

Although adults were not immune to polio — President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously contracted the disease at age 39 — most of its victims were young children. Today, COVID-19 appears to pose the most danger to people over 60 — that is, the same group that polio targeted 65 years ago. “There was a high level of fear in the country then, very similar to what we have now,” says Cort Vaughan, who is one of those volunteers I’m awed by. When we spoke in April, Vaughan and his wife, Tonya, had recently returned from participating in a polio vaccination campaign in India.

A member of the Rotary Club of Greater Bend, Oregon, and a past End Polio Now coordinator, Vaughan began his work on the polio front before he was even aware of it: He was a March of Dimes poster child in Riverside, California, when he was three years old. He still has a copy of an article from a local newspaper with a photo of him dressed as a cowboy guarding the spare change that people contributed during a fundraising drive in 1955.

Vaughan doesn’t remember contracting polio at age two in October 1954, but, he says, “I have clear memories of my parents relating stories about it, and I could feel the emotion in their voices about what they went through. For my mother, it was like she was reliving the fear and anxiety of having her child stricken with a potentially deadly disease. Their stories were so vivid, so palpable, they almost became my own memories.”

The darkest story starts with his mother discovering one morning that her toddler was suddenly unable to walk, calling the doctor, and rushing him to the hospital. “If you had to go to the hospital, there was a high probability of being crippled for life,” Vaughan says. “Once my parents took me there, it was out of their hands.” At that time, polio wards restricted visitors, and Vaughan’s mother was desperate to be with him. “She discovered a women’s group that was sending volunteers to hospitals. She joined the Junior League primarily to get to see me.”

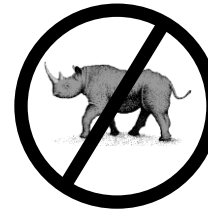
Vaughan’s illness paralyzed his right leg from the knee down, requiring him to wear a brace and sentencing him to a childhood in which frequent trips to the hospital for physical therapy replaced playing outdoors with friends. “I didn’t feel lucky then, but looking back, now I do,” he says. He also believes that the knowledge that comes from living with the scars of polio has heightened his grasp of what is required to overcome the current pandemic. “I know what it’s like to face a hidden threat, and I understand the need for people to stay vigilant and work together to prevent the spread,” he says. “I was defending the stay-at-home order in Oregon early on, when friends and relatives were thinking it was not really serious.”

# THE EARLY RISER

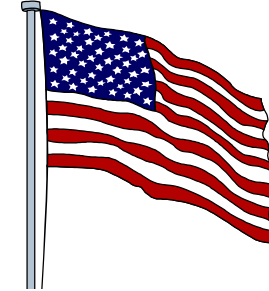
EVERY ROTARIAN  
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EVERY YEAR



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DON'T BE A R.I.N.O.  
(Rotarian In Name Only!)



## ROTARY PRAYER

Oh Lord, and giver of all good, we  
thank Thee for our daily food.

May Rotary friends and Rotary  
ways, help to serve Thee all of our  
days.

# THE ROTARY CLUB OF WICHITA FALLS NORTH



2020-21 R.I. Officers - D5790

President of Rotary International: Holger Knaack

District Governor: Roger Paschal

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Website: [www.wichitafallsnorthrotaryclub.org](http://www.wichitafallsnorthrotaryclub.org)

## ***FUTURE PROGRAM ASSIGNMENTS***

September 25 -----	Tom Cale
October 2 -----	David Collins
October 9 -----	Mike Crocker
October 16 -----	Larry Gunnell
October 23 -----	Ajay Kumar
October 30 -----	Ann Lucas
November 6 -----	Bill Neale
November 13 -----	Rob Noble
November 20 -----	Jeani Secord
November 27 -----	No Meeting (Thanksgiving)
December 4 -----	Troy Secord
December 11 -----	Tom Sheriff

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### ***NEWS FROM OUR LAST VIRTUAL E-MEETING:***

Thanks to President Clint, the meeting was held live and in living color at the Vantage Point Condomenia.

The Rotary Prayer was led by President Clint and the Pledges were led by Jeani.

President Clint read to the club a “Thank You” note from River Bend Nature Center for our recent donations.

The brag bucket was proudly fed by Troy, Mike, Phil and Clint (\$10.00).

Phil introduced the program. It was a video about former Navy Seal Adam Brown. Adam was born and raised in Arkansas, near Phil’s lake house. Adam was killed while on duty.

***It was announced that this week’s meeting, September 25, will be back at the Work Services Corporation (WCS).***

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### ***NEWS FROM ROTARY INTERNATIONAL:***

#### **WHAT IT’S LIKE TO SURVIVE THROUGH TWO PANDEMICS**

Sixty-five years ago, in 1955, I was diagnosed with polio. I was two years old, so I was unaware of what it meant to have been infected with the poliovirus, but I became

more aware of it in subtle ways as I got older. And at some point, I understood what my mother meant when she said I was “one of the lucky ones.”

My mother came from Jersey City, New Jersey, and she sounded like it all her life, aided and abetted by a daily regimen of unfiltered Kool cigarettes. She drove a supply truck as a civilian during World War II and delighted in telling a tale about a GI who tried to “get fresh” with her when she gave him a lift back to the base. When she told him she was married and her husband was deployed overseas, he said, “Baby, what’re you saving it for — the worms?”

She stopped the truck and told him, “Ride in back, buster!” I have no doubt that she used an expletive, although she never employed one in the retelling, Jersey accent notwithstanding. But she still thought “saving it for the worms” was the funniest line she had ever heard. She was a woman who could take things in stride, the quintessential “tough cookie.”

But there was one recollection that could unravel my mother like no other — the one that involved her youngest son being diagnosed with polio and the palpable fear that stalked parents across the country during the summers of the early 1950s. She could not stop her voice from cracking when she spoke about that time. That, along with her warnings about staying out of “polio puddles” after it rained, shaped my awareness of how frightening the epidemic had been.

Among my childhood memories, getting the oral polio vaccine is as vivid as the classroom drills that taught us to seek safety under our desks in case of a nuclear attack. While I can now joke about how sturdy school desks must have been back then, there’s no amusement in my recollection of lining up outside the local firehouse for the Sabin sugar cube — that was serious, important business. I knew it then, and I know it now.

My appreciation for having survived polio faded away over time, but returned in force about 12 years ago when I began writing for *Rotary* magazine. I had assumed polio had been eradicated — or, more accurately, I didn’t think about it. I have since had the opportunity to get to know, and be awed by, some of the Rotarian volunteers who are working to achieve that goal.

#### **One of the lucky ones**

Now, as the novel coronavirus makes its way across the world, I feel a renewed gratitude for what it means to be one of the lucky ones — and a deeper understanding of how terrifying life was for many people six decades ago. As a 67-year-old former smoker, I’m among those now considered vulnerable — I have two adult children to keep reminding me of that — but I’m also among the privileged. My wife and I are able to work from home, we live in a single-family house with creature comforts, and we can afford to practice social distancing with little sacrifice.