

## A Day as an Independent Polio Survivor

*When Doris Maez was only four years old she was struck with polio. Her parents sent her to Shriners hospital in Minneapolis for rehabilitation and after several months she learned to walk again. She had a relatively normal life, attended college for two years, fell in love and got married. The marriage produced six children and to help support her large family Maez worked as a lab technician and chemist. Maez eventually returned to college and obtained a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a master's degree in environmental management. Years later sadness and stress entered her life when her husband died of cancer. Her body became weaker and today she has difficulty walking. Yet her spirit is stronger than ever.*

Maez is a member of the American Association of University Women who meet once a month. They not only enjoy each other's company but like to attend different events together. "We call ourselves the gadabouts!" says Maez proudly.

One of their gadabout adventures included a visit to the Legion of Honor in San Francisco to see the "Women Impressionists." The exhibition opened at 10 a.m. but to avoid parking problems Maez arrived at 9:30 a.m. As soon as her friends joined her they bought tickets for a docent tour.

Because of her physical disability Maez rode her electric three-wheel scooter into the Legion of Honor. She is used to maneuvering her scooter in public places and tries not to be obtrusive. However, her sit-down scooter created a problem when other people sometimes stood in front of her, blocking her full view of the paintings. Even so, she found the exhibition fascinating and at the same time alarming when she realized how these female artists were marginalized and treated with ambivalence. As the docent explained, one female impressionist, Berthe Morisot, was married to the brother of Manet and

friends with Renoir and yet, despite being a gifted painter, her own work was ignored.

After the docent tour, her friends decided to have lunch together. Maez didn't join them since her body doesn't have the strength to handle too many activities in one day. "My energy level isn't the same as my friends."

Instead, she decided to see the exhibit of Women Impressionists one more time. These female artists had struck a chord with Maez who has learned through her own challenges in life to be an independent spirit. There weren't many people in the gallery on her second visit, allowing her the opportunity to enjoy a close-up view of each painting.

After driving home she fixed lunch and took a short nap. Her afternoon was spent scanning some of the photographs from her family albums, a sit-down nonphysical activity. Maez had come to the conclusion she had too many albums, stretching over years. "At some point," she concedes, "I will have to reduce my possessions and move to a smaller house on flat land. The home where I live now is on the side of a hill, making it difficult to get in and out of the garage and downstairs to the laundry room."

As she scanned her photographs she paused to gaze at one photograph taken in Yosemite, California, of her husband. "Yosemite was one of our favorite places to visit. We camped a lot with all our kids because we couldn't afford to do anything else."

While Maez was still scanning the photographs one of her daughters called. "Valerie also has six children and we have a lot of empathy for each other and can laugh about life."

Maez is proud of the fact that despite physical problems she had a successful career and has a close-knit family. "Survivors of polio often develop type A personalities. We are super achievers."

Out of necessity Maez now lives life at a slower pace. "My neurons are like batteries that don't get charged as quickly. I have learned not to do too many things and yet still take

advantage of every day, every minute. It is important to be around beautiful things and nice people. Life is too short not to be as happy as possible.”

## A Day Walking on the Moon

*On February 5, 1971, astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell became the sixth man to walk on the moon. Mitchell was the lunar module pilot for Apollo 14, NASA's third manned moon landing. The commander was Alan Shepard (1923 – 1998). Two hours before Mitchell and Shepard were programmed to land on the moon a warning light came on in the cockpit indicating the abort system had been activated. It was a time of high drama, intense concentration, and deadline-oriented work. For astronaut Mitchell, this historic adventure in space culminated in a personal transformative experience that ultimately changed the direction of his life.*

“As soon as I saw the warning light in the cockpit,” says Mitchell, “I knew that if we ignited the engine it would shut down the system in motion and return us to orbit instead of allowing us to land on the moon. The abort system had to be disabled. I tapped the instrument panel with a heavy pen light, and sure enough the warning light went out. Then it came back on again, again, and again.”

In Houston, Texas, the experts urgently tried to correct the problem while Mitchell and Shepard spent the next hour and forty-five minutes going around the moon.

There was no sense of panic in the cockpit. Edgar Mitchell—scientist, test pilot, naval officer, and astronaut—had been trained to stay tightly focused on any complex task. “You’re too busy to think about anything other than the job at hand.”

