

Hi everyone,

Well, I'm on the last lap of getting rested up from all the fun in Branson.

This will be long, so if you're not interested in hearing all about it, please feel free to delete now or later.

Usually, the ones who arrive early get together for supper on Thursday night. This year, however, 12 of us got there on Wednesday and went out to eat together at Docker's, a restaurant across the street from the Settle Inn. (Virginia Dugger, Jim and Margie Ellison, Charlie and Kathy Greulich, Linda De Ryke, Rain and Leland Bleck, Toni and Jack Fenner, and Tom and me.)

Unfortunately, that meal wasn't the most pleasant for all of us. The service was poor (probably the only place we've ever been to in Branson where they seemed to have the attitude that we were an imposition. Jim and Margie ordered the special --prime rib and it took an hour to get there, and then it wasn't cooked to their order.

That could have, naturally, spoiled the entire reunion for us....but that's the key word....us. We're a family; survivors and supporters, and we have fun together, regardless of the circumstances.

Afterward, most of us gathered in the parking lot at the truck that Jim Ellison had brought filled with DME. He had brought 2 used PCs for me to try and one for Toni. The one he brought for Toni was a perfect fit for her. One of the PCs he brought for me to try was "made for me". I can't say this too often....Jim Ellison is a treasure, not only because of his abilities concerning DME, but because he cares so much for all of us.

Since we didn't have access to the Hospitality Room and Jim's DME room until Thursday morning, we stayed in the parking lot and talked until very late. While Kathy and Margie helped Tom unload our van, Jim and Charlie gave Toni and me lessons -- such a sight -- all of us wheeling around that parking lot! Oh, I almost forgot: I had brought my new Jazzy(which didn't fit, it always hurt my outer thighs, etc.) When I said that I'd like to use the one PC that Jim had brought, Virginia asked if she could use mine. Of course, it was fine with me. It just goes to show how different we all are. Virginia has had her PC for almost 6 years and it has hurt her back the entire time. She used mine the whole time in Branson and her back never hurt once.

About midday on Thursday, we were able to get into the rooms and set everything set up for the reunion. At 5 that afternoon, 34 of us met at Lambert's for a wonderful, noisy, laugh-filled time. Everything there was as it has been every time we've been. The waitpersons were so pleasant and happy to have us there. They didn't mind moving things around to accommodate our scooters and PCs.

Oh, yeah, anytime someone goes to Lambert's in a scooter or wheelchair, their meal is FREE. The waitpersons would actually throw hot rolls to us when we raised our hands.

They came around with fried okra, fried potatoes, blackeyed peas, and macaroni and tomatoes (all of which are free extras).

Then there are the size of the portions you get on your order: all I can say is that if you come away hungry, there's a realllll problem! LOL

Afterward, we all met outside and their photographer took our picture(they're going to submit it in the hope that it will be put on the Lambert's web page).

After we caravanned back to the Settle Inn in Branson, we opened up the hospitality room and got everyone registered, shirts and caps handed out, and more visiting.

Friday, the day started at 9, and more people got there throughout the day. We had lunch there (yeah, we shamed Kathy into being on time with the food, ha ha).

Jim's room with the Durable Medical Equipment was filled with wonderful goodies, including: several different kinds and sizes of scooters, grabbers, tub/shower grab bars, thermophore moist heat pad (large), adjustable canes, crutches, an uplift power seat cushion and a Hoyer pool/tub lift.

Tom and I always find things that are very helpful --this year, we hit the jackpot! I had gotten the manual Uplift cushion last year and love it, so I got the power one and put it in my 'puter chair (it is so neat). I mentioned earlier that I bought one of the used PCs that he brought; we also bought the Thermophore moist heat pad(Tom is monopolizing that so far, for his bad). Oh, I also got a 4-piece set of things to attach to my PC --umbrella, tray, cup holder and a foldable trashbag holder. I love the idea of having an umbrella attached to my PC!

Jim does a great job every year of bringing things to make our lives easier and more pleasant.

Margie gave Tom a dulcimer lesson in the afternoon while others visited, rested, when to shows, went sightseeing or shopping.

Then, Kathy brought in fried chicken with all the trimmings for the evening meal.

