

Background about the Book – Small Steps

In 1949, at the age of twelve, Peg Kehret (then Schulze) became the only child in Austin, Minnesota to contract polio. She details the intense fear and horror the disease evoked in her and others. Many doctors, nurses and therapists who rendered care were instrumental in her recovery, but she clearly depicts how devastating the lack of empathy from health care workers can be for seriously ill patients. Most of her seven months of hospitalization were spent at a rehabilitation hospital where she formed intense friendships with her roommates, friendships she likens to those formed in wartime foxholes and trenches. Her story never descends to self-pity, in fact, she credits her experience for giving her character strengths she might never have developed. Humor bubbles up in this endearing, human saga. Vintage photographs are provided.

Barnes and Noble.com

About the Author



Peg Kehret (pronounced "carrot") likes to write about ordinary kids who find themselves in extraordinary situations and use their wits to solve their problems — kids who are a lot like Kehret herself when she was growing up.

At age 12, Kehret found out she had polio and became paralyzed from the neck down. Because she remembers that experience and her year of recovery so well, she says, she finds it easy to write from a kid's viewpoint. Kehret wrote her autobiography, *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio*, about that period in her life. Before she began writing for children, Kehret published plays, short stories, articles, and two books for adults.

Kehret says *Small Steps* is her favorite book because it's her own true story. Among her fiction stories, her favorites are *Cages*, *The Richest Kids in Town*, and *Searching for Candlestick Park*.

Peg's latest blog:

[Just too many](#)

June 24th, 2009

When I'm revising a manuscript, I do a word search for *just*. Experience has taught me that I tend to over-use it and that many times it is not needed. In fact, the sentence is stronger without it.

This time I eliminated *just* twenty-two times in a manuscript that is 160 pages long. I did not cut every *just*. I left some of them, twice I replaced it with *only*, and a few times I completely rewrote the sentence, but there were still twenty-two unnecessary words and my book is better without them. Example: The heading on today's blog would be better without the first word.

Years ago, I often began a line of dialogue with the word *Well*. "Well, it was my turn." "Well, let's go see where she is." I finally broke myself of that bad habit, so I no longer need to do a word search for *Well*.

I'm meeting Anne and Kevin for lunch today. Tomorrow Bob and Pam arrive for a two-day visit. I love spending time with my kids.

www.pegkehret.com

Reviews – Small Steps

School Library Journal

Gr 4-6-Although young readers today might only associate the word "polio" with a vaccination, this well-written account gives them a hard look at the devastating physical and emotional effects of the disease. In 1949, there were 42,000 cases reported in the U.S.; the author was the only one stricken in her hometown that year. She writes in an approachable, familiar way, and readers will be hooked from the first page on. The author details her diagnosis, treatment, frustration, and pain. Perhaps the most startling part of the book is her description of the sudden onset of the illness, coming with no warning and leaving her paralyzed. Although this is an excellent record of the progress of the disease, it is also a fascinating account of how an ordinary girl with crushes and homecoming dreams had to live for part of her adolescence in an artificial, restricted environment. In the epilogue, Kehret describes her current battle with post-polio syndrome, and brings readers up to date on the lives of her fellow patients and friends at the Sheltering Arms Hospital. An honest and well-done book.-Christine A. Moesch, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, NY

Barnes and noble.com

A Kid's Review

In *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio* by Peg Kehret, Peg has plenty of friends, a brother, and two loving parents. She's the average middle school girl. How much more normal can you get? One day while in choir class, she has this terrible muscle spasm. That's the beginning of what made her unique. Peg's temperature rises, and is taken to the hospital, only to find out she has polio, the only case in her town of that year. Peg is immediately put into isolation, where she becomes paralyzed from the neck down, and cannot breathe properly. She develops not only one type of polio, not two, but three types. The author made me feel like I was there, witnessing Peg's discomfort. Read about Peg's feelings as her polio worsens, then gets better. Share her triumphs and disappointments. You'll be caught up in this book, and you won't want to put it down. Peg Kehret tells what happens in Peg's fight against polio. The author really makes you feel like you're there. I think people of all ages looking for a good drama will really enjoy this book. It teaches you what happens when you're willing to try anything to get things the way you want them. This book takes you away from your world, and into Peg Shulze's.

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Read Alikes –Small Steps

Miss Spitfire: Reaching Helen Keller *by Sarah Miller*

Harriet Tubman *by George Sullivan*

Five Pages a Day: A Writer's Journal *by Peg Kehret*

Piano Starts Here: The Young Art Tatum *by Robert Andrew Parker*

Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became The World's Fastest Woman *by Kathleen Krull*

Discussion Questions: Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio

1. How did Peg change as a result of her experience?
2. What were Peg's parents like? How did they support Peg?
3. Were there other details that you wish the author would have included?
4. What did you find most interesting in the book?
5. What do you think would be the worst thing about having polio and going through what Peg did?
6. How much did you know about polio before you read this book?

Author chats.com with peg kehret