

Running with God By Mary McManus

Two years ago, in October of 2006, when I felt I could no longer live with fatigue, weakness and pain, God suggested that I google post polio syndrome. I called Spaulding Rehab's International Rehab Center for Polio and an angel, Anna Rubin, answered the phone. After a series of appointments at Spaulding, an MRI, an appointment with my primary care provider and seven tubes of blood later (to rule out any other possible causes for my symptoms), I was diagnosed with post polio syndrome – a progressive neurological dis-



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ease. Mind, body and spirit were burned out from the external demands of a full time job in social work and caring for my family, and mind, body and spirit were crying out for growth and transformation.

On a cold dark day in February 2007, wearing a leg brace, using a cane and at times a wheelchair for mobility, I contemplated my future. I felt the urge to create: I sat down at my laptop and wrote the poem, *Running the Race*.

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Running the Race

Late summer 1958 my kindergarten year
 Everyone around me filled with nervous fear
 Despite the Salk vaccine hope polio would disappear
 The polio virus crept right up and knocked me in the rear.

Dancing all around the gym feeling free just like a bird
 I dropped to the ground just like a stone and no one said a word.
 The pain it was so searing-the diagnosis even worse
 "It's polio," the doctor said...he was abrupt and terse.

Called one of the 'lucky ones' I had a 'mild case'
 But with the other athletes I could never keep their pace.
 Miss Holly physical therapist, curly hair and a warm, broad smile
 It tempered the pain of being apart – to walk I'd take awhile.

I always wore those 'special' shoes the kids they poked and teased
 With no support and much abuse with childhood I wasn't pleased.
 But put nose to the grindstone and learned all that I could
 I couldn't kick a ball but my grades were always good.

Years went by and no more thought to polio did I give
 I accepted the limp and everything else and decided my life I would live.
 But symptoms of weakness and muscle pain did grow
 I kept a stoic face hoping no one else would know.

Life no longer was my own I struggled through each day
 Suffered in silence, isolated from friends-trying to keep depression at bay.
 And with the grace of glorious God my world it opened wide
 I discovered there was a Post Polio team and they were on my side.

Using wheelchair to travel, set limits on what I could do,
 Resulted in joy to realize I could live life anew.
 Celebrated my body- creaks, groans and need for a brace
 While in my mind I focused on winning a 10K race.

Sought out paths for healing and my spirit flew free
 For the first time in life, I could truly be me.

The chains are gone and possibilities abound
 I'm a tree with my roots planted firmly in ground.

I'm now off the sidelines, no need to sit and whine
 So much gratitude fills my heart and love and beauty shine.
 After all these years I can join the loving human race
 I exceed all expectations and now I set the pace.

Carl Jung says that our unconscious prepares the future. I had no idea that on October 13, 2008, I would, in fact, run a 10K race with my daughter Ruth Anne.

Through intensive rehab at Spaulding Rehab, major lifestyle changes (quitting my full time job to follow my bliss of being a poet), nutritional changes, reconnecting with God, working with an angel personal trainer, Janine Hightower of Boston Home Bodies and Janice Wesley, a gifted physical therapist and energy healer, my mind, body and spirit healed in profound ways. In February of 2008, I traded in my polio shoes for running shoes. And, at the Tufts 10K, my daughter and I finished the race with a time of 13:53 minute/mile pace. The actual time of course is irrelevant – it was a miracle that I was able to even lace up a pair of running shoes and contemplate running 6.2 miles. My daughter and I had set our goal pace at a 15 minute mile hoping to finish in an hour and a half.



We spent a lot of time together in prayerful preparation for race day. We ran 4.5 miles on Saturday at a 15 minute pace. We rested and nourished ourselves on Sunday. I did the alignment exercises prescribed by Janice and did pilates to strengthen my core. We took our time getting ready on race day, fueling with

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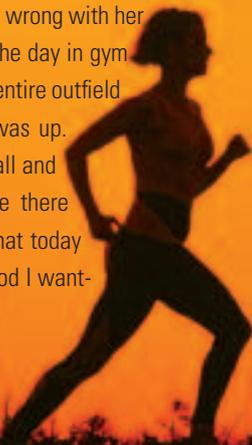
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a healthy breakfast and while I was chomping at the bit to get to the race, Ruth Anne helped steady my nerves by talking about the need to conserve energy.

We became quiet and I meditated on the train ride to the race inviting God to shower me with energy, strength and love. I could run the distance – we were up to running 10 miles for long distance runs, but could I run it at a fast pace? I reflected on one of my spiritual experiences on one of our long distance runs. I had an image of my polio self and who I am today side by side in a huge bubble. As I ran, the distance lengthened between my polio self and who I am today until the bubble finally burst and I was free. I felt God's presence as a long forgotten childhood memory surfaced. Cries from my childhood of 'easy out', 'we don't want her on our team,' 'what's wrong with her anyway?' melted away. I remembered the day in gym when we were playing kickball and the entire outfield moved in as they always did when I was up. All of a sudden, I connected with the ball and ended up kicking a home run because there was no one in the outfield! I decided that today was a day for another surprise. I told God I wanted my daughter to be proud of me.



We were in perfect physical and spiritual harmony. Our feet moved in perfect rhythm; we ran hills as we had during hill training sessions and coached each other during downhills. God's presence was palpable and my Spirit transcended my physical body allowing me to sustain a pace I had never run before. I felt the energy and cheers from the crowd along with the prayers from friends I knew were praying for me that day. As my daughter and I crossed the finish line, the clock read: 1:29 – but that was gun time...our actual time was 1:26 – four minutes under what we visualized as our goal for that day and a good one minute less per mile than we were hoping for! The magic and miracle of October 13, 2008 shall forever be an imprint on my Spirit! I am so grateful to my beautiful daughter, the organizers of the Tufts 10K, the staff at Spaulding Rehab's International Rehab Center for Polio and Spaulding Rehab Downtown Boston, Janine Hightower, Janice Wesley, and of course, God – our Loving Creator who guides my footsteps every moment of every day. **cha**

Mary McManus is the author of *New World Greetings: Inspirational Poetry and Musings for a New World* and creator of *New World Greeting Cards*, customized poetry for all occasions. 20% of the proceeds of the sale of her book is donated to Spaulding Rehab's Polio Fund to help other polio survivors. www.newworldgreetings.com



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