

OUR BRANSON TRIP

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By Don Holbert

Our Branson trip began on Wednesday, May 28th, when Mary and I got in the van that morning and headed for Springfield. We were going to work a Special Olympics summer game in Springfield before we went on to Branson. We left early that morning because we were going to make a stop at the Springfield zoo before we had to check in at Special Olympics.

Mary had never been to a zoo, a Special Olympics state tournament nor had she ever stayed overnight at a college dormitory. She had never been to Branson. Oh, was she going to have fun.

We arrived at the Springfield zoo about 10:30 that morning; it was a very cool, but nice. Oh, by the way, it happened to be zoo day for the schools that day. Amongst the 10 million kids and chaperones, there was Mary and me on our scooters going around the zoo. We had a blast watching the kids and looking at the different animals and reptiles. I do not like the snakes, but Mary does; scared the life right out of me. Ok, ok back to my story.

We had a good time at the zoo, but finally had to leave to go check in at the dormitories to work the Special Olympics tournament. As we arrived at Southern Missouri University, a lot of the athletes were arriving at the same time. We got stuck in a long line of traffic and finally found the parking lot where everyone was supposed to park. We left our luggage in the van and mounted our scooters to go find the check in.

2½ blocks later we found it. Being involved with Special Olympics since 1981, I knew what I was doing; Mary did not. I did not give Mary a test of who was who after 45 minutes of different introductions. We found out what dorm we were staying in and went to check in at the dorm. We were in a suite of 4 rooms. Mary got our key, went up to our room and found out we had to move everything around so I could get in. We finally checked it out and decided it would work, so we went to the van to get our luggage.

Loading both of us down, we were off with our first trip. Trip number one was done and off we went for the second trip. Finally after the third trip, everything was in – or so we thought! If you have never eaten at a college food court, you would not understand the experience Mary had for supper.

After supper, the athletes were lining up for opening ceremonies. We made our way through all the athletes saying hi to me and to the football stadium, where the opening ceremonies were going to be. Remember when we said earlier, it was a cool day? It got a lot cooler during opening ceremonies. Mary being the smart person that she is, brought a blanket with her; so we sat snuggled together in this blanket. It sure was nice being newlyweds!

Opening ceremonies began and the athletes came marching in. It was a very pleasant evening. After everything was over, we made our way back to the dorm. It sure did feel good to get inside; until my lovely wife forgot my charger. I had to go back outside to get it because her scooter was dead. Then I could not find the cord to the charger, so I

brought the charger up to the dorm and we used Mary's cord to charge my scooter. By the time we got settled down and in bed, Mary realized there was no television to watch.

Me being the helpful husband that I am, I volunteered that we could do something else to occupy our time; somehow she was not too impressed with this on a single bed so we just went to sleep. I will say that 5:30 came awful early the next morning. We dressed and headed down for breakfast at 6:00. Breakfast was much better organized than supper the night before. We had a good breakfast and off we went to the fields at 6:45am.

Mary and I worked the awards area and we stayed there until about 11 o'clock and then told them that we were going on to Branson to a Post-Polio BransonGoers weekend. Back to the dorm we went to carry our luggage down and, on our third trip, turned in our key. Van loaded, we headed off the Branson.

Remember, Mary had never been to Branson, so I very helpful to point out some of the scenery, including where Lambert's was. Finally, she ran in to the hills. Our van love's the hills; at least the going down part. Going up, I thought I would have to get out, tie a rope to my scooter and pull it. We arrived at our hotel in Branson about 1:00 in the afternoon.

Mary went and checked us in. We pull up close to a door and Mary went in to get a luggage dolly, filled it and took the load in while I watched over the van. Mary came back out and filled it a second time; you would have thought we were going to be gone for a year! This time, I followed her in on the scooter. We had a very nice room; a roll into shower in the bathroom, which was good for me. Also, I could get fairly close to the bed so I could transfer.

After we got everything in the room and before we started unpacking, my body thought I had better go potty; remember most motel rooms are tile flooring. Off we took to the bathroom! Here is where the fun begins! At the time I really didn't think it was fun. Mary took off my shoes and socks so I could stand on the tile floor. After about thirty minutes of struggling and twisting and turning, I finally made it! We took my pants and undies down so I could spread my legs. I did my duty and the paper work, and then tried to figure out how to get back on the scooter on the tile floor. I had Mary move the scooter but decided it was still not close enough, so I decided to move it closer. In doing so, I hit my leg and down I went.

In the process, I took the toilet paper holder with me. I got my toes caught under the wheels of the scooter and, to add insult to injury, this was the first time Mary had seen me fall. After a good round of talking like a sailor to myself, I had Mary move the chair and the broken toilet paper holder out from under my back and I started to figure out how to get myself out of this and still keep my dignity. After lying there thinking, knowing that Mary could not lift me up, I decided to use my arms to pull myself into the bedroom to see what I could use to pull myself up on. Remember, this was a tile floor and the air conditioner must have been set on 42 below 0, because when I flipped over on my belly and started pulling myself I sure hoped that Mary had brought her hair dryer so I could defrost certain areas when I got up.

