

*From Henry's Desk.....*

## Looking Back

The Central Virginia Post Polio Support Group has existed for twenty-six years. I joined our group in 1991. Fifteen years ago I conducted a survey on some of the members in our group. Sixty-one members completed the survey in 1997. The results were interesting. The average age of our group was fifty-nine at the time. 70% were married, 10% widowed, 8% single and 8% divorced. Among the responders the average number of children was two. 51% had earned a college degree or higher. Almost one half of us were infected with polio in an urban environment, one-fourth in a rural area and one fourth in a small town. Two thirds of us functioned at a maximal level from 20 to 40 years after polio before Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) began causing symptoms of new motor weakness, new pain and new fatigue. Over half of us felt that PPS began in the 1980's and most of the rest after 1990. The vast majority reported that PPS symptoms were moderate to severe in causing problems in functioning. One third of us were being treated for hypertension and one half of us reported a sleep disturbance. Half of us reported problems with anxiety and/or depression. 90% of us had new motor weakness and an equal number had some form of fatigue. 80% of us were dealing with pain. 70% of us reported some form of cognitive problem, usually word finding difficulties. 18% of us were still working full time and 10% of us were working part time. The rest of us were disabled from working or retired.

Fifteen years have passed and hopefully we are wiser as well as being older. Most of us have made necessary adjustments in our lives to live more comfortably with PPS. Sadly some of our members are absent from us because of death from natural causes such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. PPS and ywe have risks of falling and PPS can contribute to falling. The difficulties in accomplishing the activities of daily living have become more challenging and risky. Often we require the help of loved ones or hired care workers in order to function on a day-to-day basis.

At this stage in life some of us reflect on those blessings we have received and hopefully those ways in which we have been a blessing to others. In an article I wrote some years ago, I compared our aging fate as dying gladiators. The image of the dying gladiator comes from the poet Lord Byron in his long poem *Childe Harold*. The lines read:

I see before me the Gladiator lie:  
He leans upon his hand -- his manly brow

Consents to death, but conquers agony,  
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low --  
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow  
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,  
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now  
The arena swims around him -- he is gone,  
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.

He heard it, but he heeded not -- his eyes  
Were with his heart, and that was far away:  
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,  
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,  
There were his young barbarians all at play,  
There was their Dacian mother -- he, their sire,  
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday --  
All this rush'd with his blood -- Shall he expire  
And unavenged? -- Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!

The article concludes with my words

Do you feel at times like the dying gladiator? So many of us fought the polio gladiator early in our lives and often came away victorious or at least came away stronger despite residual wounds of the battle. Those wounds might have been shorter or curved limbs that limped, limbs wrapped in steel and other atrophies and curves marking our fight with the polio gladiator. For many two score of years passed or even more time elapsed and another polio gladiator engaged us in another, but different battle. This time we were no longer young. We tried many of the battle tactics of the past, but usually these tactics only added to our misery and suffering. We did learn new tactics and became wiser. We conserved our energy and put it to better use. We formed alliances with other survivors of the polio gladiator and together we found that we were stronger in a cognitive, emotional and spiritual sense. We found that often what we had experienced as individuals was almost universal with the experiences of other survivors of the polio gladiator. For many of us our eyes are with our hearts and minds in our experiences of battles fought long ago and battles fought only yesterday. Are we still dying after a long struggle with the polio gladiator and do we expire unavenged. No, we keep arising every time we tell our stories to each other and to the world