

## **My Branson memoirs!!!**

*Tommy Lynn*

This all started with a dream of mine to have our INTERNET family of PPSer's get together in a central location so they could meet each other and put a face with a name. When I first joined the St. John's University polio list last year, I immediately could see that these folks represented one large family. I asked the question, "Why not have a family reunion some where", and one thing lead to another and it was decided we meet in Branson, MO on the 21st of May, 1999.

Now, let's move ahead to Thursday, May 20th:

We went to the already agreed upon Motel 6 at 10 AM. We needed to unload our truck which was full to the roof, front and back so that we could head to Harrison, AR., 35 miles to the south to pick up Dale and Susan from N. Carolina. They had flown into Harrison on Big Sky airlines.

Naturally, we were too early for our room to be ready, but after pleading with the staff, our room was made available for our belongings which included lots of food and a small refrigerator which we sneaked in the back door.

As I was getting back into my truck, some one hollered, "Hey, Tommy". I looked around and saw some dude standing across the parking lot with a huge grin planted on his face. You see, I had put Judy's and my picture on the world wide web so these folks could recognize at least their host.

This was Jim Ellison from Ohio with his darling wife, Margie. As we were saying hello, Clayton and Judy Baxley strolled up to introduce themselves. They came from MM. I knew that Dale and Susan would be landing soon and expected me to be there, so I said a hasty goodbye to my new friends and headed to Harrison.

We arrived in time to see Dale and his wife deplane and I took several pictures of the event only to discover later that I had no film in my camera. The look on Dale's face was beyond description when he discovered their luggage was not on board. We then spent a couple of hours filling out lost luggage forms before heading back to Branson.

It was predetermined that the early birds would meet in the lobby to meet and go out for supper.

Imagine my surprise when 15 folks showed up for supper. I thought that only a few were coming in on Thursday as this gig was set up for Fri. and Sat. We agreed on Shoney's and I lead the parade as I knew the route. When we all arrived, Linda and her companion, John from CT, were missing. We waited and waited and waited before giving up on them and going in to eat. They had

become lost and went back to the Motel and decided to try again. They finally made it and we were glad they did as they are such a delightful couple.

After supper, the gang retired to the motel and I took Dale & Susan to Wally World to buy clothes and sundries to tide them over till they received their missing luggage.

When we returned to the motel, we encountered a very noisy group of people sitting in and on their various wheel chairs, scooters, and power chairs in the hallway. We were supposed to have the use of the conference room, but no one could find the key. Now let me tell you, these folks, despite their various degrees of post polio afflictions, know how to party!

I expected the cops or at least the owner to come and throw us out on our wheels as we were so wound up! We finally all went to our rooms around midnight, much to the relief of the other guests.

### Friday AM

We went to the Golden Corral for the buffet breakfast and were all seated together at one table. Mistake number two.

We then made plans for the day. I produced 10 free passes to Silver Dollar City so it was decided to go there. When we arrived at the front gate, we were advised that all of us in wheel chairs could get in for nothing! We only had to use 4 passes so we all enjoyed the experience for no charge. This would have cost \$390.00. Every one had a great time and could not say enough about their experience. We all went to the old country church to meet Linda Fridal, the singer and pianist. She introduced us all to the crowd as polio survivors and one gal stood up and said, "I had polio, too." Jack bought a walking stick at the wood carvers shop and most everyone paid my friend a visit to say thank you for the passes.

Our daughter and son-in-law came down from Springfield, MO to show off my very precious grandchildren and to meet all of the people that Dad has become such close friends with over the last year. I had only had my new Jazzy for two days and I had such a good time motoring up and down the trails at the City. Prior to this visit, I could only go to a very few places before the legs would give out and this has opened up a whole new world for me and others.

When we returned to the motel for our previously arranged opening ceremonies at 5:30 PM, we met several others that had arrived during the day. It was good to finally meet and yes hug these dear people that we had been writing to via email for the last several months and for some, years.

Everyone brought their favorite munchies thus loading several tables with

scrumptious foods of all sorts. The noise level in that room would not have made OSHA happy.

At 6 PM, Linda from Silver Dollar City strolled thru the door with her pastor hubby in tow to entertain us all. We sang a few songs and listened intently to Bob, Linda's hubby, while he told a few stories and a great time was had by all.

When Linda and Bob left, bedlam broke out. Geesh, you'd a thought we were all teenagers.

There was no pairing off and visiting one on one, it was a free for all. Everyone was talking at the same time to each other. Poor Judy was in our room right across the hall, on her knees, sorting out the T-shirts that we had custom printed for this event. She did a great job putting the right names on the right size shirt before we made them available to the group and collecting the money from each one. I had paid the T-shirt lady, Delores, and I was instantly broke for about one hour.

We had put a press release out in the local papers inviting other PPSer's down for fellowship and information. Several showed up Friday night and also wanted T-shirts with our custom logo printed on. So, Judy sold hers and a couple others gave up their extras to these visitors. What a neat bunch of people not a mean bone in them.

