

RISE UP AND WALK

BY

TURNLEY WALKER

///

T. Walker, *Rise Up and Walk* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.):51-56, 91-95.



1950

E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK

Medical
52-850-16733D

Copyright, 1950, by Turnley Walker
All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

FIRST EDITION

No part of this book may be reproduced
in any form without permission in writing
from the publisher, except by a reviewer
who wishes to quote brief passages in con-
nection with a review written for inclusion in
magazine or newspaper or radio broadcast.

RJ496.P2
1015
1950

A Story Press Book

From the series of articles "I Am a Polio"
syndicated by the North American Newspaper Alliance

APR 7 1952
3LY

CONTENTS

I. <i>Polio Is a Lonely Place</i>	7
II. <i>A Friend a Long Way Off</i>	11
III. <i>New World Alive with Strange Activities</i>	18
IV. <i>Examining Your Doctor</i>	24
V. <i>You Are Watching Other Faces . . . Other Faces Watching You</i>	30
VI. <i>The Wives Come Trooping In</i>	36
VII. <i>The Book</i>	43
VIII. <i>Will I Walk Again . . . ?</i>	51
IX. <i>Birthday Party</i>	57
X. <i>Job of Work</i>	63
XI. <i>Wheelchairs Roll in All Directions</i>	69
XII. <i>No Child Is a Cripple!</i>	74
XIII. <i>Christmas Visit</i>	79
XIV. <i>Walking Is Only a Trick</i>	86
XV. <i>Departure</i>	91

4/9/52 52-16733 D

You let yourself down very carefully to your usual flat position in the bed. An hour a day, alone in a place to work. You turn towards the wall and think again about your book.

VIII

Will I Walk Again . . . ?

ONE DAY a development of staggering importance occurs.

You clench the muscle of your right leg above the knee as you have done so many times, since the doctor first discovered that it was alive, and this time the knee lifts a fraction of an inch. You think your eyes have deceived you, and you strain once more. Your whole leg lifts very slightly from the bed.

You call out to your friend, the lawyer:

"Watch this . . . it's something new!"

Again you perform the tiny hitch upward with your knee.

"Holy heaven," murmurs your friend in the prayerful tones with which miracles are observed.

You twitch the knee, turning it slightly this way and that. The pressure of triumph is so great that you find it difficult to breath.

"Hey, get up and look at this!" your friend calls down to the pantie manufacturer.

"I can't even lift my nose, you miserable character,"

says this friend farther down the room. His voice is terribly eager, though, and he waves his hand at you. "Tell me about it," he demands.

"He can lift his leg, really lift it!" shouts the lawyer.

"And here's another thing," you say, and turn the knee slightly back and forth.

"Now he's throwing that leg all over the bed!" comes the lawyer's acclamation.

"That's wonderful, really wonderful," says the pantie manufacturer, and the pure feeling in his tone causes an unexpected pain to twist in you. You know the terrible extent of his own paralysis.

"I'm telling you I *know* the guy is going to walk!" the lawyer states.

The pain turns towards a deeper point within you. Your own hands and arms are nearly normal now, while one side of the lawyer's upper body remains useless.

"I don't know," you falter, "it may not mean a thing."

"Don't talk that way," the lawyer says.

"Don't be a meathead, buddy," says the pantie manufacturer. "This means that you'll strut out of here like my old army sergeant."

You stare down at the miraculous leg.

"I'll have to ask the doctor," you say.

An attendant walks in with full water pitchers, and at once the lawyer challenges him, "What about this . . . he can move his leg! Move it!"

"That's fine," says the attendant, the indifference in

his voice barely hidden. "All of you men will recover, it's just a matter of time." His stride is undisturbed, and he only glances at your legs as he passes, not bothering to ask which one.

Your friends continue to discuss your accomplishment in tones that ring with joy for you.

"It may not be important," you say quietly, but you are shouted down.

You want to be off by yourself to think about your leg. It does not seem fair to concentrate upon it in the presence of your less fortunate friends.

Your work periods in the tank-room have been extended and you have learned to sit more comfortably in your wheel chair. But this one day the fascination of the book you are finishing does not hold you. You sit quietly, examining your leg. You cannot move it in your present sitting position, but this does not matter. You can remember its performance.

Suddenly you feel sure that you will walk again, that this is only the beginning of the most remarkable recovery in the history of polio. A strange sense of strength surges through your body.

It is quite a thing to walk, you decide. To suddenly thrash your legs into a run because you are almost too late to catch the train, and then to lift your leg to the high step and ram your body upward with its strength. You take your hands and move your knees together, out again. They waggle with weakness, but you have

seen your right leg twist and lift on the white blanket of the bed, and hope is making you breathless again.

