

## CHAPTER 17 – I BECOME A ROTARIAN

It is difficult to know quite where to relate how and when I became a Rotarian without it getting lost in my day to day life, so I feel quite justified in devoting a separate chapter to the subject.

For the benefit of readers who have no idea what Rotary is about I shall start by quoting the Object of Rotary, which is as follows:

To encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster:

1. The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service.
2. High ethical standards in business and professions; the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations; and the dignifying by each Rotarian of his occupation as an opportunity to serve society.
3. The application of the ideal of service by every Rotarian to his personal, business, and community life.
4. The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world-fellowship of business and professional men united in the ideal of service.

At this point it is interesting to note the history of Rotary – It was conceived by the late Paul P. Harris, a Chicago lawyer. The idea came to him out of his own loneliness as a stranger in a great city. His original conception was simply that of a Club for business men who had some use for each other beyond that of merely making money out of each other.

He mentioned the idea to three friends: Silvester Schiele, Hiram Shorey and Gus Loehr and the first meeting among these members took place on 23rd February 1905. The name ‘Rotary’ was used since the meetings took place in rotation at each member’s place of business. Although one of the original ideas was that members should benefit from business given by one member to another, this was quite quickly dropped in favour of a much more altruistic approach. Nowadays any attempt to use Rotary for the purpose of getting business is positively frowned upon!

Since 1905 Rotary has, like ‘Topsy’, grown out of all recognition so that today there are clubs in practically every country in the world and one of the privileges of being a Rotarian is that one can attend any meeting of any club at any time, so if one is away from home one can ‘make up’ one’s attendance by visiting a club in the country one is visiting.

I mentioned ‘making up’ attendance because one is obligated to attend a minimum of 60% of meetings throughout the year and since each club meets weekly this is a commitment not to be taken lightly.

In about May 1990 I was asked by a friend if I would like to go along to a meeting of the Cuckfield & Lindfield Rotary Club with a view to becoming a member. I went along to several meetings, all of which I thoroughly enjoyed and eventually I applied to become a member. After a time, during which the current members are given the chance to veto an application, I was ‘inducted’ into the Club on 3rd July 1990.

Since that time I have served on the Vocational Service Committee and then become Editor of the Club’s monthly magazine, which in most clubs is called ‘The Bulletin’. However each club is autonomous and so when I took over as editor I changed the name of our ‘Bulletin’ to ‘The Gazette’, which it has remained ever

since. The fact that each club is autonomous makes it very interesting when you visit another club as the procedures and atmosphere at each vary quite a lot, although all clubs adhere to the same basic constitution.

I carried on as editor of 'The Gazette' for three years before I was asked to become Secretary, a post I held for just one year before I was asked to become Junior Vice President. Becoming JVP means that you are destined to become the President Elect the following year and The President the year after that. This is a considerable honour as well as being a position of responsibility for the health of the Club is in your hands for a year, and naturally one wants to hand over the Club to the next President in at least as good a shape as it was when one takes it over!

As with most enterprises success is only guaranteed by having an excellent team to assist you. In this I was very lucky and the team I chose worked extremely hard to help me achieve my aim of raising around £15,000 for the three charities I had designated as 'President's Charities' for the year. It is the privilege of the president to be able to choose which charities to support during his year of office. The three I chose were a local one, Hollyrood House, located in Lindfield that was to provide a home for 24 autistic adults. Autistic children are, in the main, well catered for, but when they leave school at the age of 18 they can be pitched into society with little or no further support. Hollyrood House was set up to give young autistic adults support to try to integrate them into society and even hold down some sort of job.

My second charity, a national one, was the Motor Neurone Disease Association. I chose this for two main reasons – one was that the son of one of my fellow Rotarians is a sufferer of this terrible disease – and the second stems from my admiration of Professor Stephen Hawking.

My third charity, an international one, was the Rotary Eye Hospital in Hooghly, near Calcutta. I was introduced to this very worthwhile scheme by an Indian Ophthalmic Surgeon, Mr Samar Das (a member of the Rotary Club of Guildford), who regularly visits Hooghly and operates at this hospital, which is entirely funded by the Rotary Club of Hooghly. By joining forces with several other Rotary clubs in UK, France and Hooghly we were able to raise a sum of \$33,500 for the purchase of operating microscopes and ancillary equipment for use in the hospital.

Besides fund raising for charities Rotary, and in particular our Club, also provides hands on support for various organisations. Over the years we have erected a summerhouse in the garden of an old peoples home, painted several rooms at the same home, and also painted a goodly part of another building. This last year one of our members has been very active in helping the Headway Hurstwood Park Trust for people with head injuries, supervising/instructing in their woodwork facility.

I mentioned earlier that the Club meets every week and that it a duty of each member to attend a minimum of 60% of the meetings. Our programme for the month starts with a 'Vocational' evening at which we hear from one of our members about their job or hobby or whatever. At the second meeting we have a speaker, and over the eleven years I have been a member I have heard some really good speakers on most interesting topics. In particular I recall a most entertaining talk from the late Sir David Hunt (the first winner of 'Mastermind'), who told us about his experiences serving under Sir Winston Churchill and Clement Atlee.

Our third meeting is 'Business', during which we discuss items of interest regarding support for charities, fund raising and so on. The fourth week is, like the second, a speaker meeting. Occasionally we have a visit to a local place of interest and in those months where there is a fifth Tuesday we have a 'Ladies Night' at which we try to provide a speaker of interest to the fairer sex.

On the subject of ladies, members wives are invited to join a companion organisation to Rotary called 'Inner Wheel' and most of our wives are indeed members of this.

The fun and fellowship to be gained by being a Rotarian is immense and also the support of fellow members during times of crisis is a wonderful benefit as I can testify. As you will see in chapter 19 I had occasion to be hospitalised for a quadruple coronary by-pass. During this time neither Mella nor myself had to drive back and forth to Brighton as transport was provided every day by various members of the Club. This was a great help as Mella dislikes driving in Brighton and I was able to relax in the knowledge that Mella's needs were being well looked after, which I am sure greatly speeded my recovery.

Having completed my year as President I have reverted to my previous position as editor of the *Gazette*, something that I find most stimulating, especially when I can persuade fellow members of the Club to contribute items for publication.

On an international level Rotary has been largely responsible for the eradication of polio worldwide, through a programme called 'Polio Plus'. Also Rotary is almost invariably involved in providing aid to people unfortunate enough to be stricken by natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, etc, etc.

Because there are Rotary Clubs in most corners of the world it is gratifying to know that when we provide funds for, say, disaster relief in some country or another, we can rely on the local Rotary club to ensure that it all goes where it is intended to go and not siphoned off by the local 'mafia' as is so often the case. It is for this reason that both Mella and I refuse to support charities that are not administered locally by Rotary.

Just to show that our Club is moving with the times I must tell you that one of our members has set up a most wonderful website to inform all and sundry of our activities. The site has just won an award, one of only three in the UK, for its brilliance. Judge for yourself by logging on to [www.rotarysussex.org](http://www.rotarysussex.org)

So you can see that if one is minded to be of service to ones fellow human beings, being a member of Rotary is a very good , and fun, way of going about it.