

NSP OPINION: Ours, yours, theirs

Give the gift of life: Take COVID vaccine for yourself and others

My dear wife, Linda, remembers well her mother's tears and her father's joy that cold day in 1955 she and her sister and brothers stood shivering outside Briggs Elementary in Maquoketa waiting their turn to receive the polio vaccine.

Nothing could stop them. The availability of a vaccine to rid the people of the curse of polio was a *cause célèbre* not just in Maquoketa, but nationwide, and worldwide.



Impressions
by Bill Tubbs

For Linda, it was personal. The life of her father, the late Laurence "L.L." Long, the pioneer educator and county superintendent of schools, was abruptly and cruelly interrupted in 1931, just as he graduated after working his way through Cornell College and landing one of the best jobs in the state.

It was a devastating blow. With legs too weak to support his athletic frame and an arm unable to perform many tasks, he picked up the pieces, married my mother-in-law, Zoe Shipton, and lived a productive life until he died in 1997 at age 89, the heavy leg brace notwithstanding.

Laurence was one of the lucky ones. He survived. Many did not.

In the absence of a vaccine, polio, which afflicted mostly children, exploded worldwide, reaching a climax in Iowa in 1952 with 3,564 cases and 163 deaths. Nationwide, there were 58,000 cases and 3,000 deaths.

In fear, swimming pools and theaters were closed. Quarantines were imposed. Children were warehoused in steel tubes called iron lungs and had no contact with the outside world. One in 10 died. Survivors had reduced mobility, and later in life suffered a weakening of muscles called post-polio syndrome.

At last! A vaccine for polio

It was awful. Moms and dads worried – and then, Dr. Jonas Salk produced an injectable vaccine from a killed virus in 1953. It was announced as effective and safe in 1955, and parents breathed a sigh of relief. It never occurred to them to pass up the miracle of science that gave new life. Schools required it – and it worked!

In 1961, Salk's vaccine was replaced by Dr. Albert Sabin's live-virus vaccine which is given orally, with sugar cubes ("A Spoon Full of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down!"), and by 1979, polio was gone from the U.S.

But polio was not gone. A thousand kids were contracting it somewhere in the world every day – 350,000 a year – when a trial in the Philippines in 1985 went well and the leadership of Rotary, a group I'm proud to be a part of, decided to take action. No child anywhere should live a life of paralysis when prevention is possible, they said.

With technical and logistical support from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Rotary put its "boots on the ground" to work, with members in 35,000 clubs in more than 200 countries. Members have given \$1.8 billion (that's billion with a "b"). That was augmented by governments of the world, Unicef, and more recently, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Rotary members have traveled to the ends of the world to administer

the polio vaccine to more than 2.5 billion children in 122 countries. I was one small part of a National Immunization Days team in India in 2012 when the oral vaccine was given to 172 million children under 5.

Think of it. 172 million! The logistics were staggering, but successful. India has not had a case of polio since.

In all, more than 16 million children have been spared paralysis. The virus is in retreat.

But the virus is still alive, no thanks to anti-vaxxers, led by Muslim clerics in Nigeria, which this year, at last, for the second time, was declared polio-free, and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where 136 children have contracted polio so far in 2020.

As long as the wild polio virus is alive anywhere, it can spread everywhere. It is but one airplane flight away.

That polio wasn't eradicated years ago is inexcusable. Billions of dollars and millions of man hours have already been invested in the coordinated effort to rid the world of polio – dollars and man hours which could be dedicated to another worthy cause, were it not for ignorance and superstition.

300,000 lives, and now a vaccine

Comes now COVID-19, which has claimed more than 300,000 lives in this country, overwhelmed our healthcare institutions, disrupted our schools, and sent shock waves through our economy, including small businesses here and everywhere.

It is a cause for celebration and hope that on Monday, a vaccine was rolled out in this country which has been tested and re-tested by medical and scientific experts who have pronounced it effective and safe.

And yet 20 percent nationally – and 26 percent in *The NSP's* question of the week – say they will "definitely not" take it.

Is that a kick in the gut, or what? Thirty-three years ago, Rotary raised the vision of a polio-free world – which still has not been achieved due to ignorance and superstition.

Now we're only at the beginning of a campaign to stamp out COVID-19, and one fifth of the people say NO?

