DISPATCHES FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE COUNTY

The Bridge

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My Polio

by Marilyn Mayes Kaltenborn

One night at the beginning of July 1954, a few weeks before my fifth birthday, I went into my parents' bedroom and told them I felt sick. I threw up by their bed, had a fever, and a stiff neck. My mother, Bertha Cowan Mayes, was a nurse, and was very alarmed. She suspected infantile paralysis — polio. It was in the area at the time.

That night, my parents drove me to Margaretville Hospital. Early the next morning, I had a spinal tap that came back positive for polio. My mother always thought I got polio from some homemade candy she bought me a few days before at an auction we went to.

My parents immediately took me to Albany Medical Center, a two-hour drive from home. There, I had another spinal tap, which also came back positive. I still remember how frightened I was. People held me down and kept telling me not to move. Of course, I screamed. The spinal taps were very painful.

I was admitted to Albany Med and was in a room all by myself, in isolation, for about two weeks. Initially, no one could visit me, not even my parents. But, fortunately, my mother still had her RN license and after a day or two the hospital let her see me. She came to the hospital every day, renting a room at a nearby house.

Margaret Vermilyea, a girl from Red Kill, was also in Albany Med with polio. I knew her because her aunt, Ruth Carey, lived next door to us and I played with Margaret and her twin sister, Mary, when they visited Ruth. One of Ruth's legs was paralyzed because she had had polio at the age of two.

Ann Marie Combs of Clovesville was also a polio patient. She was eight years older than I and had been admitted a day or two before I was.

My bed had railings on the side and I remember trying to stand up and my legs not supporting me. I could pull myself up, but my legs just would not hold me. It was very strange. I could not figure out why I kept losing my balance.

Marilyn Mayes is seen on her bicycle at age five, before she contracted polio.

When I was no longer contagious and had improved, I was moved to a room with a roommate who was also recovering from polio. She was an African-American girl about my age who lived in Albany. She and her parents were

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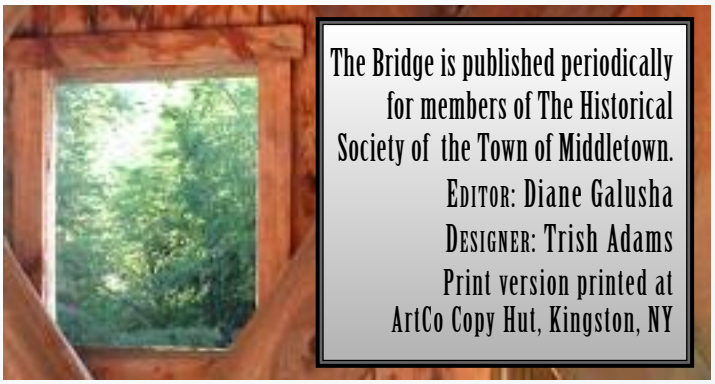

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very nice. This was my first close contact with non-white people.

I went to physical therapy once or twice a day. The part of PT that I remember and really liked was going to the pool. An aid would put me in a wheelchair and we would take an elevator down to a big pool. When I was beside the edge of the pool, someone put me in a small canvas chair that was attached to a pole with chains. After I was securely in the chair, the whole contraption was swung over the pool and I was lowered into the warm pool water. Once there, the physical therapist exercised my legs.

I was in the hospital for more than two weeks. I was able to walk by the time I was discharged.

Once home, my mother did the PT exercises three or four times a day while I lay on my bed.

In September, I started kindergarten. My mother drove me to school and picked me up at lunch time. After lunch, I did my PT exercises and took a nap.

About a year after I had polio, the vaccine became available. My mother made me get the vaccine, which, I believe, was administered in three shots, spaced out over a period of several weeks. There are three serotypes that cause the disease and, according to the New York State Health Department, while rare, a person who has had one type can get another type.

After the polio vaccine became available in 1955, my father, Murray Mayes, had a local doctor come to his veneer mill in Fleischmanns and offered all of his employees the polio vaccine.

