

Parrish Battles Polio

Polio was one of the terrors of daily life through the first half of the Twentieth Century. In the United States it reached its peak in the 1940s and 50s. Each summer, it would sweep across the country. Children were especially vulnerable to the disease. Through the years thousands of children were crippled, and many died from the infection.

Coppell was not immune to the dreaded virus. Wanda Parrish Blair records that, as a child, her husband Howard Elgie Parrish came down with polio. It was the summer of 1940 and Parrish was 10 years old.

Parrish was taken to the Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas. While there he received extensive therapy and an operation was performed on his hip. The doctor told Parrish's parents that he would never walk again.

While at the hospital, Parrish alternated between walking with crutches and using a wheelchair. He would not leave the hospital until 1942. Before sending him home, doctors fitted his shoe with a wooden block that was shaped into a five inch sole.

Over the years that followed, Parrish continued to work with his leg. He became a star pitcher for Carrollton High School. Despite the crutches, Parrish threw a number of no hitters for the team. By his sophomore year the crutches were gone, and by his senior year so was the block.

In 1950, Parrish walked across the graduation stage in a pair of brown dress shoes.