



GLEANINGS

August - September 2015

Survivors

By Millie Malone Lill

Some time ago, I read an article about an experiment done on rats. Of course, most experiments are done on rats, aren't they? And rather than me, I must admit. But I digress. This time, a number of rats were dumped into a vat of water and left with no way to get out. Scientists can be so heartless sometimes! After a period of time, half the rats were rescued, the rest left to drown. Then the rats that had been rescued were dumped into another vat of water with a fresh batch of rats. Bear with me, even though I do not love rats, this seems unnecessarily cruel to me, too. This time, the previously rescued rats worked harder at staying alive than the others that had never been rescued. I'm not sure what this proved to the heartless scientists who really deserved to have their grants suspended, but to me it said that once you are a survivor, you are always a survivor.

Each thing you survive makes you more able to survive the next thing. It seems the old saying, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is true. Over a period of around thirty years, I have met and interacted with hundreds of polio survivors, so that's what I'm using as the basis for my belief in this cliché.

I am continually amazed at the strength and resiliency of my fellow polio survivors. One of my dear friends not only survived polio, but



she had a stroke as well. Does that mean she is beaten down? Not on your life! She continues with her life on her terms. She lives alone, she has a part time volunteer job, and she advocates for the disabled and has a life that many an able bodied person would envy. Another friend of mine, completely unable to walk, managed to fall off the roof of his garage while replacing that roof. Oh, wait, that might be an illustration for the bullheadedness... oops, I mean determination of the average polio survivor. Never mind.

Millie's Column (continued on p. 2)

Annual Reunion Invitation Inside

Wheelchair Athlete Manages UNO's Campus Rec Center

By Elaine Allen

The University of Nebraska at Omaha opened a biomechanics lab last year that is unique in the world. Faculty and students study movement, working with NASA on specially-built treadmills. Mike Kult, UNO's Associate Director of Campus Recreation, Intramural Sports and Special Events, told a group of NPSA members that graduate students at the biomechanics lab might be interested in post-polio research.

"We would love to have NPSA members come to our facility for exercise studies," Kult said. "We have brilliant students at UNO" and they are always looking for grant and research money to fund students' research.

(Kult, continued on p. 2)

Millie's Column *(continued from p. 1)*

Back to the main point: I've spoken to polio survivors who have been sexually, verbally, mentally, emotionally and physically abused. They survived that, as well. Each instance seemed to toughen them and make them more likely to survive the next onslaught. Why is that, do you think? My thinking on this is that each time they survive something, they realize that they can. If you can survive all of that abuse, and a surprisingly large number of us have, how bad can it be? A little thing like a broken leg is not going to stop us.

I'm very proud of my fellow polio survivors. If our legs don't work, we will use our arms. If we can't walk, we will use whatever tools it takes to get us from here to there and once we've adjusted to it, we will do whatever we planned to do. I've been called stubborn, but I prefer "determined." All of this does make it harder, though, to accept limitations. I am always preaching about using whatever devices we need and to think of them simply as tools.

I love my tools. If I need to reach something off a high shelf, I use my reacher. Or sometimes I use my nephew who lives down the hall and who is over 6' tall. That is more fun than the reacher because I can have a conversation and tease him about how many cookies that job will cost me. He works for cookies, so he tells me I use my power chair to get from Point A to Point B if those points are further apart than a few yards. I use my brace, too. And there are always my Dashing Young Men as I call my grandsons, any of whom will dash right over and help me any time I ask.

I'm not saying we should be grateful for all we've survived nor do I think we should take chances to see how much more we can survive. I'm just saying that we are stronger than we think, braver than need be and above all, never forget, we are Survivors!

Kult *(continued from p. 1)*

UNO's campus recreation facilities at the newly-renovated Heath Physical Exercise and Recreation (HPER) building were designed to accommodate all populations, including aging

faculty, staff, students and alumni. Kult explained variety of ways they have adapted the equipment they bought and installed in HPER. "We have over 100,000 square feet and all of it wheelchair accessible around all of the exercise equipment," he said.



Kult is no stranger to the challenges of living with limited mobility. But, he prefaced his talk by telling the group, "I will never let anybody see my disability as an excuse." A spinal cord injury at the age of four resulted in partial use of his legs. But his parents, who farmed in western Iowa, made him walk to school, telling him, "You want it, you figure out how to do it." His parents wouldn't let him say "I can't" until he tried several different ways of trying. "I was very active as a kid. We had a welder on call because I broke so many braces." Kult wrestled in high school. He played wheelchair basketball and hockey while he was in college and when he was working. He dropped out of college for a while and worked as a jailer in Washington County, Nebraska.

As an international athlete, Kult has participated in three Paralympic Games. He's been at UNO since 1992, when started as a graduate assistant in intramural sports. For the past 22 years, he has coached many sports, including wheelchair for basketball for several hundred kids. "I'm proud to say that every kid who has participated in my teams has graduated from high school.

Two UNO exercise students who work with the elderly population researched post-polio to help Kult prepare his talk. He said some studies

show endurance with post-polio is the biggest obstacle to exercises that could increase strength. The research indicates to reduce activity using the 20 percent rule. For example, he said instead of exercising for 20 minutes, work for just 5 minutes. To maintain or increase range of motion, “do it slow,” he urged.

Kult admitted that is probably as difficult for polio survivors as it is for him: “I want to go ‘hells bells into it’ so going slow is not easy for me.” During his talk, he demonstrated small muscle exercises with rubber bands to increase upper body strength.

Because he had the partial use of his legs, Kult used crutches for many years but because of wear and tear on his shoulders, he has been using a hand-powered wheelchair for the last few years. “My shoulders and elbows are like able-bodied people’s hips and knees.” Before he tore his rotator cuff, he had been bench-pressing 400 pounds but after the injury “I couldn’t lift a glass of water.”

For more information on UNO’s biomechanics facility, go to this link: <http://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-education/biomechanics-core-facility/>

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We’re grateful to the following donors for their gifts received from *June 17 through August 14, 2015*:

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NPSA
PO Box 6076
Omaha, NE 68106

Nebraska Polio Survivors Foundation

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Edward B. Roche, Ph.D.
 117 Bellevue Blvd S
 Bellevue, NE 68005-2440
 Home: 402-292-3781
 Work: 402-559-4645
 Email: ebroche@cox.net

Vice President and Secretary

Kusum Kharbanda, Ph.D.
 770 N. 93rd St., Apt. 4B4
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 Email: kkharbanda@unmc.edu

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Eugene and Barbara Roth
 4011 N. 15th St.
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 Cell: 402-326-3266
 Email: groth@neb.rr.com

Executive Director

Elaine J. Allen
 PO Box 6076
 Omaha, NE 68106
 Voice mail: 402-932-5426
 Email: npsa.org@hotmail.com

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PO Box 6076
Omaha, NE 68106

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Meet Joan Headley from Post-Polio Health International!

The invitation to hear her speak at our

October 4th Annual Reunion is enclosed.

Please respond no later than September 21, 2015.

NPSA Mission Statement

The mission of Nebraska Polio Survivors Association is to educate the public and the health care community concerning polio and post-polio syndrome and to respond to the needs of individuals who suffer from the syndrome through group meetings, educational programming and newsletters, financial and other support of research concerning the syndrome and the circulation of research results.