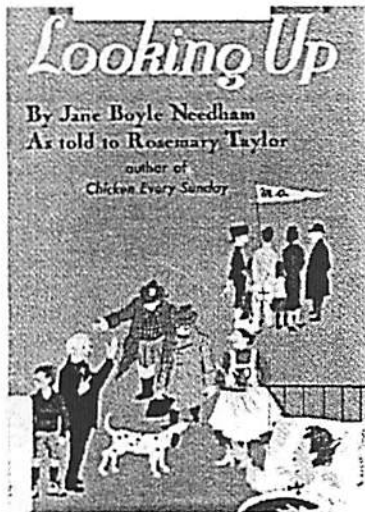


Jane Boyle Needham

1920 - 1962



JANE BOYLE NEEDHAM

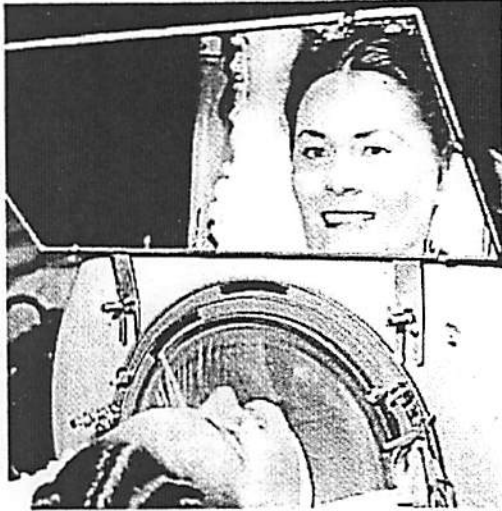


Looking Up by Jane Boyle Needham, as told to Rosemary Taylor ~ 1959. This edition: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959. Hardcover. 191 pages.

This was a rather unusual memoir, narrated by the author to journalist/memoirist Rosemary Taylor (*Chicken Every Sunday*, *Harem Scare 'm*) for the very good reason that the subject was paralyzed from the neck down as a result of adult-acquired bulbar (affecting the brainstem) polio in 1949, when she was 27 years old. Jane Needham lived in an iron lung for thirteen years, until dying from complications of gall bladder surgery in 1962.

Looking Up was written when Jane Needham had been in the iron lung for nine years. She was, as she well knew, living on borrowed time. After five years in hospital, Jane Needham decided that she needed to make a concerted effort to provide as "normal" as a home as possible for her three children.

She had been unexpectedly divorced by her husband several years earlier and had with difficulty retained custody of her young children. Her elderly parents liquidated their assets, moved into an apartment, and purchased a house for Jane, the children, and Jane's round-the-clock private nurses. Unable to breathe on her own, and never regaining more than twinges of movement in her extremities, Jane did create a functional home and proceeded to confound the naysayers who predicted disaster.



Jane Boyle Needham, quite literally “looking up”, into the mirror attached to her iron lung, which allowed her to view her world.

The tone of this book is rather unrelentingly cheerful; one might call it positively inspirational. Jane Boyle Needham comes off as a darned good sport, even when relating her experiences with her rather caddish husband. Perhaps her strong Catholic faith had something to do with this? Towards the latter part of the memoir Jane goes on at great length about the strength her faith has given her, and the spiritual and moral assistance given to her by her parish priests.

Or perhaps the positive tone was partly façade? But Jane does manage to occasionally convey the anger at her fate and the anguish of her spouse’s betrayal; occasionally she is downright cutting, and those bits are a relief, because otherwise this woman’s saintliness and fortitude would be much too good to be true.

This book, something of a bestseller in its time, is a fascinating glimpse into the world of the many polio sufferers whose lives were saved by the invention of the iron lung and various portable breathing apparatus. Every breath was a struggle, brutal physical pain was a constant, and death was ever-present, lurking around the corner. A few moments of electrical outage, and it could be game over, quite literally, unless one had an attendant who could immediately start manual lung compressions.

The chirpy tone of Jane Needham’s narration serves to add piquancy to her tragic fate. She desperately hoped to live long enough to see her children make their way in the world; they would have been still in their teens when she died. I wonder what became of them?

