



# The Polio Post

The Voice of the Polio Survivors & Associates Fellowship

(A group of Rotarians dedicated to improving the health of polio survivors. This Fellowship operates in accordance with Rotary International policy, but is not controlled by Rotary International )

Editor: Jack Campbell. e-mail [JackCampbell@cox.net](mailto:JackCampbell@cox.net)

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## Polio – Live from Nigeria

*As a change of pace for the Polio Post I thought you would be interested in a first-hand account of the work that Rotary and various World Health Organizations are still doing in the frontier of this savage battle to eradicate polio once and forever.*

*Winnie Morgan is a professional in the field of social services in North Carolina. She traveled to Nigeria in November with her husband, Ken Morgan, RI Director, Zone 33/34, to participate in the on-going fight to vaccinate all children in the world. The major obstacles remaining to achieve this goal are cultural misunderstanding and the isolation of many areas of the world which contribute to very high costs in time and money. I asked her to keep her Journal entries and what follows are a few of them.*

Saturday: Nov. 20, 2004 – I am so excited I am doing internal flips with my energy...to see a child given the drops to wipe polio off the face of the earth...as I think back to the polio victims we saw on our first day in Kano...my commitment gets even stronger...the polio victims in USA can't possibly know how lucky they are – to have been born in a place where (medical and rehab help is available)...in a developing country many are reduced to street beggar...we visited a “rehabilitation workshop”...a place by the side of the road where men worked to transform “junk” into hand operated tricycles. But what we really saw were men with hope for a future with skills and a purpose for being. Hope to remove themselves from the ground as “crawlers” with their new tricycles...hope to earn a living versus begging...hope for transport. The hope I am feeling is that we will wipe out polio and there will be no need for “rehabilitation workshops”. With the help of WHO, CDC, and UNICEF Rotary has put the heart and legs into the complete eradication of polio throughout the world.

Sunday: Nov. 21...On the road again...well, the road is a series of potholes, but glorious compared to the “off roads” taken to find settlements (small villages) which look like a mud fort...large square shaped structure with a variety of “doors”...inside (usually) the only rooms with a roof were “bedrooms”...cooking would be done in an open courtyard on the ground...people and animals share the same courtyard...usually the people in the settlements are related...(in Kano) Muslim men can have four wives...with separate “bedrooms” for each...only the “man of the house”, or the father of the children can enter the inside of the house...if the man said it was OK for the children to take the vaccine, then it happened. The man is the decision-maker in most places we saw.

Monday: Nov. 22...Today was THE DAY...that I finally got to drop two drops of the oral vaccine in the mouth of a baby...it may be only two drops in an ocean of effort and one of millions of children but my two drops count as far as adding to the overall success. It feels like one drop of effort in an ocean of billions of gallons of effort but to create the ocean we all must

add our drops whether it is money, time to fundraise, time to volunteer, time to tell our neighbors, or-Rotarians, friends – we must commit to create a world free of polio...when people allow their heart to look into the eyes of the children I have seen today, how can anyone not want peace and understanding – and a polio free world?

**“POLIO”** – what does the word mean to me today?...Polio means a child’s eyes searching my face to find reassurance in their fear of the unknown that I won’t hurt them....my polio memories include standing in line in the 1950’s at the high school gym to get my oral vaccine on a sugar cube...I was spared...now in the “50 years ago news” polio was REAL...the last case in the Americas occurred in Peru in 1991, but I have discovered that I know lots more people with polio than I thought...like the 4-H leader with a limp but I never knew what caused it...

**“A Few of the Things we learned....:**

- Polio eradication must go beyond political issues and religious beliefs and the leadership of each...
- A smile communicates the same thing in all languages...
- Kids love to have their pictures taken, and see the results...
- Children love sweets; fun songs; playing and to laugh and have fun...
- Teams had a social mobilization chair and were trained for social mobilization, which has the potential to be an effective system for many other problems and initiatives in their communities...
- We were shocked to learn the number one stereotype of the USA was that Nigerians believe all American carry guns...
- Rotarians are wonderful no matter where you are – they become friends for life
- When the combination of Rotary, UN agencies and Center for Disease Control began the eradication program in 1988 there were approximately 350,000 reported cases...by 1993 the number was down to 9700 cases and in 2003 this was down to 754; 75% of which were in Nigeria...
- Polio virus can live for months in sewers...
- In 2003 the Kano state of Nigeria banned the polio vaccine due to false rumors that the vaccine would reduce fertility and spread the virus that causes AIDS. The ban was lifted after pressure from their neighboring countries, and pilgrims were barred from Mecca unless the ban was lifted. Supplies of vaccine were made available from Indonesia. However, by that time, the virus had spread to ten other countries, and the process had to begin again...

*Since returning to North Carolina, Winnie has begun making “polio” presentations to local clubs. Her message (after showing pictures and telling of their experiences) is that we cannot abandon the effort that is almost complete – ask your family, neighbors, outreach committee at church, or folks at your job to participate in the largest public health effort ever orchestrated in the world. “I have held that baby (the future) in my arms and looked him in the eyes and realized you and I have the power to create his future as a crawler and a beggar or as a fully functioning human being. You now have the baby in your arms – are you going to make a difference in polio eradication?”*

And as the President of India recently said, we cannot abandon those for whom the vaccine came too late...

Happy Holidays to you all...Ray Taylor, Chairman PSA