

A Polio Perspective

Stricken with virus as a child, Stan Sibley sees parallels with COVID-19 pandemic

By JOEL STEVENS
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

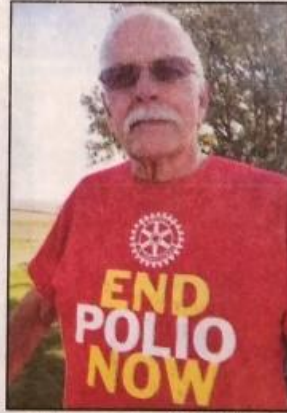
The virus came in like a frightening storm.

It rolled into cities and then rural areas, terrifying families unaware of its infectious spread. Silent carriers of the disease showed no signs at all. Thousands died and thousands more were bedridden for weeks.

Doctors could treat symptoms but were powerless to cure it. The federal government's response, while well intended with health measures and warnings, was largely ineffective to the spread of the virus.

No, that virus wasn't the COVID-19 coronavirus.

It was polio, or poliomyelitis, or the poliovirus, a paralyzing and potentially deadly disease that most commonly affects children, was the most feared communicable disease of the 1940s and 1950s. The highly infectious virus spread, doctors know now, through contaminated water or food or



Polio survivor Stan Sibley

contact with a infected individual. Some infected children didn't show symptoms.

By the 1952, the worst year of the virus, there were nearly 60,000 cases reported, more than 3,000 people died and thousands more were left crippled by disabling paralysis.

Dr. Jonas Salk eventually developed the first vaccine in 1955 that led the eradication of polio in the U.S. by 1979.

Much like the mysteries at the onset of the coronavirus

last March that continue to confound doctors today as they attempt to develop a vaccine, it's genesis and the near daily discoveries of both symptoms and treatment, polio was even more confounding to doctors in the first half of the 20th century.

There are certainly differences between poliovirus and the coronavirus – polio is neurological, COVID-19 is respiratory; one was contact spread and the other is both contact spread and airborne – but the resulting hysteria associated with the diseases and its impact on America 70 years apart is striking.

Stan Sibley, 76, is retired now. He put in more than 40 years in education in Nebraska and Iowa, serving as the Glenwood Community School District superintendent from 2001 to 2010. He liked the town so much he and his wife stayed. But in 1949, Sibley was one of the thousands of children to contract polio.

He was 4 years old.

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On Friday, Oct. 15, reported 32 confirmed cases of the virus involving 21 residents. On Oct. 16, there were 26 staff and 15 students infected with the virus. There have been a total of 54 confirmed cases of COVID-19 involving GRC staff, students and visitors.

COVID-19 East Mills season t

By JOEL STEVENS
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Home was the home of Connie Viner and her family Monday night.

But there she was coaching. Instead of coaching, she was coaching. No. 15-ranked Fremont-Mills in volleyball team against Glenwood Community School District in Region 2 open playoffs. Viner spent her time in the gymnasium – like a coach – and coaching staff between live streaming and coaching the team's first round match.

"It's hard to watch, but it's also hard not to," Viner said, watching matches between live streaming and coaching in.

Viner and her son was abruptly called to the gym Tuesday when a

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Had To Be There



DENNIS KELLY
BEST COLUMNIST

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POLIO VIRUS

From Page 1A

Sibley's memories of that summer in 1949 are partially his own hazy recall and partially his mother's stories, shared over the following decades. It was her that took him to the hospital after he began to feel a numbness in a leg, the telltale sign of the onset of the disease.

"Not understanding it, I started crying and screaming," Sibley said.

They called those summers "polio season," Sibley said. He and his 7-year-old brother were well aware of the virus by then. They were not to exert themselves, the community pool was off-limits and they had to take frequent naps.

He had no idea how he contracted the virus; contact tracing wasn't yet a thing.

"We lived in a neighborhood with a lot of kids and I was only four so my big brother had to kind of watch over me a little bit," he said. "I have no idea if I got it from someone else or something in the environment."

