

ROTARY MEGA LIMB CAMP BANGALORE 3rd to 9th JANUARY 2011

Limbs	518
Calipers	1128
Crutches	500
Tricycles	55
Wheelchairs	75
LN4 Forehands	88
TOTAL	<u>2364</u>



They say that all good stories start with once upon a time. However I don't want to tell you just one story; that would condense too much human dignity and determination. I want to tell you many stories.

I was accompanied by fellow Rotarian and friend, Judith Finn, to the annual Limb Camp which we, the Rotary Club of Brentwood Breakfast, had funded with a matching grant.

We all know about the tremendous ability that Rotary has when we come together to work either across the ocean or within our own clubs. To see the dedication of the Rotary Club of Bangalore Peenya was an eye-opener. To see the scale of what is termed the "Mega" Limb Camp was breathtaking.

On the first day alone nearly one thousand people turned up. Some were carried, some crawled and some dragged themselves across the ground on wooden boards with wheels beneath. There were many moving individual stories and I will focus on a few of these; people I will never forget. The impressions of activity, personal stoicism and determination will be emblazoned on my mind forever.

There was Suneesh. He was given a hand after a last minute debate about his amputated arm; the minimum requirement is 5 inches from elbow to mid forearm for an artificial limb to fit – his was $\frac{1}{4}$ inch too short. Many had been turned away because of this, but Robert and Alex; the two American's who had come over with the artificial hands, decided to give it a try. In five minutes or less Suneesh's new hand had been fitted and within seconds he had learned to operate it. We became puzzled as we stood there watching; he was pretending to pour a jug over his head. He began to laugh and picked up a comb in his artificial hand to show us that he used to be a barber. Now that he could hold a comb in his new right hand he would be able to cut people's hair with his left. The joy on that man's face brings a lump to my throat thinking of it even now.

There was Rami, 30 years old who lost his left leg in an automobile accident and came 300km to try and see if he can be given a new limb.

There was Pratara aged 13, born with congenital Polio with both limbs deformed. He was hoping for callipers or a wheelchair, anything I am told that can make him move.

One story that is most affecting is a mother who carried her son into the camp, staggering under his weight and weeping, saying she could carry him no longer. She had carried him for 30 years and now she was too old and he was too heavy.

We all had to turn away because the power of being able to give somebody their life back within five minutes was so overwhelming.

There were other lighter moments as well; The five year old who had the limb fitted at the end of the day, which worked in seconds and a beaming smile spread cheek to cheek as she attempted immediately to spell her name using a pen in her artificial hand. The people we saw being carried in and then walk out with new limbs. There was a young student studying economics who had lost

his leg because of a cut that had turned into septic gas gangrene – his stump was playing up and he had come for a new one. There was little Rajiv who had lost his leg in a factory – the details were unclear and vague, I suspect he had been working there, but this is just my conjecture.

One patient had previously paid a phenomenal amount for a bionic hand which had only worked for two days. When confronting the hospital they had laughed and told him he could sue them. So he turned up at the camp to ask could he have one of the standard model hands. Dr Subramanyam Ganesh had the quick foresight to ask him what he might do to help this whole project. He considered for a moment and said he had 2 acres of land that he did nothing with and that if America wanted to contact him he would be willing to consider the erection of a factory to make the artificial hands in India as opposed to trying to get them transported from America. This bit of hope has emerged out of the collective work of the Rotary Club of Bangalore Peenya with our support.

I met social workers who devoted their lives to trying to explain to rural villagers that their disabled children need not be locked up in rooms, out of fear, shame and stigma but should be integrated into the community.

The Mega Camp offers hope; this is what rotary can do when we come together. Have you ever thought that a garden chair could be turned into a fully functioning wheelchair or what looks like a metal shopping basket being turned into a fully function mobility scooter operated by hand held pedals? The ingenuity and the speed with which crutches were made and the sheer organisation of marshalling over a thousand people into various clinics was truly amazing. There was a sense of organised calm pervading the whole camp.

For many this was a holiday; a place to be fed and a place to sleep. The children played games whilst waiting for their parents. There was also a sense of thrill and hope around. Each new limb fitted, crutch given, wheelchair supplied or watching somebody operate their mobility scooter with their hand held pedals, making nervous strides out of the camp made one smile.

The raising of this money has caused much discussion but all I can sincerely tell you is that every penny was put to good use. I would not have missed this experience for anything.

We were able to exchange our Rotary banner and thanks were offered to our club for the funding of the camp.



A thought to consider: There was a child whose name I never learnt because there was no interpreter nearby, but every time I saw him it twisted my heart. He could have been my son's age but he walked with his head near to the ground, his arms outstretched before him and his legs rigidly straight behind him; walking in a crab like motion. He could not look up and make eye contact with anyone. He had spent all of his life in this position. When I badgered Doctors if something for what could be done for this young man, they sighed and said it was a congenital cerebral palsy deformity and his spine was now set rigid. They doubted if anything could be done. His deformity was too great. I feel that such cases should be individually considered by rotary to see if Western surgeons can assist gratis. But this is perhaps for a larger debate.....

I personally want to thank every member of the club for backing all that has been done in the last three years to reach this final pinnacle of our work. We still have funds waiting to be utilised for

polio corrective surgery. The money that we have already given could not have been spent more wisely. I only wish sincerely that you could have all been there with Judith and I to share this amazing experience. The pictures only tell a small part of the story. What really matters were the interactions between us as people, the connections we made with one another instantly in a common goal, a common hope is and what Rotary at its best is all about.

Marie Conyers

International Chairman Rotary Club of Brentwood Breakfast