



Meetings: Tuesday 12 Noon

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JUNE IS ROTARY FELLOWSHIP MONTH

Happy Birthday		Happy Anniversary
June 21	Mary Robson	

Upcoming Speakers:

June 16	June 23	June 30

LAST WEEK'S MEETING

President **Alex Pope** presided.

Guests:

Gem and Tanyss Munro
Al Stjernegaard

[Al served as the **Past President** of the Port Moody Rotary Club (2012/2013) and as a **District Assistant Governor** (2019/2022). He has also served as the International Committee Chair, and has been a primary organizer and coordinator for major local events, notably serving at the helm of the multi-day Port Moody Rotary Ribfest held annually at Rocky Point Park. He leads massive literacy and humanitarian global grants (most notably in Belize, South Africa, Kenya, and Ecuador), which have collectively raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to provide computers, training for teachers, and support for children and incarcerated adults. He serves as the **Canadian Chair of the Rotary Intercountry Committee** spanning Canada, the USA, Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala, connecting districts and clubs from different countries and encouraging Rotarians and Rotaractors to engage in meaningful exchanges.]

Program: **Gem Munro** - the Amarok Society

His Bio: Gem Munro has devoted his life and career to improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged people across Canada and abroad. Pursuit of this objective carried him into residence in unfortunate communities across most of Canada, before carrying him overseas. With his wife Dr. Tanyss Munro, PhD., he and she are the Co-Founders and Co-Directors of the Amarok Society, a registered Canadian charity that provides education programmes to the very poor in South Asia and Africa.



[Note- in 2027 the name will change from 'Amarok Society' to 'Start with Mothers'.]

For their work, Gem and his wife Dr Tanyss Munro, PHD., were recipients of Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medals.

[Interesting fact about Gem: His first name is actually **George**. His mother intentionally christened him with the middle names **Edward** and **Mitford** so that his three initials—**G, E, and M**—would perfectly spell out the acronym **G.E.M.** This allowed her to use "Gem" as his lifelong nickname.]

His Presentation

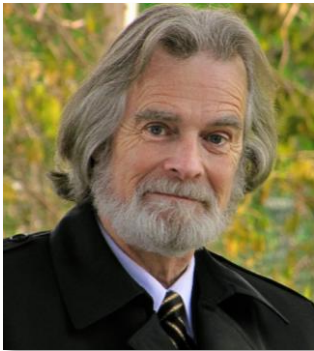
In 2005, Tanyss and Gem packed up their 4 children and moved from Vancouver, Canada to Dhaka, Bangladesh. They'd been invited by an international organization to make improvements to the country's education system. But as they worked within the existing school system, they noticed thousands of children who weren't in school at all. It turns out the biggest threat to education in the developing world isn't a deficient school system; it's that even those deficient schools are out of reach for millions of children. So, they tried to help in the most obvious way: by opening their own free schools for children. But teaching 60 children at a time, in a world where 250 million of the world's 650 million children are growing up illiterate. A chronic global challenge needed an innovative approach: teach mothers to teach others. The first school for mothers opened in January of 2006.

Gem and Tanyss went into the worst of the worst slums in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, to help improve the school system that they quickly identified as the worst school system they had taken on. In fact, there was no education system at all for the poorest of the poor, and the problem was not being addressed by anyone. Bangladesh is roughly one-sixth smaller than B.C. in land area, yet had a population approximately 40 times larger (about 178,000,000 people). Gem and Tanyss found that the Muslim women in the slums of that country have the worst quality of life in the world.

Gem and Tanyss decided to try to make a difference, but realized that just building schools and hiring teachers was not the answer as it would not diminish the number of children getting educated. They needed to find an affordable and sustainable effort, and that is when they started to teach mothers to become teachers in their own homes. Each of the young mothers then, in turn, taught about 5 children to read and write - and the Amarak Society was born. They met with criticism/scepticism by the government and international agencies which felt the effort would not work, and that women could never learn, let alone teach.

Says Gem, "People who have never learned how to read or do arithmetic or be taught anything, lead socially isolated lives. However, with the opportunity to learn, people are able to make sense of their lives and able to make decisions for themselves, their families and their community". Mothers in the slums who taught children in the slums gained a purpose in their lives – and this was transformative. The mothers changed from having only pessimism and despair to having optimism and hope. Gem said that "minds have a natural urge and ability to learn. The scourge of the world is ignorance, and it destroys the mind, just as polio destroys the body."

Those holding power in Bangladesh are not really in favour of education in the slums, and prefer an uneducated population who they can control, and they provide little or no funding for education of children in the slums. Death threats to those working in this program of Gem and Tanyss are not uncommon, but "if it doesn't scare you to death, it is probably not worth doing", said Gem. As a result, funding is from private donors. Asked about whether or not there were Rotary clubs in Bangladesh, Gem's answer was yes, but not like most Rotary clubs in other countries. Rotary clubs there are only run by the "elite" and they are not fundraisers for charitable causes.



Gem Munro



Tanyss Munro

HAPPY AND SAD Dollars included:

Alex Pope was sad to learn about the passing of **Gordon Kirkland**. His wife **Dianne** was a long-time member of our Club, and of course **Brad**, their son, is presently a Club member.

Mary Robson and Sharon Kyle were sad to hear about the passing of Mel Zajac, who ran the Zajac Ranch whose goal is to ensure that all children with special medical needs in British Columbia and across Canada can participate in a camp experience.

Ineke Boekhorst was happy to receive confirmation from District 5050 regarding our Club receiving "matching funding" (\$2,300 USD) for "Reading Corners" in Ecuador.

Club Business and Events

- June 20 - Club Installation Dinner – Golden Eagle Golf Club, Pitt Meadows
- June 25 - Pub Hub
- August 9 - Duck Race

President's Closing Quote

Visited my doctor today. He told me my sugar was too high. So I came home & moved it to a lower shelf.

Thoughts and Talents of the Week

Whoever decided to put a "p" in "receipt" was an idiot.



Submitted by Laurie Anderson