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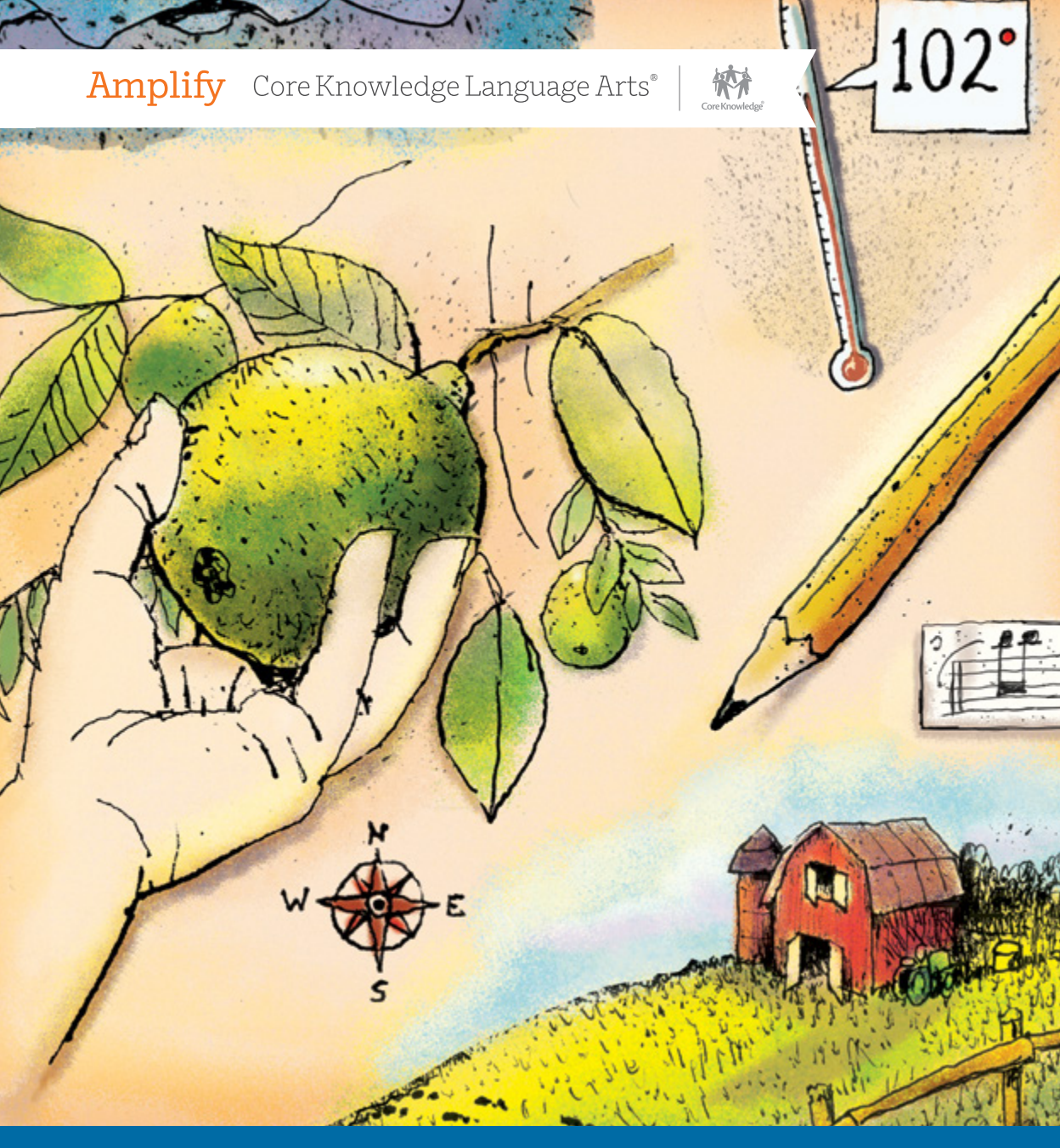

Unit 1

Reader | Grade 4

Personal Narratives

Grade 4 | Unit 1

Personal Narratives

Reader

Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

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A Good Lie

by Laurel Snyder

Laurel Snyder is a poet and writer. She has written five novels for children, six picture books, and two collections of poetry.

Lying is generally a bad idea. Most lies are sneaky and selfish, and some lies are even **illegal**. Maybe you know this because you've been lied to, and it hurt your feelings. Maybe you know this because your parents have grounded you or yelled at you or **confiscated** your favorite video game when you've lied in the past. If that is the case, I really hope you learned your lesson! Yes, lying is a terrible idea *most* of the time. However, some lies are gifts. Some lies are made out of kindness. I was once the **beneficiary** of a very special lie, and it changed my life.

I was eight, and I had a new best friend. We'll call her Lily. Lily was having a slumber party at her house, and because I was her brand-new very best friend, she and I were supposed to share the plaid pullout sofa, while all the other girls slept on the floor around us in their sleeping bags. I felt extremely special.

It was a great party! Because it was almost Halloween, we told ghost stories in the dark, with flashlights. We ate candy and popcorn as we watched a spooky movie. At last, we fell asleep. Then, in the

middle of the night I woke up, **paralyzed** with shame and fear. Horror of horrors—I had wet the bed!

What would you have done in my shoes? At first I simply lay there in the darkness, with my cold pee drying sticky on my legs. I listened to all the other girls snoring and breathing, and worried about what would happen when Lily woke up. Would she stop being my best friend? Would she tease me? Would she have her mom call my mom and send me home right away? Surely all the other girls would laugh. Probably I would never be invited to another slumber party for the rest of my life.

It was awful, lying there, frozen in the bed. But finally my nightgown was soaked all the way through, and I couldn't stand the waiting anymore. I tapped Lily on the shoulder. "Lily?" I whispered in the darkness. "I peed. I peed myself. I'm sorry." I thought I might cry.

Lily just stared at me. "Oh," she said. She was quiet for a minute. She looked like she was thinking things over. I waited, terrified. But that was when Lily told her wonderful lie, the amazing lie that would change my life and make me love Lily until the day I die. "You know what?" she said. "Me too! I peed myself too." Then she smiled.

"What?" I asked. I was so confused. I was certain she had *not* peed in the bed. Her side was dry. I knew it was dry because I'd sort of been trying to creep over onto it, to get out of my own wet spot. "What do you mean?"

Lily nodded her head. "Yes," she insisted. "I did! I peed in the bed

too. I'll go get my mom. She'll take care of the mess."

Then Lily got out of bed and walked up the stairs. I followed her, and watched as she woke up her parents and told them we had both peed in the sofa bed. They seemed surprised, but they didn't get mad. Lily's mom found us both clean pajamas, and then came down to the basement with us, to change the sheets.

Some of the other girls woke up, but incredibly, nobody laughed at us. Not even Sandy, the meanest girl in our class. "I peed the bed," said Lily with a laugh. She made a silly face, and everyone laughed along with her. Lily didn't act like peeing in the bed was a big deal, so nobody else acted like it was a big deal. Everyone went back to

sleep, and nobody even mentioned it in the morning. We all just ate yummy pancakes and went home with our goodie bags.

Now, I ask you—was Lily's lie a bad thing? A **sin**? I certainly don't think so. I think it was a gift. It changed me and made me a better person. From that day forward, I tried really hard to be a better friend. I tried to be kinder and more generous. I tried not to laugh at people so much. I tried to grow. Lily had shown a kind of strength I'd never seen before in another kid, and I wanted to be like her. Though I must confess, there was one thing I couldn't fix about myself—sometimes I still peed in my bed. But that was all right because I had Lily, who knew the worst and was willing to be my best friend anyway.

(And still is, to this day!)

Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family

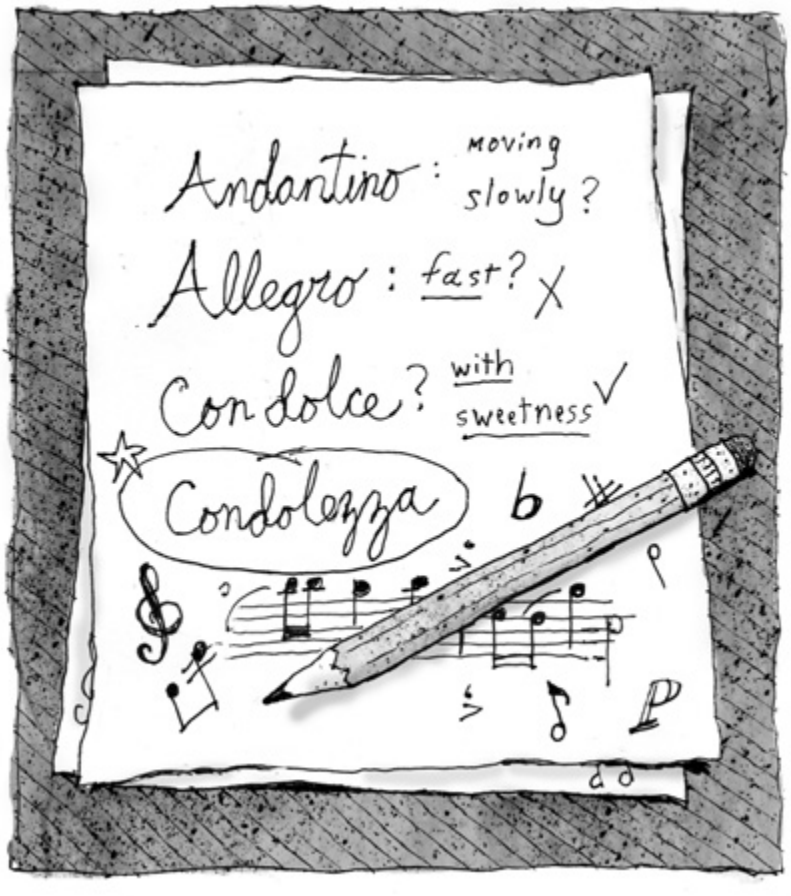
Chapter One

by Condoleezza Rice

Condoleezza Rice is a professor and scholar of political science at Stanford University. She has also served in government. She was the first female National Security Advisor from 2001–2005, and the first female African-American Secretary of State from 2005–2009. This excerpt is from the very beginning of her memoir Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family.

By all accounts, my parents approached the time of my birth with great **anticipation**. My father was certain that I'd be a boy and had worked out a deal with my mother: if the baby was a girl, she would name her, but a boy would be named John.

Mother started thinking about names for her daughter. She wanted a name that would be **unique** and musical. Looking to Italian musical terms for inspiration, she at first settled on



Andantino. But realizing that it translated as "moving slowly," she decided that she didn't like the **implications** of that name. Allegro was worse because it translated as "fast," and no mother in 1954 wanted her daughter to be thought of as "fast." Finally she found the musical terms *con dolce* and *con dolcezza,* meaning "with sweetness." Deciding that an English speaker would never recognize the hard c, saying "dolci" instead of "dolche," my mother doctored the term. She settled on Condoleezza.

Meanwhile, my father prepared for John's birth. He bought a football and several other pieces of sports equipment. John was going to be an all-American running back or perhaps a linebacker.

My mother thought she felt labor pains on Friday night, November 12, and was rushed to the doctor. Dr. Plump, the black pediatrician who delivered most of the black babies in town, explained that it was probably just anxiety. He decided nonetheless to put Mother in the hospital, where she could rest comfortably.

The public hospitals were completely segregated in Birmingham, with the Negro wards—no private rooms were available—in the basement. There wasn't much effort to separate maternity cases from patients with any other kind of illness, and by all accounts the accommodations were pretty grim. As a result, mothers who could get in preferred to birth their babies at Holy Family, the Catholic

hospital that segregated white and Negro patients but at least had something of a maternity floor and private rooms. Mother checked into Holy Family that night.

Nothing happened on Saturday or early Sunday morning. Dr. Plump told my father to go ahead and deliver his **sermon** at the eleven o'clock church service. "This baby isn't going to be born for quite a while," he said.

He was wrong. When my father came out of the **pulpit** at noon on November 14, his mother was waiting for him in the church office.

"Johnny, it's a girl!"

Daddy was floored. "A girl?" he asked. "How could it be a girl?"

He rushed to the hospital to see the new baby. Daddy told me that the first time he saw me in the nursery, the other babies were just lying still, but I was trying to raise myself up. Now, I think it's doubtful that an hours-old baby was strong enough to do this. But my father insisted this story was true. In any case, he said that his heart melted at the sight of his baby girl. From that day on he was a "**feminist**"—there was nothing that his little girl couldn't do, including learning to love football.

When I Was Puerto Rican

Prologue: How To Eat A Guava

by Esmeralda Santiago

Esmeralda Santiago is a writer and actress. She was born in Puerto Rico in 1948, and moved with her family to the United States when she was thirteen. This excerpt is the beginning of her first book, When I Was Puerto Rican, *the first of her three memoirs. It tells the true story of her childhood in Puerto Rico and the move to New York.*

Barco que no anda, no llega a puerto.

A ship that doesn't sail, never reaches port.

There are **guavas** at the Shop & Save. I pick one the size of a tennis ball and finger the **prickly** stem end. It feels familiarly bumpy and firm. The guava is not quite ripe; the skin is still a dark green. I smell it and imagine a pale pink center, the seeds tightly **embedded** in the flesh.

A ripe guava is yellow, although some varieties have a pink **tinge**.

The skin is thick, firm, and sweet. Its heart is bright pink and almost solid with seeds. The most delicious part of the guava surrounds the tiny seeds. If you don't know how to eat a guava, the seeds end up in the **crevices** between your teeth.

When you bite into a ripe guava, your teeth must grip the bumpy surface and sink into the thick **edible** skin without hitting the center. It takes experience to do this, as it's quite tricky to determine how far beyond the skin the seeds begin.

Some years, when the rains have been plentiful and the nights cool, you can bite into a guava and not find many seeds. The guava bushes grow close to the ground, their branches **laden** with green then yellow fruit that seem to ripen overnight. These guavas are large and juicy, almost seedless, their roundness **enticing** you to have one more, just one more, because next year the rains may not come.

As children, we didn't always wait for the fruit to ripen. We raided the bushes as soon as the guavas were large enough to bend the branch.

A green guava is sour and hard. You bite into it at its widest point, because it's easier to grasp with your teeth. You hear the skin, meat, and seeds crunching inside your head, while the inside of your mouth explodes in little spurts of sour.

You **grimace**, your eyes water, and your cheeks disappear as your lips purse into a tight O. But you have another and then another, enjoying the crunchy sounds, the acid taste, the gritty texture of the unripe center. At night, your mother makes you drink **castor oil**, which she says tastes better than a green guava. That's when you know for sure that you're a child and she has stopped being one.

I had my last guava the day we left Puerto Rico. It was large and juicy, almost red in the center, and so **fragrant** that I didn't want to eat it because I would lose the smell. All the way to the airport I scratched at it with my teeth, making little dents in the skin, chewing small pieces with my front teeth, so that I could feel the texture against my tongue, the tiny pink pellets of sweet.

Today, I stand before a stack of dark green guavas, each perfectly round and hard, each $1.59. The one in my hand is **tempting**. It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hopscotch under the mango tree. But this is autumn in New York, and I'm no longer a child.

The guava joins its sisters under the harsh fluorescent lights of the exotic fruit display. I push my cart away, toward the apples and pears of my adulthood, their nearly seedless ripeness predictable and bittersweet.

