

“Leg Bone”

“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 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.

- Rita A. McGovern, Lombard, Illinois

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