

My Polio Life - Zsuzsanna Snarey

Even though I had polio as an 8-year-old child, I had always been very healthy. With the help of my mother, I overcame my disability and coped with life as if I were able-bodied. I was not able to run and had to use a stick but that did not stop me from working. I gained a Chemistry degree at London University and met my husband who is also a Chemist. We married and had three beautiful daughters. My pregnancies were trouble free, and I had easy births. I became a part time teacher, I kept our house clean and tidy, did the shopping, attended evening classes in pottery, learnt to play the violin and joined an orchestra, later I joined the Manwood Singers and stood for long hours in concerts. I could lift, if not carry, heavy shopping bags, schoolbooks and after retiring from teaching before the age of 60, I became a chiropodist. I managed to lift and pull my chiropody case and visit people in their homes as well as seeing patients in my surgery. I carried on working until past the age of 76 when we moved to Nottingham.

I am quite used to tripping and falling but that does not worry me, I could always get up and hardly ever did any real damage until one day in January 2001 my good knee gave way in the shower, and I cut my right shin on the edge of the shower tray. There was a lot of blood, and my first thought was to stop the bleeding. So, I lifted my leg up and supported it on the wall while I called to my husband to get me some bandages from the surgery downstairs. I stopped the bleeding and bandaged it so well that when the ambulance people arrived, they were quite satisfied with my efforts and I walked down the stairs to be taken to the hospital. I had a V-shaped cut which was stitched up with 27 stitches and I was sent home with antibiotics. Even though I was on antibiotics the wound became infected and had to be dressed in the hospital twice a week. I realised that I should have washed the wound with cold water before dressing it and in the hospital, they assumed it had already been done. After about four weeks the wound became gangrenous and I nearly had to have a skin transplant, but when I was allowed to dress it myself daily it began to clear up and eventually healed.

In 2005 I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to stop taking HRT which I believe helped my muscles and my joints because soon afterwards I started a steady decline. I started having joint pains and my stamina decreased dramatically. I had a lumpectomy followed by mastectomy. The two anaesthetics did not help me either. Later the advice about HRT was changed and now it is not stopped for people who had breast cancer. The following year we bought a folding wheelchair to take on holiday which was a liberating experience for both Michael and I and the year after that I had a Pride GoGo electric buggy because I hate being pushed. In 2011 we flew to Budapest with my family and took a small folding buggy, called a Luggie on the plane.

The day before Christmas 2014 I had a nasty surprise, I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C. I have no idea how long I have had the disease which is caught from infected blood. I know that it has harmful effects on the body. It may also have contributed to my failing muscle strength. I could have picked it up in the hospital in 2001 although one doctor suggested that it was caused by the blood transfusions sixty-five years previously when I had polio and was given blood with possible antibodies from a woman who had overcome the disease! I was hoping to have treatment but after two years of fruitless waiting I decided to buy the drug privately from India and took the twelve-week course and I was cured within four weeks. I have by now overcome three possible killer diseases: Polio, breast cancer and Hepatitis C not to mention falling headlong down the stairs three times. My husband insisted on buying a stairlift. So, I have stopped going up and down the stairs which was a very good exercise. It is possible that any one of these influenced my failing mobility, but it is impossible to know which one had the most decisive influence. Another reason for my declining strength is getting older. We lose precious neurons daily after the age of fifty.

For quite some time I have been using a wooden stool to do the cooking. I now have a hairdressers' stool on which I can scoot about as well as lower and raise myself. I sit down to use the vacuum cleaner, sometimes on the mobile stool, or a computer chair and I use the mobility buggy for trips to the shops and to cover any distances outside the house. I expect the day will come when I will need a wheelchair even inside the house, but I try and keep going as long as I can without it. I have a UTX swing caliper for each leg. It took many years of persistence to get them from the NHS. Now I am not able to walk more than a few steps without them.

I spend my time in doing mainly sedentary occupations, such as writing, reading, studying mostly on the computer, having spent nearly 18 years looking after people's feet. But I know that too much sitting is not good for me, so to increase my strength I stand up from time to time and also try to do exercises. Of course there is always something more interesting or important to do, so recently I came upon an online physiotherapy App called OneStep and I have

been following their exercise regime. I get reminders on my phone and I am in touch with a real physiotherapist who takes note of my particular condition.