A Girl from Yamhill

The Farm

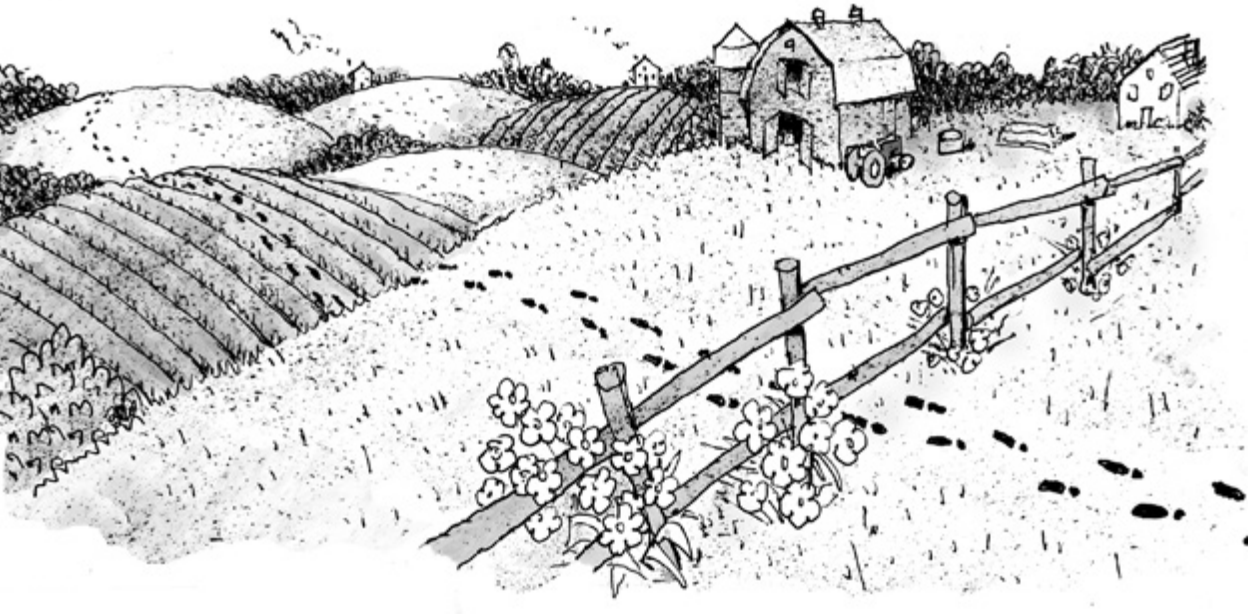
by Beverly Cleary

Beverly Cleary is the award winning author of more than twenty books for children, including the Ramona books.

This passage is from her memoir, A Girl from Yamhill, *in which she tells the true story of her childhood. She was born on a farm in rural Yamhill Oregon in 1916 and lived there until she began school. In this excerpt, she is a young girl and lives with her mother and father on the farm.*

At Christmas I was given an orange, a rare treat from the far-off land of California. I sniffed my orange, admired its color and its tiny **pores**, and placed it beside my bowl of oatmeal at the breakfast table, where I sat raised by two volumes of Mother's *Teacher's Encyclopedia.*

Father picked up my orange. "Did you know that the world is round, like an orange?" he asked. No, I did not. "It is," said Father. "If you started here"—pointing to the top of the orange—"and traveled in a straight line"—demonstrating with his finger—"you would travel back to where you started." Oh, My father **scored** my orange. I peeled and thoughtfully ate it.



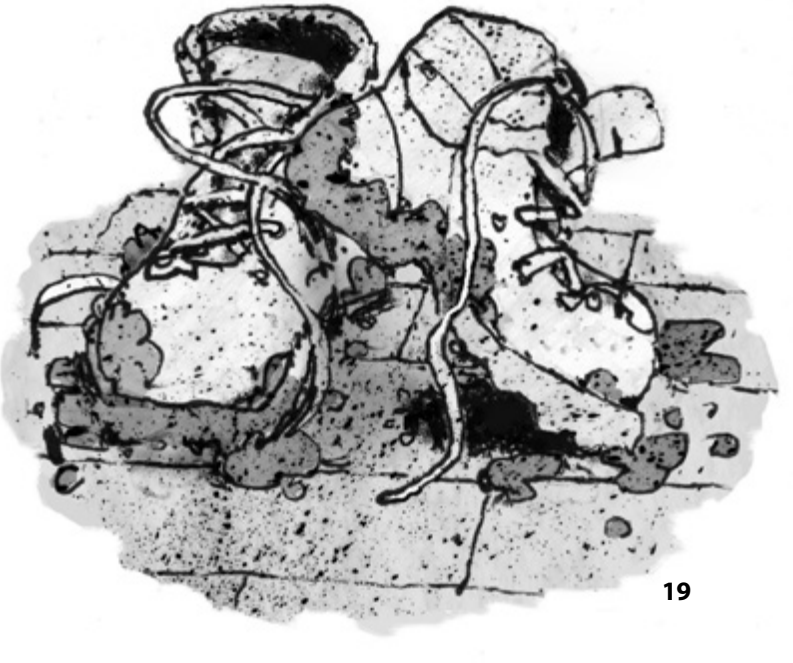
I thought about that orange until spring, when wild **forget-me-nots** suddenly bloomed in one corner of our big field. The time had come. I crossed the barnyard, climbed a gate, walked down the hill, climbed another gate, and started off across the field, which was still too wet to **plow**. Mud clung to my shoes I plodded on and on, with my feet growing heavier with every step. I came to the fence that marked the boundary of our land and bravely prepared to climb it and **plunge** into foreign bushes.

My journey was interrupted by a shout. Father came **striding** across the field in his rubber boots. "Just where in Sam Hill do you think you're going?" he demanded.

"Around the world, like you said."

Father **chuckled** and, carrying me under his arm, **lugged** me back to the house, where he set me on the back porch and explained the size of the world.

Mother looked at my shoes, now gobs of mud, and sighed. "Beverly, what will you think of next?" she asked.



Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 1: The Diagnosis (Part 1)

by Peg Kehret

Peg Kehret is an award winning author of books for children. When she was 12 years old she contracted polio, which resulted in a long hospital stay and rehabilitation, but she finally made an almost complete recovery. Small Steps *is her memoir of that time in her life.*

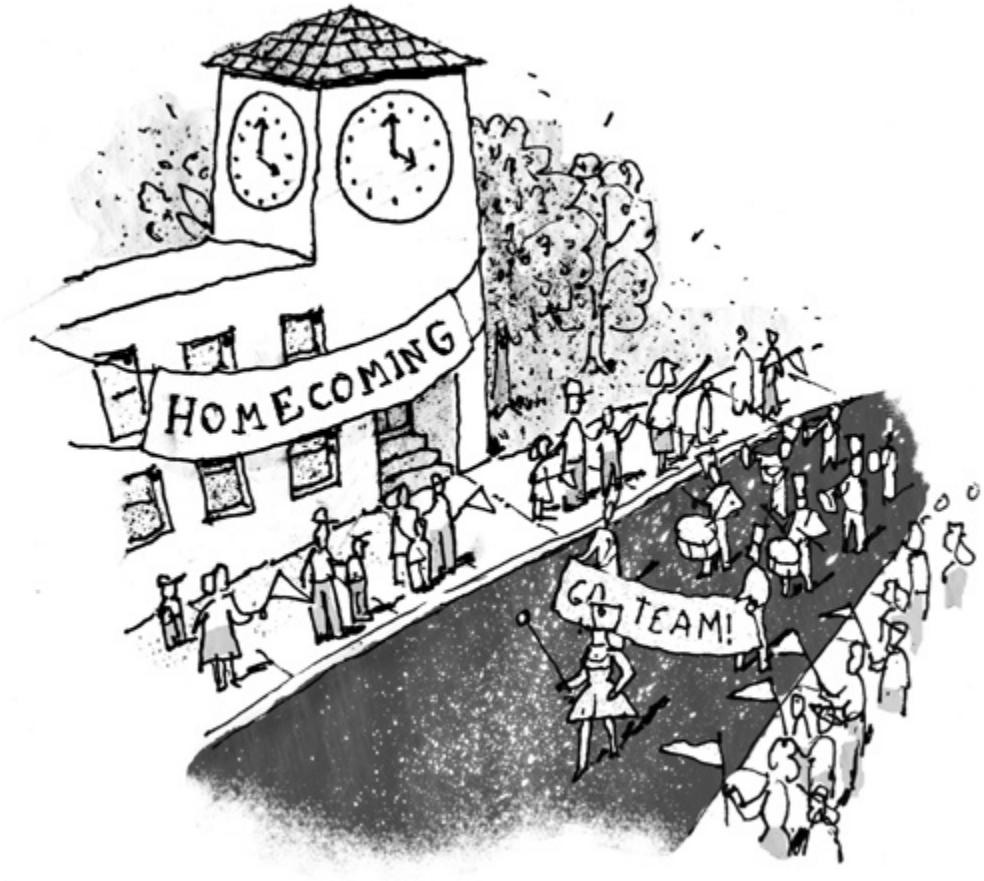
You will read several excerpts from Small Steps. *"The Diagnosis" is the first chapter in the book and subsequent chapter numbers reflect those in the original text.*

I never thought it would happen to me. Before a polio **vaccine** was developed, I knew that polio killed or **crippled** thousands of people, mainly children, each year, but I never expected it to invade my body, to paralyze *my* muscles.

