



# THE LIGHTHOUSE

*Shining light on post-polio health*

**Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association, Inc**

January 15, 2023

[www.coastalempirepoliosurvivors.org](http://www.coastalempirepoliosurvivors.org)

Vol. XXVI, No. 1

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year to everyone! Nothing equals the beginning of a new year for raising our hopes for better times to come. Though still cautious, we have begun to venture out more and more like we did before COVID changed our lives forever. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, seven of us gathered together for a meeting of The Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association at the Islands Public Library on Whitemarsh Island. Great parking, excellent audiovisual equipment, comfortable seating, and a friendly staff made this free meeting space almost ideal. The cool room temperature could not be adjusted at all, and my one shawl was not big enough to offer warmth to everyone. We all need to remember to bring extra clothing wherever we go to keep our polio bones warm enough for air conditioning. Our hot coffee and snacks tried to help us. Richard Graham from Springfield brought coffee; Cheryl Brackin brought muffins; Shannon Foxx Willhite, my daughter, donated a variety of snacks. Penny Smith drove up from Brunswick. JoAnn Hardyman came down across the river from Beaufort, South Carolina. Sandra Bath drove from Georgetown. Shannon and I drove 18 minutes from midtown Savannah.

Our newly updated website on the big screen took us on a great tour of CEPASA's mission, history, and memories like our Oglethorpe Mall exhibit and special projects. JoAnn brought a book to recommend. We shared stories of our lives and news from members we have heard from like Hattie Allen, Nancy Hess, and Casi Rainwater Fisher. The library staff allowed us to stay as long as they could before helping us clear out. We plan to meet in different places in 2023. The library branches do not all have meeting rooms but many do. Our homes and restaurants may be good places to try also.

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to Daniel Shehan who died January 9, 2023, in his home.



### **My Polio Story by Dan Shehan**



I had just finished the fifth grade at Parker Elementary School in Panama City, Florida. I was ten years old and loved to spend my summers with my maternal grandmother, Lilly D. Everage, in Andalusia, Alabama. She lived alone in the old family home, but several of her children had homes nearby; and one owned a grocery store a block away. I would walk to the store in the mornings and get the food she planned to cook that day. If it were peas or butterbeans, I would help shell them. In the afternoons I would walk to one of the theaters, pay twenty-five cents, and sit through the showing several times.

One Wednesday morning (August 5, 1953), I awoke with a stiff neck and terrific headache. As the day progressed, I began to feel very weak. The next day, I could hardly get out of bed or stand up without help. I was admitted to Andalusia Memorial Hospital. My parents, Comer and Helon Everage Shehan, were called; and they drove up to Andalusia from Panama City. Dr. Parker told them that he did not know what I had but would like to observe me for a couple of days. By Thursday evening I could not move, and my breathing had become very shallow. My parents would not wait; and, against the doctor's wishes, my dad carried me out of the hospital, placed me in the back seat of the car, and drove me to Pensacola, Florida.

A relative had arranged for a doctor to meet us at the emergency room of one of the hospitals in Pensacola. It was dark when we arrived. I was placed on an

examining table and told to be very still for a spinal tap. After the procedure, the doctor and nurse left the room; and I was alone. My parents had not been allowed in the room. While lying there wondering what was the matter with me, I heard a scream from another room. A little later, I was put on a stretcher, placed in an ambulance, and driven to a building, which in the dark of night looked like an army barrack. Inside, I was placed on a small, low bed with some sort of mechanism strapped to my chest. I was very thirsty and semi-conscious, but the nurse would only put a drop of water on my tongue all along. A couple of nurses and I were the only ones in the dimly lit room. I had not seen my parents since arriving at the emergency room. I thought whatever was wrong with me must be so bad that I was being put to death!

When I awoke the next morning, I found myself enclosed in a tank-like contraption with my head sticking out one end. I learned that it was called an iron lung. I was feeling better and had no trouble breathing; although, I was unable to move my arms or legs. As I shifted my eyes to the left, I saw rain through one of the high windows. To the right I saw my parents looking through a window at me. I could not speak or hear them. I wondered what was going on. How did I come to be in the iron lung?