Rosemary Lanzi seemed unfazed as she received the first of three polio shots administered by Dr. C. R. Huggins May 26, 1955. Dr. Charles Ives is seen preparing another innoculation at Margaretville Central School, one of five schools where 215 students were vaccinated. Waiting in line were Joan Dickman, Mike Ondish and Danne Stoutenburgh. The licensing of the vaccine developed by Jonas Salk led to mass vaccinations against the disease which was killing and disabling millions worldwide. Cases in the US fell from 29,000 in 1955 to 161 in 1961.— Photo from Alton Weiss Collection

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New Kingston case

Years later, my mother told me she was exceedingly nervous because of what her sister, Elsa Sanford, went through with her son, Linden.

Aunt Elsa summarized Lindy's journey in the January 23, 1948, issue of the *Catskill Mountain News*. On October 23, 1944, Lindy, at the age of nine, became ill and lost the use of his legs overnight. He spent three weeks in local hospitals where he was treated with hot packs. When he came home, he could not bend his back or his legs.

On January 8, 1945 he was admitted to the New York Reconstruction Home in West Haverstraw, N.Y. It was a facility for 260 children, ages three months to 21 years. Every day at this facility, Lindy received four baths with a water temperature of 101°, massages, and medications. He spent seven months there.

When he came home his right leg and back were normal but he had a nine-pound metal brace on his left leg that went from his hip to his shoe. The brace cost $100 and the shoes $16. He needed a new brace and shoes twice a year because he was still growing. Aunt Elsa said she was very thankful that the March of Dimes paid for Lindy's stay in West Haverstraw and for his braces and shoes. At the time, Aunt Elsa and her husband had three other children at home, had lost a child to leukemia three years before, and were dairy farmers eking out a living in New Kingston.

Halcott health scare

In the fall of 1961, when I was 12 years old, Stanley Kratochvil, a strong, healthy man in his 30s, became seriously ill with polio. He lived in Halcott Center with his wife and six children. (I think he was a logger and sold logs to my father. My mother told me he became ill because he was afraid of needles and did not get the vaccine.)

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ONE DIME AT A TIME

The March of Dimes was founded Jan. 3, 1938 as the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis by Franklin D. Roosevelt as a response to U.S. epidemics of polio. Roosevelt was himself diagnosed with polio in 1921. The foundation was an alliance between scientists and volunteers, with volunteers raising money to support research and education efforts. More than 3,100 county chapters were established.

The Foundation was itself a reconstitution of the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation, which Roosevelt and friends founded in 1927.

The name "March of Dimes" — a play on the contemporary radio and newsreel series, The March of Time — was coined by stage, screen and radio star Eddie Cantor. He inspired a nationwide fundraising campaign in the week preceding President Roosevelt's birthday on January 30, 1938. What followed was a flood of more than 80,000 letters sent to the White House with dimes, quarters and dollars tucked into the envelopes. The "silver tide" yielded 2,680,000 dimes or $268,000.

Ten years later, Florence Maurer of Margaretville was Delaware County chairperson of the March of Dimes campaign which passed the hat at the movie theater, got the Boy Scouts to solicit donors on Main Street on a Saturday night, and recruited canvassers to go door to door.

The Catskill Mountain News January 17, 1947 said, "Last year this community raised $680. Double that amount is needed today. The disease is not something far away. It is here. Children well known here who suffered in 1946 are Nancy Merritt, William Avery, Linden Sanford, Harley Franks and Gale Lawrence."

Recalls Marilyn Kaltenborn, "The whole nation was committed to stamping out polio and the March of Dimes was very successful at raising money. I remember putting dimes in the March of Dimes cardboard placards on the counter of Solomon's grocery store in Fleischmanns and at the Fleischmanns Methodist church."

The March of Dimes is still active, but with the widespread availability of polio vaccine, its focus turned to prevention of birth defects and premature births.

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Stanley was admitted to Margaretville Hospital with polio and was transferred to Albany Med where he was put in an iron lung.

As a result of his diagnosis, the Supervisor of the Town of Halcott went to Catskill and obtained vials of the polio vaccine. Then, Dr. Rottkov, who lived two houses away from us and a public health nurse vaccinated 60 people at the Halcott Center Grange hall one afternoon and another 28 Halcott Center residents in Dr. Rottkov's office in Fleischmanns that evening – a truly prompt response to a public health crisis.

By December, Stanley had been transferred to the Veterans Hospital in Albany and was able to talk to his family by phone while still in an iron lung. He was weaned from the device over a period of weeks and eventually could walk with help. He was discharged from the VA in May 1962.