Polio is a highly **contagious** disease. In 1949, there were 42,033 cases reported in the United States. One of those was a twelve-year-old girl in Austin, Minnesota:

Peg Schulze. Me.

My ordeal began on a Friday early in September. In school that morning, I glanced at the clock often, eager for the **Homecoming**



parade at four o'clock. As a seventh-grader, it was my first chance to take part in the Homecoming fun. For a week, my friends and I had spent every spare moment working on the seventh-grade **float**, and we were sure it would win first prize.

My last class before lunch was chorus. I loved to sing, and we were practicing a song whose lyrics are the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. Usually the words "Give me your tired, your poor …" brought goosebumps to my arms, but on Homecoming day, I was distracted by a twitching muscle in my left thigh. As I sang, a section of my blue skirt popped up and down as if jumping beans lived in my leg.

I pressed my hand against my thigh, trying to make the muscle be still, but it leaped and jerked beneath my fingers. I stretched my leg forward and rotated the ankle. Twitch, twitch. Next I tightened my leg muscles for a few seconds and then relaxed them. Nothing helped.

The bell rang. When I started toward my locker, my legs **buckled** as if I had nothing but cotton inside my skin. I collapsed, scattering my books on the floor.

Someone yelled, "Peg fainted," but I knew I had not fainted because my eyes stayed open and I was conscious. I sat on the floor for a moment.

"Are you all right?" my friend Karen asked as she helped me stand up.

"Yes. I don't know what happened."

"You look pale."

"I'm fine," I insisted. "Really."

I put my books in my locker and went home for lunch, as I did every day.

Two days earlier, I'd gotten a sore throat and headache. Now I also felt weak, and my back hurt. What rotten timing, I thought, to get sick on Homecoming day.

Although my legs felt wobbly, I walked the twelve blocks home. I didn't tell my mother about the fall or about my headache and other problems because I knew she would make me stay home.

I was glad to sit down to eat lunch. Maybe, I thought, I should not have stayed up so late the night before. Or maybe I'm just hungry.

When I reached for my milk, my hand shook so hard I couldn't pick up the glass. I grasped it with both hands; they trembled so badly that milk sloshed over the side.

Mother put her hand on my forehead. "You feel hot," she said. "You're going straight to bed."

It was a relief to lie down. I wondered why my back hurt; I hadn't lifted anything heavy. I couldn't imagine why I was so tired, either. I felt as if I had not slept in days.

I fell asleep right away and woke three hours later with a stiff neck. My back hurt even more than before, and now my legs ached as well. Several times I had painful muscle **spasms** in my legs and toes. The muscles tightened until my knees bent and my toes curled, and I couldn't straighten my legs or toes until the spasms passed.

I looked at the clock; the Homecoming parade started in fifteen minutes.

"I want to go to the parade," I said.

Mother stuck a thermometer in my mouth, said, "One hundred and two," and called the doctor. The seventh-grade float would have to win first place without me. I went back to sleep.

Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

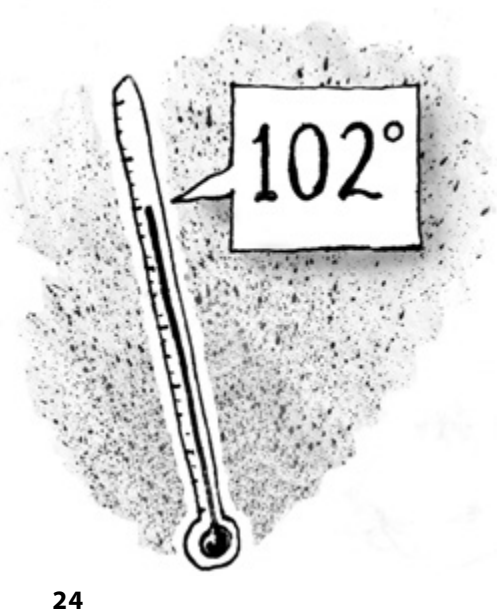
Chapter 1: The Diagnosis (Part 2)

by Peg Kehret

Dr. Wright came, took my temperature, listened to my breathing, and talked with Mother. Mother sponged my forehead with a cold cloth. I dozed, woke, and slept again.

At midnight, I began to vomit. Mother and Dad helped me to the bathroom; we all assumed I had the flu.

Dr. Wright returned before breakfast the next morning and took my temperature again. "Still one hundred and two," he said. He helped me sit up, with my feet dangling over the side of the bed. He tapped my knees with his rubber mallet; this was supposed to make my legs jerk. They didn't. They hung **limp** and unresponsive.



I was too **woozy** from pain and fever to care.

He ran his fingernail across the bottom of my foot, from the heel to the toes. It felt awful, but I couldn't

pull my foot away. He did the same thing on the other foot, with the same effect. I wished he would leave me alone so I could sleep.

"I need to do a **spinal tap** on her," he told my parents. "Can you take her to the hospital right away?"

When Dr. Wright got the results, he asked my parents to go to another room. While I dozed again, he told them the **diagnosis**, and they returned alone to tell me.

Mother held my hand.

"You have polio," Dad said, as he stroked my hair back from my forehead. "You will need to go to a special hospital for polio patients, in Minneapolis."

Polio! Panic shot through me, and I began to cry. How could I have polio? I didn't know anyone who had the disease. Where did the **virus** come from? How did it get in my body?

I didn't want to have polio; I didn't want to leave my family and go to a hospital one hundred miles away.

As we drove home to pack, I sat slumped in the back seat. "How long will I have to stay in the hospital?" I asked.

"Until you're well," Mother said.

When we got home, I was not allowed to leave the car, not even to say good-bye to Grandpa, who lived with us, or to B.J., my dog. We could not take a chance of spreading the deadly virus. Our orders were strict: I must **contaminate** no one.

