



Living with Polio: The Epidemic and Its Survivors

Daniel J. Wilson

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Polio was the most dreaded childhood disease of twentieth-century America. Every summer during the 1940s and 1950s, parents were terrorized by the thought that polio might cripple their children. They warned their children not to drink from public fountains, to avoid swimming pools, and to stay away from movie theaters and other crowded places. Whenever and wherever polio struck, hospitals filled with victims of the virus. Many experienced only temporary paralysis, but others faced a lifetime of disability.

Living with Polio is the first book to focus primarily on the personal stories of the men and women who had acute polio and lived with its crippling consequences. Writing from personal experience, polio survivor Daniel J. Wilson shapes this impassioned book with the testimonials of more than one hundred polio victims, focusing on the years between 1930 and 1960. He traces the entire life experience of the survivors—from the alarming diagnosis all the way to the recent development of post-polio syndrome, a condition in which the symptoms of the disease may return two or three decades after they originally surfaced.

Living with Polio follows every physical and emotional stage of the disease: the loneliness of long separations from family and friends suffered by hospitalized victims; the rehabilitation facilities where survivors spent a full year or more painfully trying to regain the use of their paralyzed muscles; and then the return home, where they were faced with readjusting to school or work with the aid of braces, crutches, or wheelchairs while their families faced the difficult responsibilities of caring for and supporting a child or spouse with a disability.

Poignant and gripping, *Living with Polio* is a compelling history of the enduring physical and psychological experience of polio straight from the rarely heard voices of its survivors.

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