Unknown to me at the time is what had transpired during the night. After the spinal tap, the doctor met with my parents and some relatives and gave them the news that I had Bulbar polio and would be dead within 24 hours. Mother screamed! (I heard this from the examining room.) She would not accept the doctor's prognosis. She called her brother-in-law, Dr. Robert Earl

Vickery, who was a student at the University of Alabama Medical School in Birmingham, Alabama. He and one of his professors flew down to Pensacola, Florida, during the night. They asked my doctor at the Escambia County Hospital if there were an iron lung in the hospital. The reply was yes, but no one knew how to use it! My uncle and his teacher put me in the iron lung, thus saving my life!

After a couple of weeks, the iron lung and its resident (myself) were placed on a Navy plane and flown to Birmingham, Alabama. The plane did not have the electrical power to operate the iron lung; so, two uncles, Norman Everage and Henry Everage, took turns pumping the iron lung manually during the flight. When we arrived in Birmingham, I was transferred from the Pensacola iron lung to one from Jefferson Hillman Hospital. During the transfer, it was discovered that the

neck seal had cut into the back of my neck. From that point on attention had to be given to healing that injury while keeping a tight seal around my neck. The doctors also told my parents that I would never be able to walk and I would be in a wheelchair the rest of my life! In late September, after about four weeks in Jefferson Hillman Hospital, I was transferred to Crippled Children's Hospital next door.

I stayed in Crippled Children's Hospital about six months. While there I was weaned from the iron lung, using the rocking bed; and I gradually gained the use of my arms and legs. I had a private teacher for my sixth-grade studies. I celebrated my eleventh birthday on October 6, 1953. I was given daily physical therapy and whirlpool baths. It was during one of my therapy sessions that my therapist noticed a slight curve in my spine and thus began a life-long struggle to prevent my spine from curving. The weakened muscles of my back allowed the onset of scoliosis. Before I left the hospital in March of 1954, I was fitted with an acetate jacket to prevent further curving.

During my hospital stay my parents moved to a community near Pensacola, called Gonzalez, Florida. They had built a new house with wide doors that would accommodate a wheelchair. Again, the doctors had been wrong. By this time, I was walking on my own. I attended the seventh and eighth grades at Tate High School. Sometime during 1957, our family moved to Warm Springs, Georgia, so they could be near me. I had been admitted to Warm Springs Clinic for several months for treatment of my scoliosis, part of which was to lose some weight. I was fitted with a different type of brace, which consisted of a corset with a steel bar on the back. On the top of the bar was a mechanism, which held my chin and head. This bar could ratchet my head up, thus stretching my spine. I wore this brace until I finished high school in 1960. My ninth grade was completed at home with several different teachers coming to my home. The remainder of my high school years were completed at a private school, Brent Christian High in Pensacola, Florida.

I enrolled in Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. After my freshman year, I took a break and went to Houston, Texas, for a spinal fusion with Harrington rods. I resumed college about a year and a half later and was graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education in January 1966. It was not easy finding a teaching position in the middle of the school year, but I found one in

DeFuniak Springs, Florida. By the beginning of the next school year, I secured a position at Andalusia High School in Andalusia, Alabama, the place of my birth.

In the summer after my first year of teaching at Andalusia High School, I chaperoned eight high school students on a six-week tour of England, Ireland, Scotland, and France. Four of those weeks were spent at the University of Durham in Durham, England. During the next three summers I attended the University of South Alabama and graduated in 1972 with a Master of Arts degree in English education.

Around the year 1976, I began to feel very fatigued by the end of each day. I began to become sleepy during the day. Then, one night, I realized I was having trouble breathing when I lay down to sleep. After a visit to the emergency room, I was placed in the hospital and given oxygen. By the next day, I was barely conscious. My mother had me transferred to a hospital in Dothan, Alabama, where I was given a tracheotomy and placed on a breathing machine for about a week. My condition improved, and I was released about a week later. I was still having trouble breathing when lying flat; so, I slept in a recliner, sitting up at night. Realizing that I could not continue like this, I made an appointment with a doctor in Houston, Texas. After his examination, he said that I might have to sleep in an iron lung. He had one at the hospital and asked me to sleep in it that night. The next day I felt like a new person! The mystery had been solved, but where were we going to find an iron lung to use at home! My mother and I called several hospitals in Alabama. Someone finally directed us to Emory University Hospital, which maintained a March of Dimes equipment center in Augusta, Georgia. After we contacted the office in Augusta, the March of Dimes shipped an iron lung to my home in Andalusia, Alabama. This stabilized my life, and I resumed my normal activities. There was one problem with the iron lung. When I got into the iron lung, someone (usually my mother) had to close the latches on the lung; and then someone would have to unlatch it for me to get out. One day for a nap I was latched in by my mother. She went to visit a friend and forgot about me. When I awoke and discovered that she had not returned, I had to extricate myself by tearing the flexible collar around my neck and reaching out to unlatch the lung. I related the story to the mechanical engineer at the March of Dimes equipment center in Augusta. He informed me that he could modify the iron lung with the latches operated from the inside so that I could open and close the lung myself. I was shipped the modified lung in exchange for the one I had. This new iron lung gave me some independence.

