

Cindy Ranii

You can watch the video of this podcast at: youtu.be/jGyRK8ITVGy

[00:00:02] **Landy Thomas:** Hello and welcome to the SRNA "Ask the Expert" podcast series, "Community Spotlight" edition. I'm Landy Thomas with the Siegel Rare Neuroimmune Association. For this episode, I am pleased to be joined by Cindy Ranii. Cindy Ranii is a 79-year-old retired educator who lives with her wife, Shelly, and service dog, Hollis, in Santa Cruz, California.

[00:00:21] In 2005, her life changed drastically when she was stricken with transverse myelitis. Within four days, she went from golfing, playing tennis, and working vigorously as a superintendent of a local high school district to being a paraplegic. You can find her full bio in the podcast description.

[00:00:36] SRNA is a nonprofit focused on support, education, and research of rare neuroimmune disorders. You can learn more about us on our website at wearesrna.org. This episode is made possible in part by the generous support of Amgen; Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease; Genentech; and UCB.

[00:00:53] Hi, Cindy. Would you be willing to introduce yourself to us—your name, your diagnosis, and what you love to do in life?

[00:01:03] **Cindy Ranii:** Hi, my name is Cynthia Ranii. I'm 79 years old. I live here in Santa Cruz, California, and my diagnosis is transverse myelitis. I'm a T3 complete ASIA A. My onset was acute, and it was in July 2005. It hasn't changed much since then in terms of my physical situation. Yeah, it's unchanged.

[00:01:34] **Landy Thomas:** Not too much. Not too much of a change. For your early diagnostic journey—that's a big question that a lot of people like to hear about, other people's processes—when did it first happen to you, and what was that process of getting to the hospital and trying to get the diagnosis? Were you able to get a diagnosis in a relatively decent amount of time, or no?

[00:02:00] **Cindy Ranii:** No, not at all. It was very puzzling. It took a while. My first inkling that something was wrong was when I had a foot that went a little limp. We had been traveling in Scotland, my wife and I, and had been at our daughter's wedding. Toward the end of the trip, I was a little bit tired.

[00:02:20] We came home and met some grandkids here at the house. We were playing around. I remember giving some of them piggyback rides. I felt in good health. I'd been golfing the day before down in San Diego. When we were in Scotland, we had played four or five rounds of golf, walking up and down Scottish hillsides, carrying bags.

[00:02:40] So I was very vigorous and in good health, just tired from work. I have a big job, and it was really good to be on vacation because I was worn out.

[00:02:50] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah.

[00:02:50] **Cindy Ranii:** But when we got—

[00:02:50] **Landy Thomas:** You were a superintendent at a school, right? Were you still a superintendent?

[00:02:54] **Cindy Ranii:** I was still a superintendent, yes. It was a big, stressful job. I've always wondered if that had something to do with my onset and the inflammation, but we'll never know. Yeah. So, after I had this bit of a weak foot, I went to work, and during the day, I got a really bad backache. But I've had backaches before where I've had to go to the chiropractor, and I even lay down on the floor in my office because my back hurt so much.

[00:03:28] I thought, "This isn't good." I went to my primary care physician. She examined me, but she didn't know what was wrong. She said, "I'm concerned. I don't know what it is. Don't go to a chiropractor. Go home. Pick up some prescriptions on the way there." She sent me a prescription for steroids

[00:03:49] and some pain medication. And she said, "If you lose control of your bowel or bladder, get to the ER right away." So I was in the drugstore, and I had to wait in line to pick up the prescription. The oddest thing happened as I was standing in line; I said to myself, "I'm having a hard time standing up."

[00:04:12] Yeah, that's the weirdest feeling. So, I actually went to the aisle where there were canes, and I borrowed a cane to help me stand up. Then I went home, took the medication, and lay down. I was still in a pretty bad back pain situation, and then I lost control of my bladder. I got up to go to the bathroom and—oops, there it is.

[00:04:38] I didn't make it to the bathroom. So, actually, I called an advice nurse and I said, "My doctor said to head to the ER if this happens." She goes, "Yes, get to the ER right away." So I went to the ER, gave the basic information for the triage, and it was a little bit crowded, so I sat down, assuming I'd wait quite a bit of time, as usually happens in the ER.