It was a rainy night in June when Sibley's mother took him into the Madison, Wisc., hospital where he'd spend the next several weeks in a ward of nearly 20 other children, all suffering from the virus. Sibley's mother sang him a lullaby before the nurses ushered her out.

The numbness soon



COURTESY PHOTOS

Stan Sibley, who was stricken and hospitalized with polio as a child, served as superintendent of the Glenwood Community School District from 2001-2010.

spread to his other leg and his arms. The concern of the virus was the rapid spread would cause paralysis of involuntary muscles of the lungs. The iron lung, a tank ventilator, was common at the time. It would enclose a patient's body to vary air pressure to help stimulate breathing.

Sibley never reached the iron lung.

Treatments and therapies of the era were varied in both efficacy and success. Each day in the hospital, Sibley would be submerged in a tub of hot water while nurses painfully manipulated his limbs, stretching the muscles, perhaps attempting to activate his muscle memory, Sibley wonders now.

"I don't remember much of it, but my mother told me the nurses told her it was so excruciating it feels like bending a

child's elbow the wrong way," Sibley said.

After several weeks Sibley began to regain the feeling in his arms and legs and then lifting himself off the bed.

Sibley isn't sure exactly how long he was in the hospital, he thinks five or six weeks that summer. But when he got out of the hospital he does remember one thing:

"I walked out of the hospital," he said. "I was only four so they probably carried me part of the way but I remember walking."

He had no lingering effects of the virus and he was back playing with his brother and friends "doing all the normal things kids do of that age," within a few days after returning home. Today, he still has some stiffness in his legs on occasion but that he mostly chalks up to age.

Sibley sees a lot of

similarities between the coronavirus and the "polio season" of his youth. The panic and fear, parents frightened to let their children play outside or with other children, being symptomatic and asymptomatic and not knowing where the virus comes from or how to protect yourself and not having a cure, only having treatments.

"That's all very, very similar," he said. "Obviously, our science is so much better today. There's probably less fear than there was then simply because people understand viruses better and understand ways to better protect ourselves, although we don't all do that obviously."

But the thing that strikes Sibley the most about the parallels is full circle. As child, it was his demographic that was most impacted by polio and now, as a 76-year-old, it's his current demographic, older adults, that is most at-risk to the coronavirus.

"You wonder about that," he said. "I know I'm not alone and there are lots of people in the community that had polio. And here were are in another pandemic."

Like many Americans, Sibley is left waiting, hoping for a vaccine that can return life back to normal soon. It's a familiar sentiment, he said.

"It has the kind of

PolioPlus



Rotary International



feeling that we all had in those days before the vaccine was out there," he said. "You were always looking over your shoulder. You were always afraid that thing could still bite you. Even though I had polio when the vaccine came out, my folks still made sure I got it because there was no for sure sign you'd always be immune."

Sibley's experience with polio factored heavily in his joining Rotary International over a decade ago. The group is a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and has contributed over \$2 billion to the fight against the disease.

"I didn't know it (polio) was still raging in places until I joined," Sibley said.

Sibley has helped organize the Rotary Club's spring chili supper in Glenwood every year to raise funds on behalf of the PolioPlus project fighting the disease in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, much like their role in curing

COVID-19, are a partner in the polio fight.

It was the work of organizations like Rotary and the March of Dimes, the group largely credited for helping end the polio epidemic in the U.S., which likely saved thousands of lives.

Sibley still gives annually to March of Dimes. He has very personal reasons.

His family wasn't wealthy, there was no medical insurance to speak of to cover the medical bills and his father, an undertaker, was saving every penny he could to attend the seminary. When Mr. Sibley entered the hospital to make the financial arrangements for his son's medical bills, he was crestfallen and uncertain how he'd ever pay it all back.

But he was told, "Mr. Sibley, there are no bills. The March of Dimes has paid the entire bill."

"It was, in my folks' view, the second miracle of the day," Sibley said. "The first was my going home and the second was they didn't have to go into debt because of it."



