

Pauline Corrigan's Story



As a child of 2 1/2 years I came to Australia with my family from England. After living in Sydney we moved to Traralgon South, where I caught Polio. I was approximately 3 1/2 years. At this time my legs were deformed and, at the age of 5, I had 11 operations to straighten them. This put me in calipers and unable to walk but I can remember crawling to the school through several paddocks to see my brother and sisters.

Our family then moved to Traralgon where we lived in a shed while my parents were building a home. My father was an engineer and worked closely with the royal children's hospital to assist with my recovery from the operations. I can remember a doctor visiting on his days off and helping my dad to concoct gadgets to make me exercise as I resisted due to the incredible pain I suffered.

I was not a child to just sit, so when my siblings climbed trees or climbed into the trailer, I was with them, suffering many injuries due to being able to get up, but most times not down. I could read at a very early age and used to get the paper first thing in the morning and have it read before anyone else was up. I regularly escaped from home as I wanted to go to school, and on three occasions I crawled across the highway from Allard Street to go to school, but the police always got me at the Caltex service station, which was about half way. For some reason the school would not allow me to attend. It was my legs that didn't work, not my brain. After being caught 3 times the police spoke to my parents and they all went to the school, where I was then allowed to attend, going to school in a pram with my feet sticking out the end. I went through the grades very fast and was with my peers in the first year, which spoke well of my home schooling from my parents.

I also got a wheelchair in the first year, and also spent time in my father's workshop as therapy, because my feet were tied to the treadle of my father's lathe for exercise. This was my main therapy and I soon became very proficient at using the lathe I was approx 11 when I was first allowed to walk unaided, and attempted to have a ride on "Ned Kelly's" horse at the Traralgon show parade. It was not to happen as the horse trod on my foot breaking some bones. I spent another year getting over this. I attended high school, but even though I built and fitted wrought iron work to the headmaster's veranda, when I had careers day a week later he refused me the opportunity to do an apprenticeship in fitting and turning, using lack of toilet facilities for girls as a reason. I was very angry as I had planned my future, so left school, walked to Morwell and got a job, as in our family you could not leave school unless you had work.

In my life I have walked, run and danced, and though I now have post polio, I have a very active life and appreciate all I do. My hobbies are building/renovating homes and furniture, and I taught these subjects including car maintenance, from 1975 at Monash University, then at several Neighbourhood houses for approx 12 years. I now work with people with physical and intellectual disabilities and never under estimate their ability to achieve. The world is waiting for us.