

Ambassadorial Scholar
Fourth Report
March 2005
John B. "JB" Horton
Sponsoring Rotary District 5730
Hosting Rotary District 1040
Leeds, England

Red Nose Day

March 31, 2005

Every two years in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) a nationally coordinated day called "Red Nose Day" takes place. Red Nose Day is exactly that - it encourages people to cast inhibitions aside, put on a red nose, and do something a little silly to raise money.

This tradition has taken place since 1985, during the month of March, when Comic Relief coordinates a nationally televised fund-raising effort to combat poverty in Africa and the UK. Obviously poverty levels in Africa are much different than in the UK, but the efforts are focused on tackling poverty and injustice of which 60% of the proceeds go to Africa and 40% is spent at home in the UK.

It is a very effective fund-raising campaign, because it allows the average person, or in my case, student, to participate by purchasing a red nose sold throughout the UK or (if you are too cool to wear a red nose) by donating money directly to the Red Nose organization. A brilliant idea, because people who participate remind others of Red Nose Day by wearing a red nose, and it gives everyone the opportunity of being a part of the process. People tend to be more generous when they are involved in the effort. The red nose I bought has great personality and only cost £1 (about \$2). It is basically a big red smiley face with colorful hair made of elastic strains - and it fits nicely on my nose. You know what they say, when in Rome....

Since 1985, Comic Relief has raised over £337 million (\$636 million) plus this year's effort in raising almost £38 million (\$71.7 million).

With the fun and catchy national effort (run by the private sector) there seems to be a good spirit among people throughout the one-day event. I think, in the spirit of giving, people feel better about themselves. To know

you are apart of something that is helping others, or being a part of something bigger than yourself, makes a person feel good. But besides the fun and good feelings, this campaign has a very serious side.

World death statistics show that of the top 20 countries with the highest death rates, Africa has 19 of them. Number 8 on the list was the only non-African country, Afghanistan.

It is scary to think about, but contributing heavily to the death rate in these countries is the AIDS epidemic. Sixteen countries in Africa have over 10% of their adult populations (age 15-49) infected with HIV. In Botswana, 37.5% of their adult population is effected with HIV. Imagine every third person you know being infected with a terminally ill disease - family, friends, and neighbors. Every one in three.

The World Health Organization estimates there are 42 million AIDS cases in the world, and 29.4 million of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa. HIV/AIDS could potentially wipe out an entire generation of Africans. By next year, AIDS is expected to be the leading cause of death on the planet and it is projected to spread by the rate of 14,000 new cases per day. Scary. Sad. And it will have worldwide ramifications.

It really is difficult to imagine the differences in our societies. Clean water, electricity, hospitals, a stable government, good education systems, plentiful food, a dependable post office service, well kept roads; to the complete opposite in every category. I think Red Nose Day is a great concept because it not only raises money for a good cause, it reminds people that no matter their circumstances, no matter how desperate a situation we seem to be in, that if we open our eyes and look around, there are millions and millions of people facing far worse circumstances. It also reminds people that we can make a difference! There are many blessings to be thankful for. I, for one, am thankful to act a little silly by wearing a red nose to help those, even if only in a small way, who have lost sight of hope or laughter long ago. That type of despair just should not happen in our world today -home or abroad.

God bless.

JB Horton was awarded the 2004-2005 Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship to represent the Texas Panhandle at the University of Leeds in England. For comments, e-mail JB at jbhorton4@hotmail.com