Even season is plenty scary

Rosby's World



DOROTHY ROSBY
COLUMNIST

go through haunted houses without jumping obviously have sluggish reflexes and probably shouldn't operate motorized vehicles. I don't need zombies coming at me to scare me either. I'm terrified when a spider crawls out of my cupboard. Or when my grocery store moves everything around. Or when a computer person tells me it's time to update my software. I w a "beware the dog" sign on an open gate and my heart rate hasn't come down. Knowing this about you may be surprised to learn that I've not only been to haunted houses, it was my job to persuade unsuspecting souls attend them. For many years, I was the public

relations person for a non-profit that hosted an annual free haunted house for the public. A vegetarian probably wouldn't make the best spokesperson for cattle producers. A Prius owner might have a hard time selling Humvees. And chickens probably shouldn't promote haunted houses. I don't mean actual chickens. They can promote whatever they want. I mean fraidy-cat chickens like me.

But that's what I did. Then all the while I was telling people how terrific our haunted house was, I was thinking, "There's no such thing as a terrific haunted house." In the public relations business, this is called "lying."

But I was being honest when I told them that I'd once gone to the haunted house and it scared me so much that I'd never been back. I'd actually gone twice, but one of those times they had left the lights on, so I'm not sure that counts. It was the morning after the haunted house, and I had to walk across the street to the building where it was, by then, being dismantled. Along the way I met up with a friend who hadn't heard about the haunted house.

I realize that doesn't speak well for my skills as a promoter.

I was unaware that she was unaware, so I failed to warn her about what we might see when we entered the building. And what we saw was blood everywhere. And she didn't stick around long enough to find out it was fake.

Unlike my now former friend, I was unfazed by the haunted house in broad daylight. It wasn't my blood we were looking at.

The other time I attended the haunted house, it was the morning before it opened. A handful of employees were invited to "test" it, and this time the lights were off. I worked for a company made up of compassionate people who served others. It was the organizer's first attempt at a haunted house. How bad could it be? I'll tell you. It was torture. I hated it. I thought it would never end, which is, I suppose, a resounding endorsement of a haunted house.

Dorothy Rosby is the author of several humor books, including *I Used to Think I Was Not That Bad* and *Then I Got to Know Me Better*. Contact drosby@rushmore.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Uphold RFS

for agriculture in acts of the pandemic restrictions. I've forward from d special interests mine our ethanol ming increasingly ties.

Agency (EPA) has and their lobbyists g requirements in (RFS). These Small anger stability for owering demand a and soybeans.

the COVID-19 they would start "gap-year" waiver opens the door already facing a

difficult year.

Listening to Senator Joni Ernst, President Trump directed the EPA to reject 54 of these gap year exemptions. However, there is still more progress to be made; the EPA is still considering at least 50 other exemptions, including 17 covering past years.

Leaders like Senator Ernst understand that the EPA needs to deny these waivers. The administration should too. It's crucial for Iowa's rural recovery that the EPA upholds the RFS.

Richard Crouch,
Glenwood

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR NOTICE

As announced previously, the deadline for submitting letters to the editor regarding the upcoming general election was Friday, Oct. 16. We will not be publishing letters regarding the election after Oct. 21.

Our prior pandemics will show us the way

Like all my fellow citizens in Mills County, we watch and worry as the global pandemic of COVID has affected the very way we conduct our lives.

Almost everyone now knows someone who has fallen sick to this virus, or worse yet, knows someone close to them who has had serious hospitalization episodes or even succumbed to it.

"When will this end?" we ask ourselves and each other. Perhaps we can gain some insight into today's worries, by looking back at a scourge on the world which swept our society back in the 1940s and into the 1950s, called Poliomyelitis, or Polio, for short.

For decades, there was no cure, and it was a very scary prospect for parents, as the paralyzing and potentially fatal disease invaded the nervous system and could cause total paralysis in hours. While Polio could strike people of any age, it primarily affected children under the age of five. Swimming pools were closed, children were kept indoors and almost everyone knew of a child who was affected.

Thousands of Americans ended up in iron lungs, fighting to breathe. Their small limbs withered and needed to be straightened and continual physical therapy perhaps got the young victim through the frightening aspects of the disease. At long last, several vaccines were developed, which provided a prevention and protection, but sadly, the disease itself could not be fully cured.

