

Richard Whitney



In the spring of 1954, after weeks at the doctor's office for appointment after appointment, he told my parents he didn't know what was going on with me. He told them I was in perfect health except for my weakness.

My dad then asked, "Why does he have to place his palm under his chin to push it up to help him chew his food?"

The doctor was quiet for a while, thinking, and then looking at my folks said, "I think your son has Myasthenia Gravis."

Until this time my MG was getting progressively worse. I had trouble going down stairs, holding my head up, chewing; my eyes lids drooped and my vision crossed, and worse, when I laughed I could not get my mouth to smile. These are a few of the things that come to mind. There are more that I've forgotten. It has been a quite a while ago.

In those days I started to attend high school and I was picked on, which didn't help either, because I couldn't keep up and was absent a lot. My doctor had put me on prostigmin which helped.

I wanted to write a little on my condition and tell some of the negative things that affected me so you might see that some of the things you may be going through I have also.

The good news is I never blamed God for any of my illness and I began to think positive. These are things I feel are important. God did not punish you or me with this disease.

Positive thinking will help you. Positive thinking is probably the most important thing one can do to improve your health, I am not saying it will cure you; it didn't me, but it improved my well-being until I have been able to do most things and live a completely healthy life.

I improved over the years through high school and went on to a year of college. Shortly after my 19th birthday when we moved to Omaha, Nebraska, I applied for and got a job drawing plans and perspectives of kitchens. It was a fairly easy job, but as the company grew I had to make more drawings quickly for the salesmen. My fingers would get so weak I couldn't hold the pencil. I

remembered reading somewhere that a lot of times you can teach your other hand to write; all you need to do is practice. So, thinking positive that it could be done, I started off practicing with my left similar to how they taught me to print in kindergarten. After a few months I was printing with my left. When my hand would get tired I'd switch hands and go right on.

In 1965 I married my wife. At the time I was taking 6 prostigmin tablets every three hours about 6 to 7 times a day. Not going to the doctors, I medicated myself; if two an hour worked what will 6 do? My new wife helped me, she used positive thinking to try to get me to see if less would work and it did. Through other companies I worked as a technical illustrator, and with the positive attitude of "I can," I succeeded in becoming an art director. This short version of my life up to 1975 is to show how with the willingness and the positive attitude, you can!

In 1975 I resigned my technical illustrator job. I now had three children, and a home to pay for and bought into a construction company in San Jose, California. My position was to be sales and to draw plans for remodels, which also slipped me into the construction end. It was hard even to hold a hammer. It took a bunch of taps to drive in a nail 3 ¼" long. I kept at it and learned how to frame, carry studs/material, and the longer I worked at it the stronger I got. Sure I was handicapped but I kept trying.

This is important for all of us -- keep trying. Exercise is important and you will grow, and you will be stronger for trying.

In 1980 I applied for and got my own contractor license for the State of California and spent the last of my working years selling, drawing the plans for and building houses and remodels to homes.

We have moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where I still get involved in doing things like exploring out in the country, geology, helping at museums and studying old machines and equipment. It keeps my mind off personal medical issues and it helps when you talk with others who have MG in my support group.

At the start I mentioned "positive thinking." It is helpful to start a hobby; searching on the internet is interesting and I like to do it too, but it produces nothing. Start drawing or painting; you don't have to be good at it; get a book from the library and start. As you practice over time you will look back at your

first attempts and ask, "Who drew that?" One thing I like to do is to close my eyes and scribble on a piece of blank paper and turn it around and study it until I see something then draw it in. You'd be surprised what you can create from nothing. Making something has helped me to grow. It is very satisfying to create something.

Having MG is not the end. It is the beginning of something new and the more you try, the more you will be blessed.

To learn more about how you can help create a world without MG, visit <http://www.myasthenia.org/HowcanIhelp.aspx>.