

“Mom!”

Whenever I’m asked, “How did you survive?” the answer is immediate and emphatic ... “Mom!”

I contracted polio at age three, just a few months before the vaccine was released for use on younger children. From that moment on, Mom was my primary caregiver in all ways – physical therapist at home, chauffeur, provider, cheerleader We were a team!

As a kid, I took her commitment for granted, especially the chauffeuring until age 24, when I learned to drive. But one example of her dedication and sacrifice became clear to me many years later. When I was ten, the family lived in Kailua, Oahu, Hawaii. My doctor was at Army Tripler Hospital on the other side of the island in Honolulu. Corrective surgery was performed in February of 1963, and for 3 months my mom drove daily from our house to the hospital bringing me a comic book and my math homework (that was the only way I was allowed to pass 5th grade). She drove 36 miles round trip on the only route available back then – the Pali Highway – a winding road which, of course, meant nothing to me as a ten-year-old. Only once, due to heavy rain, did she fail to visit. In 2000, my husband and I visited “the islands.” We visited the places I lived, and we drove the same route my mom drove each day. It was only then that I fully comprehended the distance and driving conditions. Upon my return to the “mainland,” I went to Mom and delivered the biggest hug to say, “THANK YOU.” Tears were shed.

I’ve known enough people to know that not all moms make these kinds of sacrifices for their kids. Maybe it was because of her Missouri upbringing; maybe it was because she was a Marine Corps wife; maybe it was because she really, really loved me. NEVER in all our years together did she ever say, “Well, if it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t be the success you are today.”

During her final two years of life, I was honored to be her caregiver. There I was with braces and crutches pushing her in a wheelchair, and never once did I regret the effort to do for her what she had done for me – we were a team! And “I’m Still Here” because of “Mom!”

- Mary Ellen Stan, Chino, California