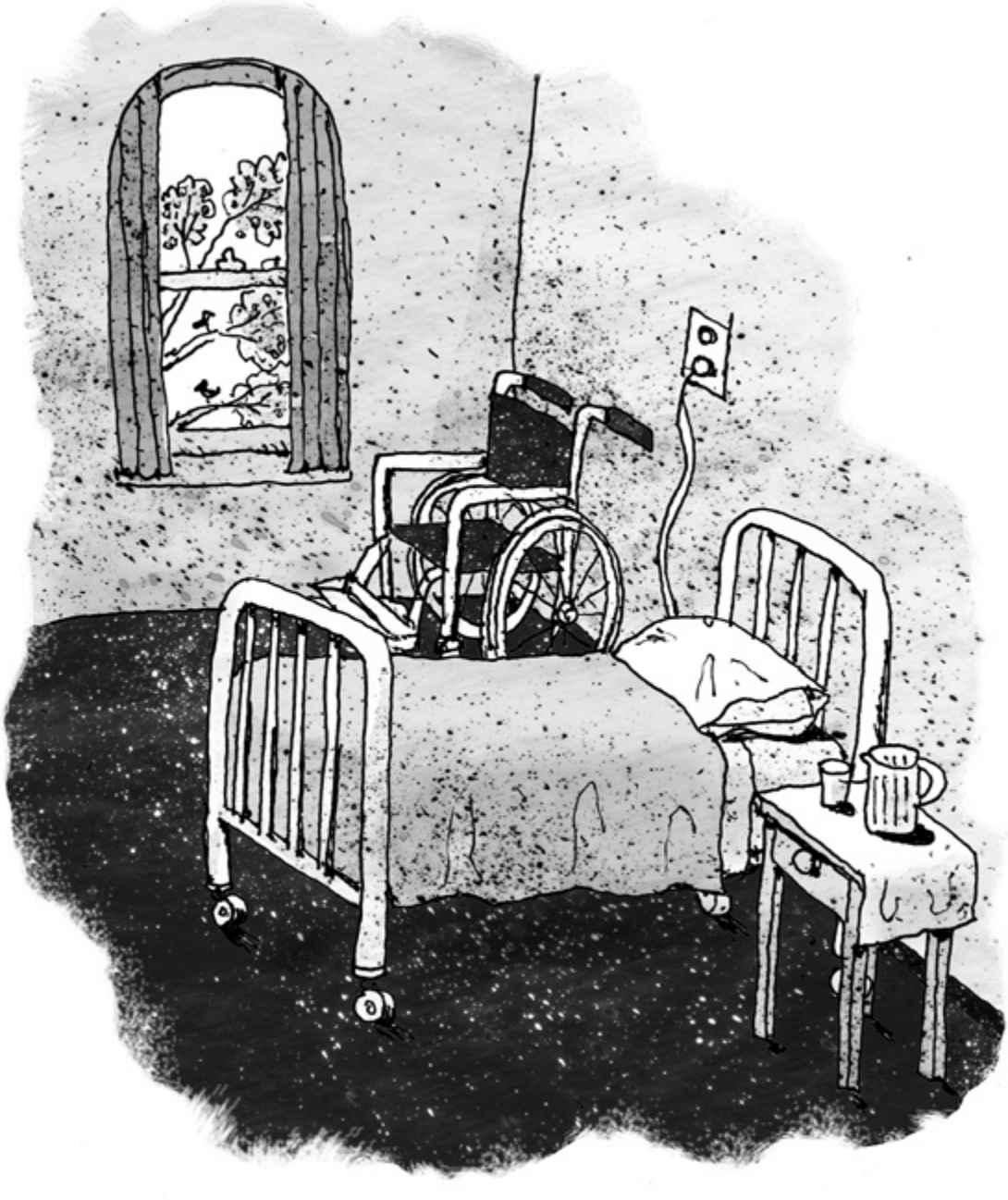
"Karen called," Mother said when she returned with a suitcase. "The seventh-grade float won second prize."

I was too sick and frightened to care.

Grandpa waved at me through the car window. Tears **glistened** on his cheeks. I had never seen my grandfather cry.

Later that morning, I walked into the **isolation ward** of the Sheltering Arms Hospital in Minneapolis and went to bed in a private room. No one was allowed in except the doctors and nurses, and they wore masks. My parents stood outside on the grass, waving bravely and blowing kisses through the window. Exhausted, feverish, and scared, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I was paralyzed.



Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 3: An Oxygen Tent and a Chocolate Milkshake

by Peg Kehret

After Peg is rushed to the hospital at the end of "The Diagnosis," she grows sicker and her ***paralysis*** *continues. She is placed in an oxygen tent to help her breathe, and has trouble eating and drinking, until her parents take a risk and take things into their own hands.*

Because of my fever, it was important for me to drink lots of liquid. I tried to drink some ice water each time my parents and the nurses held the glass for me. I was also given apple juice, grape juice, and 7-Up, but they were no easier to swallow than water. I was not offered milk even though I drank milk at home. Because milk creates **phlegm**, or **mucus**, in the throat, patients with **bulbar polio** were not allowed any milk or ice cream for fear it would make them choke.

One evening, a particularly patient nurse **coaxed** me to drink some 7-Up. She put one hand behind my head and lifted it gently, to make it easier for me to swallow. "Just take little sips," she said.

I wanted to drink the 7-Up, to please her and because I was thirsty. I sucked a mouthful through the straw, but when I tried to swallow, my throat didn't work and all the 7-Up came out my nose. As the fizzy liquid stung the inside of my nose, I sputtered and choked.

The choking made it hard to get my breath, and that frightened me. If I couldn't breathe, I would be put in the **iron lung**.

After that, I didn't want to drink. I was afraid it would come out my nose again; I was afraid of choking. Only the constant urging of my parents and the nurses got enough fluids into me.

Eight days after my polio was **diagnosed**, my fever still stayed at one hundred two degrees. My breathing was shallow, the painful muscle spasms continued, and every inch of my body hurt. It was like having a bad case of the flu that never ended. My only bits of pleasure in the long hours of pain were the brief visits from my parents and looking at the little teddy bear that Art had sent.

On the afternoon of the eighth day, Mother said, "We can't go on like this. You need more **nourishment**. You'll never get well if you don't swallow something besides water and juice. Isn't there anything that sounds good? Think hard. If you could have anything you wanted to eat or drink, what would it be?"

"A chocolate milkshake," I said.

NO MILK, my chart stated. NO ICE CREAM.

Mother told a nurse, "Peg would like a chocolate milkshake."

"We can't let her have a milkshake," the nurse replied. "I'm sorry."

"She needs nourishment," Mother declared, "especially liquid. She thinks she can drink a milkshake."

"She could choke on it," the nurse said. "It's absolutely against the doctor's orders." She left the room, muttering about interfering parents.

"You rest for a bit," Mother told me. "We'll be back soon." She and Dad went out.

They returned in less than an hour, carrying a white paper bag. The nurse followed them into my room.

"I won't be responsible for this," she said, as she watched Dad take a milkshake container out of the bag. "Milk and ice cream are the worst things you could give her."

Dad took the lid off the container while Mother unwrapped a paper straw.

"We know you have to follow the rules," Dad said, "but we don't. This is our daughter, and she has had nothing to eat for over a week. If a chocolate milkshake is what she wants, and she thinks she can drink it, then a chocolate milkshake is what she is going to have."

He handed the milkshake to Mother, who put the straw in it.

"What if she chokes to death?" the nurse demanded. "How are you going to feel if you lose her because of a milkshake?"

"If something doesn't change soon," Dad replied, "we're going to lose her anyway. At least this way, we'll know we tried everything we could."

Mother thrust the milkshake under the oxygen tent and guided the straw between my lips.

I sucked the cold, thick chocolate shake into my mouth, held it there for a second, and swallowed. It slipped smoothly down my throat. For the first time since I got sick, something tasted good.

I took another mouthful and swallowed it. I had to work at swallowing, but the milkshake went down. The next mouthful went down, too, and the one after that. I drank the whole milkshake and never choked once, even though I was lying flat on my back the whole time.

When I made a loud slurping sound with my straw because the container was empty, my parents clapped and cheered. The relieved nurse cheered with them.

Within an hour, my temperature dropped. That chocolate milkshake may have saved my life.

Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 7: Star Patient Surprises Everyone (Part 1)

by Peg Kehret

After successfully swallowing the milkshake Peg starts to improve. She has an easier time eating, her pain lessens, and breathing is easier. Eventually she is transferred to another room, where her roommate is an eight year old boy named Tommy, who is also paralyzed with polio, and needs the help of an iron lung to breathe. Peg and Tommy enjoy listening to the Lone Ranger radio program together. Peg also begins intense physical therapy, in the hopes that it will eventually relieve her paralysis.

On October first, I lay in bed with my eyes closed, rehearsing a new joke. As I imagined Dr. Bevis's laughter, my leg itched. Without thinking, I scratched the itch. Then, as I realized what I had done, my eyes sprang open.

Had I really used my hand? After three weeks of **paralysis**, I was almost afraid to believe it, for fear I had dreamed or imagined the movement. Holding my breath, I tried again. The fingers on my left hand moved back and forth.

"I CAN MOVE MY HAND!!" I yelled.

Two nurses rushed into the room.

"Look! I can move my left hand!" I wiggled my fingers **jubilantly**.

"Get Dr. Bevis," said one of the nurses. She smiled at me as the other nurse hurried out of the room.

"Can she really do it?" asked Tommy. "Can she move her hand?"

"Yes," said the nurse. "Her fingers are moving."

"Hooray!" shrieked Tommy. "The Lone Ranger rides again!"

Dr. Bevis came bounding in. "What is all this shouting about?"

Feeling triumphant, I moved my fingers.

"Try to turn your hand over," he said.

I tried. The hand didn't go all the way, but it moved. It definitely moved. It was Christmas and my birthday and the Fourth of July, all at the same time. I could move my hand!