Since the United States has been polio free since 1979, I seldom think about it except in the context of the World Health Organization's effort to eliminate it from all parts of the world. I am fortunate that I have not experienced weakness or pain in my arms or legs because of the polio.

This is an abbreviated version of a memoir written by Marilyn Kaltenborn in 2020 as the world awaited development of a vaccine to confront the Covid-19 pandemic. Go to our website to read Marilyn's remembrance of her father, weaver Murray Mayes in The Bridge, #46, April 2023.

The Pulse of America, 1935

In September 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration sent a form letter to more than 120,000 members of the clergy across the country. The mailing was a strategic effort to generate grassroots support for the Social Security Act, which had just been passed but lacked funding.

The single form letter, written on September 23, 1935, asked clergy to provide their "counsel and advice" on how the government could better serve the American people during the Great Depression. The letter resulted in over 100,000 responses from ministers, priests, and rabbis, which are now part of the records at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park.

Jim and Elizabeth Lehmann of Fleischmanns and Florida had a letter sent by FDR to Elizabeth's great-grandfather in Tennessee, and were curious about whether Middletown clergy had responded to the President's inquiry. They went to Hyde Park to investigate, and found two letters, from O. W. Chapin, the pastor at the Presbyterian Church in Margaretville, and George Murdock, the new pastor of the New Kingston Presbyterian Church.

On October 2, 1935, Rev. Murdock wrote that his new community "contains as staunch a group of loyal citizens as might be found anywhere." Noting that farmers "are living in constant fear of having their holdings swept from them by excessive taxes," Rev. Murdock stressed that "the most needful thing I find is a renewed or revived reverence and love for the spiritual values of life. . . We need help in getting the mind off of dollars and cents and back to God."

Rev. Chapin, on the other hand, had a strong opinion about how best to spend those dollars and cents.

Writing to the President on October 3, he reported that the consensus of his parishioners was that the Social Security legislation "is highly favored and looked upon as a great step forward for the benefit of all America."

"On the subject of the Works Program, opinion is less favorable," he continued. "Too many receiving aid have no incentive nor desire to work when jobs become available . . . Those few who have a true desire to work feel (and are made by others to feel) that their efforts are merely camouflaged charity."

Then Rev. Chapin spoke to pending farm legislation. "The majority of the people are rabid, feeling that herein the present administration has exceeded all bounds of judgment," concluding, "The people realize and appreciate the abnormality of the times under which the government is laboring. I believe, aside from all party views, the people are more than willing to give their president whole hearted cooperation within reason."

Thanks to Jim and Elizabeth for providing a window into this little-known aspect of New Deal history.

Card sharks gathering 'round the pinochle table are l. to r. Judy Bauer, Barbara Atkin (standing), Ellen Weaver, Martha Blish, Betty Sherwood and Ruth Wolcott.

by Diane Galusha

Every Monday afternoon Barb Atkin opens the door of her Dunraven home to five friends who've come to play some cards. Pinochle, that is.

Most have been playing since they were kids, and that's a long time. Because these white-haired women – Betty Sherwood, Ruth Wolcott, Judy Bauer, Ellen Weaver, and Martha Blish — are all in their 90s (well, Judy's only 80), still sharp, engaged and enjoying the comradery of a weekly card game.

There are snacks on the table, chatter between hands (maybe a bit of gossip but not the malicious kind). But when the automatic card shuffler rattles and the dealer passes out 16 cards to each person around the table, concentration turns to the matter at hand.

So what's the object of the game?

"To win – any way you can!," Ellen responds, laughing. Something about getting to 5,000 points. And the Jack of Diamonds and Queen of Spades allows you to claim "Pinochle." Beyond that is a mystery to this observer, though Barb exhorted several times, "Just watch. You'll get it."

Though the intricacies of Pinochle were lost on me, it was clear the players relished the game that was once very popular. Barb's parents, Ralph and Evelyn Ruckert, hosted pinochle parties in this very house. "As kids, we learned to play because my father liked it," said Betty Sherwood, chief scorekeeper. "Back when everybody lived on farms, you had cards, and square dances, for entertainment," added Ellen.

The group has been meeting weekly for decades, starting at Barbara Kapitko's house. When she passed away the game moved to Barb and Gary Atkins'. The cast of characters has changed over the years, and even seasonally. "When Ruth and Martha leave in the winter, Reba Brainard sits in to make the 5th," Barb explains.