[00:04:59] And then all of a sudden, they said, "Cynthia Ranii." I thought, "Why are they calling me so fast?" So, I went in, and there was a team of doctors, nurses, specialists, and lab technicians. They were doing lots of tests, talking among themselves, and then calling more people in. They were really concerned that something was wrong because by now, pretty much my whole left leg was on the verge of numb, and the back pain was pretty severe.

[00:05:30] But one by one, the specialists said, "No, it's not my problem. Heart's fine. Nope, lungs are fine. Orthopedically you're fine. No broken legs or anything." So, I lay in the emergency room for probably seven or eight hours with different people saying, "No, my specialty's checked off." Then the neurologist came in and said, "It's probably something neurological, but I don't know what it is." Oh, I lost part of the picture there.

[00:06:00] **Landy Thomas:** Oh, you're good.

[00:06:02] **Cindy Ranii:** I'm okay?

[00:06:03] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, yeah, I can see you.

[00:06:04] **Cindy Ranii:** Okay, thanks. They said, "We'll get you a bed. We need to do some more tests." So, I'll shorten the story a little bit. I ended up in a room, and they still didn't know what was wrong. They did more

tests. They did an MRI, a spinal tap, and other tests I don't remember the names of. After a couple of days, they said, "I think what's happened is you've had an infarction in your spine." Okay.

[00:06:38] "But you should be okay. We'll get you over to rehab, and in a month or so you should be back to normal." Okay. So, I lay in bed that night, and the physical therapist had given me some range-of-motion exercises. I was doing the range-of-motion exercises in the middle of the night, and I realized I couldn't move my legs. The paralysis had gone from my feet, up my legs, up to my tummy, and was rising.

[00:07:13] That was a pretty drastic realization in the middle of the night. I rang the bell and said, "I need to see the doctor. This paralysis feels like this numbness has turned into not being able to move my legs at all." The neurologist came in. He had the oddest look on his face. This was a couple of hours later when he came in.

[00:07:36] **Landy Thomas:** The same neurologist as before?

[00:07:38] **Cindy Ranii:** Yes. He said, "I don't know what's going on with you. This is not a spinal infarction, but we're going to get you over to Stanford." So, they transferred me to Stanford Hospital. I had been in a hospital in San Jose. Then it was the same thing at Stanford: lots of specialists, lots of residents, and lots of med students looking at me with puzzled faces. "Oh, here's an interesting case. We don't know what's wrong with this lady." So, it took about seven days to actually get the words "transverse myelitis" spoken.

[00:08:12] Ironically, a friend of ours had a colleague who had transverse myelitis, and she was one of the first ones who spoke those words: "Maybe you have transverse myelitis." It was about that same day that a doctor came in and gave me that diagnosis. Then I was waiting for, "Okay, how do we treat this? What are we going to do to treat this?" They basically said, "There's really no treating this." Actually, they didn't say that. I said, "How are we going to treat this?" They said, "We're going to send you over to Valley Medical Center's rehab center. It's one of the best in the country."

[00:08:51] Okay, that's great. I still had it in my mind like, "Okay, I'm going to get rehabbed and, in a sense, get over this." Then, when I went to do some reading about transverse myelitis, at the time at least, the articles that I read said, "You have about a third of a chance of getting better, a third of a chance of staying the same, and a third of a chance maybe you'll get worse."

[00:09:14] So I thought, "That's not a cure." When I ended up at the rehab center, one of the nursing assistants actually came in. She was tidying things up for me, getting me settled in, and in a very sweet voice, she said, "So, how long have you been a paraplegic?" I thought, "Wow, I didn't realize I was a paraplegic."

[00:09:36] Yeah, and I had just been admitted. So, it was pretty stunning to go from, "We don't know what's wrong with you," to, "You have transverse myelitis," to, "Here's how to use a wheelchair for the rest of your life." So, it took about a week. That's a long answer to a short question, but it took about a week to get a diagnosis. Very fortunately in my situation, the paralysis stopped right there at chest level.

[00:10:04] My biggest concern was that it would keep going and that I would lose the use of my hands, but I have full use of my hands, which is a blessing every day to me. I have quad friends, and their lives are a lot harder than mine. So, I'm very grateful that the paralysis finally stopped when it did. From there, I did rehab for about six weeks.

[00:10:25] Back then, they gave us more time in rehab than other folks I know who got pushed out a lot sooner. I got quite comfortable with the wheelchair, had good PT and good OT, and they sent me home to start a new chapter in my life.

