

Connections • Summer 2022 Newsletter

To often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest complement or the small act of care, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

- Leo Buscaglia

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A 70th Birthday to Remember! The Story of Bonnie Kittle – Polio Survivor

- by Barry Rubenstein

Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center (BOEC) participants come from all walks of life. They come to us from all over the world, of all ages, and with a wide array of disabilities and special needs to experience the life-changing effects of our outdoor programs. One disability that is not usually on our radar these days, however, is post-polio syndrome. Bonnie Kittle, a New Jersey native and polio survivor, skied with us for the first time on her 70th birthday this past December. This is her story of surviving the epidemic, living a very fulfilling life and experiencing something that she never thought possible.

At just two-years-old, Bonnie contracted the disabling and life-threatening disease caused by the poliovirus. It was 1952 and the area around New York City, where Bonnie lived, was in the midst of a surge in polio cases with nearly half of them resulting in its patients being paralyzed and even dying. While the polio virus can attach itself to any part of the body, Bonnie considers herself one of the “lucky” ones because she “only” contracted the disease in her right leg. Due to the

fact that she was only two at the time, and naturally doesn’t remember very well, she calls on the memories of her mother as to what exactly happened.



Bonnie (left) with her KAC crew for the day; Jim Vogel (center) and JR O’Neil (right).

“From one minute I was walking and the next minute I was not,” she recounts her mother’s experience. “There was, of course, a panic and my parents took me to the hospital where I was diagnosed with polio. As a child, I spent quite a bit of time in hospitals and at one point I was hospitalized for about six months.”

Bonnie was fortunate enough to be born into a family of medical professionals while being raised in the suburbs of New York City,

A 70th Birthday to Remember... (Continued)

giving her access to quality medical care and therapy that a lot of other people living with polio didn't have at the time. There's no cure for the disease once you have it, however, so Bonnie was forced to rely on consistent physical therapy sessions to keep mobile. When she was 12, surgery was performed on her left leg to keep it from outgrowing her right leg, but complications resulted in problems with that leg as well, leaving her with two semi-functional legs as a result. But Bonnie and her family wouldn't let that stop them from being positive and supportive of the situation.



Bonnie (left) as a child

“People who had polio in their chests were much worse off than I was

because they had to be in iron lungs,” Bonnie compassionately says. “That was really, really different from me and I was lucky that I had parents who really knew to push and encourage me to just go out and do what I could do.”

But there were some things that she simply could not do because of the lack of strength in her legs. Her family would go on ski vacations each year and Bonnie would miss out on the festivities to her dismay. Instead of hanging her head, though, Bonnie eventually took up horseback riding, but skiing with family wasn't meant to be.

As Bonnie matured, whether it was directly due to her condition or not, she set her mind to helping others ... first as a volunteer in the Peace Corps before entering a career as a public health advisor. After obtaining degrees from Bethany College in West Virginia and The School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont, at age 22 she started a 45-year journey as an international public health advisor that would ultimately take her around the world.

A 70th Birthday to Remember... (Continued)



Bonnie enjoys some time at work.

She traveled to third world countries, first counseling community members directly; then providing technical assistance to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on how to improve the health of mothers and children. She spent 20 years living and working in Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia and South America, and another 25 years training NGO staff in various developing countries. Bonnie had found her passion in helping others help themselves.

“My passion is to help people live healthier lives and my focus was on mothers and children,” Bonnie says. “They’re the most vulnerable, and because of my Peace Corps experience I decided to focus on third world countries.

It’s super rewarding because I was doing something that’s really important and people really appreciate the work that one does in this field.”

While working in Burkina Faso in the 1970s, Bonnie met her husband abroad and the couple eventually had two children, Andrew (35) and Jason (33). The family traveled across the world and experienced things that most of us only dream of. Things were good.



Bonnie working as an international public health advisor.

Fast forward 45 years, and at age 65, Bonnie decided to hang up her passport and retire from her life-long career. Now it was time to switch gears and let others help Bonnie do what she did for so many others her entire life ... live her healthiest life. But, as is the case with post-polio syndrome, the muscles in her leg

A 70th Birthday to Remember... (Continued)

continued to atrophy as she aged, so she added a set of leg braces to her arsenal, giving her a lot more stability and generally making it much easier for her to get around.

“During your life there’s only so much you can do to make them (muscles) stronger,” says Bonnie. “You can exercise a little bit, but unlike most people where they say use it or lose it, that doesn’t apply to people who have polio. You can exercise too much and then you will lose it! That’s why I tell my boys that I’ll probably end up in a wheelchair because those muscles are going to make it so that I can’t walk even with the braces.”

While a wheelchair might be in Bonnie’s future, she doesn’t focus on such things and instead sets her sights on what she can control. The 70-year-old now lives in her RV and travels around the country, spending at least a month exploring each state, a feat she will finish by the end of this summer. She also makes Andrew and Jason a priority, visiting them in Denver every year for the holidays. And that’s where this story takes a unique and pleasant turn.