By 1995, I had retired from the field of education, and one of my doctors began trying me on a bi-pap machine. It took a little time to get used to wearing the mask, but by 1997, I was using it with two liters of oxygen for sleeping and resting. I was finally free from the iron lung! Today I am retired in Savannah, Georgia, and a member of the Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association, Inc. As for the iron lung, it is now owned by Bubba Daiss in his private museum. It will be used for displays and demonstrations.

Shellie Daniel "Dan" Shehan

*Front page news in Andalusia, Alabama, on August 13, 1953:*

## Polio Strikes in Andalusia

Danny Shehan, 10, Taken to Pensacola; Placed in Iron Lung

Polio struck in Andalusia last week for the first time in the past 12 months. Danny Shehan, 10, grandson of Mrs. J.W. Everage, of West Watson Street, whom he has been visiting for most of this summer, was stricken on Thursday, August 6.

Tests and examinations continued through Friday when young Shehan was rushed to Pensacola where he was placed in an iron lung.

His condition on Wednesday was reported satisfactory, but it is understood plans are being made to have the youth transferred to either New Orleans or Birmingham so that he can be given special exercises required for patients in iron lungs.

Dr. C. D. McLeod, county health officer, said the case is of the dreaded bulbar polio type. The case will be charged against Covington County as the Shehan child had been in Andalusia for several weeks.

Parents of Danny Shehan are Mr. and Mrs. Domer Shehan, who recently moved from Panama City to Pensacola. Mrs. Shehan is the former Helen Everage. The couple has one other child.

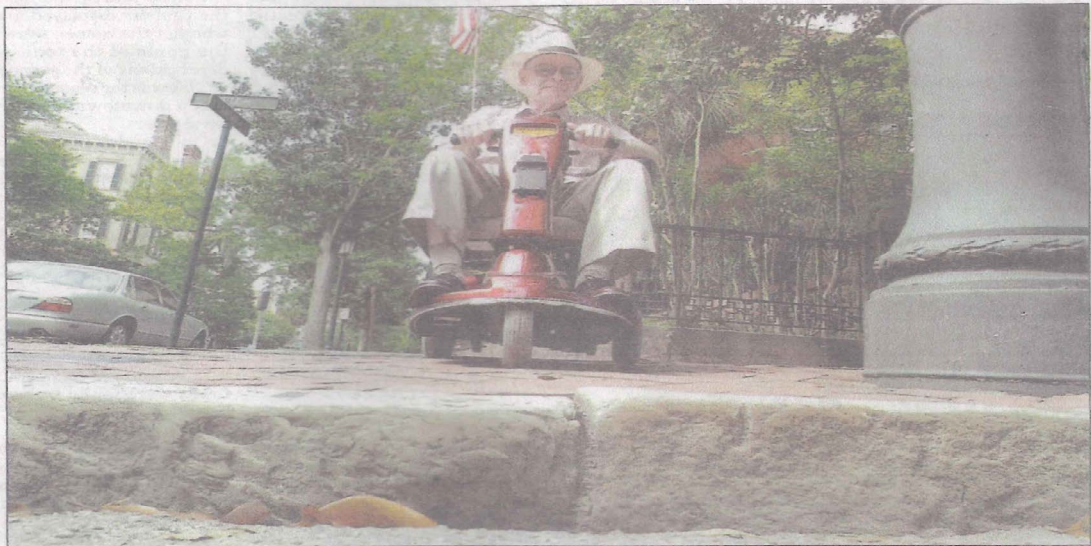
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*One of Dan's projects in 2006 involved CEPSA members and the City of Savannah working together to make our historic district more accessible to people in scooters and wheelchairs. The maps we published started the reconstruction project which gave us what we have today. The following article from the Savannah Morning Newspaper describes that public service venture.*

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Photos by Carl Elmore/Savannah Morning News

Shehan, peers down at a curb too steep for his scooter. When Shehan started using a scooter, he was surprised at the lack of curb ramps on Savannah's downtown sidewalks.