[00:10:42] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, that is so sudden and life changing. When I was paralyzed as a kid—when I had an instance of paralysis—I was able to get a lot better with time, which I'm really grateful for.

[00:10:59] But we had so many thoughts about the fact that we lived in a two-story house, and that wasn't going to work. Yeah, we were trying to figure out if we needed to sell the house or get a ranch-style, all-on-one-story layout because my bedroom was upstairs, and they were having to help me get up the stairs.

[00:11:16] I couldn't even move. It was so much. It's so sudden; everything—drastic changes have to happen around you. Yep, and nobody talks about the hidden costs of trying to make your house accessible if you're in a wheelchair. I know we try to show a lot of different accessibility tools through our website and through all our stuff, but gosh, it's expensive to get all the things you need. Chairs alone cost—

[00:11:45] **Cindy Ranii:** That's a good point. Yeah, we often say how fortunate we are that I had a good job. We have a one-story home. We had the means to remodel a bathroom

[00:11:54] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah.

[00:11:55] **Cindy Ranii:** and to put in a lift that took me up to the garage, to help pay for a ramp van, and to put ramping around the house so I could get around the yard.

[00:12:08] **Landy Thomas:** It's so much.

[00:12:08] **Cindy Ranii:** So often we think, "What if we weren't able to do that?" It's hard. What if I didn't have a support system? I could be in a nursing home with the same ill-fitted wheelchair they gave me when I left the hospital. There's a lot of equipment and a lot of supplies that go into keeping you healthy. So, I feel very fortunate that I was employed, went back to work after six months, had a good salary, and was very fortunate to be able to take care of things financially. Plus, I had good insurance. So, folks who don't have all those means and that support system... man, they need a lot of help from the rest of us.

[00:12:51] **Landy Thomas:** A lot of disparity, which is hard. It's hard. I'm just grateful that you had all that. It's really important to have a support system and to have a wife, kids, grandkids, and everything that you need.

[00:13:02] **Cindy Ranii:** Essential, yes. It's essential to good mental health, no doubt about it.

[00:13:07] **Landy Thomas:** Love is curative in its own way, so it's—

[00:13:10] **Cindy Ranii:** Isn't it awesome to hear that? Yes. Love and laughter, yeah.

[00:13:13] **Landy Thomas:** Yes, yeah. I think that I've done a little research on you because I was really excited about this and getting to see your story, and I know that you are a Paralympian—or you're shooting for the 2028 LA Paralympics, I believe. How has that process been going for you?

[00:13:38] **Cindy Ranii:** Training's been going well. Technically, I'm not a Paralympian; I'm trying to be a Paralympian.

[00:13:43] **Landy Thomas:** You're trying to be.

[00:13:44] **Cindy Ranii:** Just so that I don't misrepresent my accomplishments. But I have participated in three Pan American Games.

[00:13:53] **Landy Thomas:** Which is awesome.

[00:13:54] **Cindy Ranii:** I compete quite a bit at the international level. My training's going well. I try to help able-bodied people understand that when you're a para-athlete, there are always these ups and downs of

[00:14:09] health issues that arise, and you have to stop your training. Recently, I had some surgery early in March, so I'm just now finally getting back to what I would call training—finally able to play at least an hour a day of table tennis. The training is a lot of fun. It involves working with a coach and doing some physical exercises outside the ping-pong training itself,

[00:14:36] as well as playing in local tournaments. The next international tournament I'll compete in happens to be in Spokane, Washington, in August. So, my target right now is to get back to where I was, get better, and participate with athletes from all over the world in August.

[00:14:54] Then you have to do quite a bit of international travel to make a Paralympic team in table tennis because it's all based on accruing points. The only way you can get the points is by traveling to other countries, participating, and getting medals in

[00:15:13] a series of events. It's not like, "Okay, here are the Olympic/Paralympic trials, and if you do well this one day, then you'll get to go," or, "You've been doing well, so you're guaranteed." Some committee will sit down and decide who to send. Another thing I didn't realize when I first went for the Olympics—and I've been trying to get there for at least 12 years now, through several cycles—is that they don't just take the best top three female players in the United States and send you to the Paralympics. You have to be, in our sport at least, one of the top 16 in the world.

[00:15:54] So for the last three cycles of the Paralympics, no females have gone from the United States in table tennis, and we've only had three players go at all. You have to be, like I said, basically top 16 in the world just to go. I'm top-ranked right now in the United States, but I'm down around 23rd internationally, so right now I wouldn't qualify. My skills have to get better, and my competitiveness has to get—

[00:16:27] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, it's a lot.