This past December, for her septuagenarian birthday, Andrew decided to do something special for his mother, something the entire family could enjoy. Knowing that she could never join in on the family ski vacations as a kid, he made this idea come true with BOEC’s program at Keystone Ski Resort, the Keystone Adaptive Center (KAC).



Heading down the hill in her bi-ski.

“My brother and I live a pretty active life, and while my mom does pretty well for her condition, she’s never really been able to join us on anything like skiing and snowboarding,” says the Golden Fire & Rescue volunteer firefighter. “I used to work for Vail so

A 70th Birthday to Remember... (Continued)

I knew about adaptive skiing and I looked into it for her 70th. It was reasonably priced so we decided to go for it.”

“He was super excited about this because he’s a snowboarder and he loves going out on the mountain,” says Bonnie about Andrew’s gift. “He asked if this was something I would be interested in and I told him it wasn’t that high on my list of things to do, but ‘ya know it might be fun.”

And fun – or more than fun – it was as Bonnie exclaims, “It was awesome! It was just fabulous. I loved every minute of it and the guides (JR O’Neil and Jim Vogel) who helped me were just awesome. It was just really, really great!”

One of her guides, BOEC Volunteer Jim Vogel, echoes the sentiment, “It was pure joy for Bonnie, a polio patient at the age of two, to celebrate her 70th birthday by skiing for the first time ever! And icing on the cake, she did so with her two sons!” Before taking the plunge, Bonnie had an idea in her head of what the experience might be like, but



Heading up the chairlift for another run.

“boy was I wrong,” she said. She envisioned going real slow down the bunny slopes, kind of like tubing, but in a “sled type thing” as people helped her down the mountain. While she was partly correct in terms of people helping her down the hill, what she experienced was nothing like she envisioned. “We went really fast going down the mountain zoom zoom,” she remembers. “I thought it was super fun going back and forth over a bunch of moguls and even catching air a couple of times. It was nothing like I expected beforehand.”

And, even more importantly, she finally got that family ski vacation that had to be put on hold so many years earlier.

A 70th Birthday to Remember... (Continued)

“It was super cool that my boys got to board alongside me,” she says. “It was like we were going as a family for the first time! I am so very grateful that they thought it was really important to do something special and fun for my birthday and that they provided this experience for me.”

“Just being on top of the mountain being able to see all the mountains around me was just spectacular,” says Bonnie thinking back on her experience. “You don’t get to see that very often. And the fact that my boys were able to be with me the whole time, and that I was able to watch them board for the first time, was super fun. It was great to have an insight into what life is like for them when they tell me they’re going out to the resort and go boarding.”

As you can tell, Bonnie isn’t afraid to throw caution to the wind and overcome her disability in any way she can. From volunteering with the Peace Corps to a 45-year career traversing the variable terrain of third world countries to hopping in a sit-ski and attacking the slopes of Keystone,

it’s only natural then that she would name the hypothetical book of her life, Go For It! The idea being don’t let physical limitations dictate what you can and can’t do.

So, the BOEC has made a believer out of Bonnie and her family. Not only does she think this will become a yearly holiday tradition, she speaks to others in a similar situation that might be hesitant to get out on the hill with us.

She says, “Just go do it! You feel very, very safe and the guides are very skilled, knowledgeable, calm and collected, and just really fun. And it’s wonderful at age 70 that you can look forward to learning something new and having such a really new experience. That’s a really cool thing.”

It looks like we’ll be seeing you again this December, Bonnie and family. Until then, keep being an inspiration to all of us and all those that are facing similar challenges as you. To learn more about BOEC’s Adaptive Ski & Snowboard Program, or to schedule a lesson, go to boec.org.

Get Good Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep can be difficult. According to the National Institute on Aging, insomnia is the most common sleep problem in adults ages 60 and older. People with this condition have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. Insomnia can last for days, months and even years.

On average, an adult of any age needs seven to nine hours of sleep each night. As you age, you often go to sleep earlier and get up earlier than you did when younger.

Signs that your rough night is actually insomnia include:

- difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- variable sleep, such as several nights of poor sleep followed by one night of better sleep
- daytime fatigue or sleepiness
- forgetfulness
- poor concentration
- irritability
- anxiety
- depression
- reduced motivation or energy
- increased errors or accidents
- ongoing worry about sleep



Some simple changes to your daily routine may bring that restful sleep you crave.

- Establish a routine, going to bed and getting up at the same time every day.
- Get moving – add low impact exercise to your daily routine. This is best four to five hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink or eat items with caffeine after lunch, same goes for alcohol.
- Make sure your bedroom is sleep ready – dark, quiet and on the cool side of your comfort temperature.
- If you are a night worrier, make a list before bed, or keep a notebook by your bed to quickly write down thoughts at night.