More visiting followed the meal. Oh, several of our group brought crafts for barter/sale: Bill and Liz Cross brought the gorgeous stained glass that he makes, Virginia Dugger's mother had made chair bags and bottle bags to match, Rain and Leland Bleck brought some of their crystal. Also, Virginia Wood brought tiles that she had painted flowers, etc. to give each of the polio survivors--beautiful.

Saturday, we started again at 9, and, for lunch, we had Runzas, made by Pat Grimes(YUM). Then we had our business meeting after lunch, during which we voted to stay at the Settle Inn again next year. We also voted to have PURPLE shirts and caps, and use the same logo.

Tom, Anita Bjorling, Pat Grimes, Phyllis Bischof and Linda Booth had fun in a Dulcimer workshop with Margie Sat. afternoon.

Sat. night was our catered meal. The food was delicious and we were treated to a comedian, Terry Sanders, who performs in Branson. He was a scream, so, so funny and good.

Then came the next part: Jim had told Tom that since he was taking Dulcimer lessons, he would have to play for his supper, so Tom and Margie played a duet. Now, I know I'm totally partial, but I thought Tom did a great job; Margie also said he was a wonderful student.

Last on the program was the part that has become a favorite for all of us: the door prizes. We started a few years ago with 3 or 4 door prizes. From that point on, people have volunteered and brought gifts (homemade or inexpensive, fun or serious) so that there has been a gift for each person attending.

Jim and Margie were joint MCs for the door prize fun, and Jim asked each one to tell a little about themselves and why they came to the Branson Reunion. That really helps us get to know each other better.

After all that, we divided up and had separate meetings for the survivors and supporters. We always have separate meetings so that each group feels comfortable talking about issues that might not be easily discussed with everyone present.

Well, that gets us through the official "things" for Saturday. I'll get back to you with the rest of the Branson fun--and there's a lot of it!!

I forgot to mention that some of the guys went fishing on Friday (it was free fishing day). I'm sure the guys are wondering how in the world I could forget that?! LOL

Steve Chastain brought his boat and took Jim Ellison, John Booth, and Jack Fenner out on the lake for a fun-filled morning of fishing. Of course the rest of us expected to have a fish fry, but silly them---they threw all the fish back. And do we REALLY believe they caught as many fish as they came back bragging about?? Ha ha

Steve made the comment that, when Jim caught his first fish, he looked like a 7-year-old on his first fishing trip. (It was Jim's first time on that lake in 40 years.) What a fun time for him.

The other thing I failed to mention was the Assistance Dog/Basic Obedience Seminar conducted by Suzanne Chastain, Trainer. We had that seminar on Sat. afternoon. Suzanne used Linda Booth's service dog, Katie, who did a great job, by the way! Suzanne is a tremendous trainer and we all learned a lot from her presentation.

Okay, here's 'the rest of the story':

The Saturday night activities didn't end after the meetings. We had been out of the survivors' meeting for about 5 minutes when Judy Eades went back into the room for her purse. Nope, not there. We went back in and checked the room, front to back, top to bottom. No purse. The supporters finished their meeting shortly, and Kathy asked what color Judy's purse was--black. More description? zippers and pockets. Well, THAT was a big help! So, Miss Kathy got a flashlight and went back into the room and checked every corner, every crevice--NO PURSE.

By this time, the purse had been missing 30 minutes or longer. Judy and several of us sat down in the hospitality room, trying to decide what to do. All of a sudden, the door to the outside (smoking area) opened. Toni Fenner came in slowly, holding something with both hands, about 2 feet out in front of her (as if it would bite her), with this horrified look on her face. "Who-whose is this?? What was it doing on the back of my power chair?" Yep, it was Judy's purse. Well, Judy's face lit up immediately as she remembered coming out of our meeting to hug Toni and hanging her purse on the back on Toni's PC!!!! Judy was one of the new Bransongoes this year, but we could tell she was fitting in just fine. LOL

About that time, Kathy came down the hall and ran into a Pizza delivery man with two unclaimed pizzas. When Kathy came in and asked if we wanted them, Judy was quick to spring for the cost in appreciation for having her purse back.

So, here we were--a small group of some 50+, some 60+, laughing uncontrollably and eating pepperoni pizza at 12:30 in the morning. I think Tom & I gave it up a little after 1, but I heard rumors the next day, that the 'party' didn't end till 1:30 or 2!

Boy, that was a short night---some of us have short nights during the entire reunion every year for fear of missing out on some of the fun.

