

Getting to know Nigeria through Rotary

The only way a person can really get to understand another country and culture is to go and live there and that is what 20 Rotarians from Zones 27 – 28 (four District 6420) did. We split up into two groups of six and one group of eight representatives going into different parts of the country of Nigeria. We had no idea what was waiting for us in a country we knew so little of. We knew that parts of Nigeria had poverty and water problems but we also knew that Nigeria had many resources and one of them was oil, how could this be?

I am sure there are different stories from the other two groups who went to different areas but from talking to some of them, the stories are not that much different from mine.

Our group started our journey in the northern part of Nigeria in the city of Kano. We arrived sometime in the late night of a mid November day. Much to our surprise, many of the members of the Rotary clubs of Kano were anxiously waiting for us. After introductions and many pictures we went our separate ways with our Rotarian hosts to be a part of their family for two days. On the way to my hosts home which was only a fifteen or twenty minute drive from the airport we were stopped several times at road blocks which was very scary, when machine guns are pointed at your car. My first host family was of Indian descent. I did not get to meet the rest of the family until the next morning because of it being so late at night. My host mentioned that his wife was in bed sick with malaria. In the morning I met his ten year old daughter, his ten month old daughter, and his father who lives with them. After a bite to eat, we were off to join the others in our group to see the humanitarian projects that the Rotary clubs of Kano would like to do, with our help. Little did we know the magnitude of devastating poverty and utter hopelessness we would see when we went from one slum to the next, each more horrible than the last. Our hearts went out to the beautiful



Open well and polluted water from well

smiling children in the streets where open sewers ran next to the wells where they draw their polluted water. They live in mud huts with rusty tin roofs.



Homes in slum districts as far as you can see where millions live.



Nearly naked child playing with the only toy he has, a stick, in the street of sewage & garbage.

We visited several public schools all with the same handicaps of no desks, no running water and no bathrooms. The children had to go outside with part of the school yard designated as the latrine with flies and insects everywhere. Those schools had the fortunate children that got to go to school because many children never have the opportunity to go to school at all.



Typical Nigerian classroom

In each of my Rotary mission trips I always bring beanie babies as gifts for the children and they have always been received with open arms. To my surprise the



Nigerian children were terrified when I handed them a beanie baby because they have never been given a toy or any kind of gift, especially from someone who had white skin that was so different than theirs that they have never seen before. After they teacher explained to the children what it was and it was



a special gift it did not take long before they were all smiles.

Happy children with their treasured beanie babies

We went to the local hospitals that have no equipment, no sanitary conditions, no medicine, no waiting rooms and not enough beds for the ill and injured.

After two days in Kano we were soon off to the city of Kaduna, Nigeria which was about a three hour drive south of Kano. The Rotary clubs of Kaduna were anxiously awaiting our arrival to show their projects to us. Just when we thought we had seen it all, they took us not just to their slums with just as horrific water and sanitation conditions as we have seen in Kano, but they took us to an orphanage for children of unwed 12 and 13 year old girls. The orphanage



Children playing next to open sewer.



Orphaned Nigerian child

delivers the children and takes the children, raises them and gives them an education. The young mothers are shunned from their parents so the orphanage teaches them a trade to earn money and be on their own, never to see their child again.

The Rotarians in Nigeria are warm, friendly, and very open people with hearts as big as I have ever seen but they are limited to what they can do because the needs are so many that are effecting so many millions of people.

Our group went on to the capital city of Abuja where we met up with the other two groups along with 70 additional Rotarians from around the U.S. and Canada to attend a two day West African Rotary Project Fair, Rotary clubs from other areas we were not able to get to, came and showed their humanitarian projects. We were told that we were the largest delegation of North Americans to have visited Nigeria; obviously it has not been a major tourist destination.

The last two days in Nigeria, we had a different kind of opportunity to help. Together with local health workers, we administered and monitored oral polio vaccine for children less than 5 years of age.



Young Nigerian girl and her sister going out to sell what ever goods the family has to make money to buy water and firewood to cook with.



Never seen a white skinned person before, the curious Nigerian children wanted to feel our skin and sometimes trying to see if the white would rub off.

This trip made a huge impact on my life. We are so blessed to have so much, yet there are so many people, not living, but just surviving day to day, people with a tremendous future potential. Having been a Rotarian for many years and being a Past District Governor, I truly believe there is hope when "Rotary Shares".

District 6420 Past District Governor Bob Newlon