## Where the sidewalks don't end

Handicap-accessibility has long been a problem in Savannah, but a new map could help wheelchair and scooter users navigate downtown

Polio survivor Dan Shehan, 64, peers down at a curb too steep for his scooter. When Shehan started using a scooter, he was surprised to find Savannah's downtown sidewalks lacking when it comes to accessibility, including curb ramps. (Photo: [Carl Elmore](#) [4])



Dan Shehan, 64, survived polio, but in the last year has suffered from post-polio syndrome which causes muscle weakness. (Photo: Carl Elmore)

BY ANNE HART

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Call him the curb-cut connoisseur.

As a polio survivor and scooter-user, Dan Shehan, 64, has to know which sidewalks in downtown Savannah dead end without curb ramps versus those that allow wheelchairs and scooters clear passage.

Suffering from post-polio syndrome, which causes muscle weakness, Shehan rides his scooter from his home near Forsyth Park to his part-time job on River Street and to events in the Historic District.

Similar to other people with physical disabilities, Shehan was surprised to find Savannah's sidewalks lacking when it comes to accessibility, including curb ramps.

"The Historic District's sidewalks were a maze of dead-end sidewalks," he said.

So Shehan, scooter-user Richard Graham and fellow members of the Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association Inc. scouted out downtown sidewalks to find those free of dead ends and trouble spots.

They used that information to create a navigational map showing the few sidewalks and curb ramps that connect historic sites.

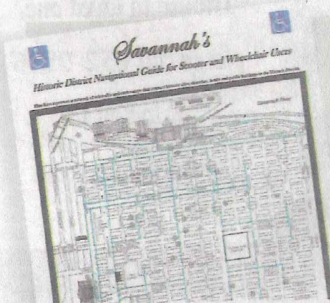
The city also has old houses, historic public buildings and restaurants that don't comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1992. The back of the map lists two dozen restaurants found to have adequate accessibility.

This week, CEPSA members distributed the free maps to about 50 local spots — hotels, visitor centers, libraries, city hall,

SEE MAP PAGE 3D



Polio survivor Dan Shehan, 64, checks for traffic as he crosses Gordon Street at Bull Street. The street, with curbs cut for scooters and wheelchairs, has the only direct north-south sidewalk from Forsyth Park to Bay Street. Other north-south downtown sidewalks simply end, with no curb ramps.



## NAVIGATING THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association Inc. has created a map that shows the few sidewalks and curb ramps that connect historic sites in downtown Savannah.

The map was distributed to about 50 locations this week to be given to people who use wheelchairs or

scooters. Pick up a free map at the Savannah Visitors Center, Bull Street Library, Kroger on Gwinnett Street or various downtown hotels.

Visit the Savannah Morning News Web site to download a map at [savannahnow.com](http://savannahnow.com).



# Map

FROM PAGE 1D

grocery stores. Some even have been posted in parking garages.

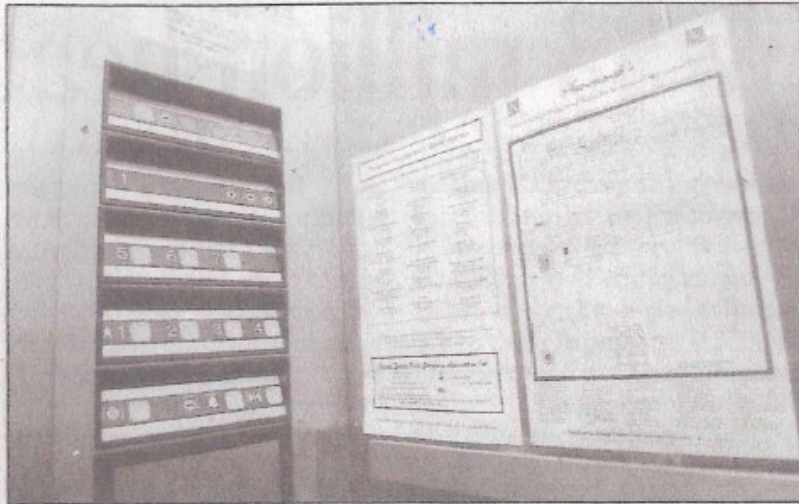
"We want people who use wheelchairs or scooters and who come to Savannah to feel like we are doing everything we can to make their stay here comfortable," said polio survivor Diane Davis, president of CEPASA.

