

“I’m Still Here”

In August 1952, at 11 months of age, I contracted poliomyelitis. My mother and I were hospitalized, and I spent my first birthday in the hospital. My family and sheer determination have allowed me to thrive and succeed. Family members said that my father was determined that my mother and I would walk again. Dad continued the physical therapy even though my mother and I would scream in pain. My older brother by five years became my champion. Bill pulled me around in his little red wagon and sled.

At age seven, I could no longer walk with aides, so surgery was done to lengthen my left leg. The surgery was done in early May 1959 and was experimental. All the ligaments and tendons in my left leg had to be stretched. While in the hospital, I decided that I wanted to be a nurse. After four months in late September, the cast was removed. My leg had atrophied and had no feeling. I was very disappointed when I found I could not walk and had to spend several more months in a wheelchair.

My father purchased a sidewalk bicycle for me to ride for therapy to strengthen my legs. It had solid rubber tires, no air. This was difficult to ride since we lived on a farm with no sidewalks, just grass and white rock. The therapy continued with the bicycle until I turned 13 and was discharged as a polio patient. I received my first bicycle with air tires that year for Christmas. If someone told me that I could not do something, it made me more determined. My parents never treated me different than my siblings. I always found a way to accomplish tasks, though maybe not the traditional way. If there is a will, there is a way.

My rehabilitation scholarship sponsor said that I could not be a nurse because I wouldn't last ten years. They insisted that I be a laboratory or x-ray technician. I declined the scholarship and continued my dream of being a nurse. I worked for 30 years as a nurse. There are still challenges on my journey of life, but I will face them with support of my family and determination to keep going. My nursing education is a valuable tool for me and others. Yes! We Are Still Here.

- Diana Sprague, Lakeland, Florida

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