***This information was taken from the Leaves and Pages website.

Chronology of Key Events

1920	<i>Born</i>
1942	<i>Met James Needham</i>
1943	<i>Married James Needham</i>
1944	<i>Daughter Sharon is born</i>
1945	<i>Daughter Sue is born</i>
1946	<i>Son Craig is born</i>
07/06/49	<i>Diagnosed at age 29 with polio while in Glenbrook, Lake Tahoe "Last steps I ever took." "You are in an iron lung, it's making you breathe."</i>
12/31/49	<i>New Year's Eve at Children's Hospital in San Francisco "Not getting ready for bed already in bed, getting ready for sleep." Remembering one year ago on 12/31/48 when I was dancing at the Menlo Country Club New Year's Eve Ball.</i>
1950	<i>"...there was nothing left at all. Just nothing. I think deep down inside me I knew this but I refused to accept it. How could I accept the fact that never, never, never would I move again? Never embrace my husband, hold my children, walk, dance, play the piano. Never under my own power breathe again. From here on I must depend for the breath of life upon the iron lung, the respirator, the rocking bed, the positive pressure mask, or, in emergencies, the skilled hands of others pushing my diaphragm in and out."</i>

1950	<p><i>Left Children's Hospital, admitted to polio ward at Santa Clara County Hospital (Santa Clara Valley Medical Center)</i></p> <p><i>Separation Begins</i></p> <p><i>Kids - Foster Homes</i></p> <p><i>Condition: From her neck up, she was fine.</i></p> <p><i>Sensory nerves: Felt pain.</i></p> <p><i>Motor nerves: Destroyed.</i></p>
1954	<p><i>"I needed to stop being a polio patient and start being 100% mother."</i></p>
08/28/54	<p><i>Left hospital in an iron lung and went to Naglee house.</i></p>
09/01/54	<p><i>Divorce final.</i></p> <p><i>Gained custody of her three children.</i></p>
1956	<p><i>Moved to Martin Avenue house.</i></p>
1956-1962	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jesuits</i> • <i>Repairmen to service the lung</i> • <i>Nurses</i> • <i>All household chores</i> • <i>Rocking bed</i> • <i>Firemen</i> • <i>Animals</i> • <i>Multitude of friends</i> • <i>"This is my mother, don't be scared."</i>
1960	<p><i>Craig met Becky Villarreal.</i></p>
07/04/61	<p><i>Becky introduced Craig to his future wife Stephanie.</i></p>
10/02/62	<p><i>Date of Death</i></p>

A Few Reflections from Mom's Book.

"YES, it's hard to cope. I can't swat the children if they need it, and just to get my hair washed means taking down the kitchen door."

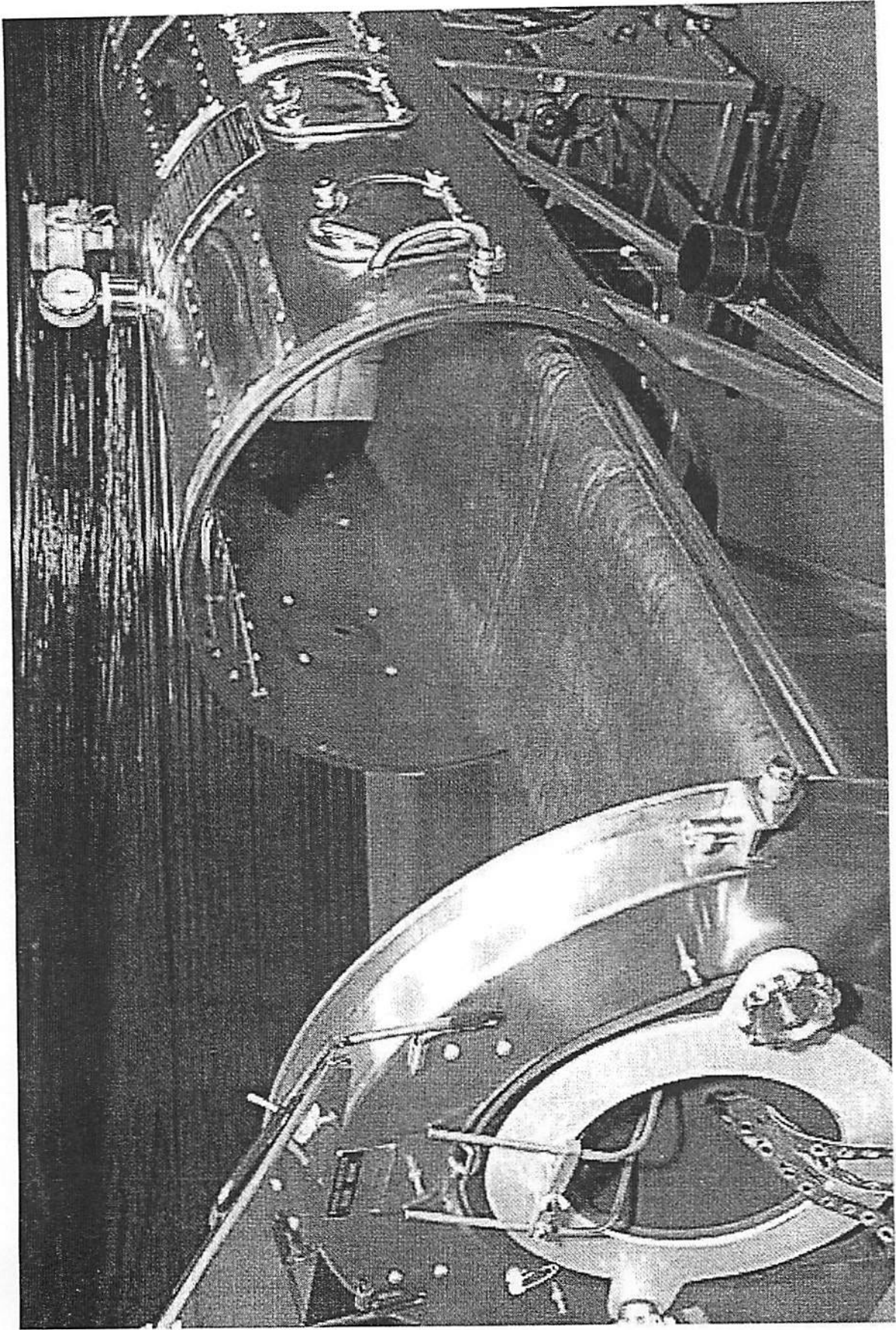
"Lucky I have polio and not my kids. Relieved when all got last polio vaccine."

