Susie Fender shows a photo from 1951 when she was a young girl, wearing a brace on her leg.

**Polio Survivor Shares Personal Story with Southwest**

Susie Fender was just four years old when she started limping on her left side. That’s nothing new for an active four year old; but when she started running a fever, Fender’s parents became alarmed. And with good reason.

There was an epidemic of polio going around the country, and for Fender in particular, polio was also wide-spread in her hometown of Mars Hill, NC. Her parents rushed her to the local doctor who used a small rubber hammer to tap her knees for reflex. “My first knee reacted just fine—with a big kick,” said Fender. “And then the doctor tapped my other knee, and he tapped it again, and then again. Nothing. There was no reaction,” she said.

Fender was admitted to a hospital in Asheville, a hospital that was designated to receive polio victims. “The March of Dimes was a big supporter of the hospital and they placed polio victims in a pool of warm water, followed by the wrapping of our legs in a wool Army blanket,” said Fender. “They gave me a brace to wear on my leg—one to help me walk since my left heel stopped growing. As I continued to age and grow, the polio left its mark with one leg 2.5 inches shorter than the other,” said Fender. “I wore the brace until I was 12 years old.”

Eventually, I met a doctor who took an X-ray of my hand to determine how much more I would grow,” said Fender. “He took a bone from my good leg to help stop the growth in that leg—and now there’s only one-quarter of an inch difference in length between my legs. I have been very fortunate,” she said.

Today, polio has been eradicated in the United States, said Fender. “However, there are children still fighting the disease in three countries including Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. We have to continue to fight this battle to end the disease in those countries, too. Polio returning to the United States is only one plane away. That’s why it’s important to continue with the vaccinations across the world,” said Fender.
The Hickory Rotary Club sponsored Fender’s visit to Southwest Elementary, along with O’Neil Shelton, a Rotarian from Mars Hill. Rotary Clubs from around the world are helping with the fight against polio—as the organization’s most notable current global project is contributing to the global eradication of polio.

Following Susie Fender’s presentation, the president of the Hickory Rotary Club, Suzanne Trollan, demonstrated “the purple pinkie project,” a process used during polio vaccinations with children. HPS Superintendent, Dr. Walter Hart, volunteered to join the purple pinkie excitement at Southwest—as Trollan colored Dr. Hart’s pinkie with the purple solution. Throughout the world, each time a Rotary volunteer administers a polio vaccine, a child’s pinkie is colored purple with the topical solution Gentian Violet - temporarily marking the child to prevent double dosage.

All Southwest students, with parental permission, were invited to bring in a $1 donation for the purple pinkie project—and in doing so, they could have their pinkies colored purple. According to Southwest Principal, Jenny White, each $1 donation will cover vaccinations for ten children. In addition to the purple coloring of Dr. Hart’s pinkie, Conrad the Crawdad (from the Hickory Crawdads) was on the scene—waiving a purple glove on his claw to help generate enthusiasm for the project.

Before the end of the program, the Hickory Rotary Club sponsored the induction of a new student council at Southwest Elementary. President Trollan helped to organize the induction ceremony and along with Principal White—awarded all new student council members with a Rotary coin, embossed with a message about goodwill to others.