Dr. Bevis turned my hand palm up. "Try to bend your arm," he said.

My hand lifted an inch or so off the bed before it dropped back down.

"What about the other hand?" he asked. "Is there any movement in your right hand?"

To my complete astonishment, my right hand moved, too. Bending at the elbow, my lower arm raised several inches and I waved my fingers at Dr. Bevis.

By then, I was so excited I felt as if I could jump from that bed and run laps around the hospital.

"This is wonderful," Dr. Bevis said. "This is terrific!"

I agreed.

"When your mother makes her daily phone call," Dr. Bevis said, "she is going to be thrilled."

In the next few days, I improved rapidly. Soon I could use both hands, then my arms. I was able to sit up, starting with two minutes and working up to half an hour. Movement returned to my legs, too. My arms were still extremely weak, but I learned to feed myself again, which did wonders for both my attitude and my appetite. I was no longer totally helpless.

With my bed cranked up, I could balance a book on my stomach and turn the pages myself. I had always liked to read, and now books provided hours of entertainment. The hospital had a small library; day after day, I lost myself in books.

I began reading aloud to Tommy. I quit only when my voice got hoarse, but even then he always begged me to read just one more page. I preferred reading silently because it was faster, but I felt sorry for Tommy who was still stuck in the iron lung, unable to hold a book. I was clearly getting better; he was not. Each day, I read to him until my voice gave out.

Dr. Bevis continued to praise and encourage me. Mrs. Crab bragged about my progress. The nurses called me their star patient. I realized that no one had thought I would ever regain the use of my arms and legs.

A week after I first moved my hand, Dr. Bevis said he wanted to see if I could stand by myself. First, he helped me sit on the edge of the bed. Then, with a nurse on each side, I was eased off the bed until my feet touched the floor. Each nurse had a hand firmly under one of my armpits, holding me up.

"Lock your knees," Dr. Bevis instructed. "Stand up straight."

I tried to do as he said.

"We're going to let go," he said, "but we won't let you fall. When the nurses drop their arms, see if you can stand by yourself."

Tommy, my iron lung cheerleader, hollered, "Do it, kemo sabe! Do it!"

It was wonderful to feel myself in an upright position again. I was sure I would be able to stand alone. I even imagined taking a step or two.

"All right," Dr. Bevis said to the nurses. "Let go."

As soon as they released me, I toppled. Without support, my legs were like cooked spaghetti. The nurses and Dr. Bevis all grabbed me to keep me from crashing to the floor.

Disappointment filled me, and I could tell the others were disappointed, too. The strength had returned so quickly to my arms and hands that everyone expected my legs to be better also.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I tried."

"It will happen," Dr. Bevis said.

They helped me back into bed, and I was grateful to lie down again. Standing for that short time, even with help, had exhausted me and made my backache.

The twice-daily hot packs and stretching continued, and so did my progress. Each small achievement, such as being able to wiggle the toes on one foot, was **heralded** with great joy. I had to keep my feet flat against a board at the foot of my bed to prevent them from drooping forward permanently, and I longed to lie in bed without that board.

Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 7: Star Patient Surprises Everyone (Part 2)

by Peg Kehret

Although I was delighted with every small accomplishment, I wondered why I got better and some of the other patients did not. Tommy might spend the rest of his life in the iron lung. It didn't seem fair.

I mentioned this to Dr. Bevis. "Some cases of polio are severe, and some are mild," he said. "When the polio virus completely destroys a nerve center, the muscles controlled by that center are **paralyzed** forever. If the damage is slight rather than total, the paralysis is temporary. Your muscles were severely weakened, but the nerve damage wasn't total. It's possible for weak muscles to gain back some of their strength."

"So Tommy's polio is worse than mine," I said.

"That's right. It also helped that your parents took you to the doctor right away. You were already here and diagnosed when you needed oxygen; some people who have **respiratory** polio are not that fortunate."

I remembered how hard it had been to breathe, and how much the oxygen tent had helped.

Dr. Bevis continued, "Most people think they have the flu and don't get medical help until paralysis sets in. By the time they learn they have polio, and get to a hospital that's equipped to treat them, the respiratory patients often have to go straight into an iron lung. They don't get hot packs or physical therapy until they can breathe on their own again, which might be several months later. The sooner the Sister Kenny treatments are started, the more they help." He smiled at me. "You are one lucky girl."

But it wasn't all luck, I thought; it was quick action by my parents. They helped create my good luck.

"I've been wondering something else, too," I said. "How did I get polio when not one other person in my town got it?"

"Many people have polio and never know it," Dr. Bevis said. "They are highly contagious, but because their symptoms are so slight, they don't see a doctor. There are probably thousands of cases of polio every year that are so mild they are never **diagnosed**."

"So I caught it from someone who didn't know they had it," I said. It seemed unbelievable to me that anyone could have polio and not realize it.

Mail was delivered every afternoon, and I looked forward to a daily letter from my mother. Most of her letters were signed, "Love, Mother and Dad," but a few were signed with a muddy paw print.

Those were from B.J., telling me he had chased a cat or buried a bone. Grandpa depended on Mother to tell me any news, but he sent a gift each week when my parents came to visit.

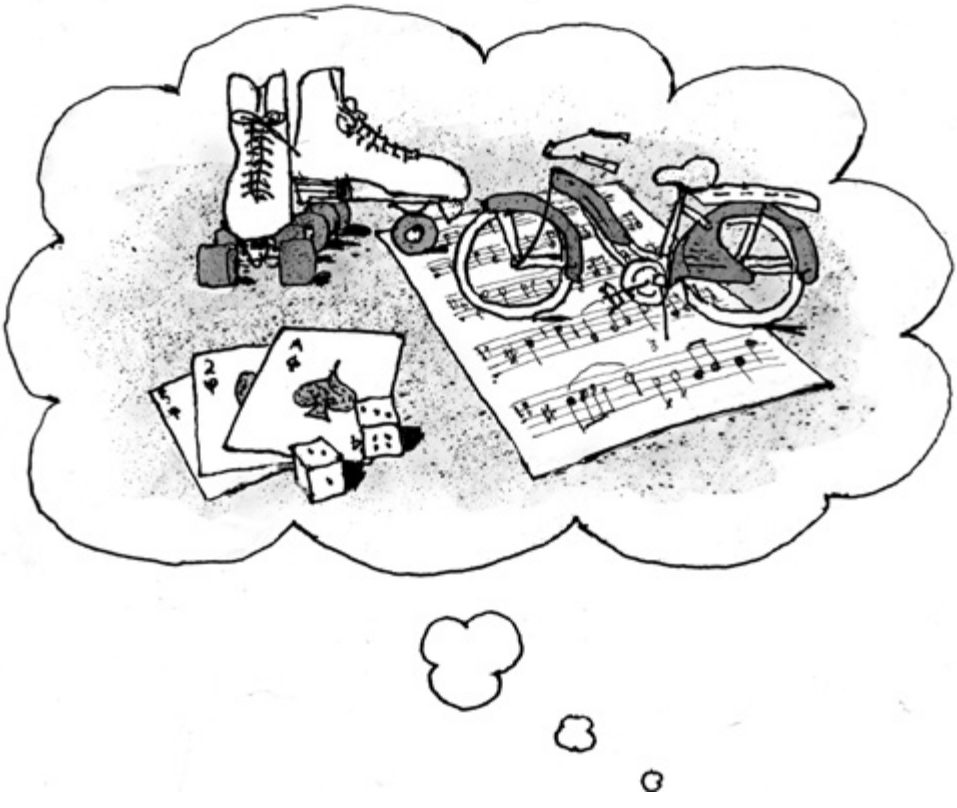
Art wrote about college life and sent me a new teddy bear just like the one that got burned.

One mail delivery included a big brown packet from my school in Austin. When I opened it, dozens of letters from my classmates tumbled out. Karen wrote about a student petition to change the rules so girls could wear pants to school instead of the required dresses. Another girl complained that her new haircut was too short; a third was outraged at the basketball referee.

I had the strange feeling that I was reading about a different lifetime. The other kids were upset about such unimportant things.