It's not about YOU

I say NO WAY. GET YOUR SHOTS. It's not about YOU when YOUR activities affect OTHERS. Get your shots so our schools and churches and families and businesses can resume normal activities. So we can come together safely as a community again, with concerts and plays and fairs and festivals and ballgames with fans in the seats and all the rest.

I think of Linda's parents, and my parents, and everyone in the community who rallied to stamp out polio, FOR THE COMMON GOOD, and shake my head in dismay that medical science, which serves to protect, is so disregarded.

The question is not, "Do you believe in vaccines?" That's like asking if you believe the earth revolves around the sun. Science is fact. Belief is faith. Both are important, but they should never be confused.

Give the gift of life. Get your shots.

Publisher Bill Tubbs can be contacted at btubbs@northscottpress.com.



In Maquoketa, Iowa, and communities across the U.S., the fight against infantile paralysis (polio) was a common cause, as seen in this headline from the Jan. 26, 1939, issue of the Maquoketa Community Press. When a vaccine became available in 1955, the idea that people might not receive it was unthinkable.

Photo by Bill Tubbs

2020: Muddling through a Merry Little Christmas

*Through the years, we all will be together, if the fates allow,
Hang a shining star upon the highest bough,
and have yourself a merry little Christmas now.*

“Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” has long been one of my very favorite holiday songs, touching my heart several times through the years. Listening to its



All Dunn
by Tracy Dunn

melancholy lyrics always makes me wistful and hopeful at the same time – thankful that we had forged relationships that would stand the test of time and distance, until we could see each other again.

While living in Davenport when our children were little, we became friends with several families in our neighborhood. None of us had relatives close by, and we moms, especially, came to depend on each other for childcare and emotional support. We got together around the Christmas holidays because, in a way, we had become family. But then, one of the families moved away. That first Christmas without their friendly faces at our door was difficult. Yes, we still traveled to see our own relatives, but we knew it might be a long time before we'd enjoy the company of “faithful friends who are dear to us.”

Losing family members, obviously, can make the holidays a time of heartache instead of hallelujahs. The first Christmases after my sister passed, then my mom and brother, and most recently, my dad, reminded me of all the memories we made as a family. The crazy adventures of chopping down a tree; decorating gingerbread men around our big kitchen table; and sneaking out to see our gifts in the wee hours of Christmas morning. While we hadn't experienced those things in a long time, it was still sad to think I'd never again see them around the tree.

Final holiday in Iowa

Last Christmas was destined to be our final holiday in Iowa. I made a gift for our dearest friends – a lighted shadow box with a snowy scene and the words, “Through the years, we all will be together.” I cried when I made it, and our friends cried when they unwrapped it. After more than 20 years of being

each other's chosen family, we knew we wouldn't be spending Christmastime with them again.

Then came 2020. The year we had long planned to move from our Iowa home back to Missouri, closer to family. The pandemic shutdown forced us into greater isolation in an already remote area. Summertime get-togethers with friends and family didn't happen, but we thought surely this awful virus would be vanquished by Christmas.

Last spring, when I began sewing face masks, it occurred to me how sad it would be to be making masks with holiday-themed fabric. Yet last month, I dug out the red-and-green plaid scraps from my fabric basket, and we're decking ourselves with the 2020 version of the ugly Christmas sweater.

The Dunn side of our family has established a tradition of getting together on one of the Saturdays around Christmas, when all of the “kids” can travel to Springfield. With Tim's parents, his siblings and their spouses and children, and now, our grandchildren, the count is over 20.

Sacrifices

As much as we long to continue this annual daylong celebration, some sacrifices have to be made. Not everyone will be traveling. The weather may not permit us to be outdoors or to leave windows open. And it's impossible to wear a mask while downing goodies and drinking wassail.

And so, the lyrics to my favorite Christmas song apply to this year's celebration as well. I heard the Judy Garland version on the radio last week, and the words were slightly different. She sang, “Someday soon, we all will be together ... Until then, we'll have to muddle through somehow.”

Exactly the way we're all approaching this Christmas season – hoping and praying that this pandemic will be abated in the coming months, but for now, we'll all just have to muddle through somehow.

We celebrate the birth of our Savior, whether we're apart or together. So have yourself a merry little Christmas, even this year.

Proofreader Tracy Dunn has been recognized as a Master Columnist by the Iowa Newspaper Association. She has been employed with North Scott Press since 1997. She can be contacted at DunnsatRedbird.2020@gmail.com.