

WE'RE STILL HERE

Setting: *Any appropriate space to be used as a small stage in front of your audience. Slightly to the L, five or six chairs should be roughly arranged in a semi-circle, leaving room for a wheelchair and/or scooter in between. Adapt this to your needs. Small area to the R holds one '50's institutional wheelchair behind a rolling screen.*

PETE (Steps to the right of chairs. Stands stage R, speaking as announcer) The Post-Polio Players now bring you their latest production, WE'RE STILL HERE! The scene: A post-polio support group meeting room, minutes before the meeting. Take it away...!

(Pete goes off R. Sally and Carla, who have been frozen in place near each other on stage, now come to life, chatting inaudibly)

SALLY (looks off R Gestures to Howard) Hey, Howard—get yourself in here, friend. Where you been lately?

HOWARD *(Howard, speaking loudly, enters on scooter, from R; takes place near Sally)* Would you believe—I've been on a Caribbean cruise. Had the time of my life, sunning on the beach, sipping piña coladas. That IS the life for me.

CARLA We were just talking about the old days, Howard. Remember 1952?

HOWARD Do I remember 1952? Are you kidding me? That's the year I got polio. Class of '52, that's me. What a summer that was. My mom kept saying polio was such a killer. Wouldn't let me near the pool. Wouldn't let me go to birthday parties. Wouldn't let me do a darned thing that was fun. When you're eight, that's really a bummer. She said I couldn't risk being around other people 'cause there was so much polio. So guess what happened in August, anyway!

SALLY I got polio in 1955, right after the Salk vaccine came out. Our timing was sure off for that one. I was only three, and honestly I don't remember much about it. We were living in Wichita then, and I do know a neighbor boy ended up in an iron lung. He hung in there for about nine or ten years, but then his body just couldn't do it any more, I guess.

CARLA 1952 was the year I had polio—same year as Howard. The first of June. Remember the old Mobile General Hospital? (use local hospital name)

SALLY You mean the big old white building near the corner of St. Anthony and Broad Street? (use local street names)

CARLA Yes, I was there for two weeks in isolation. Of course, my family couldn't go with me into isolation, but bless their hearts, they stayed in the courtyard all night that first night, outside my room.

SALLY Were you scared?

CARLA Not really scared—well, maybe a little bit. I was ten—to tell the truth, I didn't really understand what was happening.

HOWARD Then you went home after two weeks?

CARLA Oh, no. Then they transferred me to the polio ward for two months while I had therapy.

HOWARD Yes, yes, yes. Therapy. Did you get Miss Brown, Carla--Brownie?

(Sally, Howard, and Carla freeze in place as screen on wheels is rolled in front of them, obscuring them and thus revealing a young Carla, sitting in wooden wheelchair, and Miss Brown, dressed in white uniform, standing by her side.)

BROWNIE Hi Carla. Ready for therapy?

CARLA No Miss Brown. I don't want to do any therapy today.

BROWNIE Oh, but Carla, you know we can't skip a day. We have to keep those muscles stretched out.

CARLA But I went to the whirlpool this morning. Won't that be enough for today? Besides, I'm sure I had plenty of those smelly hot packs to last forever, Miss Brown. Couldn't we skip all this once?

BROWNIE Well, let's just do a little exercising. We won't get on the table today. We'll just do it here in your chair. *(kneels down and begins to lift Carla's leg)*

(Carla shows pain on her face as Brownie begins exercises)

BROWNIE You're such a good patient, Carla. You're making excellent progress. You'll soon be up and around, back on your feet.

CARLA *(still showing discomfort, but pleased by Brownie's words)* Oh, I can't wait. I want to get back to skating and dancing. You know, I was learning to skate backward when I got sick.

BROWNIE We'll see how it goes for you.

CARLA My granny is praying for a miracle. She had Oral Roberts send her an anointed cloth she puts on my legs. Have you known anyone to be cured this way?

BROWNIE No, I've not had a polio patient cured miraculously. But I've seen lots of people work hard and be able to get up and around again, at least on braces and crutches.

CARLA Oh, Miss Brown, I'll work harder. I don't want those braces on my legs.

BROWNIE We'll see. Let's exercise those arms now to keep them strong...

(Miss Brown reaches for Carla's arm as screen is rolled back in front of them, revealing Sally, Howard, and Carla, who come to life again in first set.)

HOWARD Sure stirs up memories, thinking about the old days, doesn't it. You know, I must have gone into Mobile General about the time you left, Carla. I was pretty much totally paralyzed in the beginning. Then after about three months, they sent me to Warm Springs, down in Georgia.

SALLY Warm Springs? That's the rehab center President Roosevelt started, isn't it?

HOWARD The same. That place was something. Huge campus. All white. Beautiful colonnades. *(moves around, demonstrating locations of areas he describes)* They had everything. Pool for exercising. Therapy rooms. We all had to go to school, you know. They had a church, a movie theater, a snack shop—WITH Hershey bars, thank you very much. There was this huge sort of lounging area with a grand piano, Georgia Hall, they called it. Windows from floor to ceiling. Never saw anything like it. And the dining room had a stage at one end, where the older patients put on productions for us. *(laughing)* You should have seen ol' Joe Elder making his wheelchair dance!

CARLA All of that in a rehab center? My word—sounds like a little town to me.

HOWARD That's not the half of it, either. Once the Navy Band showed up for a concert in our outdoor exercise courtyard. They all the time had little performances there. They had this juggler once that you simply wouldn't believe. My arms were still too weak to propel my chair, but all I had to do was holler out "Push Boy," and someone would come running to take me where I needed to go.