[00:16:27] **Cindy Ranii:** to another gear so I win more matches, get more medals, and qualify that way. So, it's pretty arduous. Going back to means, it's very expensive. Tournaments in Finland, France, and Argentina... I don't know how people have a chance at competing internationally without some support.

[00:16:52] I do have the support of some wonderful philanthropists who are helping support my quest. Without that, I really couldn't do it. It takes just too much money.

[00:17:04] **Landy Thomas:** It takes a lot, yeah. Gosh. And travel alone—traveling with a wheelchair is very difficult.

[00:17:11] **Cindy Ranii:** It's arduous, yeah. The older I get, the more difficult it gets. I don't transfer the way I used to. I used to transfer in and out of cars pretty easily, and I really don't like to do that anymore. Most people, as they get older, get into that osteoporosis realm. I've had broken legs, and I don't transfer in and out of taxis anymore. So, I'm dependent on finding transportation that has ramps. One nice thing about these tournaments is they're para-tournaments, so there's a bus

[00:17:43] **Landy Thomas:** Very accessible.

[00:17:44] **Cindy Ranii:** with a lift. Yes, they're very accessible. There are people at the hotel to meet you, and the venues are right next to the hotel. It's a treat to go to one of these tournaments because everyone around you has, in the case of the Paralympics, a physical disability.

[00:18:02] It's almost fun to see how everybody else is managing their issues. It's thrilling to be in that community and not be, in a sense, a minority, but to be the majority. Everybody here, at least in my category and classification, is in a chair. Everybody's overcoming obstacles and everybody has a story. It's quite an enriching experience.

[00:18:35] **Landy Thomas:** It's a room where nobody looks at you funny; everyone gets it. They're all in it together. They're not going to ask you a silly question; they're just all supportive. It's really cool to be in a room with people like that.

[00:18:49] **Cindy Ranii:** You understand that, absolutely.

[00:18:52] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, yeah. I've had those moments in my life, going to patient days with different organizations, and that alone saved me many times. Just going around a room and being able to be myself, not have to hide it, and not have to be ashamed of it or anything like that. There's a lot of disability pride in trying to make sure that you feel confident in yourself even when you're facing a disability.

[00:19:22] I've had to come to terms with that and accept what I can and can't do at any given point. I think a lot of us have to come to terms with that over time. Having that community aspect seals the deal. It helped me.

[00:19:40] **Cindy Ranii:** Another fun aspect of those games and tournaments is that I'm considerably older than all the other contestants. I often play teenagers and kids in their 20s and 30s. I'm 79. Often I'm old enough to be my opponent's grandma, and that's fun. I'm often seen as the matriarch of the crowd, and I enjoy that role.

[00:20:06] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah. No, you're getting to inspire countless younger generations and countless people. It's really cool. I think that, first off, you're navigating a disability, and of course, you're navigating getting into older age, and it's fantastic.

[00:20:25] **Cindy Ranii:** Thank you.

[00:20:25] **Landy Thomas:** I hear a lot of stories because I work with a lot of different people, and a lot of people talk to me about how, when they get diagnosed, they have to change their dreams a lot. Speaking from my own experience, when I was younger, I did ballet and hip-hop dance. I wanted to be a dancer; that was my number one thing. Then everything happened and I was facing so much pain,

[00:20:56] **Cindy Ranii:** Wow.

[00:20:57] **Landy Thomas:** in a chair, out of a chair, in the hospital, out of the hospital, and I felt like I had to give up on certain aspects. I think a lot of people feel like that. A physically exerting lifestyle choice can be hard. But I think you represent a lot of this overcomer spirit. How did you get to that point? Your story is really powerful because you did get through the stress of, "Am I going to be able to do that?" What was that like?

[00:21:35] **Cindy Ranii:** I've always turned to athletics for fun and for feeling good. I've played tennis since I was eight years old, and we always played table tennis at my house. I was one of six kids. Our mother died when I was very young—I was only 10—and my dad was left with six kids. We all turned to athletics, I think, to keep our spirits up and to keep things going.

[00:22:03] My dad would always say, "Go outside and play. Go shoot some baskets, play baseball, get on your bikes and go for a ride, or go down to the tennis court." That was just what all of us kids did in the Hall family, and it's always been a part of my life. I competed in tennis tournaments since I was about 10 years old.

