

## John Van Delft's Story



I was born in the Netherlands early 1942 and contracted polio 18 months later from the waist down. The left leg got better but the right needed a splint for the rest of my life. With the calliper I was able to, nearly, lead a normal live, other than walking long distances. But I used a bicycle for that.

I was brought up with two brothers who are able bodied. I attended primary school from grade 1 to 6, then high school. When I was 11, I helped a friend in his plastic factory and learned how to make souvenirs, key rings and display showcases for shop windows. At 12 I had an operation in the left leg to slow the growth so that the right leg could

catch up in length. At the age of 14 (1956), I migrated to Australia together with my parents and brothers.

This migration to Australia had many setbacks for my parents. They first applied to migrate in 1948 but because of my polio I needed to have a medical and failed. My parents applied again in 1952 and although I felt confident that this time I would pass the medical, unfortunately the test was not the same and I failed it again. **My parents were advised that they should leave me behind, but my father would not do this.** Again in 1956 my parents applied, only this time it was different because I did not have to go for a medical. This was because relatives were asked if they would sponsor our family, on condition that the Australian Government would not have a responsibility to our family i.e. no government assistance for the passage or medical claims in the first five years, and accommodation and employment ready on arrival. My parents agreed and now I am here.

We moved into Surrey Hills with my auntie, uncle and their son. The two families lived in three rooms with communal kitchen and showers. Three month later we all moved into a three bedroom house in Blackburn, then some time later our family moved to bungalow in central Blackburn and again later to the rear of a shop in Chatham. Then in 1960 we moved to our own home in Nunawading. I joined the local swimming club and the water polo group.

I played with the polo club from 1960 until 1996. During this time I got heavily involved in club administration with our parent club Nunawading, the polo group, the Victorian Polo Club and eventually with the Australian Polo country section. I have filled the positions of secretary, treasurer, coach, promotions officer for the state of Victoria, Secretary General for Australia. Country, team manager for State and Australia Country - taking 60 members to various championships around Australia - and obtained level 2 coaching qualifications. I also participated in the 1995 Masters Games in Melbourne and my team achieved a Bronze Medal.

At the age of 16, I participated in an apprenticeship in screen printing art & design and worked within this industry for 20 years. During the latter years I began studying for a Bachelor in Business Studies (Accounting) which I completed over a ten year part-time span and have operated my own accounting practice over the past 18 years. Having this qualification I offer it to community groups as volunteer. I am Board member/Treasurer for EDAR (day care centre for adult intellectual handicapped), Board member / Treasurer for the Disabled Motorist Association, and Board member / treasurer for "The Dutch Courier" newspaper. I also lecture at Swinburne TAFE with 20 different subjects to my qualification.

Over the past 10 years I have been slowly getting less able until one day I collapsed in the shower. I was advised that I was developing symptoms of post polio (late effect of polio). I needed to learn on how best to manage this new set back. Until my mind accepted the facts and I started using a wheel chair to assist, I had great difficulty managing these symptoms. Today I still manage to be independent but it is getting more difficult as fatigue comes in at various times. However, I still socialise by going to Dinner/Dance nights while dancing in the wheelchair. At present I am teaching a person with spin bifida about wheelchair dancing (independence). I have been married twice and have three children and six grand children and now one great grand child.