

THE MEMOIRS OF A VIRGIN—ELEARNER

BY DEL GREEN

DISTRICT 5000 ROTARY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY CLASS OF 2010

When I enrolled in the District 5000 Rotary Leadership Academy, I wasn't sure what to expect. While I assumed I would have an opportunity to broaden the scope and depth of my Rotary knowledge, the courses were not taught in the traditional classroom environment where the instructor and the student are present at the same time and place. Instead, they were delivered in an asynchronous eLearning (or distance learning) environment. I had no prior experience with distance learning and was uncertain as to how well it would work for me as an adult learner. To my gratification, I found that the eLearning format was a flexible and effective way to teach and learn the broad range of material that was covered in each of the six courses. One course, however, will forever stick in my mind.

While the six courses covered a broad range of key Rotary topics, they were all generally similar in the way they presented and tested the material. In each course, we were given a course description, a list of course objectives, an extensive reading list, and a writing assignment. After we successfully completed the course assignments, we were given a pre-test and then a final test relating to the reading materials. It didn't take long to adapt to eLearning and this method of teaching, which greatly reduced the amount of time necessary to successfully complete the succeeding courses, with the exception of one in particular.

While each course was challenging in its own way, none was more challenging for me than Course #5 entitled, "PolioPlus, The Rotary Foundation Educational Programs and Ways of Giving to TRF." As with each of the other courses, I first completed all the course reading assignments for Course 5 and then completed the writing assignment relating to the course material, which entailed preparing outlines for two full presentations at a Rotary Club, and then making arrangements to have myself placed on my Club's speaking schedule sometime during the current Rotary year. While the reading, writing and testing were no more or less challenging than the other courses, I would later discover that the real learning would occur when I tackled the final element of the course—which was the full presentation to my Club.

I chose to use "PolioPlus and Rotary's \$200 Million Challenge" as the topic of my presentation. It was an important topic, and it had been a while since anyone gave a PolioPlus presentation to my Club. It was an opportune time to bring everyone up to speed on the current status of the PolioPlus program, especially the newer members who may have had little, or no, in depth exposure to PolioPlus and the \$200 Million Challenge, but were being asked to support this Rotary Foundation program.

As the date of my presentation approached, I noticed myself becoming anxious. I was not anxious because the presentation would entail public speaking, which some will say is their greatest fear. As an attorney and a past president, I am accustomed to public speaking, especially before the familiar faces of the members of my own Club. Instead, I realized that I was anxious because I was no longer playing the passive role of an eLearning student. I was taking on the roles, responsibilities and challenges of a teacher, and I did not want to fail my Club, my instructor or myself. The learning process took on a whole new character. I realized that I had to know all of the material (not just 70% of the material, which was the minimum score to pass any of the final

tests), and had to know it well enough to deliver a full presentation to my fellow Club members (as well as any guests) and then field any questions that may arise, including questions that may not have been in the core material. As a consequence, this course was unlike any of the other courses for me.

To prepare for my Club presentation, I had to re-read all of the provided course materials, and then spent many more hours searching the Internet and reviewing the various on-line resources, such as the Rotary International website, The Devlyn Amigos Polio web site, and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative website. The links from one internet page often led to another page, and seemed endless. At times, the information would conflict or was incomplete, which necessitated yet additional research. Additionally, I strived to include the most current information so that there was something new for everyone, including members who were already familiar with PolioPlus and Rotary's \$200 Million Challenge.

I was no longer reading to assure a minimum 70% score on an open book test, but was researching to develop a deeper understanding and ensure that I fully understood the material and could hopefully deliver it in an authoritative and interesting manner. I don't know if this was an intended consequence of the course, but the assignment had the natural effect of transforming a student into to teacher. They say a "picture is worth a thousand words," so I took advantage of the option to include a PowerPoint slide show. This task became a bonus learning experience because of the additional Internet research necessary to select Polio-related images for the slide show, to complement the wealth of Humanity in Motion materials available through Rotary International.

My Club presentation was last Friday. To my relief, I wasn't anxious. Instead, I was prepared and everything went well as a consequence. While I'm definitely relieved that it's over, I now have the luxury of looking back and can't help but appreciate the learning experience that was involved in preparing and presenting the presentation to my Club. In retrospect, it was fun and was rewarded by the sincere appreciation of my fellow members and our guests. While I can't advocate that every course instructor incorporate a Club presentation requirement into their curriculum because of the amount of time and energy that can be involved to do it right, I do believe that lessons that are capable of transforming students into teachers are valuable. I am grateful that I am no longer a virgin eLearner. Thank you Academy for a worthwhile learning experience.

