


Celebrating 100 years of service  Rotary International

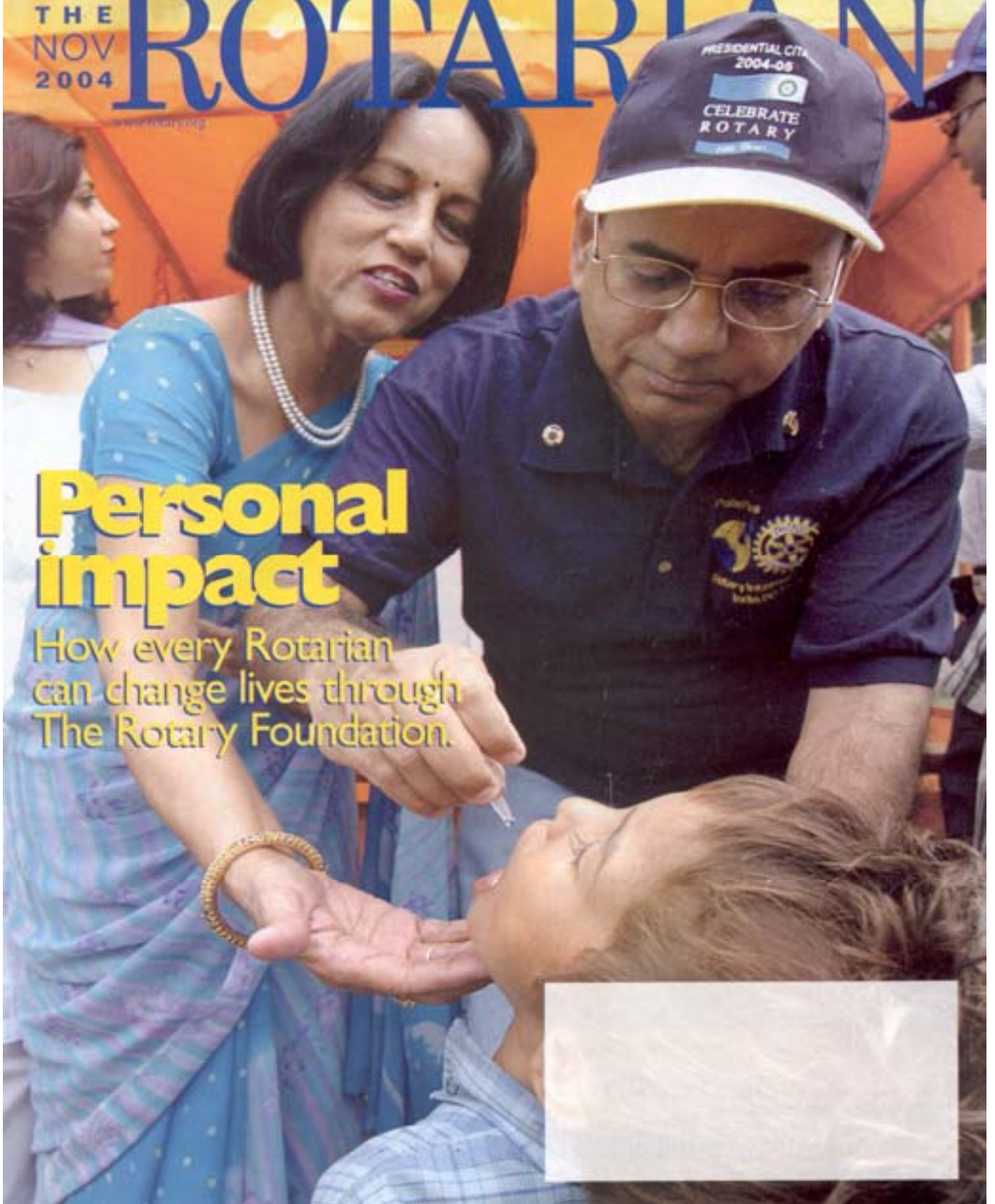
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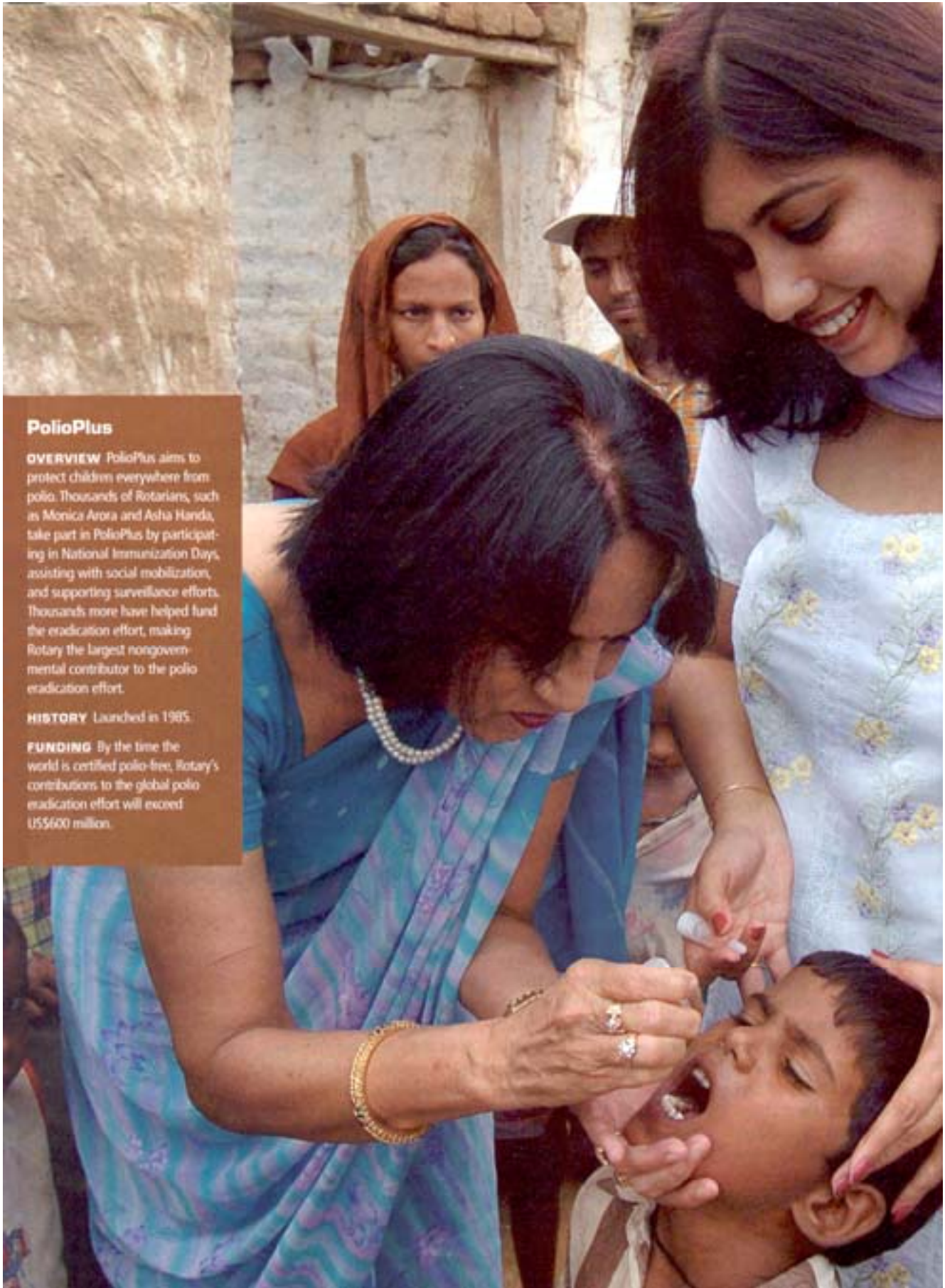
ROTARIAN