"Everybody in the house worries about the possibility of current failure."

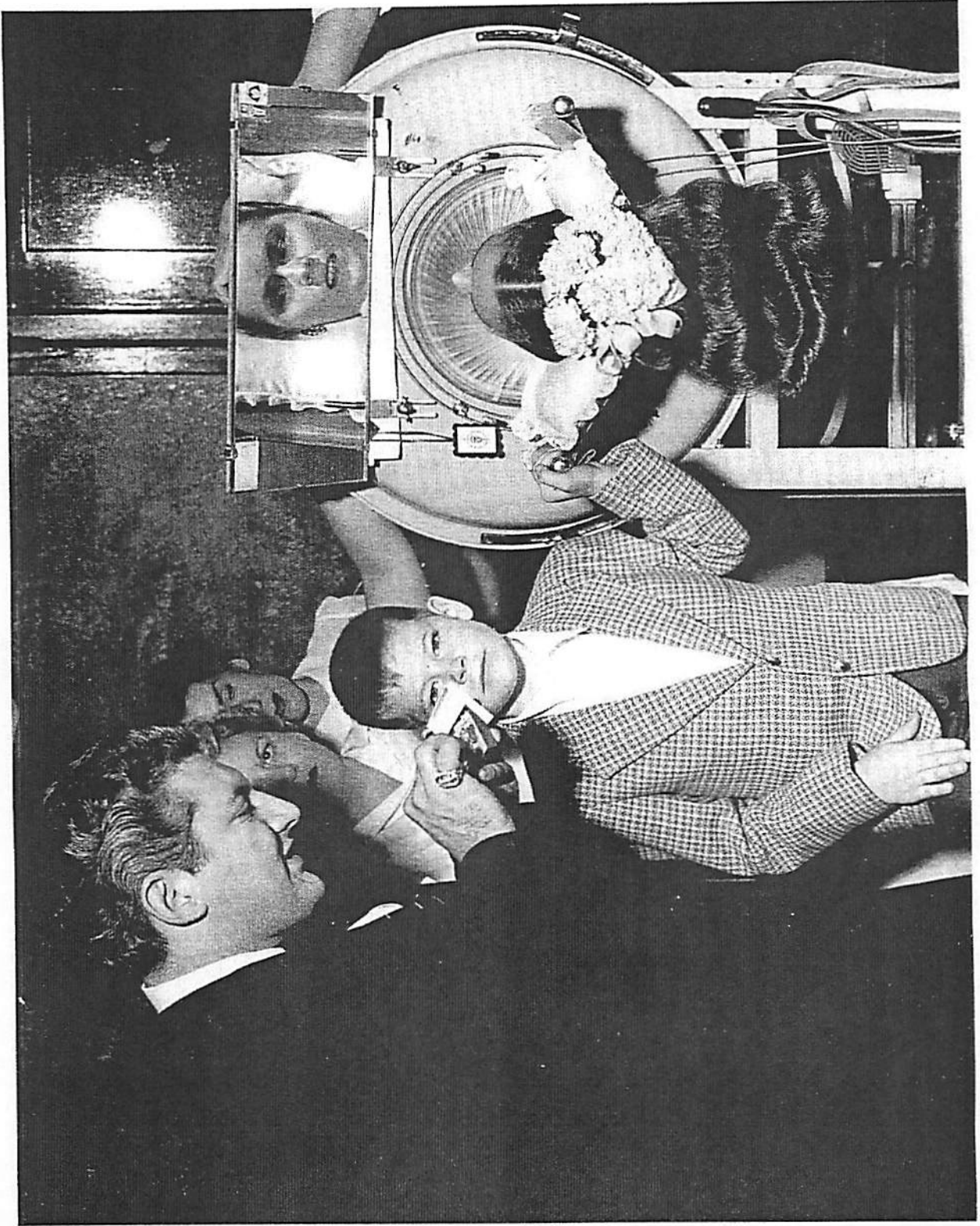
Speaking to her kids, "I believe, I told them, God will let me live as long as you need me."