Anyway, the group congregated in the hospitality room around 10 on Sunday morning for the group picture--that's the key word....picture...as in ONE!!

One of the Settle Inn staff members, Matt, volunteered (or was drafted) to take the picture. At that time, as if by magic, there were about 30 cameras shoved in his face. He was a good sport, though, and took at least one pic with each camera. Of course, he had to get operating instructions for a few of them; but I think that kind of relaxed everyone and made us laugh some during that long time (did I say LONNGG time?) holding the 'perfect picture pose'. So, it became the session for the picturessssssssssss.

When we finally finished the smiling session, we had another treat...Jiggling George!! That right: Jiggling George.

A little background on this: shortly before the reunion, Phil Vrana wrote the group about having purchased something called the CHI machine; he said it really was helping him

with circulation and pain, and that he would bring it so we could try it out if we wanted to. So, thanks, Phil, for getting us started on this.

Well, John and Linda Booth found a little shop that carried the same thing, but it is called the "Jiggling George". They tried and purchased it on the spot, because it helped Linda's pain the very first time she used it. It cost about \$160 less than the CHI, and they arranged for the people to bring several to set up and let us try. The people even took one to one of our rooms so that it could be used even if the person couldn't get down on the floor. The people even made an agreement to give John and Linda a \$30 check for each one they sold that day; and, in turn, John and Linda donated that money to the Branson Post-Polio Reunion Scholarship Fund. Thanks so much to you two for your generosity!!

So, that was another purchase Tom and I made during the reunion. It is great, and we love it--we put a 20x20 piece of plywood at the end of the bed so we don't have to get down on the floor. I'm here to tell you - we came home with the van much more fully loaded than it was we went to Branson! LOL

After all the Jiggling, it was time for lunch. As you probably have gathered by now, we do not go hungry during this reunion! (and that's an understatement!!) Sunday lunch is always leftovers...and still there is plenty for all.

After lunch and cleanup, people scattered--Dulcimer lessons, rest, visiting, etc. till time for the picnic at Moonshine Beach (yep, that's not a typo...Moonshine Beach). We had rented the shelter house there this year and it was beautiful, overlooking the sandy beach and lake.

I only know this secondhand, because I crashed after lunch and slept through the picnic. Everyone enjoyed it, though.

They had burgers and brats, prepared by our chief chefs, Jack Fenner and Gleason Grimes. For dessert, there was the traditional Branson Reunion Cake (always yummy).

Although nothing was scheduled for Monday, the hospitality room was open that morning for us to get everything cleared out.

Charlie and Kathy Greulich usually have supper on Monday night at their house for those of us who are still there. So, there were around 25 there enjoying food (one of the special treats were fried pies made by Pat and Gleason Grimes with their Pie Irons--fun, and delish!) and still more visiting.

Now, some of you may think we would have been all 'visited out' by this time. My reply to you is that this group NEVER reaches that point! There are always more things to share, PPS related and otherwise, more bonding to make us feel more like a family, more laughter, and, yes, even more tears.

It gets harder each year to wait till time for the reunion, and much more difficult to say goodbye to everyone when it's time to go home.

I think everyone except us had left by Tuesday morning. We slept in and went shopping in the afternoon. One of the fun things included a stop at a Dulcimer shop. I have a hammered dulcimer, but I hadn't gotten the hammers for it. So, I found the hammers for it, as well as a couple of books so now I can learn to play it. The neatest part of the trek was that I was given 3 free lessons (one after another) on site by one of the owners.

Afterwards, we met Charlie and Kathy for supper. Yes, you guessed it--we started making notes and planning for Branson 2005.

Statistics for the 2004 Branson Reunion: 70 total in attendance, plus 2 service dogs and 2 companion dogs --that's terrific!!

FYI - Branson 2005 dates are: June 10, 11, 12, 13. That is week following G.I.N.I.

Hotel rates are the same as this year:
\$52 a night (plus tax = appr. \$58) for the regular rooms
\$95 a night (plus tax = appr. \$106) for the theme rooms

If you are interested for next year, PLEASE email me for more info. Don't put it off and take a chance on forgetting.

I guess that's it for my account of the 2004 Branson Post-Polio Reunion. In my opinion, every year gets better!!

Anyone else want to share their memories? Please do.

Love,
Ann