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Personal impact

How every Rotarian
can change lives through
The Rotary Foundation.





PolioPlus

OVERVIEW PolioPlus aims to protect children everywhere from polio. Thousands of Rotarians, such as Monica Arora and Asha Handa, take part in PolioPlus by participating in National Immunization Days, assisting with social mobilization, and supporting surveillance efforts. Thousands more have helped fund the eradication effort, making Rotary the largest nongovernmental contributor to the polio eradication effort.

HISTORY Launched in 1985.

FUNDING By the time the world is certified polio-free, Rotary's contributions to the global polio eradication effort will exceed US\$600 million.

Joining the fight

As a young woman, she helplessly watched her child suffer from polio. Today, both mother and daughter are Rotarians, working for a polio-free India.

by Carol Metzker

In a remote section of Delhi, India, children laugh and play at the edge of a crowded alley. In flip-flops of every color, they skip past the outdoor bazaar, skirting bits of trash and dung from wandering animals, leaving small footprints

in the red dust street. Their mothers watch from dilapidated apartments or rooftop homes — make-do structures covered with tarps, secured from the wind by stones and old tires. A young boy bathes outdoors among family and neighbors; two others chatter as they splash about and play with sticks in a small open gutter of raw sewage, unaware of the potential for exposure to diseases such as polio. For these young residents of Pahargang, extreme poverty, illiteracy, and overcrowding are simple facts of life. The standards of sanitation commonplace in richer nations are not found here.

