

My story by Elizabeth Edmondson.



I am playing with some coloured blocks that you could wind off a wooden stick and then wind back on. My nephews and nieces still play with them today.

Although I was born on July 1st, over 60 years ago, my story really began on September 27, 1951, when at the age of 15 months; I was taken to hospital and diagnosed with polio. I spent the next fifteen months in the Golden Age Hospital.

Towards the end of my stay in hospital, I was allowed home for the weekends. I would go home with both legs in plaster, with a wooden bar holding my legs together.

When I was at home, later on, every night, I had to sleep with my legs in plaster and my back tied down onto the bed. I became very good at winding bandages each morning. One night, I lifted up my legs vertically, and then back down onto the bed. As a result, all my blankets were under my legs, and as it was in winter I never did this again, as I was cold for the rest of the night.

When I came home at 2½ years, my father made me parallel bars so I could learn to walk. I was given a jelly bean for every length I walked. Later on I would go to the Golden Age Hospital, for physiotherapy lessons. There was a large warm bath, probably 3 meters square, where several children would sit in the bath doing exercises. I was 6 when my sister Pam was born. One time, when going to my lessons, my mother hadn't locked the pusher properly, and the pusher collapsed with Pam inside. Mum quickly opened the pusher and up popped Pam like a Jack in The Box! I thought it was funny but Pam was not amused. Mum also helped me do exercises on the kitchen table—we used to listen to Jason and the Argonauts on the ABC radio.



Walking with the parallel bars.

I started swimming when I was about 5, learning to swim at the Crawley Baths in the Swan River. My coach would walk along

backwards, with his hand under my head, while I swam backstroke. For dog paddle and freestyle, he had a piece of wood on a rope, which I would hold onto. While he towed me up and down the pool, I would be swimming freestyle or dog paddle. You had to be quick, so that you didn't let go of the wood completely. My first success in swimming was coming 3rd in the dog paddle race in year 1 at the school sports. I never used my legs for swimming.



Home from hospital on a weekend visit.

In those days, my calliper did not bend at the knee. At about the age of ten, I finally had a calliper that would bend. I was so happy going to school on the bus, wanting to show off this wonderful new calliper that bent at the knees. My friends weren't impressed as their knees bent all the time! Also, I used to have to get special boots made for me, to support my ankles. As my feet were growing rapidly, Orthotics department would cut the toes out of my shoes so I would have more room to grow.

In early 1964, when Pam was nearly 8, Mum took her to Tony Howson to learn to swim. I said I would like to go too, as it was one sport I could do. He lived in a Commonwealth Games House in City Beach which had a 25 yard pool in the back yard. Very soon, Tony suggested I joined his Swimming Squad at Beatty Park, which I did.

One day Tony came up to me and said "You have just broken a world record". Before I knew it, at the age of 14, I was



competing in the Adelaide selection trials for the Paralympics to be held in Tokyo. At the age of 14 years and 4 months, (the youngest person to represent Australia) I went to Tokyo, and won 3 gold medals and broke three world records in the 55m freestyle, breaststroke and backstroke. I was not selected to go to the Commonwealth Games in 1966, but went to Israel in 1968, and won 2 gold medals (also world records) and 1 silver in the 50 meters backstroke.



Big sister Jo and I, showing my socks peeping out of the cut shoes.

I stopped swimming after this, as I had to earn my living. Whilst working at Telstra I met and married Ken. We had one daughter Ruth, but unfortunately we separated when she was 3. Ruth is now 24 and studying at the Australian National University for her doctorate.

Arriving home from Tokyo November 1964.

In 2000, I was awarded the Australian Sports Medal in recognition for my services to swimming. I returned to competitive swimming in September 2006, and as a result my health has improved greatly. I am an active member of the Stadium Snappers Masters Swimming Club. In April 2008, I swam in the 800m freestyle event in the World Masters Games held in Perth and in June I was an inaugural inductee into the WA Swimming Hall of Fame.



I am showing my medals to friend Robyn, Mum, and sisters Pam and Jo on my return from Israel 1968. Jo had read that if you can bite gold, it has a high gold content, as gold is a very soft metal. So one of my medals has a tooth mark in it.

In December 2008, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a lumpectomy. After surgery, I wrote to my friends and told them I now had one concave and one convex breast. One friend then asked “Does that mean you will swim round in circles?” Luckily, when I resumed swimming in early 2009 I was still able to swim in a straight line!

I competed in the Australian Masters Games in Geelong and Masters Swimming in May 2009. I then had 6 weeks radiotherapy in May and June, resuming training in July for the World Masters Games held in Sydney in October where I won 4 gold and 1 silver medal.

In 2009 I was lucky to win 22 gold, 4 silver and 1 bronze medal which doubles my medal collection in one year. I was also inducted into the Wheelchair Sports Hall of Fame.



Home from World Masters Games 2009.

In 2010, I went to Launceston to compete in the Masters Short Course Games. I was very pleased with my results as I broke 11 PB's out of a total of 12 events. I was also lucky to win a bronze medal in the 4 x 25 Medley Relay. I then swam in the State Short Course Championships in Perth and broke another 6 PB's out of 7 races. I have celebrated turning 60 this year by breaking 60 PB's! (oops I ended up breaking another 3!)

In 2011, I had a new challenge to face- I was diagnosed with post-polio syndrome in my right arm, but still competed in the 2011 Australian Masters Games held in Adelaide in October. I won 6 individual gold medals and 4 relay medals.

In 2012, I had surgery on my left shoulder in February, but now back in the pool and swimming slowly.

I intent to keep swimming for as long as I can, as the motto for the World Masters Games was “Fit, Fun and Forever Young” a wonderful quote to live by.