



THE TALENT AROUND THE TABLE

Sounding the alarm on postpolio syndrome

Bob Williams contracted polio at 29, but put it behind him as he raised a family of four children and pursued a career. Decades later, he was diagnosed with postpolio syndrome (PPS), a debilitating complication of the disease, after reading about the condition in an article in *The Rotarian* in September 2010 ("Polio's Second Act").

Now, Bob and his wife of 63 years, Mary, are working with the Rotary Club of Stevens Point, Wis., USA, of which Mary is a former president, to tell people about postpolio syndrome. The club has produced brochures and a video and is working with the medical community and state and local governments to publicize the symptoms of PPS and treatment resources.

THE ROTARIAN: How did you figure out that Bob had PPS?

BOB: We live near a college campus, where we walk on a wonderful wooded one-mile track. In September 2010, I noticed a general fatigue in my legs. It was not enough to stop me from walking, but I was worried. Then I picked up Mary's *Rotarian* magazine and saw an article

that described the symptoms [fatigue, muscle pain, joint pain, muscle weakness, intolerance of cold, and muscle atrophy]. I said: That's me.

I went to the Mayo Clinic, which confirmed the diagnosis. It took two days of testing, because the symptoms are shared by so many things: arthritis, Parkinson's, ALS,

muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis.

TR: Does this diagnosis frighten the two of you?

MARY: PPS brings back the uncertainty and anxiety of when Bob had polio in 1954. We had one child and were expecting another. I remember the fear when Bob first realized he was sick one morning in early Sep-

tember; he had a slight fever; he couldn't raise his right arm, he said, 'I think I have polio.' He was diagnosed and hospitalized immediately; he had paralyzed his arm and legs. People were terribly frightened about it because it was contagious. The nurses were afraid.

BOB: With postpolio syndrome the diagnosis was followed by fear too. But when I came from the Mayo Clinic, I was assigned to a physical therapist who had studied PPS. She prescribed an exercise program. When I had polio, personal physical therapy had greatly restored my leg strength.

TR: How did your Rotary get involved?

MARY: I invited Bob to tour our club, and our members wanted to do everything we could. One paid to do a brochure, and the chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point offered the services of a professional videographer. Now it is a project in District 6220 (parts of Michigan and Wisconsin).

TR: What are the goals?

BOB: A key goal is to have doctors routinely ask patients. Have you ever had polio? An estimated 50 percent of people who had polio have PPS. Many are over 60.

They come in with the usual complaints for that age group: the fatigue and pain and the symptoms of PPS that worsen without treatment.

MARY: This project has decreased our interest in preventing polio. Anyone who has polio is at risk for PPS. We are running the red flag for awareness.

— KAT