

Address of Past RI President Bhichai Rattakul
As the RI President's Representative
At the Conference of District 2700, Fukuoka
12 – 13 April, 2014

“ Why Rotary?”

District Governor Motoaki Anai, and my Fellow
Rotarians,

I rise to speak with great humility because I am fully aware of the honour given to me by our President, Ron Burton, a man of great vision, and a man of dignity and integrity.

There is no doubt that President Ron Burton and his dear wife, Jettta would love to be with all of you on this special occasion, especially to renew the friendship he had with you, Governor Anai, during the week in San Diego in January, 2013.

Like all Presidents in the past, President Ron Burton and you, Governor Anai have been working very hard to make Rotary a more realistic force for good, and to ***Engage Rotary and Change Lives.***

We have now only less than three months left before the year comes to its end. .

I think the year, so far, has been a year of great satisfaction to all of us as Rotarians. Thus, it is only quite natural that nothing would bring real happiness to President Ron if he could only be with all of you even for a short period of time.

But, as we have more than 360 districts around the world it would be impossible for him to be at every conference to thank you personally, but you can be assured that his heart and his love for district 2700 will always be with him!

I have been a Rotarian for 56 years, and there are many more who have served Rotary for more than 60 years and perhaps even 70 years. But, very often the question arises, “*Why Rotary?*” “*Why take time for it?*”

I can only say to you that in my conviction and experience I have found it good for the people.

I think this is the *measure* of goodness. I have found that it contributes to understanding and communication and goodwill and peace and service and the relieving of human want and suffering among men, and women.

I can only say to you that I would not take a year of my life, nor any part of it, for Rotary if I didn't have a conviction pertaining to its purpose and its future and its effectiveness.

And this I bring to you as our witness from these wanderings around the world as well as my 56 years of association with it at closer range.

In one of my stops...official calls...in my own country for a day of outing for a “*hands on*” National Immunization Day of the Polio eradication campaign, with more than 50 other Rotarians I had the sorrowful experience that was later on made known to Rotary International.

We all are aware that the Polio Plus programme costs a lot of money. In fact more than one billion dollars were raised by the Rotarians worldwide to keep the project moving in the hope to completely eradicate this dreadful disease as soon as possible.

But, money and fund are not only the “*service*” that Rotarians provide. Rotarians give their time, their energy, and even their *life* to this noble cause.

Rotarian Yongchai Surapantanakorn who was only 35 years old had a wife and two young children. He owned a small automobile spare parts shop in a small town not far from Bangkok.

His income was so meager just enough to cover the family expenses and be a member of a Rotary Club.

He had never been a Paul Harris Fellow!

But, the PolioPlus programme had always been close to his heart. However, the constraint on his income had forced him to abandon the desire to have even a small part to contribute some fund to the programme. But, he *devoted* his time, talent and energy going around the district to raise fund for the programme.

HIS DETERMINATION TO HAVE A SMALL PART IN THE ERADICATION OF POLIO WAS SO STRONG THAT HE SPENT EVERY WEEK VISITING VARIOUS CLUBS AND ENCOURAGED THE ROTARIANS TO PARTICIPATE BY CONTRIBUTING TO THE POLIO FUND OR PERSONALLY PARTICIPATING ON EACH AND EVERY NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION DAY.

It was on a humid day in April, Yong Chai with his wife, daughter and a friend went out once again for a National Immunization Day. They went in a small sampan boat carrying with them the precious Polio vaccine drops.

The whole day was spent at various villages along the winding canals where parents brought their children out waiting for the Polio drops.

It was another hard day work for Yongchai. His body was all soaked with sweats and dirt.

The sun started to set and it was time to return home.

Suddenly, the water gates in the canal opened for the farmers to till their lands the next day. Yongchai didn't realize that the current was so strong that it could do him and his family harm.

He continued paddling against the current.

As a result his small sampan boat was capsized! He grappled the remaining Polio vaccine on one hand and the other his 7 years old daughter. He swam to the shore and returned again in time to save his wife when she was starting to go down under the current.

