

The Overcoming of It

At the age of a few months, Lorna (the name means “lost”) was placed with the Children’s Aid Society and considered as unadoptable because she had spina bifida, along with mild hydrocephalus and cerebral palsy. In those early days “handicapped” children were supported by the state as Crown wards. Lorna was placed in several foster homes until the age of 5 when a concerned family took her under their wing.

Lorna has no sense of herself as a young girl, nor does she have any pictures of her early childhood. This void has created a wound that will never heal. One time a doctor at Sick Kids recognized her, saying that he had seen her at the age of 3 but Lorna was too shy to ask him, “What was I like?” To this day she cries when she sees people on TV seeking their “real” family. She says, “You would think that at 71 I would be over this hurt by now.”

Spina bifida is a birth defect which, in Lorna’s case, meant that 5 vertebrae are missing, and 3 others are only partially there. Paralysis from the waist down gradually set in at age 10. She wore leg and body braces and crutches for over 50 years but now uses a wheelchair. Living to 71 years of age with spina bifida and hydrocephalus is an extraordinary accomplishment.

Lorna has had a remarkable life. She has an indomitable spirit and like Helen Keller believes that “Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.” Undaunted, Lorna took full course loads throughout university and worked 25 hours a week at a part-time job. She is proud to have paid her own way and managed the expenses of operating her hand-controlled car, a Morris Minor.

Armed with an Honours English degree from McMaster University, she applied for a teaching position. On mentioning that she had braces and crutches, she was promptly told, “Why, we wouldn’t be able to hire you, in spite of the policy regarding this type of thing.” Unconcerned, she replied, “but you don’t know me” and promptly got a job elsewhere.



Lorna was a gifted artist who generously gave back to Hydrocephalus Canada through her art.

Lorna married and was the first woman who was paralyzed, to adopt from the Metro Toronto Children’s Aid Society. The couple adopted 4½ month old Martha, and after two years, they adopted Andrew, just 5 months old.

Raising young children wasn’t easy but she always found a way. For a bath, Martha as a baby was wrapped in a towel secured in Lorna’s teeth and transported to the sink via the wheelchair. When she needed to go out Lorna placed infant Andrew in a laundry basket, bumped him gently down the front steps and over to the car.

Lorna has always realized, “It takes tremendous effort to get an unwilling body ready each morning to meet the world.” Although the medical professionals thought that she should have been in a wheelchair at age 20, Lorna managed for more than 40 years using braces and crutches.

Over the years, the braces caused many pressure sores. The most recent, was a huge, fist-sized pressure sore that developed in the coccyx area. Finally after amazing surgery and a 3-month hospital stay, it healed over completely. Thankfully, she is still able to transfer from her wheelchair to bed and back. Lorna, like many other people who use wheelchairs or are bedridden, is concerned about weight.

“It is easy to gain a couple of pounds a year.” she says. Lorna reminds herself that she carted around 27 lbs. of leg and body braces for many years that kept her weight in check!

Lorna Wreford is an accomplished artist. In the Millennium Year, the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) was pleased to publish 13 of her watercolour drawings for our lottery fundraising calendar. Lorna was thrilled to have a second “batch” of her drawings accepted for publication in the 2002 edition of the calendar. The sale of these calendars raised much-needed funds programs and services.

Whether she admits it or not, Lorna is a wonderful example of a woman who has the spirit and the desire to overcome the challenges of spina bifida and hydrocephalus! She would be the first one to declare that it wasn't always easy, but it can be done.

There are thousands of young men and women with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus Canada that have the same desires as Lorna, but need guidance. SB&H wasn't there when Lorna was growing up but now Hydrocephalus Canada is helping individuals deal with issues such as independent living, sexuality, relationships, employment and how to manage their unique physical disabilities on a daily basis. We provide support and information to guide individuals through difficult times with the goal of improving their quality of life. We help empower them to make the best life possible.

Hydrocephalus Canada

We are the voice of
Canadians living with hydrocephalus and spina bifida.

Every day we strive to empower those impacted by both conditions to experience the best life possible.

We do this by establishing environments that protect, support and enhance the lives of those living with, or at risk of developing, these conditions.



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