

*From Henry's Desk by Henry Holland*

## **PPS and Faith**

In the wake of PPS much has been written about the various personality traits of many polio survivors. Because most of us had polio as children, those adults who helped and encouraged us often influenced our personalities in certain directions. Many of those adults have passed from our lives, but they often told us that exercise and determination would bring greater strength and various levels of recovery. Thus, many of us learned to persevere and often we became over achievers. During the days, weeks, and months of our initial battle with polio, have you ever wondered how many prayers were offered in secret and in public for our recovery and well-being? Family, friends, and religious leaders probably presented more prayers than we will ever know. While I was hospitalized with polio at MCV Hospital in 1950, I was not aware of any religious efforts to aid in my recovery. I do recall that the pastor of my church did visit me after I had come out of isolation and he gave me a list of scriptures, which he hoped would comfort me. I did not have a Bible at the hospital, but I read these scripture later and they were helpful.

A year after polio I returned to elementary school for one semester before moving on to junior high school. At the conclusion of elementary school, most of the students had autograph books signed by classmates and teachers. Below are two examples of what some of the adults wrote in my autograph book. The first is a typical encouraging word and the second has a religious insight.

Dear Henry,  
I've only known you for  
this semester but you have  
shown courage in overcoming  
your difficulty & with  
continued effort you will  
make a place for yourself in this  
world. When you become  
discouraged, remember to  
persevere until the goal is won has  
helped many others to achieve success.

Ruth E. Anderson, school nurse

Henry,  
Guard well your  
thoughts for they  
are heard in Heaven.

Love,  
Mrs. Louise Davis (4 th grade teacher)

Many of us have no doubt found that some faith belief or expression has helped us to accept, adjust, and deal with that which we could not control. None of us elected to have polio. Our faith tradition is a choice. That faith may find expression in organized religion, in a more private or monastic style, in joining with nature, in our relationship with others or in the mystery of our consciousness of the true self.

Over the centuries millions of children have died from infectious diseases. The mystery of so many incomplete lives causes me to wonder about the mind of God. Is there a God who chooses to inflict certain peril in the order of nature and leave us as helpless victims of random selection? I don't believe that anyone can truly answer that question. Each of us may find unexpected spiritual growth in examining the mystery of our consciousness. Many of us have experienced some degree of entrapment brought on by the damage of the poliovirus scores of years ago. In 1990 Vaclav Havel, the leader of the Czech Republic and a former political prisoner, addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress. As part of his address, he said, "Someone who cannot move and live a normal life because he is pinned under a boulder has more time to think about his hopes than someone who is not trapped in this way." Many of us have had the opportunity to think about hopes as a result of boulder polio. Our hopes may have found expression in meditation, prayer, weeping, and even anger. Our inner lives may have been enriched and strengthened. We often looked to spiritual sources for fulfillment of these hopes. Many find comfort in the Psalms or in the book of Job in the Hebrew Bible. Others find comfort in the teachings and sayings of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament. I am particularly fond of some verses in Isaiah. These were written to give hope to people in captivity, but could apply to any one facing adversity.

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The Lord is God from of old,  
Creator of the earth from end to end,  
He never grows faint or weary,  
His wisdom cannot be fathomed.  
He gives strength to the weary,  
Fresh vigor to the spent.  
Youths may grow faint and weary,  
And young men stumble and fall;  
But they who trust in the Lord shall renew their strength  
As eagles grow new plumes;  
They shall run and not grow weary,  
They shall march and not grow faint

References:

Vaclav Havel, speech delivered to joint meeting of the U.S. Congress. From *The Art of the Impossible* by Vaclav Havel; translated, Paul Wilson et al. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1997), pp 17-18.

The Jewish Bible, Isaiah 40:38-41. Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1985.

Author's sixth grade autograph book, entries by Ruth E Anderson and Louise Davis.  
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