While the astronauts were behind the moon they were out of radio contact with Houston, but as soon as their contact resumed the Houston team gave them instructions on how to reprogram the computer manually. They had ten minutes before they were supposed to land.

“The few seconds before we ignited the engines was harrowing,” admits Mitchell. “As we passed through 30,000 feet, we also realized the landing radar was disabled and needed to be reset because the ground rules stated we had to abort our mission if we reached 10,000 feet without landing radar.”

With Houston’s guidance the astronauts rapidly recycled the landing radar circuit breaker. “We performed the task at about 20,000 feet, but they were moments of demanding frenzied activity.”

Finally, when they reached the key point of 10,000 feet, they were able to proceed to a smooth landing, right on target. “Shepard and I congratulated each other. There was a sense of amazement, relief, excitement—a whole range of feelings.”

They had landed in the rugged Fra Mauro region of the moon, dominated by hills and craters. Shepard was the first one to step out the door, followed by Mitchell.

“We had to adjust to the moon’s dusty surface, get our bearings and our balance,” says Mitchell. “When you’re on the moon, you’re one sixth of your normal weight. Your backpack is heavy, you are a little wobbly, and if you are not careful you could fall and end up on your back like a turtle.”

During their first excursion outside they erected a flag, set up a telemetry station to help conduct automatic scientific experiments, as well as an automatic TV camera. The astronauts used the first wheeled vehicle on the moon, a modular equipment transporter to help haul equipment, giving them the ability to use tools and retrieve more samples from the moon’s surface. They also climbed to the summit of Cone Crater, collecting bedrock samples from the Cone’s rim.

“We conducted a whole host of experiments, and took many photographs,” says Mitchell. “Since we were the eyes and ears on the moon we talked constantly, describing everything we saw for the geologists and scientists on Earth who monitored us. It was a team effort.”

From the surface of the moon and on the return flight the astronauts had a spectacular view of the earth. For Mitchell, the experience was particularly remarkable because he saw life, literally, from a different perspective. As he gazed at the planet earth he suddenly felt, through a spontaneous flash of insight, that the whole universe is interconnected. “I could perceive the synthesis between the molecules in my body, the stars in space and the harmonious intelligent process that links all of life. The feeling was overwhelming and profound.”

This transformative experience changed the course of his life. He later founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences with the purpose of conducting scientific research in the field of human consciousness. “I decided as a scientist to continue investigating the mysteries of the universe by exploring the types of questions every generation and civilization has asked throughout history: *Who are we? What is life all about?* I continue to try to discover new answers to these questions.”

*Eleanor Tomic has had a diverse career. She used to teach home economics to high school students, and then switched to food consulting. She also tested recipes for an advertising agency, and toward the end of her working life became a caterer. All these jobs demanded deadlines. It was rush-rush between tasks—and between years. Now, in her eighties, she lives in a retirement community in New York.*

I yearn for more solitude, to slowly move through a day. Even in my retirement community the weekly schedule is packed with daily lectures and many activities. Although I am an energetic person and like being on the go, I have to rein myself in because I also love to be alone.

One winter Sunday became a perfect day to be a hermit. I closed the door, took the telephone off the hook, and began the morning with a focused hour of journal writing. Words flowed easily. After sitting for a couple of hours I needed to move and took the time to deliberately enjoy my morning exercises conducted in the living room of my studio apartment.

Brilliant sunshine covered the patio, which gave me a chance to hang my bed covers out in the sun; a down comforter puffed up willingly after a long winter. Then two letters were written in welcome silence.

After these small tasks, it was time to relax. I placed a CD in the player, hoping it was functioning. (My player is as fickle as New York State's weather.) This time it worked. The sounds of Beethoven's Symphony #6 (*Pastoral*) filled my room—elegant, rich, and poignant. With pure delight I moved around the floor, swirling in free-association elementary ballet movements.

Making ginger cookies came next, which was an easy accomplishment. While they baked, I gave myself a leisurely shampoo. When I retired I had promised myself the luxury of re-reading

my travel journals, a pleasure denied for too long. That afternoon it was a joy to read them.

The rest of the day was like swimming in a warm bay, alone. I achieved a state of blissful solitude.