[00:22:28] As an adult, I competed in tennis tournaments. So, when I found out I was going to be in a chair, fortunately, I had some wonderful people around me who said, "Oh, I know somebody who's active in wheelchair sports." The rehab center I was in also gave us some examples of wheelchair sports.

[00:22:54] One gal named Sharon Kelleher had been in the Paralympics in wheelchair tennis, and she came to visit me. She was just so matter of fact. Without even asking, "Do you want to play tennis?" or, "Here's how you play tennis in a chair," or, "Do you think you could do this?" her can-do attitude was just, "We practice on Thursdays."

[00:23:17] When do you get out of the hospital? Here's the park where we play. Come on out; we start at 6:00 PM and play for a couple of hours, and I'll meet you there." I think her positive assumption, from her sitting in a chair and having been to the Paralympics in wheelchair tennis, really set me off on the right foot, so to speak.

[00:23:39] She just assumed, "Oh, you were a tennis player, you can play wheelchair tennis. You have your arms. You have your hands. No problem. Let's go play." So, it was a big help that I had Sharon to get me started. Then I was also trying to see what else I could do. First, I love to play the piano. I've always taken piano lessons and was improving my piano skills.

[00:24:05] So I had somebody bring me some music, and there was a piano at the rehab center. I sat down and went to play, and I realized I couldn't really do it. I didn't have the balance to sit up and play the piano with two hands. So that was an example of, "I really can't do this." I think if it had been my heart song—if my life turned on the piano—I probably could have figured out adaptations to get back to playing.

[00:24:36] I just wasn't quite there. I still play the piano, but I just play one-handed because I collapse forward if I try to play with two hands. That's an example of something I would have loved to have continued, but it didn't really work for me. But in terms of tennis, once I got out on the court, I realized, "Oh, this is a flat surface."

[00:24:58] This doesn't have cracks or angles. I can really move." I could feel that sense of movement, and oh, it felt so good. I could still hit the ball, hear that thwack, and feel the fun of getting the ball over the net and hitting it past somebody. I picked it up pretty fast.

[00:25:17] Being who I am and used to being in tournaments all my life, I got onto the national circuit of playing wheelchair tennis and did that for about five or six years. I got nationally ranked in the top 10, but I was 58 at that point, and I realized I didn't really have the strength, stamina, or wheelchair skills to compete at a high level in that sport.

[00:25:43] So I went to a sports day. Rehab hospitals will often have those, and I went to one where they gave us lots of examples of sports that one can participate in. From there, I had a chance to play a little table tennis with some nationally ranked people, and after just a few minutes they said, "Oh, you could be pretty good at this."

[00:26:06] That's all it took—a couple of people in a chair saying, "You could do this. You could excel at this." I think you never really know what those little moments of encouragement can do. In my case, both for wheelchair tennis and wheelchair table tennis, it was the confident voices of a couple of folks who had been in chairs longer than I that really made a difference.

[00:26:32] **Landy Thomas:** It sounds like you have many awesome people in your corner, especially Sharon.

[00:26:37] **Cindy Ranii:** Yeah, Sharon.

[00:26:38] **Landy Thomas:** Just having—

[00:26:39] **Cindy Ranii:** I now play table tennis with her; she has since moved to Santa Cruz. Now I've helped introduce her to table tennis. That's awesome. She comes up to the house, we play together, and sometimes we go to the same center and play. I'm trying to convince her to get more serious about it so we could train as a doubles team, but so far, she hasn't quite caught the bug totally.

[00:27:02] **Landy Thomas:** Sounds like she's a friend for life, which is awesome.

[00:27:07] **Cindy Ranii:** Perfectly so..

[00:27:08] **Landy Thomas:** I love that she assumes competence. I think assuming competence—that someone can do something—is important. We can always be our own worst enemies and our biggest doubters. Having somebody in your corner saying, "Hey, you can try something. It might or might not work for you, and that's fine too, but at least try," is a solid push. It's important to be reasonable with things, and if you find that something like the piano doesn't work, then it doesn't work, and that's fine too. It's a lot about accepting what the limitations are but also trying to push and see where that limitation actually is. That's something that I've tried to get better at with time, and something I think a lot of people could really benefit from: trying to figure out where to push and where not to push and having someone like you in their corner. Honestly, your story is really magical to me.