Not far away, a committed group of Rotarians is gathered to address these issues. Fighting polio has been a top priority here for nearly two decades, but this year, there's a renewed sense of urgency. As Rotary and its worldwide partners, the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), enter the final stage of their campaign for a

polio-free world, India — the north, in particular — is considered a key battleground.

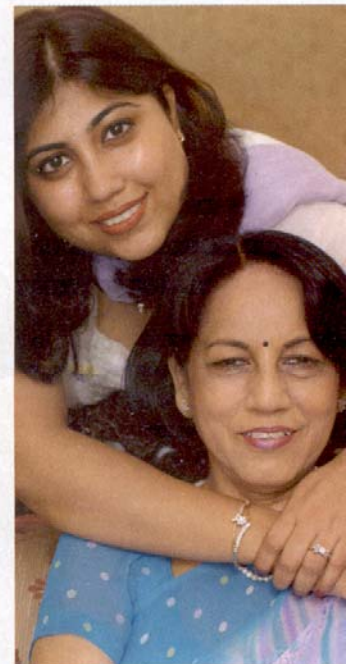
Walking tall, a beautiful young woman in a flowing sari enters the room where a dozen members of the Rotary Club of Delhi-West have already assembled to discuss the latest efforts. She greets Ravi Choudhary, 2003-04 president of the club; Ashok Kantoor, current president; and other Delhi-West Rotarians. She moves elegantly across the room to welcome Rotarians from Canada, England, and the United States who have traveled to Delhi to help with a polio National Immunization Day in February 2004. She introduces herself — Monica Arora — and explains to the visiting Rotarians that she is dressed to attend a wedding after the meeting.

Just before the meeting is called to order, the woman takes a seat next to another attractive, festively attired Rotarian. She whispers a quick introduction between the guests and fellow club member. For the visiting Rotarians, it's hard to believe that

the two women are daughter and mother. It's even harder to believe that they joined Rotary last year because Arora was a childhood victim of polio.

"When Monica was a year old, she became ill and couldn't move her feet," her mother, Asha Handa, relates. The year was 1971, and she was very frightened, recalling her brother's early battle with polio that left him with a limp decades later. Although Arora had been given "the drops" — the two drops of pale lavender liquid that constitute one dose of vaccine — as an infant, she had not yet been fully immunized. Arora was taken to the hospital, treated, and later wore special shoes and calipers (leg braces). Today, thanks in large part to Rotary's contributions to the global polio eradication effort, such tragedies are now much less likely to occur.

Because she was so young, Arora has no recollection of fighting the disease. She has only vague memories of her therapeutic shoes — "heavy boots that were different than other children wore."



ABOVE: MONICA ARORA (STANDING), AND HER MOTHER, ASHA HANDA

OPPOSITE PAGE: ASHA HANDA (LEFT) AND ARORA ADMINISTER POLIO VACCINE DURING A DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGN IN AUGUST 2004.



But the experience left a lasting impression on both women. Today, the only trace of Arora's illness is a commitment to helping prevent the

booths, and educating mothers. When she shares her own story, says Handa, even mothers who are afraid of immunization because of cultural

'When I see my whole family working [for polio eradication], I feel very good.' – Ravi Choudhary

disease in others. That's why both became Rotarians, they explain. That's also why they've worked at three NIDs this past year – distributing vaccine, gathering children for immunization, transporting doctors to the

beliefs are willing to listen to her advice to immunize their children.

Their personal experience with polio is one reason Choudhary recommended that the pair become Rotarians. Expanding the family of Rotary was

another: Handa is his mother-in-law and Arora his sister-in-law.

"When I see my whole family working [for polio eradication], I feel very good," he says.

Their work is not easy. The children of beggars who shift from one street to another are difficult to pin down and immunize. And, says Arora, when she and her mother first began walking house-to-house to educate the Pahargang community, some looked down on them. They also had to persuade several mothers, afraid the drops were "voodoo," that the vaccine was safe and beneficial.

Through patience and persistence – continually educating families, allaying fears, and using their own story as an example – they have taken great strides. Mothers who were initially shy and watched as their children asked questions – Why do you keep vaccine out of the sun? Does my little brother get drops because he is sick? – are now interested and engaged, Handa says. Children want to help immunize others. Parents who once indicated that mother and daughter were not welcome now invite them into their homes and ask them to talk to their children about the importance of education and hygiene.

As they share their stories, Handa and Arora serve as inspiration for Rotarians across the globe and help fulfill Rotary's goal of world peace and understanding. But perhaps the greatest legacy mother and daughter leave through Rotary is that of polio eradication for the children of Pahargang and, with it, the ability for all of them to play in the markets and leave footprints of their own. ■

Carol Metzker is a freelance writer and member of the Rotary Club of West Chester, Pa., USA.