After pulling myself across the tile, I made it to the rug. I laid there and, while looking around, remembered that we had brought a big suitcase. I decided if I could get myself up on it, I could get to another level and eventually get my body off the floor. Well, after

rug burn, I defrosted and thought, 'This is ok. I can explain we are newlyweds.' We got to the suitcase and I discovered how much strength I no longer had, so decided to flip over. I lifted the upper part and Mary lifted the lower part and we got me on the suitcase. When she straddled and locked her hands around me, I thought, 'Please don't slip or I will be singing soprano.'

Turning around to where I was sitting on the suitcase, I had Mary get me some underwear and shorts. After she got them put on me, I had her call the front desk to see if a maintenance man could come up and give us a hand. In a matter of a few minutes, there was a knock on the door. Mary answered it and the maintenance man came in, looked at me and said, 'We didn't have enough chairs in this room.' From that I knew that our Branson trip was going to be fun. He grabbed beneath one arm while Mary grabbed under the other and up I came. He waited until I got to the scooter and he asked is there anything more. I said, 'If it is all the same to you, you could run a heater in that tile floor.' We all laughed and off he went.

Well, after Mary's heart settled down and began to beat regular again, I told her not to stress out, that I am going to fall at times. She said she didn't like me falling because I could get hurt. I told her I didn't want her trying to catch me because if she got hurt, we would both be in a pickle. About 3:30pm, we went downstairs. We were supposed to meet the group about 4. There were some people sitting in the lobby so we sat down with them and started talking and we found out that Betty, from Arkansas, was constantly on the go. We also found out Gleason and Pat lives in Nebraska, and that Kathy was always late.

We did a lot of listening to various conversations, looked at each other and knew that we would have fun with this group. Finally about 4:20, Kathy showed up and asked for everyone to come out and help unload, so off we all went. We unloaded and unloaded and unloaded and then Kathy said we needed to hurry up and go. We needed to be at Lambert's at 5. Mary and I looked at each other and I asked her if she felt like driving to Lambert's or did she want to get something to eat at the hotel. She decided we would go. So, off to Lambert's we went. There, we met several other people, Liz and her mother-in-law from Columbia, Gleason and Pat was at my table; Mary met Lucy, Mill, Linda, and Sharon. There were others at our tables, but we don't remember names very well.

Dinner was extremely good. I loved watching them throw the rolls. Mary did a good job catching them at her table. After dinner, I found out what I already knew; that Mary and I had a lot in common. I asked her what she had for supper and she told me she had the fried chicken. I started laughing and said, 'me too.'

At Lamberts we discovered that anybody on a scooter or a wheelchair got their meals free. I would have been happy to pay because the food was great. We had a good time talking during dinner. Afterward, we drove back to the motel and collapsed from being up at 5:30 that morning. We were supposed to be at registration from 9 to 11, but woke up at 8:30, rushed to get dressed and down to building 3 to find out that, you guessed it, Kathy was going to be late. So we went to get the continental breakfast. After breakfast, we went in to the meeting room and started talking to some of the people there. Finally, about 10:15 Kathy arrived, registration began, we heard them talking about this one and that one, we heard them talking about they saw this one in the hall or that one wasn't coming this year, and, of course, we didn't know who was who other than the ones we

met at dinner the evening before.

We discovered that Tom was quite the comedian. There were two ladies in the corner peeling apples. We were told to call the older lady 'the apple dumpling gal' and that is how we remember her. She makes a mean apple dumpling we discovered that evening. Lunch was served at noon; we received our yearbook on the BransonGoers, listened to some of the housekeeping notes and were free to go about 1:15pm. We went back to the room and Mary laid down while I put my feet up on the bed, sat in my scooter, watched a little bit of television and, about 3, we decided to go back down to building 3 to see what was going on. I keep referring to building 3 because we were in building 1, on top of the mountain and the only way to building 3 was down, and I do mean down, through the parking lot. Mary didn't like going down through the lot because her scooter tilted forward. I was good going down, but hated going back up. I felt like I was going to turn over backwards.

We got down there and Mary ran into Sheri. Sheri was outside having a cigarette, so we sat outside and talked to the people that was out there. There was Mary and I, Toni and Jack, Sheri, Rick and sometimes Dick would join us. After the warm up break for Lucy, Millie and me, we all went inside. There were some people playing cards and some just sitting around talking. Mary and I saw some books out on a table, saw some pictures out on another table and registration set up and selling shirts, so Mary got the shirts that we had ordered and we just kind of mingled around.

Before we knew it, it was time for supper. We had dinner and found out that there was a Christian music group that was going to perform in the next room that evening. They invited all of us to come in and listen, many of us accepting the invitation. Mary and I, for two, thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Of course, we had to go out and enjoy the smoke and heat break and the camaraderie outside that evening. After which, up the hill we went on our scooters past building 2 up to building 3. Shall we say 'up to the nose bleed section?' It was a full day and I was still tired from Springfield, so to bed I went. I don't know for sure what time Mary shut off the TV. All I know is that the next morning came too early.