[00:28:12] **Cindy Ranii:** Oh, thank you. I love your words: "assume competence." Yeah, that was so refreshing to have somebody do that for me, as opposed to seeing me as, "Oh, you can't do this, you can't do that." It's very important to share that with each other.

[00:28:27] It has taken a lot of honesty in terms of what I can't do. For instance, I'm a very driven person, and I was very eager to get back to work. I remember my doctor saying, "What's the rush to get back to work?" I said, "It's just..." Excuse me, let me let the dog out here. I'm just motivated by that.

[00:28:49] Working is a large part of my life; I want to get back to work. Which I did, after six months. But I went back part-time and then increased my time to full-time, and I realized that for me to work at this high-level job, it takes everything I have. With all the time it takes for personal care, transportation, and accommodations at work,

[00:29:14] I realized I could do this, but it's basically all I would do. I had to admit to myself that it was better that I retire. So, I worked for one more year until I got to age 60, and then I retired. That was a tough decision, but the right one. Yes, I could do this, but again, it would take—

[00:29:36] **Landy Thomas:** You went back and proved it.

[00:29:37] **Cindy Ranii:** It would take too much.

[00:29:39] **Landy Thomas:** You did prove to yourself that you could go back for a little bit, and I think that's important too. At some point, you should—

[00:29:45] **Cindy Ranii:** I could have continued it, yeah. Had I been forced to do it, I could have done it, but in my case, I was at retirement age already.

[00:29:54] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, I think you proved it.

[00:29:55] **Cindy Ranii:** I don't have to prove anything; I'm trying to have the best lifestyle I can and be there for others. If I'm going to be there for others, I have to have some energy other than losing it all to work.

[00:30:09] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, it's hard. I think it's really admirable to go back to work and to also understand when to retire, when to figure out other things, and when to put your energy toward people. It sounds like you've got some really lovely people in your life, and you probably got to spend a lot more time with everyone.

[00:30:29] **Cindy Ranii:** I did. And I also then had more time and energy to do more service in my own community. I ran for the local school board and served on it for four or five years. Things like that I wouldn't have been able to do on top of working.

[00:30:46] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah, there are always more opportunities. Giving up one thing does not mean there are no other things. There's so much out there.

[00:30:53] **Cindy Ranii:** Well put. Well put.

[00:30:55] **Landy Thomas:** Yeah. That's awesome. I think that you've done so much with pursuing the Paralympics. I understand that you're not a Paralympian by title, but you're already doing so much of the work and balancing a lot of your life with it. It's awesome to hear.

[00:31:19] **Cindy Ranii:** Oh, thank you. It takes a team.

[00:31:22] **Landy Thomas:** It does. It does. But you still have a lot of willpower and grit. That's hard. It's hard to push and push, but you're doing it.

[00:31:33] **Cindy Ranii:** It is. And things don't go smoothly all the time, do they?

[00:31:37] **Landy Thomas:** No. No.

[00:31:38] **Cindy Ranii:** You've got to power through and be persistent. Think of all the problem-solving we have to do to keep going, keep going forward, and keep that trajectory going. Yeah, constant adjustment.

[00:31:52] **Landy Thomas:** It's a lot, yeah. You've already had to deal with a lot of adjustments in life, which is hard. I know that you wrote a book about some of your early life experiences, *Parakeet Races and Other Stories*. Would you like to share a little bit about that? I think that's awesome. When did you write it? I know it's about you, your family, and your siblings.

[00:32:16] **Cindy Ranii:** Yeah, I think I started it in 2006, a year or so after I was in a chair. Like you pointed out, when you stop doing one thing, you have more time to do something else. In my case, I had more time to reflect on a lot of things about my childhood and, in a sense, where my resilience came from

[00:32:38] Where did my persistence come from. In a sense, also- I was congratulating myself on my competence in facing this this challenge of transverse myelitis, and I realized that a lot of it came from my childhood.

[00:32:55] And then I realized, wow, there's so much about my childhood I don't remember, and specifically I couldn't remember very much about my mother. As, I mentioned, my mother died when I was 10, and I was the oldest of three girls, and I had three older brothers. And w- as some people would put it, we pretty much raised ourselves, although I give my dad a heck of a lot of credit. But he was very busy with his work, and we had a lot of time at home- Yeah ... alone.

[00:33:24] **Landy Thomas:** You're gonna have to feed all the kids.