Lest you think this is a throw back to an obscure, obsolete past-time, Ellen points out that there are plenty of people who enjoy the game: She, for one, sits down at her computer regularly to play with other aficionados online.

Who's On Next? YOU!

So you've been an HSM member for years, you come to programs when you can, you buy raffle tickets and send in a check from time to time. And you really like what we're doing here! Ready to step up your support by becoming a regular volunteer in the archives? Or even a trustee? Please consider getting involved – HSM needs you! Call any board member, email us, or leave a message at 845-586-2400 and we'll get right back to you. Thank you for your continuing support!

Annual Meeting in Stitches

Amy Schaffer of Margaretville, left, was all smiles after winning the Log Cabin quilt made by Jackie Purdy, right. The drawing took place at the HSM annual meeting November 2.

Jonathan Glazer, left, the newest member of the HSM Board of Trustees, shared a moment with speaker Bill Abranowicz at the November 2 Annual Meeting. Jonathan has been a Margaretville resident since 2006. With friend and neighbor Michael Cioffi he purchased the historic Galli Curci Theater in 2018. He is a history lover, researcher and writer who has worked in the fields of community economic development and small business finance. His trustee term runs through 2028. Bill, a noted travel, home interior and celebrity photographer, also lives in Margaretville. His presentation November 2 took the audience of about 50 people on a whirlwind tour around the globe.

– Photo by Joan L. Bauer.

Give the Gift of History

Is there a history lover on your holiday gift list? Or a native who now lives far away and misses the old stomping grounds? An HSM Gift Membership may be just the right present. Members get our monthly e-newsletter and, three times a year, the Bridge, either by USPS or email. Send us the giftee's name, postal and email addresses and a check ($20 senior or student, $30 individual, $40 household) and we'll add them to our member roster. Include your name, too, and specify this is a gift. We'll also send the lucky recipient a note telling them of your gift. Go to our website, mtownhistory.org (Join/Support page) if you'd rather pay electronically. Add 'Gift Membership' in the Notes box.

The symbolic opening of a multi-year observance of the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War took place November 9 at Bedell Cemetery where a new headstone was installed to replace a missing one for veteran Sylvenus Kelly (c.1750-c.1825). Gathering 200 years after his death to dedicate the new stone were several descendants (from l. to r.): Iris Mead, Joe Todd, Joyce Kelly Martin, Marilee Todd Asher, Randy Kelly, Linda Kelly Armour and Adrian Todd.

Tom Grocholl (left), caretaker of the Bedell Cemetery, had previously installed the headstone.

THE 78¢ POST

THE 78¢ POST is an exclusive for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail — your newsletter needs no postage, so you get an "extra"!

A Ukrainian Christmas

Ukrainian Christmas traditions were on display at an exhibit at the Erpf Catskill Cultural Center in Arkville in 1981. The tree was strung with dried apples, paper chains, candles, and tinsel, the table set with hand painted dishes and bowls, the walls decorated with oats, embroidered cloth and icons. Photos, background information and recorded music from that exhibit have been preserved in the ECCC Catskills Folk Life Oral History Collection which now resides with the Historical Society of Middletown. You can make an appointment to visit the Nicholas J. Juried Archives in Margaretville to listen to interviews of dozens of people from the 1980s, read transcripts, and view images.

Meantime, we wish everyone a happy holiday, no matter how you mark the season. And we send a fervent wish for peace in Ukraine and all the other war-torn places around the globe.

Nice Work If You Can Get It!

Among the activities at the All Things Pumpkin event held October 19 at the History Center was a pumpkin bake-off. Judges Karen Dietrich and Diana Cope, pictured, had a tough (but sweet) job: They ultimately chose as winners 11-year-old Evie Marks of Margaretville and Sharon Suess (age undisclosed) from Halcottsville.

PUMPKIN SNICKERDOODLES

½ C, butter, melted
¼ C brown sugar
½ C sugar
1 egg
1 t vanilla extract
¼ C pumpkin puree
1 ½ C flour
3 t pumpkin pie spice
½ t cinnamon
1 t cream of tartar
½ t salt

by Evie Marks

Mix all and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Form balls and roll in cinnamon and sugar. Bake 12-13 minutes at 350°.

CHEESECAKE STUFFED PUMPKIN BREAD

Baker Sharon Suess says you can find the recipe for this award-winning bread by searching the Food Network website!