You can remain no longer in your narrow workroom. you wheel out into the hall, and take the elevator to the hospital's solarium. You notice with satisfaction the efficient legs of doctors, nurses and the scattered visitors of private patients. You catch the eye of a few of these brisk people and smile at them companionably. If they should ask you how you are feeling, you would enjoy describing the remarkable strength of your right leg.

Crowding as close as you can to one of the solarium's wide windows, you stare down six stories into the busy intersection of Forty-second Street and Second Avenue. People are walking in all directions. You examine them carefully. They are so bold. They step out with carefree swiftness against the traffic light. They bound up to the curbs. They make you laugh with the quickness and dexterity of all their movements.

Your thoughts turn to the doctor, and excitement leaps up in you. What will he say? What *can* he say when he watches that lift and that twitching back and forth?

The hours roll away. In your bed you prepare yourself carefully for the doctor's visit. You tie a narrow binder around your middle. In a sitting position you twitch the knee several times, and lift the leg just once.

You must not tire the muscles before the doctor's inspection.

Your friends are full of admonitions.

"Take your time," the lawyer says.

"Don't just lift your leg, turn it the way you can," you are instructed by the pantie manufacturer.

The doctor comes into the room, followed by his retinue of therapists, nurses and other doctors who listen intently to his every word. It is his habit to begin his rounds in the far end of the room.

But, your friend the lawyer cannot contain himself.

"Doctor, he can lift his leg," he calls out.

The doctor turns to peer at him, then follows his excited directions to your bed.

"Your leg?" says the doctor, his eyes smiling with their cool blue light. "What is this you have to show me?"

You whip back the light covering. You twitch your knee this way and that. You clench the narrow area of muscle with all your might, and with a jerk your leg lifts higher than ever before.

The doctor straightens from his examination and turns to your friends who strain forward attentively in their beds.

"You all know about this, I am sure," he says.

A chorus of assent answers him. The other doctors and the company laugh loudly at this. For them it is

quite an amusing interlude. But your doctor's lips scarcely lift, and when he turns back to you, there are shadows in his eyes.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asks quietly.

You can feel that the attention of your friends is crowding toward your bed.

"Will I walk again?" you ask.

The doctor touches your shoulder gently with his fingers, as he did on his first visit to your bed. His eyes are fixed on the window.

"I can't tell you that," he says, and the shadow is in his voice now, and you know it is a peculiar kind of sadness. "This is a strange disease. I *think* this leg of yours will lift higher and higher, and grow strong. But I don't know. Not yet."

The fingers on your shoulder grip in gently, then he turns away. He pauses only briefly by the other beds, and then the room slips back to quiet behind the clatter of his following.

"He didn't know . . ." the lawyer says.

You watch your leg. You lift it and twitch it this way and that.

IX

Birthday Party

DAY AFTER DAY you think about your children.

Now that the first pain and depression of polio have passed, the borders of your new world have extended beyond the edges of your bed, but they are still much narrower than before the disease hit you. They encompass only a score of people, the least important of these being your dearest friends, and at the center of the group, burning in your heart every waking hour, are your wife and children. You no longer have time for anyone else, and, as it now seems certain that your recovery will be slow and difficult, your instincts tell you that the world beyond these few people no longer can be trusted.

Your wife is with you every visiting period, always bursting eagerly through the doorway on the minute of the hour, her dauntless smile lifting you like strong hands. And at such times friends pour in upon you in whatever quantity your wife decrees.

But children are not allowed, and daily your anxiety grows concerning what they will think of you now that you can no longer walk. With your wife, you already

you to the chair. You feel very tired and sit with your head bent down, while your friends in their beds shout out their approval of what you have done.

"When will I get my brace?" you ask the doctor.

"In a few days now," he tells you.

"What will happen then?" you want to know.

"We'll teach you how to walk," he says.

The hospital's smallest *polio*, with all the balance and dexterity of a two-year-old with one tiny leg locked in leather and dura-aluminum, tries to turn at the far end of the corridor. She falls, hands grasping at the air, and only the quick pull of the chief therapist on the reins of her white harness saves her from a thumping on the floor.

Fright makes the child cry, and the grown men watching from their wheel chairs turn their eyes away.

But soon they hear the chortle and the sharp, glad directions with which the little patient commonly accompanies her exercises. They see the little girl come stepping, dragging, stepping, dragging towards them once again.

"You show them now," says the therapist with the gallant urging children love. "Walking's a trick anyone can learn!"

XV

Departure

THE LONG BRACE clicks and locks smartly at the knee, and leaning against the wall, you stand erect.