The map shows there's a long way to go when it comes to making downtown sidewalks accessible. The only direct north-south route between Forsyth Park and Bay Street for example, is the west side of Bull Street. Other north-south sidewalks simply end, with no curb ramps.

"You can't jump four inches in a wheelchair or scooter," Shehan said. "So you have to back track and find another way."

No wonder so many wheelchair and scooter-users travel on the street, rather than the sidewalks, as wheelchair user Bob Habas sometimes does.

Habas is an independent-living coordinator for Living Independence for Everyone Inc., a Savannah agency serving people with disabilities. LIFE was not involved with creating



Carl Elmore/Savannah Morning News

Members of the Coastal Empire Polio Survivors Association Inc. distributed about 2,000 handicap accessibility maps this week. Here is one taped inside a parking deck elevator.

the map.

In 2000, Savannah was audited by the federal government for compliance with the ADA.

Two years later, city officials agreed to budget for improvements, including physically modifying facilities to make them more handicap-friendly. Savannah city officials are taking steps toward making downtown more accessible, but progress is slow, Habas said.

Meanwhile, Habas hears from tourists in wheelchairs who tell him they're not coming back to Savannah.

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY?

Call the U.S. Department of Justice's toll-free ADA Information Line at (800) 514-0301, or call LIFE at 920-2414.

"They say it's a beautiful city, that they really would like to be able to see it," Habas said.

"But their vacation was interrupted by inaccessibility."

**Dan Shehan's life will be celebrated on January 31, 2023, at the First Baptist Church Education Building, 102 West McDonough Street at 11:00. The handicapped entrance is through the courtyard. The lunch will be offered by reservation only at 12:00 for \$12.00. Please call or email Marty Foxx for further details or reservations for lunch: 912-508-3470 or [martyxx4@gmail.com](mailto:martyxx4@gmail.com).**

Dan enjoyed playing the organ for church and published a book of Christmas Songs:

### THE CHRISTMAS CAROL SING

Most of the Christmas songs in this booklet were written for the annual Christmas Carol Sing, which was begun in 1970 by S. Daniel Shehan in his home, Dovecoat, on Meadowbrook Drive, Andalusia, Alabama. Intended to be a get-together for his neighbors to sing Christmas songs and have refreshments, the Sing grew into an event held in local churches and including hundreds of Andalusians.

The two-to-three hour program evolved into a set format over the years, the first half, mainly secular music; the second, religious, with refreshments between. Mr. Shehan played the organ, assisted by Louise Barrow in the early years; Mary Clyde Merrill, the piano, assisted by John Beasley in later years; and Joseph Cecil Wingard directed the singing and acted as master of ceremonies.

Until her health failed, Mr. Shehan's aunt, Elizabeth (Everage) Welch, was hostess, often assisted by Mr. Shehan's first cousin, Willie Pearl Mason. Mr. Wingard's cousin-by-marriage, Lenora Johnson, succeeded Mrs. Welch as hostess; she was assisted by Irene Butler, Anna Lois Nall, and Jane Weidler.

Mr. Shehan's father, Comer Broughton Shehan, built a lectern and small platform for use at the sing, for the director.

Starting in 1971, Mr. Shehan wrote music to Mr. Wingard's lyrics for their own Christmas songs. That year it was "Just Before Santa Claus Comes." Over the years they wrote many Christmas pieces for the Sing: "Silver Crosses" (1972), "Goodbye, Christmas" (1974), "Christmas at Dovecoat" (1975), "It's Christmas Time Again" and "Mrs. Switches" (1976), "The Mistletoe Song," "I Love Christmas," and "A Christmas Toast" (1977), "I'm Too Old for Santa Claus" and "Toys Are Like Children" (1978), "I'm Gettin' All Dressed Up for Christmas" (dedicated to Jerry Hall and the memory of Bing Crosby) (1979), "Bartholemew, Krisnicholas Bobjingle Wens'las Elf" (1980), "An Olde Broken Bell" (dedicated to Mrs. W. M. Thweatt) (1981), "The Candle and the Star" (dedicated to the memory of Mildred Hart) (1982), "This Is a Christmas Carol" (1983), "Wrap Me Up in Christmas" (1984), "The Season of Singing" (1989), "As the Shepherds Long Ago" (dedicated to Don Lingle) (1990), and "Gathering the Greens" (1992).