By that time, with his concern over his friend , he went back into the canal facing yet another wave of strong current to find that his friend was struggling to climb up the shore.

His friend was safe!

But poor Yongchai was so exhausted to such an extent that he could no longer carry the weight of his *own* body.

With no one on shore to help him, Yongchai was *drowned!* He went down under the water just when the sun was setting at the far end of the horizon.

I was at his funeral the next day. I met his wife, and his daughter and his friend . All of whom survived because of an act of one service-minded man who spent his whole life trying to *Do Good in the World.*

Yongchai didn't leave much for his young family, but he did leave a legacy that Rotary service does not confine only to fund raising, and Rotary service certainly does not confine to “*purse*” service, but Rotary's real service is “*Thoughtfulness of and Helpfulness to Others*”.

I think a we should face ourselves soberly with this inevitable from mortality for all of us. This dramatized it for us, and we shall never forget it!

YES, YONGCHAI HAD THE COURAGE AND THE DETERMINATION!

SPEAKING OF “DETERMINATION” IT REMINDS ME OF HOW ONE SMALL ROTARY CLUB IN BANGKOK MANY YEARS AGO SPENT SO MUCH TIME AND MONEY FOR BANGKOK CHILDREN’S EDUCATION IN THE LARGEST SLUM AREA IN THAILAND.

EVER SINCE SHE WAS A CHILD, PORNTHIP HAS MANY DREAMS AMD AMBITIONS.

BORN IN THE SLUM...A POVERTY STRICKEN FAMILY OF THREE, HER PARENTS HAVE HAD TO STRUGGLE AND WORK EXTREMELY HARD TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

BOTH PARENTS EARNED A COMBINE INCOME OF A MERE \$10.- A DAY...JUST ENOUGH TO FEED THE WHOLE FAMILY, AND SAVING SOME...NOT ONLY FOR PORNTIP'S EDUCATION BUT ALSO PORNTHIP'S OLDER BROTHER AND SISTER.

WHILE THE OTHER MUMS AND DADS WOULD VISIT SHOPPING MALLS TO BUY SCHOOL UNIFORMS AND STATIONERY FOR TYHEIR CHILDREN, THE FIRST PLACE PORNTHIP'S MOTHER THOUGHT WAS A PAWNSHOP!

FAMILY DESTITUTION EVENTUALLY FORCED HER BROTHER AND SISTER TO LEAVE SCHOOL AFTER THEY FINISHED THEIR NINTH GRADE SO THAT THEY COULD FIND A JOB AND MAKE SOME SMALL INCOME TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE.

IT WAS A TOUGH AND ROUGH TIME FOR THE FAMILY. PORNTHUIP REALIZED THE SITUATION WELL. BUTAS THE YOUNGEST CHILD, PORNTHUP WAS TOLD NOT TO GIVE UP HER STUDIES.

THE ROTARY CLUB WAS APPROACHED, AND WITH MORE THAN 100 POOR CHILDREN IN THE SLUM, PORNTIP WAS GIVEN A SCHOLARSHIP!

HER PARENTS ALWAYS TAUGHT HER ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND HOW IT COULD IMPROVE THE FAMILY'S STANDARD OF LIVING.

IT DID!

HER STRONG DETERMINATION, LIKE THE LATE YONGCHAI, TO STUDY, FUELLED BY OPPORTUNITIES AND SACRIFICE GIVEN TO HER BY OTHERS, HAS TURNED HER LIFE AROUND.

FROM BEING AN UNDERPRIVILEGED GIRL WHO NEEDED AN EDUCATIONAL LOAN EACH YEAR, OR SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE CLUBS IN THE AREA TO BE ABLE TO STUDY, NOW PORNTIP IS RECOGNIZED AS THE VERY FIRST DOCTORATE GRADUATE TO COME FROM THE LARGEST SLUM IN THE CITY!