I dated a girl, while in a college, who had been a Polio victim. She appeared quite normal to everyone who knew her, but unbeknownst to most, she had a metal rod in her back from her neck to her hips to give her back her perfect posture. But she was a lucky one. We can hope that sometime soon, a vaccine or a series of vaccines will be developed to help the world rid itself of the scourge of COVID.

Some years back, I joined Rotary International, and upon moving to Glenwood, transferred into our highly active local Rotary club. One of our international projects is to finish Rotary's fight against Polio. You see, this terrifying disease of 70 years ago, is STILL present in the world. But the good news is that Polio is on a steep path to total worldwide eradication, with the help of efforts being made through Rotary's PolioPlus program, combined with the support of others, primarily the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, who match Rotary's funding 2-to-1.

Such high levels of attention and funding, now totaling over \$10 billion from all sources, has made a deep dent into Polio's global impact. Back in 1985, when Rotary got

You Had To Be There



DENNIS KELLY
GUEST COLUMNIST

involved, there were still 125 countries with 350,000 active cases of Polio. Today, we have reduced Polio cases by 99.9 percent, with just two countries continuing to report cases of wild poliovirus: Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Billions of children have been vaccinated and successes are quite evident in the fact 1.5 million people are alive who would otherwise have died, and 19 million people who otherwise would have been paralyzed, are walking. History tells us dozens of pandemics have swept the world, but this current COVID outbreak is the first to be covered 24/7 by the media.

By contrast, the Polio outbreaks were known primarily from the print media and the budding television media in developed nations. Earlier pandemics spread panic and fear as they moved from home to home, city to city and nation to nation without little in the way of any knowledge of how to combat it, or indeed, any idea as to what even was its primary cause. Yet, history also tells us, that like mankind's eventual success in eliminating such dreaded diseases as cholera, smallpox, malaria, and even more common diseases like measles, mumps and chicken pox, effective vaccines have been developed to stop the spread and prevent future outbreaks.

So also, will we find a preventative vaccine for COVID, and modern science and the incredible resources of the pharmaceutical industry will result in an incredibly quick, by modern standards, preventative vaccine. But, as the fight against Polio has shown, getting a world-wide fix on any disease is not an overnight task. While I did not have Polio, and so far have avoided the effects of COVID, I did suffer from getting measles, mumps and chicken pox, as they swept our nation in regular visits during the 50s and 60s, before effective vaccines were created.

Every child now must take an MMR shot before they can attend schools. So, we can look forward to an effective cure from COVID, and when there is a vaccine available, I'll gladly try it out. In the meantime — keep good hygiene standards, observe social distancing and wear a mask where warranted, and we'll all get through this together.

POLIO VIRUS

From Page 1A

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2020 ELECTION

From Page 1A

Completed ballots can also be returned to the auditor's office in person or deposited in the collection box outside the south entrance to the Mills County Courthouse 24 hours per day. A smaller collection box in the lobby of the north entrance to the courthouse is available during normal business hours. Both boxes are under surveillance. Mills County Auditor Carol Robertson noted.

Oct. 24 is the deadline for both online and mail-in voter registration. In-person registration must be completed by Nov. 3.

The auditor's office will be open Saturday, Oct. 24 from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., and Oct. 31, from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., for early voting.

Voting on Election Day in Mills County will take place from 7 a.m. -

9 p.m. at the following polling sites:

- Indian Creek Museum - Emerson, Hastings, Indian Creek Township, Deer Creek Township, White Cloud Township.
- Glenwood Shopping Plaza / Former Shopko store - Glenwood Ward 1, Glenwood Ward 2, Glenwood Ward 3, Glenwood Township.
- Henderson City Hall - Henderson, Anderson Township.
- Lakin Community Center (Malvern) - Malvern, Tabor, Rawles Township, Center Township, Silver Creek Township.
- St. John Lutheran Church (Mincola) - Oak Township, St. Mary Township.
- Al Hughes Auction (21929 221st St.) - Pacific Junction, Plattville, Township, Lyons Township.

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