We had a lot of information available for the visitors about Post Polio Syndrome and some one was always available to council with these folks. Most of them returned Saturday and spent the day with us becoming members of our extended family. It is such a shame that people without access to a computer have to go without information on Post Polio Syndrome! We at least got to enlighten several folks in the Ozarks and I know of at least one support group that has been formed because of our efforts.

Later in the evening, we sat around in a circle and told our Polio story one by one, some for the first time and it was a very tender moment for most of us, sort of a cleansing of the soul.

Most, if not all of our spouses learned a great deal from this encounter as they have not had any contact with other survivors before. I think that they learned more than we did and they went home not feeling so all alone in this journey.

We finally ran out of steam again about midnight and returned to our rooms to wipe the tears away.

### Saturday AM

We had made our plans ahead of time to have a breakfast supplied for us in the

motel conference room, so about 9AM, we rolled and walked into the room and shared a bountiful feast. At least the others did. I was so nervous about our upcoming TV interview, all I could do was to drink coffee and juice and pace the hallway. I finally corralled Pam from NY and asked her if she would speak to the news group as she has much more experience than this old hillbilly and she said that she would but she thought that Linda from CT would be a better choice. So, I prevailed upon our only blond haired beauty and she graciously accepted the challenge.

I had worried and worried for nothing as the TV crew never did show up as there was some lack of communication in their management as to what motel we were in.

Donna from the Springfield Newsleader did show up, however, and after giving her my views, I invited her to sequester in command central, our bedroom, and I would send folks in one at a time for them to tell their story about their Post Polio experience concerning doctors and the lack of understanding in the eyes of the public.

We did receive a very nice write up in the next days newspaper and a few inquiries were generated by the article. Donna interviewed for almost 2 hours and we really appreciated her efforts!

By noon, most were drained of energy as when I looked around, most had disappeared from the conference room having retreated to their rooms to rest up so they could go again. I crashed in my Jazzy and went for a roll around the halls and rode up and down the elevator to visit various floors. What a blessing, this contrivance is. I truly don't know how I got along without it and it is now taking prominence in my life!

Early afternoon found us up and at 'em again. Hey, we were there to party! Someone said, "Why not take a dinner cruise on the Branson Belle?" So about 14 of us brave souls, the ones that still had some steam left said, "Let's do it." Susan made the reservations and we were raring to go at 3:30 PM.

Once again, Judy and I led the caravan to travel around Branson to arrive at the showboat. We all arrived together and found plenty of handicapped parking. We all unloaded our various scooters and chairs and proceeded down the blacktop trail which wound thru the very nicely landscaped grounds and headed for the boat. We wheeled ourselves aboard and were shown to our tables by a very courteous young man. He removed the chairs that were in our way so that we could wheel right up to our tables and for those that could transfer from their wheel chairs to regular seating, they took their aides and parked them in a storage area.

We started off with a salad and drinks of our choice as the stage entertainment

began. Then came a meal of Prime Rib, baked tater and veggies. It was delicious and the first food that I could actually remember eating in several hours. After we stuffed our faces and were recognized from the stage, as most groups are, we had Flaming Baked Alaska. Umm um!!!

Now we were all set to sit back and enjoy the evenings show which was reported as being very good. I elected to take a wheel out onto the deck and enjoy the breath taking scenery.

As I was going down the aisle and past all of the tables and dodging the waiters and waitresses, I was saying to myself, hey, I can do this as well as anyone. Then no sooner than I had patted myself on the back, my back wheels had caught the corner leg of the last table and practically tipped the table of several senior citizens over. As I glanced back, I could see several glares and a few dental plates become dislodged as their drinks were rocking and rolling along the table top.

I just kept going straight ahead till I reached the door to the deck where I burst out laughing at myself. I never did return as I would have had to pass those rather upset folks on my way back in to the group.

After the exceptional cruise was over, we all met back at the motel and just unwound from the activities. Several were leaving early in the morning to return to their homes so we all crashed about 10:30 PM after many goodbyes. Just before we retired, we took a vote as to whether we should make this an annual affair in Branson and it was unanimously voted YES.

Now, Dale and Susan did finally get their luggage back and as far as I know, that was the only adverse thing that happened all weekend.

This is amazing as we had never met each one before and no one knew what to expect. It turned out PERFECT with folks coming from CT, NY, WI, MM, NE, KS, OK, TX, NC, OH, MO, and AR.

Who says that we physically challenged cannot have fun?

A special thanks to the management of Silver Dollar City and to our hospitable host at Motel 6, Josephine, and let's not forget my nemeses, Delores, the head housekeeper.

Not to leave anyone out of my story, here are the name that made this all possible:

From MO: John and Linda, Debbie and Bob, Virginia, Delores, Gerry and Bev, Linda and Kathy, Jerrie, Kathryn and Keith and Tommy and Judy.

AR: Shirley and Sam  
NE: Gleason and Pat  
TX: Ann and Tom  
CT: Linda and John  
NC: Dale and Susan  
KS: Paul and Anita  
MN: Judy and Clayton  
NY: Pam  
WI: Jerry, Rose, and Bob  
OK: Jack

Tommy Lynn

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