Today the floor is only twenty feet away instead of fifty, as it was upon your first ascent to the normal human walking position. The rods of the brace gleam in slender perfection downward, your thin naked leg between them.

"I still wish you had made this thing out of aluminum," you say to Lou, one of the world's great brace-makers, who stands near by.

"Quit your beefing," says Lou. "You were six foot two when they brought you in, and you've probably been stretched another couple of inches. It takes steel to hold a man your size."

"I don't mean to imply it isn't pretty," you say.

"Steel," says Lou approvingly. "There's nothing better than steel."

The doctor looks up at you from under his smooth white eyebrows. You are still surprised to see that you are so much taller than he.

"Walk," he orders tersely.

With the crutches jammed firmly under your arms, you know exactly what to do. You step out firmly with your good right leg, then lift your left hip and swing forward Lou's handsome brace with its less important content of flesh and bone. You keep it up right down the hall, and, though your technique of foot travel might appear odd or even pitiful to the man on the street, you are terribly proud of it.

"Turn around," comes your next order from the doctor.

Thrusting your weight upon your good leg and one crutch, you pivot and come stepping and swinging yourself up the hall toward the little watchful group. You are grinning with all your might. You feel your neck muscles straining with the anxiety of this expression. You want the doctor's approval more than you have ever wanted anything in your life.

You reach the group and halt. The white head of the doctor is just below, bent down intently, as he stares at your legs. His hands, his quiet hands, which you have come to believe in as some people believe in God, reach out as he stoops, touching your good leg.

"You have done a fine job with this one," he says.

It is one of the few compliments he has ever paid you, and you feel your throat choking with happiness and pride.

He prods your weak leg, your shame, between the slender steel rods which give it strength. You both

have worked very hard on that leg, and every tiny muscle failure in it is known perfectly to each of you.

"And don't give up this one," says the doctor. "There is something there. We don't know about it yet."

You feel each of his words dissolving into you. You wait. The doctor straightens. His blue eyes peer steadily into yours, the eyebrows lift intently.

"So you are going to Warm Springs," he says.

"Yes, this week, if you think I'm ready."

"Of course. Tomorrow, if you like."

You are grinning again, and the little crowd around you, nurses, physical therapists, murmur their congratulations. You have won the first big victory. You can walk alone. You can leave the hospital where you have suffered through the terrible beginning stages of the disease, and have climbed upward to the doorway, inch by inch.

You thank them all.

"Remember one thing," says the doctor quietly. He takes your arm above the elbow, and you are proud of the big clenching of muscle which you have developed with the exercises. "Remember, that you are just starting. Five months since the onset of polio. To you it seems a long time, but it is nothing. I think you will have some return of muscle strength for at least a year. You must keep working."

"And hoping, doctor?"

His eyes are deep on yours.

"Of course," he tells you.

He steps back.

You duck your head and try to keep on grinning. You feel his fingers gently pat your arm.

"All right, next patient," he says quickly, and you watch the group move away from you down the corridor.

Before going back to your wheel chair, you walk to each of the other beds in the big sunny room where you have spent a lifetime in five months.

"So you made it," says the pantie manufacturer, with a triumphant smile. You don't have to tell him, the look on your face is enough.

You nod. "Tomorrow. I can leave tomorrow."

He salutes you with his cigarette. "You miserable, miserable character," he says. "I'm going to miss you around here."

"Maybe you'll be next," you tell him. And then you are sorry you have said this. You all know that both legs and one arm are gone completely.

"Sure, I'll wriggle on my belly like a snake," he tells you.

The teen-age boy is gone from the next bed, and the new patient whom you scarcely know is deep in exhausted sleep. There is only the lawyer, your particular friend. You swing over to his bedside and stand there.

"It's terrific, the way you walk," he tells you proudly.

You know how it is with him. The weakness of one shoulder and arm have held him back from everything but the wheel chair and may for months to come.

"What a terrific right leg you've got there," he says.

You wish that you could give him a little of that strength, inject it into his shoulder.

You call for your wheel chair then, and sit down at his bedside. For nearly two hours you talk quietly. He is immensely happy about your success. It floods his thin, pain-worn face, softening it. You go over many of the small, terribly important experiences you have been through together. Then it is supertime, then dark, and you hoist yourself into your high, narrow, white bed for the last time.

There is a full moon this night, and your bed is white and clear around you, blackness dropping depthlessly from its edges. It has been your home through the longest and deepest experience of your life. It has been the one sure thing in a totally dissolving world. You grip the thick edges of the mattress in your hands which have grown so strong. You lie for a long time without sleeping. In the morning you will walk back through the doorway into the firm world you knew, and you will make that passage without fear.

You relax, and the softness of the moonlight takes you gently into a dream in which your victory continues forever.