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HIGHLANDS ROTARY

Polio survivor, up close

HIGHLANDS – Speaking from a wheelchair, Houston attorney Jack Emmott told the Rotarians about his life, and experiences since he contracted polio at the age of six.

Polio eradication is a major program of Rotary International, and all clubs around the world, including the Highlands club help fund the eradication effort. The program is known as Polio Plus, and has raised \$850 million dollars since its inception, and has seen the number of cases of polio, most often affecting children, drop to only 38 in four countries of the world. Polio Plus was started in 1985 and has treated over two billion children with vaccine.

Prior to 1950, polio was very common in the U. S. spurring programs such as the March of Dimes to fight the disease and ease the suffering of those who had contracted it.

As a boy, Jack Emmott grew up along the banks of White Oak Bayou, in a neighborhood named for his family: "Emmottville." The family owned 100 acres in farmland along the bayou, which is in the area now known as Spring Valley, north of I-10.

In 1954 the bayou flooded, and many children waded and played in the water, not knowing that it contained dangerous bacteria from pollution. This was the event which transmitted the polio virus to Emmott. Emmott recalled that he actually contracted the virus from fecal matter in the water of the flooded bayou. He was walking down a road with his grandfather, PawPaw, to get the mail.

Polio comes on very quickly, and it was soon that Emmott had trouble walking, and weakness in his body. Polio affected his body, and he was paralyzed



Author and Attorney Jack Emmott, with a picture of "Donk" from his childhood.

from the neck down.

Emmott was treated at the Hedecroft Hospital in Houston, along with other children. Along with physical therapy, the hospital tried to deal with the despair and hopelessness that many patients felt.

At the height of the polio epidemic, there were 6000 cases in Houston, and there are now 300,000 survivors around the country.

Emmott learned to cope with the disease, and although he was confined to a motorized wheelchair, he went on to school and a career as an attorney. He is now a successful collaborative family law divorce and child custody lawyer. He functions often as a mediator, and is also an inspirational speaker, entrepreneur, song writer and author. He is happily married, with two children and four grandchildren. He credits his wife Dorothy as one of his Angels.

He wrote two books as a result of his struggle with the disease and his law practice. "Prayerful Passages" opens the doors of comfort and healing to guide Christians struggling with the anger, loss, and grief of a marriage in

peril.

His second book is "Bending Angels" about those in his life that have supported him during his life-long journey of hard-won faith and unshaken hope.

As he speaks in public, as he did at the Rotary luncheon, audiences are struck by his enthusiasm and optimism. As he said in his talk, "we need to live in the present and appreciate it."

This was from a man who at the age of 35, had to go into an iron lung for 5 years as his polio attacked his body again. Physically, Emmott has had much to deal with, including pins in his back to hold him upright, and hand surgery to insure he had workable thumbs.

Jack Emmott is now a serene and happy person, it seems, and deeply religious. "Pray for my ministry" he asks, and reminds us that everyone has a Bending Angel reaching down to help them through the rough times.

He knows very well, having been there and lived the life, and seen the miraculous results.