There are medications and herbal treatments that may help, consult with your doctor before using them and it is best if you limit medical or herbal treatments to no more than two weeks at a time.

Food for Thought - The Best Seat in the House by Margaret Hinman

The best seat in the house is the one you can get into and out of with the least amount of struggle. Having difficulty going from standing to sitting and vice versa is a normal function of aging for almost everyone, but especially for those of us who have been impacted by polio.

Whether our primary polio involvement is in our upper or in our lower bodies, we can encounter difficulties beyond normal aging decline. Each of us must find our own best solution. The good news is that as polio survivors, we are usually good at being creative in coping with the challenges and coming up with solutions to problems.

Since we probably are not going to avoid any age-related decline in our strength and since we want to continue sitting and standing, we need to have practical solutions to addressing how to minimize the struggle and safely maintain our functionality.

One way is to learn successful ways of going between standing and sitting, and including for many of us,

getting on and off our beds. In doing so we need to factor in our unique strengths and weaknesses and adapt to how we get up and down in the process. This can mean using firmer seats or seat cushions and using furniture, including the bathroom “throne,” that is at a height where the bottoms of our thighs are level with our knees.



Then, by moving our bodies forward to the edge of the seat and pushing or pulling up into standing position, leveraging with our hands and arms on a stable platform, we can get up more successfully. A physical or occupational therapist can help find ways to do this based on our individual strengths and weaknesses and in a manner that helps preserve the muscles and joints in our hands, arms, and shoulders.

Food for Thought - The Best Seat in the House (Continued)

Assistive devices as well as furniture and/or home modifications can ease the struggle, help us move safely and allow us to age in place. Walkers and some canes can help you pull yourself out of a chair. Grab bars strategically placed throughout the home and next to seating, and especially in the bathroom, allows permanent assistance. Raising the height of furniture legs with commercial risers, two-by-fours, or on a platform and/or adding thick, firm cushions on top of current seating allows better use of your current furniture. Purposely sitting in chairs with arms can also be helpful.

When buying furniture, check height variations and seat cushion firmness variations, and try the pieces out and making sure that they work for you.

There are several best seats in my house, the latest being a power/lift

recliner that the CPPO grant program helped me purchase. It helps meet my goal of maintaining my independence while aging in place and comfortably enjoying TV viewing, reading, and occasionally dozing. It is probably my best, best seat in the house because, in addition to helping me get up and down, it brings back warm memories and appreciation of my family, especially my mother, who enjoyed her chair for years, despite my younger brothers lovingly teasing her about her “ejector chair,” and conjuring up images of her being propelled out of that chair, like the pilot safety ejector seats in fighter jets. Now, like my mother, I have my own “ejector chair,” and consequently my own, newest, best seat in the house! And, thank you, CPPO, for the assistance!

Just some food for thought!



Introducing Colorado Statewide and Beyond Quarterly Zoom Post-Polio Informational Meetings

Meetings will be held via Zoom. [Click here to register.](#)

Social half hour from 10:30 to 11 am MST

Presentation of topic from 11:00 am -12:00 pm MST

Questions and Answer Session from 12:00 - 12:30 pm MST

These meetings will be held the fifth Saturdays of the year in 2022

- July 30th; Dr. Marny Eulberg will introduce the New Resource book.
- October 29th; What is a Care Manager – how can they help you.

Contact mtolman@eastersealscolorado.org to be included on the meeting updates.



CPPO Grants—for Colorado Post-Polio Survivors

The Colorado Post-Polio Organization makes available grants of up to \$1000 to Colorado residents who have had polio and who have needs related to having had polio. The grants are available to help cover the costs for needs that address health and safety issues and can help maintain or enhance quality of life, perhaps allowing a person the ability to age in place. The grants help cover costs for one-time goods and related services that are not covered by or not fully covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or other insurance. They are supplemental and awarded according to the individual needs of each applicant, the amount awarded being determined by the Grants Committee and based on the information provided by the applicant.

These are not a complete list of eligible items but are examples of what could be granted:

- Durable medical equipment—copays for prescribed braces, brace repairs, crutches, canes, walkers and/or rollator walkers
- Mobility devices—supplemental payment for manual wheelchairs, power chairs, scooters, repair costs and equipment to transport the devices
- Bathroom accessibility—replacement with higher seated toilets, tub or shower chairs, grab bars as needed, entrance door modifications to allow wheelchair or walker access and the accompanying installation costs
- Kitchen accessibility—bar stools at the counters, lightweight dishes and pots and pans
- Seating—power lift chair/recliners, platforms under chairs and/or sofas or chairs with higher seats or with arms
- Home accessibility devices—porch and garage ramps for wheel mobility devices or stair replacements, porch lifts, stair chairs, hand railings
- Electronically controlled devices such as window coverings/shades, deadbolt locks, etc.
- Fall detection devices such as the Apple watch, but not subscription services that might be related.