Just a few weeks earlier, I, too, had worried about clothes and hair and the basketball team. Now none of this mattered. I had faced death. I had lived with **excruciating** pain and with loneliness and uncertainty about the future. Bad haircuts and lost ball games would never bother me again.

Even the petition to allow girls to wear pants to school, a cause I supported, failed to excite me. I would happily wear a **gunnysack**, I thought, if I could walk into the school.



"Be glad you aren't here," one boy wrote. "You aren't missing anything but hard tests and too much homework."

He's wrong, I thought. I miss my own room and playing with B.J. and helping Grandpa in the garden. I miss my piano lessons and roller-skating and licking the pan when Mother makes fudge. I miss visiting my aunts and uncles. I miss riding my bike with Karen and playing Monopoly with Richard.

I put the letters aside, knowing I was changed forever. My world was now the hospital. Would I have anything in common with my classmates when I went home? I felt closer now to Tommy, whose head was the only part of him I had ever seen, than I did to the kids who used to be my dearest friends. Tommy understood what it was like to have polio; my school friends could never know.

Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 13: The Great Accordion Concert

by Peg Kehret

After Peg regains movement, she is transferred to Sheltering Arms, a rehabilitation hospital. There she lives with a group of other girls her age who are also recovering from polio. Peg begins to use a wheelchair and works hard in physical and occupational therapy to get stronger so that she can walk and move easily again. Her parents come to visit every week and she and her roommates have fun together, even as they face the challenges of polio.

Although I had not yet mastered the fine art of moving the pile of marbles from spot to spot with my toes, I received a new challenge in **O.T.** I was going to learn to play the accordion.

Certain muscles of the arms and hands are used when pushing an accordion in and out, and it happened that I needed help with those particular muscles. The Sheltering Arms owned an accordion, and Miss Ballard knew I'd had two years of piano lessons. She said the accordion was the perfect exercise for me.

From my very first attempt, I hated the accordion. It was heavy and awkward, and pushing it in and out made my arms ache. The trick of playing a **melody** on the keyboard with one hand, pushing

the proper chord buttons with the other hand, and at the same time pushing and pulling on the accordion itself was completely beyond me.

"It would be easier if you asked me to juggle and tap dance at the same time," I said.

"You just need practice," Miss Ballard replied. "Try a little longer."

I did try however, even when I got the correct right-hand note with the proper left-hand chord and pushed air through the bellows at the same time, I didn't care for the sound. I had never liked accordion music, and my efforts during O.T. did nothing to change my mind.

When my parents heard about the accordion, Mother said, "What fun! You've always loved your piano lessons."

"That's different," I said. "I like the way a piano sounds."

"You already know how to read music," Dad pointed out. "You will master that accordion in no time."

I insisted I would never be **adept** on the accordion, and Dad kept saying it would be a breeze.

I finally said, "Why don't *you* play it, if you think it's so easy?"

"All right. I will," said Dad, and off he went to the O.T. room to borrow the accordion.

He came back with the shoulder straps in place and an eager look on his face. My dad played piano by ear, so he didn't need sheet music. Even so, the sounds he produced could only be called squawks and squeaks.

He pushed and pulled. He punched the buttons. He grew red in the face. Beads of perspiration popped out on his bald spot. Something vaguely resembling the first few notes of "Beer Barrel Polka" emerged from the accordion, but they were accompanied by assorted other sounds, none of which could be called musical.

We girls covered our ears, made faces, and booed. We pointed our thumbs down. Mother laughed until tears ran down her cheeks.

Finally, Dad admitted defeat. Temporary defeat.

"I'll try again next week," he said. "Meanwhile, I want you to keep practicing."

"It will sound just as terrible next week," I said, but I agreed to work on my accordion technique awhile longer.

The following Sunday, we could hardly wait to tease Dad about his musical fiasco.

"When do we get the accordion concert?" Renée asked the minute my parents arrived.

"Wait!" exclaimed Alice. "I want to put in my earplugs."

We teased until Dad reluctantly agreed to try it again.

We snickered and tee-heed as he brought the O.T. accordion into the room. He sat on a chair and carefully adjusted the straps.

"Quit stalling," I said.

"What's the rush?" said Renée as she put her fingers in her ears.

Dad began to play. Instead of squeaks and squawks, he played "Beer Barrel Polka" **flawlessly**, from start to finish.

Our jaws dropped. We **gazed** at him and at each other in astonishment. When he finished the song, our questions exploded like a string of firecrackers. "How did you learn to play?" "Who taught you?" "Where did you get an accordion?" He simply smiled, while Mother applauded.

Then they told us the whole story. He had rented an accordion from a music store and practiced every spare second in order to surprise us with his concert.

"Can you play any other songs?" I asked.

"It took me all week to learn that one," Dad said.

"And he stayed up until midnight every night, practicing," Mother added.

After that, I didn't dare complain about my accordion sessions. I never did get as good at it as Dad got in just seven days, but I managed to produce a few recognizable tunes, and the effort did help strengthen my arm muscles and my fingers.

Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 14: Good-bye, Silver; Hello, Sticks

by Peg Kehret

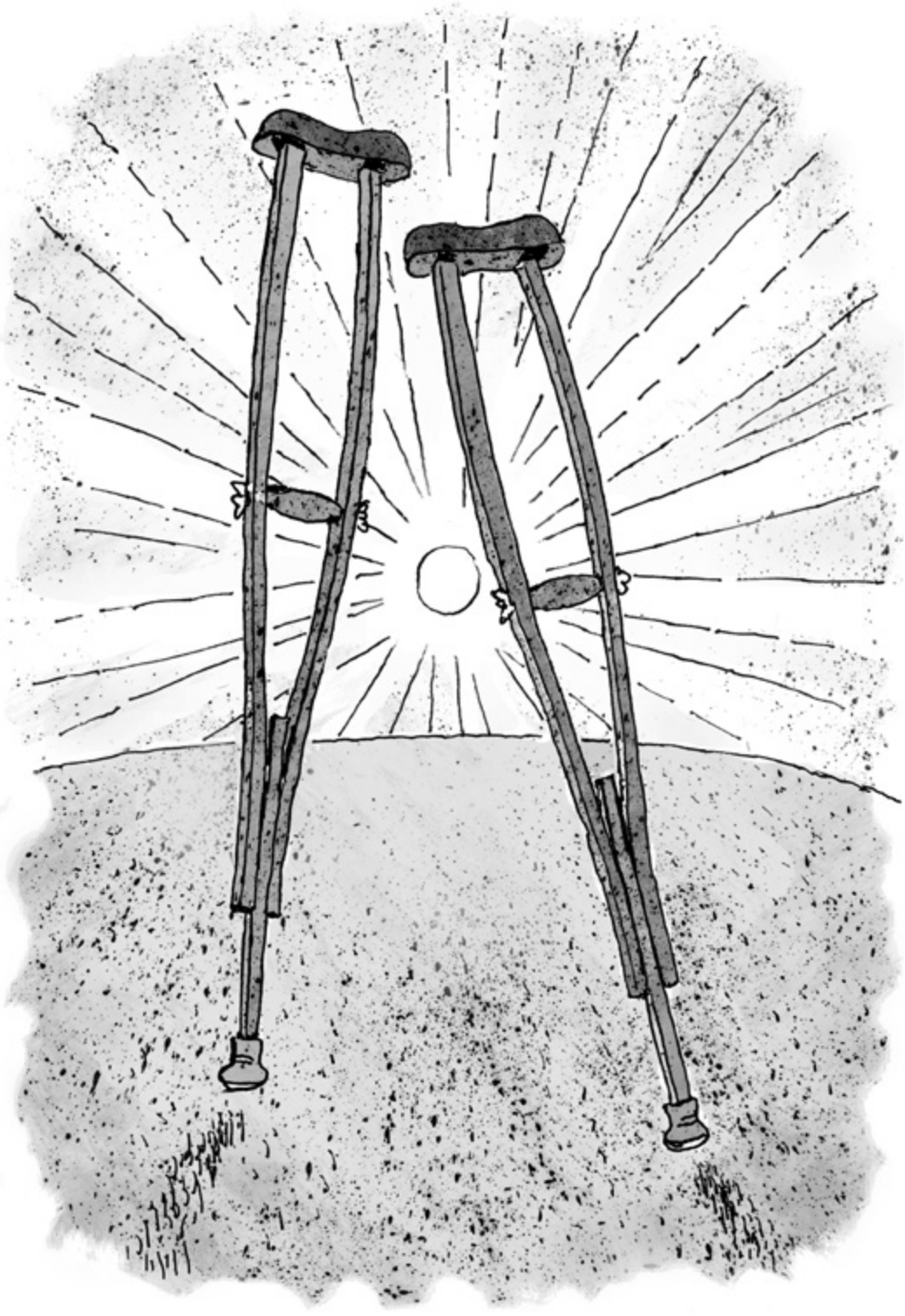
After weeks of intensive therapy, Peg is finally ready to walk again with her newly-arrived walking sticks.

