With a great deal of help from my brother, Cliff Dochterman, I have written up the following about Rotary International and Polio. There are thousands of Rotarians, spouses, committee members, volunteer workers and generous donors who are part of the Rotary story.

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Do you know how Rotary became involved with Polio Plus?   Maybe you just know that every March we have a Polio-Plus drive but now  “.…the rest of the story”.

In the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s most people knew of someone, either in one’s family or circle of friends, that were effected by polio.  In my family Cliff and I had a nephew and niece who were affected.  In the early 50’s there were annually over 55,000 cases of polio every year in just the United States. Worldwide it was perhaps 500,000. Of those 50,000 children would die from polio and thousands became crippled, paralyzed or suffered lifelong disabilities.

That was how things were in those times. Then, in 1978 President Renouf had a new committee called Health, Hunger and Humanity start. It was designed to undertake greater projects that any single Club or District could do.

Cliff was a co-chairman of the new 3-H committee.  The Committee knew if they did not have success the Committee would not progress. There were about 16 projects that had been proposed from around the world. One was from Dr. Benny Santos who wrote that if Rotary could provide the Philippines Polio vaccine then they would mobilize the Rotarians and immunize all the children.

That was the project approved and about 6 million children were immunized against polio. It was a huge success. Pharmaceutical companies had other types of vaccines-for measles, tetanus, chicken pox and other vaccines, which were donated to Rotary to distribute in several areas of the world.  Rotarians proved that immunizations was the kind of project the volunteers could handle.

A few years passed and in 1982 RI President Stan McCaffrey, who came from Berkeley Rotary, started a committee called New Horizons.  This group was to “look into the future of Rotary to see what tasks or new directions Rotary could take on in the future.”  Cliff became Chairman of that committee.  Hundreds of various ideas were considered. Cliff suggested Rotary should be thinking 20 to 30 years into the future; perhaps something big for the 100th anniversary of Rotary in 2005.

A letter from Rotarian John Severs suggested providing polio vaccine to all the children of the world; Project 2005 had its project!  In 1985 Dr. Carlos Canseco, RI President from Monterrey Mexico was eager for the project to start.  He called Dr. Albert Sabin to Evanston. The Polio 2005 Committee met with some of the world’s medical and public health leaders.  Dr. Sabin said it would cost at least $100 million dollars and there would about 500 million children to immunize just to get started-Wow

Rotary then set a goal of $120 Million to raise the funds and the name was changed to Polio Plus. That was the first major fund drive by Rotarians of the world for a single project.  That was a major goal however, by 1987, Rotary surpassed the goal and actually raised $240 million.

The Rotary Leaders went to the **W**orld **H**ealth **O**rganization and said Rotary International wanted to eradicate polio. The WHO, which contained the most knowledgeable health authorities of the world, saw Rotary as “just another service club with a group of old guys who went to lunch”.   But, when Rotary said they had “over a million of volunteers, PLUS 240 million dollars in our pockets”, the leaders of the World Health Organization said ***“Come on in!”***  That was the time Rotary became full partners with the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the US Center of Disease Control.

In 1988 polio could be found in 125 nations and it was estimated that there were 350,000 cases of polio in the world every year. Rotary then started to immunize one country at a time. The first immunizations were in Mexico where 13 million children were immunized. Next was Central America and South America. One nation after another became Polio Free.  Rotary Clubs became “Polio Plus Partners” to raise funds for National Immunization Days. Iceboxes, vests, caps, leaflets, street banners and other items needed were purchased.

When Cliff  went to India to participate in the National Day of Immunization he saw banners on the street, parades, notices, distribution of thousands of radio and television  announcements, plus handbills and leaflets. In that one day 125 million children received 2 drops of polio vaccine.  In China, Laos, Vietnam, Cuba, and other areas there were no Rotary Clubs; Rotary was allowed to work freely to distribute the vaccine.  Rotarians and health workers have to go to the most remote area of the world by canoe, camels, elephants, horseback, motor bikes and every other vehicle to reach all of the world’s children. Our own Dwight has given vaccines in Ghana Africa.  You can tell that Polio Plus is an amazing and complicated project.

At one time China officials were reluctant to take vaccine from Western Nations. They said “We use Chinese made vaccine” But there was no polio vaccine made in China.  So, Rotary said “We will build a pharmaceutical plant in China” and made a grant of $10 million dollars to construct a factory in China. As soon as the project was under way the Chinese officials then said they would take the vaccine from the West.  Immediately all the children of China were immunized. In the first 2 days 100 million Chinese children received their vaccine.  The Chinese officials had their children immunized when they saw that Rotary International was serious of the mission to eradicate polio. The amazing thing is that the pharmaceutical place in China never produced one drop of polio vaccine.

Another story happened when Cliff was Chairman of the Rotary Foundation.  He had a call from the World Health Organization saying that they had "arranged for a four-day cease fire in the Sudan civil war, but they had no money to buy the vaccine. Cliff said, "What do you need?” They said,” $400,000”. Cliff said, “You can have it in 15 minutes”.  The transfer took place, the health workers went in and immunized 3 to 4 million children — then the war started again.  The WHO then said “Of all of the places in the world, there was no place we could turn-except Rotary, to make that project happen.”

The goal of making the world polio free by 2005 was not met but over 99% of the children of the world had received the vaccine.  We are on the verge of eradication polio in the world. Right now there are 2 countries with polio -- Pakistan and Afghanistan. There may have been a case or two in Nigeria from people traveling this past year. But we are doing well since, when Rotary joined with the World Health Organization in 1987, polio existed in 125 countries of the world.

Perhaps, with the continuing help from each Rotarian, in the next year or two there will be no new cases anywhere in the world.  We will completely eradicate polio in the world – but it will happen only because we continue to make a commitment to completely eradicate polio.  If we do not completely eradicate this highly contagious disease, within a decade, we could witness a resurgence of as many as 200,000 new cases annually.

**Any contribution that you can make will be matched by the Gates Foundation   2 dollars for each 1 dollar you give!**

**See how YOU can help eradicate polio!**