We went down to breakfast and there was a lot from the post-polio group having breakfast that morning. We discovered that there was going to be a doctor that specialized in post-polio syndrome speaking to the group at about 10am. So outside we went, cigarette and warmth time, warmth for some, cigarettes for others, the smokers was sitting in the shade and I was sitting in the sun. Everybody was jealous of the tan I had on my legs. But I enjoy the sun thoroughly. Ten o'clock we went inside to listen to the doctor. Mary and I listened very intently, all I have ever had since age 13 has been a family doctor that does not know anything or hardly anything about polio let alone post-polio.

I learned a lot from the doctor. I learned that 95% of the polio survivors in that meeting were either on C-pap or Bi-pap. I did not realize that, before the next year of PPBG, I would personally be experiencing going onto this. We found out that this doctor practiced out of Joplin, MO. We also discovered that there was another doctor practicing out of KU med center in Kansas. We have filed these references for possible future visits; as I refuse to accept I am getting weaker.

I have experienced several times this year, I might want to try to set an appointment with one of them, but with my type 'A' personality, I'd rather do it myself. I haven't set any appointments yet. After listening to the doctor, which I will say was quite informative, it was lunch time. After lunch, we went back to the room for a while, came back down about 3 and had to stop at our cigarette and warm up area to visit with everyone that was out there. We got ready to go in and there was a lady at the door. As I was getting ready to hold it open for Mary to go in on her scooter, the lady said, 'let me hold the door for you. Oh, are both of you on scooters? Oh, my!' I said, as I backed up over her foot, 'yes we are and we have a hard time seeing behind us, thank you.' Then, into the meeting room we went.

We spent the afternoon talking and visiting with different ones and meeting new ones. Of course, everyone was new to us this year. It was finally supper time. Supper was very good. We enjoyed it thoroughly and learned afterwards that we were breaking into two different groups; survivors and supporters. The supporters met in one room and the survivors stayed in the main room. We quickly learned that what was said in each room stayed in each room. I will say, before I went to Branson, I felt like I was in a boat by myself. After listening to our Saturday night group, I discovered I was on a ship with many shipmates. This evening was extremely good for me.

Mary stated that she learned several things in her group too and it was good for her also. We have never had a deep conversation about what each other had learned that Saturday night, but we both have a different outlook on life since then. Sunday morning we got up, leisured around, had breakfast and down the hill we went; back to cigarette, warmth, and good friends' corner. What started out Thursday as not knowing anyone, we felt by Sunday we knew everyone. Sunday's lunch was everything left over, which was ok with us. There would have been more chicken, except I heard about some chicken thieves that had invaded late Saturday night.

They even convinced Don H. to help them out. Or he was the head of the thieves, just haven't figured that one out yet. I thought it was really funny when I learned that they thought about taking the two platters of chicken that was left, putting it all on one platter and leaving the other platter with nothing but bones; covering it and putting it back into the refrigerator. After lunch, several of them had to leave and we spent the afternoon saying goodbye, talking and visiting. We found out that Toni and Jack were going to go to a restaurant just a half of block away to have dinner that evening instead of having leftovers. We asked them if we could tag along for dinner and they said sure.

Mary and I decided to ride our scooters to dinner as it was only a half block away. Jack and Toni took their vehicle. Down part of the parking lot, we went down a long drive to the sidewalk. Branson's sidewalks have curb cuts but, if you don't watch what you are doing, when you come down your curb cut, you are driving down the line of traffic. But we made it to the restaurant. We had a great visit and dinner, learned that Toni had polio the same year I did, learned that they lived in St. Louis and that Jack sold Seafood. We came back for an evening of fun; I don't believe I have ever laughed as hard as I laughed Sunday evening.

That was when we learned of the chicken thieves. We started the evening with karaoke. Some of them could really sing. As for me, let's just say that my brother, the music teacher, got every ounce of the Holberts' musical ability. The evening progressed to the

performance of the Bransoneers. They were hilarious! Shall we say they stole the show? I was doing ok watching them until I saw the lighted ball swing between Jack's legs ! I don't remember anything after that cause I was laughing to hard.

On Monday morning, a lot of the remainder of the group was getting ready to leave . I don't believe I have ever had a weekend go quite as fast as that weekend did. After arriving on Thursday, not knowing any one, we gave hugs and waves goodbye to dear friends. Mary and I stayed for 3 days longer enjoying some of the sights and sounds of Branson. Today is February 28, 2009. We had a snow storm this morning with six inches of snow, but we have so enjoyed sitting here reminiscing about our first ever Post-Polio BransonGoers trip and so excited about seeing our friends in 3 months and 10 days, not that I am counting or anything, you know. What fun we had and what fun we will have again this year. We are going to our first PPS group meeting in Sedalia on the 7th of March and are we going to tell them what fun the PPBG is. SEE YOU IN BRANSON!

Don and Mary Holbert