[00:33:25] **Cindy Ranii:** and- That's hard ... and a lot of those, a lot of those days I remember, but I didn't have very man- many memories of when my mother was alive. So, what I did, I wasn't planning to write a book, but I wanted to remember more about my mother and who she was, and it seemed like it was important that her memory not be gone.

[00:33:46] So I made appointments in person and on the phone to talk to each of my siblings, and the basic question was "What do you remember about our mom?" And we called our mother Moo for... It's a whole other story. "But what do you remember about Moo?" And it was fascinating to hear from three brothers, two sisters, how few memories each of them had of her, actually.

[00:34:11] So the book was trying to piece together any and all memories we had of her, which were not very many, really. And then around that came all these family stories of, when we were kids and, each little vignette in the book, Parakeet Races, recounts a story from, when we were kids, and so the escapades that we had.

[00:34:35] And then the book also adds a couple of chapters. One is an onset story that I wrote for, What's the wheelchair magazine? I'm sorry, I can't remember the name of it right now. But I wrote an onset story for TM. Yeah. And I wrote a couple magazine articles, and a couple of those are in the book too.

[00:34:57] So I started to put together some chapters of my journey through TM and on into life in a chair. And I started to tell some of these stories to my neighbor, her name was Rachel, and she said, "You should write down some of these stories." I, "Oh, I don't know." She says, "Yes, you should." I said "it's hard to get started."

[00:35:23] She said, "I'll tell you what. You write something down, and my mom, who's an English professor, we'll send it to her, and she can polish it up for you. She can help you." So, I got, I started writing down the stories that I'd been telling orally and written up a draft, and then my wife, Shelley, she'd read them and help me out with them a bit.

[00:35:42] And then I'd send it to Dr. Warby, Rachel's mom, and she would consult with me to help make it a little more professional in terms of the writing. And before you know it, I had enough stories that I thought it's easy to self-publish these days. Nobody has to tell you this is good enough to publish or not.

[00:36:01] You can just publish it. So got, went to a self-publishing house and got it printed up, and I'm really happy to have it and lots of relatives in addition to my siblings, have really enjoyed having the book. And the title of it, Parakeet Races, it comes from one of the vignettes, because as kids my brothers and sisters and I each had a parakeet, and when my dad wasn't around, we'd let the parakeets out of the cage and we would race them around the house in a frantic circle. If you let parakeets out in a closed room they'll just fly in a circle and we'd have races like a horse race with the parakeets.

[00:36:40] **Landy Thomas:** That's awesome.

[00:36:41] **Cindy Ranii:** But yeah, it- it's so wonderful to write your memoir. My wife Shelley's written a very extensive memoir, and she worked on it for four years, and went back into the history of her family and her town and her state and her community. And it's a wonderful thing to put together. And then pull pictures together from your life and your relatives and ancestors will have it forever. It's a great project to do.

[00:37:09] **Landy Thomas:** It's awesome. A- I write nonfiction myself. I write a memoir. And I'm still on my journey. I think I have, I think right now I'm at oh, gosh, 200 and 13 pages of-

[00:37:22] **Cindy Ranii:** Wow ...

[00:37:23] **Landy Thomas:** And I've been pretty happy with it.

[00:37:26] **Cindy Ranii:** Good for you ...

[00:37:27] **Landy Thomas:** I think that vignettes first off are really fun to write. I like doing like a vignette type style because I can like drift down into an important part of my life without having to stay forever.

[00:37:40] I can get to the meat of it, like the really important moment and how that changed me as a person without having to stay there too long. And I really, I think that I think integrating the TM side of your story into your work is super smart.

[00:37:57] Like it's great to do that because it gets... it allows us to really see who you are now, and it adds a lot of value of perspective to your story since you are having to navigate a different life now. Time is weird, and it's super nice to be able to reflect on really good childhood memories like that and hold them in your heart.

[00:38:19] And I think that your book sounds like it really captures that moment. I also think it's a really lovely tribute to your mom. I know you said that you don't have the most memories, but at the same time- When you're able to capture all these little moments, all these little memories that you and all your siblings have had, you're able to create a very great outline of her.

[00:38:44] Even if you don't know her completely. You're making just a most glamorous portrait that's honestly really in of itself. I'm making, you're making me cry. I think that's a really beautiful thing to do. Even if part of it is the wound of not knowing her all the way. It sounds like you made her a beautiful tribute. Beautiful tribute.

[00:39:09] **Cindy Ranii:** Thank you.

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