

I had the opportunity to participate in and present at the sixth Post-Polio Wellness Retreat at Bay Cliff Health Camp, Big Bay, Michigan, thanks to Program Director Christy Osborn and with encouragement from Dr. Fred Maynard and Sunny Roller.

The comments below are those of presenter William Waring, MD, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, read by Camp Director Tim Bennett, at the closing session. Dr. Waring and his wife Mary, left the retreat mid-week due to the death of Mary's mother. His email is an excellent statement about the benefits of a wellness retreat. This retreat was different in that Bay Cliff invited others to come and learn how to organize a retreat, thus explaining Dr. Waring's reference to Canada. -Joan L. Headley

Mr. Doctor Bill and Miss Mary's last day statement:

I hope our Canadian friends have been able to learn about the special things that occur in the Bay Cliff Post-Polio retreats. If you used your eyes and ears and opened up your hearts you have learned that this retreat is more than information and small groups. Distilling this experience to its most basic level is addressing the fact that people with polio were never warned or taught how to age with their disabilities. Since chronic physical disabilities began as a new phenomenon in the 20th century, our medical, rehabilitative, and social services are also trying to learn how best to address the challenges of aging with disabilities.

You heard the "F" word many times this week, that being the word family! Being isolated in this lovely environment has helped us act like a FAMILY without the distractions of television, bars, or shopping. The simplicity of kids' camp traditions also brought us together - tasks like eating our meals, requiring all sing or lip sync grace, passing the food and cleaning up when we are done eating. We learn as much as we think of ourselves as being independent, we are also interdependent. Like any family, our family members have a lot of things in common yet we are all individuals. We learn that individual challenges may include fear, anxiety, pain, confusion, anger and sadness. Like a big family, the wiser and more experience members can show others how to be assertive, ask questions and advocate for themselves and others. Concurrently, participants can practice these new skills with the retreat faculty in group meetings and informally. The recreational activities, even the simple traditional camp ones, give our family the chance to try new things, give each other pats on the back, practice healthy new techniques and prove you are never too old to reinvent yourself.

We also want to acknowledge our Bay Cliff family, Mr. Tim, Miss Christy, Miss Karen, Mr. Ken, Mr. Adrian, Mr. Levy, the other Bay Cliff staff and all of the volunteer faculty. The success of these retreats is due to many priceless items like creativity, compassion and insight. Bay Cliff GETS IT! Disability is just not going to camp, rehab or therapy but it is life long process and they have established a commitment to this construct. The all-volunteer faculty deserve special praise - unlike a typical conference where speakers deliver their presentation, give out handouts and leave, our faculty spend time with the participants in formal and informal settings, get to know the participants and are willing to answers questions whenever they arise.

We would also like to say good bye to our post-polio family. It was nice to see old faces and some new faces - come to think about it, we are all pretty much old faces! Like any big family we don't always get along with everyone all of the time, but a beautiful outcome of these retreats is that the information sharing, caring, support and help after the retreats ends. We hope you all stay healthy, active and happy. Remember "We are all just walking each other home."*

Thank you for all of caring and kindness concerning the loss of Mary's mother. God bless you all and your work until we see you again.

-Bill and Mary Waring