Can't Move a Muscle, But She Writes a Book!

By Frances Moffat

IT'S NOT OFTEN that a society editor has a chance to play even a small role in as heart warming a success story as this—Jane Boyle Needham, the plucky polio victim who has spent the past nine and a half years in an iron lung, is the author of a book!

Collaborating with Rosemary Taylor, author of "Chicken Every Sunday," Jane has written "Looking Up," which will be published late in February by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Its foreword is by Basil O'Connor, president of The National Foundation, which is conducting its annual March of Dimes drive.

Planned Several Years Ago

The chance that someday, somehow, such a book would be written was part of the conversation Jane had with us nearly three years ago when we went to San Jose to interview this young woman, whom we had first known in her carefree days as a Palo Alto housewife. We wrote how she was managing to make a home for herself and her three children.

Jane has conquered the impossible many times. Doctors at Children's Hospital said she could not live through her attack of deadly bulbar polio.

Later, at Santa Clara County Hospital, they said she could not possibly leave to run a home of her own. By this time her marriage had failed and her husband wanted a divorce. No judge, the experts said, would ever give her custody of the children.

But, as you will learn in "Looking Up," Jane's determination and her abiding faith that God would let her live as long as her children need her, proved that experts can be wrong.

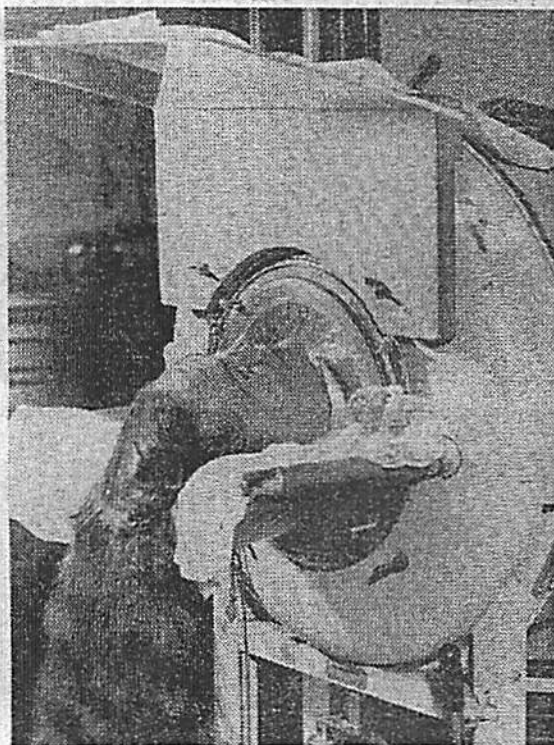
Has an "Imaginary Typewriter"

It was the same way about "writing" a book when she can't even lift a finger. In Jane's extraordinary life there are many people like her friend Alice Gallagher, who used to be a volunteer aide at the county hospital.

Jane has what she calls an "imaginary typewriter" on which she worked day after day. Alice has a real Underwood on which she wrote the words dictated by Jane.

Their efforts were sent off to Mrs. Taylor, who made a couple of trips to Jane's home to talk things over, to reminisce even more. And thus the manuscript began taking shape.

How did Mrs. Taylor, a professional author, be-



MRS. JANE NEEDHAM READS PAGE PROOFS
Her book, "Looking Up," will come out next month

come interested? Well, this is where we come in. In a recent letter to Jane she wrote:

"Isn't it strange, but it was that article of Mrs. Moffat in The Examiner which really started it all. For as I sat there in your father's office, he handed me the paper and said, 'Here's something about Jane.'

"And I read it and knew right away it was a terrific story. And then he let me take home those first few chapters you had written."

We've had the privilege of reading the galley proofs of Jane's book and it's a thrilling experience. No wonder "Looking Up" was accepted by the first publisher to whom it was sent!





"The cocoon to the butterfly."

"Body destroyed, but not her character."