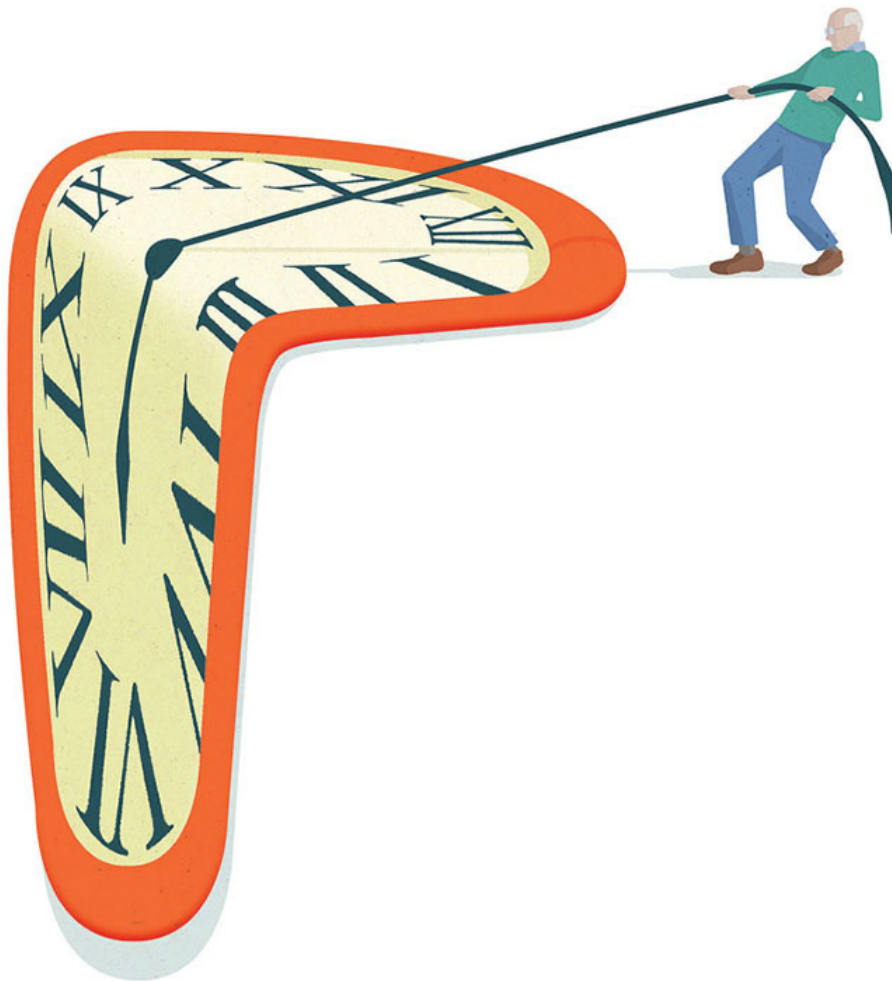


WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

BE IN ROTARY FOR 70 YEARS

JIM SIMMERMON Rotary Club of Oakmont Verona, Pennsylvania



I joined Rotary in 1950 when I was 24 years old. At the time, I was the youngest member of what's now the Rotary Club of Burrell-New Kensington, Pennsylvania. Now at 95, I'm the oldest member of the Rotary Club of Oakmont Verona. After 70 years, I still have perfect attendance. In the old days, attendance was a big deal. Rotary has become more flexible, but I've kept my perfect attendance because I like Rotary meetings. I enjoy seeing my friends and learning what's going on with projects.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, my club's Rotary meetings moved online right away. Zoom is quite popular among seniors, so I was comfortable with that platform — and after a few months, it occurred to me that I could start attending more than just my own club's meeting. My son Bill lives in Colorado. He's in the Rotary Club of Highlands Ranch (Littleton), so I started attending his club's meeting each week. I also logged on to a meeting of one of my former clubs, the Rotary Club of Fox Chapel Area, to see some of my old friends. It was great fun to speak with people I hadn't talked to in years. It gave me a lift.

You don't meet many people who've had the experiences that I've had in Rotary. There are just not very many people who have been in Rotary for seven decades! Over the years, I've seen Rotary grow and change a lot, but I think the most significant turning point for the organization came when women began to join during the 1980s. That was a watershed

moment — and now we're going to have Jennifer Jones as the first female Rotary International president. I think that's a great step forward.

When I joined Rotary as a young man, I was working for someone else. Meeting successful people through my club helped me to develop more confidence, and I ended up starting several businesses. One of them was a telephone answering service, which I founded in 1958 and ran for 35 years.

I think my club is actually more important to me now because I'm doing fewer things. My wife, Lois, has passed away, and my five children are adults. My Rotary meetings are what I look forward to each week.

When I talk to younger people about Rotary, I always encourage them to join. It's enriched my life and given me a way to help others. Yes, you have to balance your membership with other things in your life, but there's no such thing as not enough time. You make time for things that are important to you.

When I reflect on my 70 years in Rotary, I think the best part of it has been the friends that I've met — and the difference we've made together.

— AS TOLD TO VANESSA GLAVINSKAS