SALLY Didn't you feel sort of alone, though, so far away from home?

HOWARD Well, I roomed with three other guys, and the place was crawling with patients. But sometimes I did miss my family, especially my pesky little brother Tommy.

CARLA You two ever wonder if FDR had post-polio syndrome? He looked so weak and tired toward the end.

HOWARD Wouldn't doubt it. Makes ya think about a lot of things, doesn't it? You know—we wouldn't have the vaccine if it weren't for him. And now we have the World

Health Organization and the Rotarians and others just about to rid the entire world of polio. What would FDR think!

CARLA Yea, and what would be his next goal? Who would know better than he would that somehow we gotta come up with better treatment for the millions of polio survivors still here?

SALLY (*looking off R as they are joined by Wendy, in wheelchair*) Look who's here! How ya doing, Wendy?

WENDY (*enters with doughnut box on her lap*) Hi guys. Brought a few doughnuts along for us to snack on during the meeting today. Anybody make the coffee yet?

HOWARD That's Pete's job this month. He'll be along soon.

WENDY (*setting doughnut box down on empty chair as she converses and pulls up near Carla.*) Boy am I glad to see you all today. Am I the only person in the world having trouble getting a new wheelchair? This darned thing is eight years old and on its last legs (*looks to Sally*)—that's a joke, honey (*Sally laughs*)—and now Medicare decides they won't contribute a penny to a new one unless I am "bed or chair bound" in the house. What kind of deal is that?

SALLY You mean the fact that you can't walk from the parking lot to the store doesn't count? You have to be unable to make it from your bed to the bathroom, too?

WENDY That's it. I can't believe these people. Clearly they don't understand what post-polio folks go through. It's beginning to sound as if they want to keep us at home, isn't it. There'll be no wasting of Medicare money by helping a polio survivor enjoy a ride through the park in a chair they help fund.

HOWARD That count for scooters, too?

WENDY Far as I can tell it does.

HOWARD Whoa! How many years have I been teaching when I couldn't have gotten through half the day without my scooter, even though I can walk around the house fine? Bet there're a lot of people like me who don't have the stamina to make it any length of time without wheels.

CARLA Anybody know a good shoe repair person? The man who's helped me fit these ancient braces of mine onto my shoes all these years retired last month. Any ideas?

SALLY (*looking off R as Pete walks in*) It's Pete! Hurrah! And not a minute too soon, Pete. We've been dreaming of that nice, hot coffee you're about to brew up to go with Wendy's doughnuts.

PETE Glad to be here, gang. I'll get right with it and you'll have that coffee before you know it. *(starts making coffee—in mime)*

HOWARD Back to you, Carla, there's supposed to be a shoe guy who can do *anything* over in Riverview Mall. You might give him a buzz. Or how about checking in with The Brace Place over on Duling Street?

WENDY Any idea what's on today's program for the meeting?

CARLA I heard a massage therapist is coming over to talk about stress and demonstrate how massage works. Gonna have a drawing for some free massages, maybe.

PETE Really? Thought I heard someone say Dr. Ritter, the pulmonologist, was going to be here for a Q&A about underventilation.

WENDY Gosh, I was hoping for some advice on getting funding for a new wheelchair.

SALLY Well, it won't be long now. Look who I see coming down the hallway. *(shouting off R to unseen individuals)* Hiya Betty and Cal! How're the Sullivans doing today?

BETTY *(enters speaking from R with Cal)* Doin' well, Sally. Guess what we brought with us for our skit practice today! *(she and Cal unfurl large sign reading "The WE'RE STILL HERE Players Present A DAY IN THE LIFE—A Post-Polio Skit in One Act." and display it, moving around, so everyone in audience has a chance to read it.)*

(Entire cast pulls to front, shouting affirmative "Yeas" "Hurrahs," until they form a row in front of the audience. Then, starting stage right, they introduce themselves by their names, when they had polio, and what they have done in this community over the years, as in "I'm Marcia Bedlow. I had polio in July 1960 at age 2. I've been a dentist here in Centerville for twenty-five years." Each in turn does this, and when the last one is finished, all together shout "WE'RE STILL HERE" and end the skit with a bow.)

(After the above, as many as four cast members, one at a time, step forward to tell something about their group, such as "We're the Whatever Polio Survivors Support Group, going strong here in Capitol City since 1985." Then the next person takes over with something like "There are 50 of us, meeting each Monday at Idles Lodge, offering support, information, and education to each other as we learn what's new about Post-Polio Syndrome or simply lend emotional backing for each other." Then the third person says something like this: "We're proud of the newsletter we distribute to 400 polio survivors around the state and of the many projects we accomplish each year. This year we're helping the Med Center with an important study on muscle atrophy in those with Post-Polio Syndrome.")

Say whatever is true for your group, making each person's contribution short and as lively as possible. You may want to highlight certain words to throw a bit of the unexpected into the presentation by writing a word on a poster board in bright colors or glitter, then popping each up for the audience to see as it is being said.)

PETE (*In his "announcer" voice*) At the same time, a million other polio survivors at home in the USA have been working, raising our families, supporting our communities. We are lawyers, seamstresses, teachers, bricklayers. Some of us have acquired post-polio syndrome, a secondary disability. But here we are, living long, fruitful lives in the mainstream of society, many of us with major disabilities. We continue to develop strategies for living well and aging well, and we want you to know

(Now all together, shouting the words:
WE'RE STILL HERE!

(And then finally)

PETE Thank you for hearing our message. We wish you all a pleasant day.

(Another bow, all together—and then out)