CPPO Grants—for Colorado Post-Polio Survivors (Continued)

In addition to the CPPO grants, Easterseals Colorado works with some vendors of healthcare-related equipment and may be able to secure items at a discounted price.

Eligibility requirements for these programs include having had polio with after effects and Colorado residency. There are no financial qualifications. To receive an application form, contact Mitzi Tolman, Program Coordinator, message phone (720) 940-9291, mtolman@eastersealscolorado.org.



When Insults Had Class

These insults are from an era "before" the English language got boiled down to 4-letter words.

"He had delusions of adequacy." - Walter Kerr

"He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire." - Winston Churchill

"I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure." - Clarence Darrow

"He has no enemies, but is intensely disliked by his friends." - Oscar Wilde

"He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary." - William Faulkner (about Ernest Hemingway)

"Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I'll waste no time reading it." - Moses Hadas

"I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play; bring a friend, if you have one." - George Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill

"Cannot possibly attend first night, will attend second... if there is one."
Winston Churchill, in response.

2022 Advisory Council Members

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2022 Advisory Council Meetings

Advisory Council Meetings are when our planning takes place. Members are always valued to comment on our future goals and activities. **Meetings are held quarterly at 4:30 p.m. over Zoom. Upcoming dates are July 20 and October 19, 2022.**



Colorado Post-Polio Support Group Schedules

Support Groups are beginning to meet in-person with social distancing. Others still meeting virtually. Please stay in touch with your facilitator for further information.

AURORA

Meets the 4th Thursday of every month from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Meeting in-person at New Hope Community Church, 17699 E Hampden Ave.

Facilitator: Myrna Schmidt, 608.790.5755 or myrnaschmidt1@yahoo.com

COLORADO SPRINGS

Meets the 1st Saturday of every month from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

Meeting in-person at Rock Family Church, 4005 Lee Vance Dr.

Facilitator: Hal Goldberg, 303.212.0017 or halgoldberg@halgoldberg.net

GRAND JUNCTION

On hiatus until new facilitator found. If you know someone who might be interested, please contact Mitzi Tolman at 720.940.9291 or mtolman@eastersealscolorado.org.

NORTH AREA

Meets the 3rd Saturday of every month from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

Meeting via Zoom. *Members from outside North Denver welcome to attend.*

Facilitator: Jill Eelkema, LCSW, 720.675.9902 or jille@westerncarepartners.com

NORTHERN COLORADO (Fort Collins)

Meets the 4th Saturday of every month from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

Facilitator: Peter Way, 970.460.6164 or NOCOPolio@gmail.com

PUEBLO

Meets the 3rd Saturday of January, April, July and October

Next meeting July 16, 2022 at 1:00 p.m. at the Rawlings (Main Branch) Library, 100 E Abriendo Ave.

Facilitator: Jill Eelkema, LCSW, 720.675.9902 or jille@westerncarepartners.com

SOUTH DENVER

Meets the 1st Tuesday of every month from 11:00 a.m. to Noon.

Meeting via Zoom. *Contact the facilitator for further information.*

Facilitator: Hal Goldberg, 303.212.0017 or halgoldberg@halgoldberg.net

 **Donations**

If you would like to donate to support Colorado Post-Polio efforts, **please complete this form, detach and mail it to Mitzi Tolman at Easterseals Colorado.** To ensure that we receive 100% of your donation, contributions should be **payable to Easterseals Colorado** with **"POST-POLIO" written in the memo line.** Your contribution will be gratefully acknowledged. Thank you again!

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

MAIL TO:

Easterseals Colorado
Attn: Mitzi Tolman
393 S Harlan St, Suite 250
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Memo line: POST-POLIO



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**FREE MATTER FOR
BLIND OR DISABLED**

This Is YOUR Newsletter – *Connections* is the official news publication of the Colorado Post-Polio Program. The opinions are those of the individual contributors, and do not necessarily constitute an endorsement or approval by either the Colorado Post-Polio Council or Easterseals Colorado. **(Always check with your personal physician for all medical questions and concerns.)**

We invite not only your comments about this newsletter; tell us what topics you want to read about in future issues. If you have article ideas or suggestions, are willing to write a short article, tell your personal story or you'd like to review a book, please call **Mitzi Tolman** at **720.940.9291** or email her at mtolman@eastersealscolorado.org, or write to: Easterseals Colorado, Attn: Mitzi Tolman - Colorado Post-Polio *Connections*, 393 S Harlan St, Suite 250, Lakewood, CO 80226.

If you prefer to receive this newsletter online or change your mailing information, please contact Mitzi Tolman at Easterseals Colorado at 720.940.9291 or mtolman@eastersealscolorado.org.