
MEET DIANNE McTAGGART WALL

By Dr. Ted Johnson

One of the most rewarding experiences in writing articles for Tuscawilla Today is the opportunity to connect with the residents in our community who willingly share their talents and life accomplishments. This month's feature can be best defined as a reflection upon perseverance, determination, inspiration, love, and faith. These sources of motivation are the driving forces behind Dianne McTaggart Wall's amazing life. With the encouragement from husband Dennis Wall and daughter Katie, along with the assistance of her friends, Dianne has completed a book that summarizes her life's experiences. Her literary work reflects the importance of a fighting attitude bolstered by interactions and support from the positive people (referred to as *Somebodies*) that help us steer through life's course. The book is entitled: *Somebody Told Me I Could, A Polio Survivor Who's In It For The Long Haul*.

During the early 1950s, the world was waiting for an effective poliovirus vaccine. During this time, it was one of the most feared diseases in the U.S. Poliovirus destroys nerve cells in the spinal cord causing muscle wasting and paralysis. The virus is typically transmitted through contaminated water and food. Following the introduction of vaccines in 1955, the number of polio cases fell rapidly to the point where there were virtually no cases caused by wild poliovirus. Dianne's mother had been exposed to the disease while pregnant and Dianne was born with the debilitating physical consequences of the poliovirus. With no documented cases of polio in utero, she had an original misdiagnosis of cerebral palsy before the doctors determined that she had indeed been born with polio.



Dianne was also born with a fighting attitude and the ability to focus on achieving life's goals. Shortly after her birth, Dianne's parents were advised to have her admitted to a home for crippled children. Fortunately, this option was quickly dismissed and Dianne was raised in a loving family setting that nurtured

her and allowed her to develop accommodations for the physical limitations attributed to polio. She was also blessed to be a patient of an outstanding physician named Dr. Ponseti who encouraged and marveled at her abilities to cope with her physical limitations. Her early years of development were also influenced by family, friends, faith, and school teachers who strived to ensure that she had access to the emotional and educational needs that would lead to a fulfilling life. Dianne's book contains her perceptions of



the special *Somebodies* that had the greatest impact upon her opportunities and decisions while progressing through elementary and high school years and eventually college. These guiding forces, in combination with an unwavering love of music, eventually led to a B.A. in Music Education from Clarke College in Iowa and a Master's of Musical Therapy degree from Florida State University School of Music.

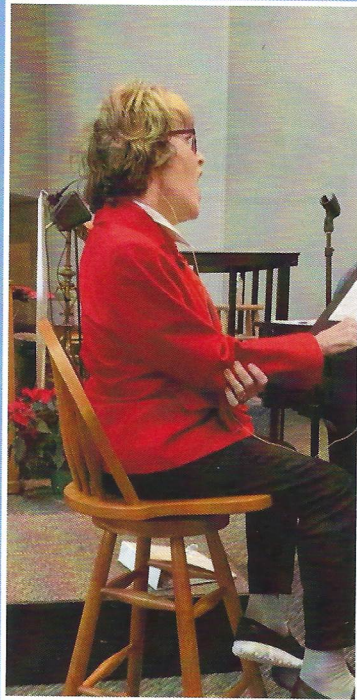
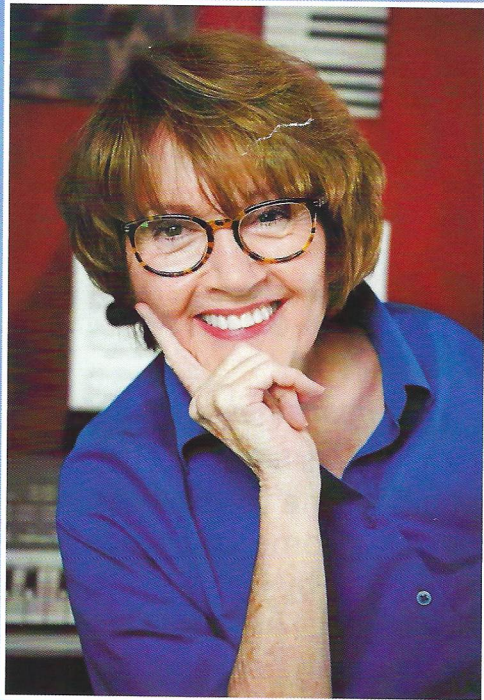
While attending FSU, Dianne met her future husband Dennis Wall. They were married in 1978 and moved to the Orlando area where Dennis secured his associate's job in a law firm downtown. Dianne had received her Florida Teacher's Certificate and began her first job at a Catholic school for Down

Syndrome and learning-disabled children. This job was followed by teaching positions with the Orange County School System that included using music therapy to help special needs students. Among her many accomplishments as a teacher, Dianne would eventually represent her school as the "Teacher of the Year."

Throughout her book, Dianne's life experiences have contained a common thread of God's will and plans for those events that call upon joy, courage and strength. This was especially true with the arrival of daughter Katie. The medical complexities related to individuals who have polio pose challenges that, in the case of pregnancy, can be frightening. Calling upon all of her skills and the skills of the doctors, Dianne gave birth to a healthy daughter and embarked upon another chapter in her life: motherhood. Being a mother was a cherished responsibility and as Katie grew older, the love of music and being active in the church offered the opportunity for Dianne to once again play the guitar and sing during services.

Post-Polio Syndrome is discussed in her book as a life changing challenge for polio survivors. In Dianne's case, pronounced weakness and severe fatigue began to take their toll. These new limiting restrictions were addressed through faith in God and living one day at a time. Dennis, Dianne and Katie moved to the Tuscawilla Community and soon developed friendships in the neighborhood. This, along with attending a support group, helped Dianne push through the fatigue and weakness. Being involved with St. Stephen's Church has allowed Dianne to continue with her love of music and she enjoyed taking part in the program honoring Father John Bluett's 50th Anniversary.

Dianne McTaggart Wall's life story is an amazing expression of overcoming seemingly impossible challenges FROM BIRTH! From her parents being told to put her away in an institution to living a full life is indeed a remarkable achievement. This little girl was a successful school student



who earned a Master's degree and would become a teacher and therapist. She has worked as an office manager, performer, and recording artist all while being a wife and mother. Her book, *Somebody Told Me I Could*, is a tribute to those positive influences that can motivate and nurture success. You are

encouraged to add this enlightening literary work to your summer reading list. The book is available on Amazon, book retail outlets and local libraries.

Thank you Dianne McTaggart Wall for allowing us the opportunity to feature you in this issue of Tuscawilla Today.

Somebody Told Me I Could

*A Polio Survivor Who's In It
For The Long Haul*

