marathon Mechanical in 1993. I have 3 children from a previous marriage. I have been very blessed to have accomplished all that I have done, having had that dreaded polio. Every year now, due to post-polio, it has been a bit more difficult in keeping my balance and walking in general. My lovely wife, Carole, and I plan on doing some more travelling and enjoying many happy retirement years in the near future. By the way, I now have to wear a brace for the last 8 years and I wear it every day, squeak or no squeak, I wear it! The best thing about having polio is joining the polio support group and meeting Carole, who also had polio in 1952, and having that loving support from someone who understands what it is all about.