- AS AN ACADEMIC STANDOUT, HER EXCELLENT GRADES ALSO WON HER THE PRESTIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE ROYAL GOLDEN JUBILEE PH.D PROGRAMME.

THAT SCHOLARSHIP ENABLED HER TO PURSUE ANOTHER YEAR OF INTERNSHIP

PROGRAMME AT JOHN HOPKINS HOSPITAL IN THE US.

“I LOVE SCIENCE”. SAID PRONTHIP. ESPECIALLY BIOTECHNOLOGY AND THE NEW FOCUS ON HOW “ NANOTEECHNOLOGY” CAN ENABLE LESS MEDICINE TO TAKE BETTER EFFECT AMONG THE SICK. AND I HIOPE MY KNOWLEDGE CAN ONE DAY HELP IMPROVE AND SAVE MANY PATIENTS’ LIVES.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT PORNTHIP ACADAMIC TRIUMPH HAS BEEN HER DEEPEST DESIRE AND STRONG DETERMINATION TO HELP PEOPLE.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT PORNTHIP’S ACADAMIC TRIUMPH HAS ALSO NEEN “OPPORTUNITY”

“OPPORUNITY” IS MORE THAN JUST LUCK”, SHE SAID TO ME RECENTLY.

“IT IS AN INGREDIENT TO COOK UP YOUR SUCCESS”.

AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ROTARIANS IS ALSO NOT LUCK...BUT AN OPPORTUNITY TO .. “ENGAGE ROTARY AND CHANGE LIVES”.

My fellow Rotarians, as I now turn more on Rotary. I feel that lately the *demand*s from Rotary International

imposed upon the clubs are increasingly becoming a heavy burden on the administration of the club.

I strongly feel that the work load placed on the Governor, and through him to his clubs is now almost a *full time* job!

As a result, fellowship among the members of the club has been diluted because of time constraint that hamper club's attendance, discouraging and ignoring the application of the formally strict classification principle., and lack of Rotary information, etc.

This has created undesirable consequences, and many clubs around the world have to close down because of our own doing...ignoring and bypassing the *qualifications* of being a Rotarian all together.

If Rotary is like any other service and charitable club will our *dream* of having *more* young business and professional men and women into the fold of Rotary become realistic?

I *doubt* very much!

I further feel that with many new programmes and new emphases every year resulting in adding more and more staff at the secretariat, and through the action of the Board and the Council on Legislation has created new rules , new regulations and new patterns for clubs to follow, Rotary has now become a *gigantic bureaucratic* establishment!

One of the emphases lately has been “*Public Image*”.

We even have a Rotary International “***Public Image Coordinator***”!

What can a ***Public Image Coordinator*** does to make good image on Rotary? I really don't know!

In the urge to have more and more members, Rotary International, for many years, had what we called Rotary International Membership Co-ordinator. We spent a lot of money on this programme, but the whole idea collapsed a few years later because it didn't make sense to recruit new members without going through the process which we used to strictly adhered to it in the past.

To me, ***service*** is what gives us our ***image!***

What we do or what we don't do...that is how Rotary is ***judged***, and that is how we get the ***image*** we deserve.

If we serve well, then we will have an image that people respect. But, there is no one who can serve for us. No one can serve us our ***image*** on a silver tray.

We have to ***work*** for it. We have to ***carry*** out the service ourselves.

This in my opinion is Rotary...service. Service is ***not*** writing a cheque book or donating money. Acting as a ***charitable organization*** certainly is ***not*** our aim.

Service is when we make available of our ***time*** to give of ***ourselves!***

Thus, you will see that the ***spirit*** of Rotary is simple. But, if Rotary's programme and activities grow to

become too large and too complicated, then we will forget the *spirit* of service.

I say, let us all renew our dedication to the ideal and the spirit of *Service Above Self* on which our *fellowship* is based.

Let each of us share the responsibility to do the best we can to *serve*.. It is the best way and, I think the *only* way we will keep Rotary running on track in the years ahead.