In 1976 Mr. Wingard had a Santa suit made, which he then began to wear during the first half. He usually wore "white tie and tails" the second half, and Mr Shehan wore a tuxedo throughout.

The first half usually ended with "The Twelve Days of Christmas" with individuals singing the various parts. The second half ended with "O Holy Night," some carols, a prayer, "Silent Night," the last verse a capella, and then with Mr. Wingard's quoting Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, "And so, as Tiny Tim observed, 'God bless us everyone!'"

The Sing was held at Mr. Shehan's home, 1970-1980. In 1979 it was held two nights to accommodate the crowd. After he moved, it was held at First Presbyterian Church six times, the First United Methodist Church twice, the chapel of First Baptist Church three times, the home of Jim and Eva Maloy twice, and the home of Forest and Sara Hobson once.

Carl and Mildred Shaw and Grace Tadlock made photographs at many of the Sings, and Carl and Mildred taped the music of several Sings. (continued on the inside of the back cover)

Soloists over the years have included James Douglas, Margie Thomasson, Ray and Jane Burdeshaw, Carolyn Rankin, Tim Willis (who sang "O Holy Night" eight years in a row), Lenora Johnson, Cindy Perrin, Kay (Weaver) Ingram, Anne Mount, Lindsey and Whitney Wiggins, Don Lingle, Paula Sue Duebelt, Mary Clyde Merrill, Ann Martin, Lane Parish, John and Betty Foster, Jeanice Kirkland, Gloria Donaldson, Jim Maloy, and Joe Wingard.

Other musicians have included the Ladies' Chorus of First Baptist Church, Louise Barrow at the organ, the Irene Hines Bell Choir of First Baptist, Wayne Miller with his oboe, French horn, and trumpet, Martha Givan at the piano, with her daughter Endsley, with the flute, Ann Martin at the piano, Sue Wilson at the piano, and Jimmy Moore at the piano.

Special moments were those when Irene Hines attended her only time, 1977 (the bell choir is named for her); singing "Happy Birthday" to Winona King when her birthdate fell on the day of the Sing; singing "Happy Birthday" to Alabama on December 14; welcoming the parents of Margie Thomasson, Calvin and Conway Jacques, who had just moved to Andalusia in 1984; dedicating the Sing to Robert Holley, who was buried the morning of the Sing, December 22, 1990; the Waco Taylors' decorating the Baptist chapel three years in a row as well as the Methodist fellowship hall; Abbie Henderson's attending in 1989 at the age of ninety-two; Francis McGowin's and Larry Shaw's wearing their Scottish kilts, Curtis and Margie Thomasson's wedding anniversaries paralleling the Sing; Mr. James Arthur Wilson's praying; and the dedication, December 21, 1993, of the Sing to the memory of Elizabeth, who had passed away.

The twenty-fifth and last Sing, sponsored by Shehan and Wingard, was December 22, 1994. After this, Dr. Rex Butler continued the Sing for several years.

"Sing, Christmas Carolers" was written for a musical version of Wingard-O'Sheehan's *Little Women*, a project of the Andalusia committee to celebrate America's Bicentennial.

"Boxing Day" was written for the Butler Sing in 1997.

"In the Heart of Mary" was written in 1985 but not used in a Sing.

"Christ the King" was written in 1999 and dedicated to Christ the King Catholic Church, Andalusia, where Mr. Shehan was organist twenty-three years.

"Glorify" is a seasonal song with verses for general praise, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. The lyrics were written in the fall of 2012 to music composed August 28, 2012. It was premiered by Mr. Shehan February 24, 2013, in his Sunday School class in Bull Street Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia.

Cover: Carlos and Wanda Clas

*Thanks to Diane Davis for maintaining our history books over the years. This red song book is part of her collection on Dan Shehan.*

*If you search YouTube with Dan's name, you can see videos he made playing hymns on his home organ.*

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Your contributions are tax deductible and will be acknowledged appropriately. Please complete this form and mail with your check to:

**CEPSA, PO Box 14355, Savannah, GA 31416**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you to Maureen Sinkule who shares her excellent ZOOM meetings with polio survivors all across the world! Her Boca Raton Area Post Polio Group [BAPPG] offers great information on her website: [www.postpolio.wordpress.com](http://www.postpolio.wordpress.com). Check it out!*



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