Two weeks after I got my sticks, Miss Ballard told me I was strong enough to use them exclusively. I didn't need Silver anymore.

"You gave me a lot of good rides," I whispered as I patted Silver's side for the last time. I blinked back tears, feeling foolish. I had looked forward to this day for months, and now that it was here, I was all weepy about leaving my wheelchair behind.

Silver had carried me to school, distributed countless treats, and taken me safely to O.T., my sessions with Miss Ballard, visits with other patients, and special events in the sunroom. I'd had many fine times, including my thirteenth birthday, in that wheelchair. As I thought about them, I realized that even if I had never grown strong enough to leave Silver, I still would have been able to lead a happy life.

I took Silver for a farewell trip, which ended with a high-speed dash down the hall, a screech of brakes, and a final shout of "Hi, yo, Silver! Awa-a-ay!," Teetering on the two rear wheels, I tipped farther back than I had ever gone before. It was a terrific last ride.



Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

Chapter 18: Back to School

by Peg Kehret

In April, after months in hospitals and therapy at home, Peg is finally allowed to go back to school.

"Did the new braces work?" I asked.

Dorothy shook her head, no. "My brothers are building a ramp so I can get in and out of our house."

I was glad that she was going home, and sad that she would always need the wheelchair.

When it was time for us to leave, I hugged Dorothy; wondering if I would ever see her again. We promised to write often, and that promise held back my tears.

We had good intentions, but letters between me and my roommates slowed, in both directions. There were two new girls in 202 now.

About two weeks after she was discharged, I got a letter from Dorothy. "I wanted to leave Sheltering Arms more than anything," she wrote, "but now sometimes I wish I could go back. Isn't that silly?"

It wasn't silly to me. We were safe at the Sheltering Arms, cocooned in Room 202, where everyone understood what it was like to have polio. Getting around in the normal world, even in our own homes, was more difficult than hospital life.

In April, I got permission to return to school. I was still on my walking sticks, but I could go up and down stairs if I held the railing with both hands and had someone carry my sticks for me. I was slow because both feet had to touch every step, but I could make it.

Dad bought me a backpack for my books. I was to start by attending only in the mornings. If I could manage that, I would gradually work up to a full day.

On my first day back, I was so nervous my hands began to sweat and I was afraid the sticks would slip out of my grasp. What if people never quit staring? What if no one would carry my sticks up and down stairs for me? What if I couldn't get around in the crowded halls, and fell? Worst of all, what if I discovered that I was hopelessly behind the other kids in every class?

When I walked into my first-period class, which happened to be English, the students whistled and clapped and cheered, welcoming me back. All morning, kids begged for a turn to carry my sticks up or down the stairs. They offered to help me with the backpack. They walked ahead of me in the halls, clearing space.

Without knowing it, I had become a celebrity. Since I was the only person in Austin to get polio that year, the whole town had followed my progress while I was in the hospital. It seems all of Austin had been pulling for me, hoping I would walk again.

Rather than falling behind in my classes, it quickly became clear that I had remained equal or even pulled slightly ahead. By the end of the morning, I felt sure that I would pass the final exams.

My last class of the morning was chorus practice.

Thanks to all those songs in the dark, my singing voice was improved, even though I now used my stomach muscles rather than my diaphragm.

As I found my seat and placed my sticks on the floor beside me, I remembered how my skirt had jumped because of my twitching thigh muscle on Homecoming day; and how I had collapsed in the hall when chorus ended.

I had been gone seven months. I had been gone a lifetime. Although I returned on walking sticks, moving slowly and taking small steps, I knew that in many ways, I was stronger than when I left.

I opened my music and began to sing.

Glossary

A

adept, adj. very skilled

antibody, n. protein created by the body to protect itself from a disease

anticipation, n. expectation, a feeling of looking forward to something

B

beneficiary, n. person who gets a benefit or advantage from an action

buckled, v. bent or collapsed

bulbar polio, n. polio that affects the brain

C

castor oil, n. vegetable oil from the castor oil plant, used as a natural laxative

character trait, n. an adjective that describes a character.

chronological, adj. organized in time order, the order in which something happened

chuckled, v. laughed quietly

coaxed, v. persuaded, asked nicely

confiscated, v. taken away

contagious, adj. capable of being passed from one person to another

contaminate, v. to infect

crevices, n. narrow space

crippled, adj. disabled, unable to walk normally

D

diagnosed, v. identified an illness

diagnosis, n. specific disease or other cause of an illness

E

edible, n. possible to eat

embedded, adj. set firmly in

enticing, adj. appealing, attractive

epidemic, n. quick and widespread outbreak of a disease

excruciating, adj. extremely painful

F

feminist, n. an advocate for equal rights for women

fiction n. a made-up story

first person, adj. told from the narrator's perspective; "I" is the narrator

firsthand account, n. version of a story or event written or told by a person who actually experienced it

flawlessly, adv. perfectly, without imperfections

float, n. a decorated sculpture or scene in a parade

forget-me-nots, n. small blue flower

fragrant, adj. having a strong smell, often pleasant

G

gazed, v. looked at intently

glisten, v. to shine

grimace, n. facial expression that indicates pain or distaste

guava, n. tropical fruit

gunnysack, n. bag made of burlap or similar rough cloth

H

heralded, n. announced

Homecoming, n. fall celebration in many American high schools and colleges that welcomes back graduates with a football game and other activities

I

illegal, adj. against the law

implications, n. something that is suggested

iron lung, n. machine that helps polio patients breathe

isolation, n. keeping infectious people separate, apart

J

jubilantly, adv. joyfully

L

laden, adj. heavily covered

limp, adj. a wilted, not firm

lugged, v. carry a heavy thing with great effort

M

melody, n. a tune

metaphor, n. a literary device that compares things like a simile, but without using *like* or *as*

mucus, n. thick, slimy liquid manufactured in the respiratory passages, especially the lungs and the throat

N

nonfiction n. a true story

nourishment, n. food and other substances that help the body grow, heal, and thrive

O

O.T., n. occupational therapy, exercises and projects used to help patients recover skills for daily life

P

paralysis, n. being unable to move

paralyzed, adj. unable to move

personal narrative n. a piece of nonfiction writing told in the first person by someone who was involved in the events being described.

phlegm, n. thick, slimy liquid manufactured in the respiratory passages, especially the lungs and the throat

plow, v. to break up earth in preparation for planting

plunge, v. jump or dive energetically

pores, n. a small opening in the skin

prickly, adj. pointy

pulpit, n. a platform in church from which the minister speaks

R

respiratory, adj. related to breathing

S

scored, v. cut a line on the surface, often in preparation of cutting through

secondhand account, n. version of a story or event written or told by a person who did not experience it but gathered information from people who did, from books, or from other sources

sermon, n. a serious speech on a moral issue, often given in church

simile, n. a literary device that compares things using *like* or *as*

sin, n. violation of a moral principle

spasm, n. violent muscle contraction

spinal tap, n. a medical test taking fluid from around the spinal cord

striding, v. walking with long steps

structure, n. the basic way a story or essay is organized

T

tempting, adj. appealing, attractive

tinge, n. a small amount of color

U

unique, adj. one of a kind

V

vaccine, n. medicine given to prevent catching a disease

virus, n. a tiny creature that infects a living organism with a disease

W

woozy, adj. dizzy, weak

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Schools

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