

for a dislocated elbow, the medical staff put me in a polio ward. A concerned nurse told my mother to have me discharged and I was taken to Children's Hospital in Boston. By the time I was admitted I was paralyzed on the left side of my body. I took up residence in an iron lung and remained in the hospital for four months. I was 20 months old. Memory lapse is sometimes a kindness. I don't remember any of this and the information comes from my parents recounting of the events. I have memories from before the polio, and I remember the day I came home from the hospital. Everything in between is missing. I endured eight years of physical therapy and was fortunate not to need braces when it was all over. The neurologists wanted to transplant muscles and nerves to my left arm and leg, but my parents would not allow me to be used as a guinea pig in experimental surgery. In those days it was the 1950s a stigma was attached to having polio. People thought they could be infected by being around you, much like the early days of AIDS. My mother warned me never to reveal to anyone that I had had polio. She said if people found out that I would have no friends, no one would ever marry me, and no one would ever give me a job. Because the residual effects of the disease were not immediately apparent to those I met, I passed for normal in most circumstances. My secret came out in school when I took a typing course and was forced to use both hands on the keyboard. The paralysis had affected my fine motor skills, and after a few minutes my left arm would spasm into a strange frozen position that I could not undo until the spasm passed. In gym class my weak left side could not keep up with the stronger right. I lived an almost normal life for many years until the 1990s when two accidents and traumatic family problems brought my post polio syndrome to the fore. As my abilities diminished and my pain increased, I sought out doctor after doctor with no improvement. Finally, in the spring of 2006, unable to make it through the workday, I was forced to leave my job. Life has become a struggle, but I am not done fighting. For we have nothing if we have no hope. Sharing our experiences can bring us comfort. Sharing information can bring us help. Sharing friendship can bring us joy. I hope to see your story here one day, and I encourage you to send it in.

Sandra Rodrigues