

Siblings Changed Forever From 4-H Exchange

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BOSWELL (Somerset Co.) — Lowell Friedline and Lynette Ely — his younger sister by one and a half years — were the second and third Somerset County 4-Hers to participate in the International 4-H Youth Exchange back in 1960 and 1961.

His experiences in Brazil and hers, in Ecuador, have left lasting impressions in their hearts that the passage of time cannot remove. Their lives were changed through adapting into the environment of another culture.

"It gives you self-confidence and a people-picture you didn't have," said Lowell.

"It made us more broadminded about the whole world and less afraid to travel," added Lynette.

The sincere courtesy, generosity, and hospitality that was showered on them still means: "We are adoptive of them as our second home. We have 'family' there," said Lynette.

Lowell, whom the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce last fall named Outstanding Person of the Year, and Lynette for three decades have been leaders in the Jenner Township 4-H Club. He's got 36 years, she has 35. Richard Ely, Lynette's husband, with 31 years, runs a close third.

As youths, the brother and sister were active 4-Hers, following in the footsteps of their late dad, Hubert Friedline, a charter member of Somerset County's first 4-H club — the Jenners Pig Feeding Club — organized in 1921. The two also square-danced at the state Farm Show and worked on committees.

A champion 4-H potato judge, Lowell was eyeing Greece, in the Mediterranean, when he applied to participate in the cross-cultural program.

He learned that South America's only Portuguese-speaking country was his destination. Everywhere else on the continent, Spanish was the primary language the people used.

Listening at home to 78 rpm records in Portuguese was supposed to help him learn some of it. "Whether it helped depended on the student," he chuckled, doubtfully. "Language was the toughest part. It was a problem the whole way through." When he arrived, the street language he heard wasn't at all like that on the "proper" recordings. "It was like asking

someone: 'Do you speak English ... or American?'" he said, adding that the barrier to communicating, at the beginning, was almost like being in solitary confinement.

Orientation had been held at the National 4-H Center in Washington D.C. where he also got walloped with a yellow fever inoculation, just when he'd finally recovered from shots his own doctor had administered at home.

The broader program called "People to People," developed under president Dwight D. Eisenhower, to provide scores of opportunities for citizens of the U.S. to represent their country to people in other lands, included the International 4-H Youth Exchange program, Lowell said.

"To learn another way of life by living it," interjected Lynette, adding that a Nepali girl came to them while her brother was gone, and when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was also elected to the presidency.

Exiled Germans who harvested their own coffee plants and were fortunate to own a truck and tractor, were the first of Lowell's six host families.

Rum and Coke were plentiful. Pure water wasn't. Like everybody else, Lowell drank strong coffee — cafezinho — that he made more palatable by sweetening with raw sugar.

Cafezinho was equivalent to the demitasse here and to offer it to a guest was considered a social grace, he said.

An unusually large family of Italian descent also welcomed Lowell. His temporary membership brought to 24 the number of children in the family. This circumstance only served to heighten the proud ego of the father of the other 23.

And in deference to the male guest from Pennsylvania, Lowell was given a room alone in the bulging home.

"At the time, it was hard to put that in perspective," Lowell says.

In general, conditions of poverty were found throughout the country, yet the presence of company was always celebrated.

"The people never had meat, but because I was new, we had meat. Everytime I went to a new home they had meat," Lowell said. Otherwise, the daily fare alternated between rice and beans or beans and rice, he said.

German industrialists — a couple with two sons — had manage-



Lowell and Carna Friedline, backdropped by numerous plants in the house of his sister, talk about the exchange that changed his life.

ment skills that impressed Lowell as he observed them being practiced in their sugar cane growing business. "The Germans are super-organized," he commented.

"About the only contribution I made to agriculture when I was there (Brazil) was to suggest the automatic fountains idea, borrowed from the United States," said the diverse director of numerous ag organizations. His responsibilities included working with Brazilian counterparts to the cooperative extension staff people in the U.S.

Later, a son from one host family, while touring U.S. farms, flew here to visit. He was the best man in Lowell and wife Carna's wedding (after Lynette started the ball rolling by introducing her brother and her college friend from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania).

Lynette had hoped to go to Kenya. She went instead to primitive Ecuadorian conditions in the Andes Mountains. "I was on the equator ... freezing," she recalls, vividly.

Communicating in Spanish was a struggle and reason to keep her dictionary nearby. Using the correct tense was the worst part. She understood what was happening, but never knew if it was happening yesterday, today, or tomorrow, she said.

Then, too, her Latin hosts were eager for the young American woman to teach their kids English, as opposed to her desire to gain a greater fluency in using Spanish. Eventually, however, everybody learned something.

The region's indigenous Indians were a common sight. "I seldom saw anything but black Indians in bright colors. Indians were (treated as) draft animals," she said.

Church, however, was a place of respect and equality.

"The church (Catholic) was one place where everybody was treated equally. The church was a promoter of 4-H and the priest was very influential. The people did what he said," reported Lynette.

Lowell added that 4-H demonstrated parliamentary procedure, which was new to the people, but illustrated how democracy works. So the church's support of 4-H was beneficial.

Her hosts, like Lowell's, treated Lynette graciously and didn't want her to do menial tasks. "They treated me too well," she said. "We fought to do the ironing."

"I ate stuff there I wouldn't eat here, like a Junebug," she said, "and I was honored to get the pig's ear." The oinker's skin was also eaten, she said.

One family locked its refrigerator and washed dishes in cold water.

Lynette also has a godchild — "Maria Lynette" — whom she has

never met. The infant was born a few years following her sojourn with the baby's parents.

Each year Lynette sent along a gift subscription to the "National Geographic." With its international flavor, she hoped her Latino namesake would enjoy the glossy magazine.

The Friedline kids, who had no siblings but each other, pulled any number of pranks in their salad days, but Lowell recalls, "We were co-conspirators always, rather than enemies."

"There was a switch," Lynette said, "but I don't remember spankings." She shared some funny escapades.

"We cannot fail to give credit to our (late) mother (Evelyn) for our moral training," she stated, placing assorted refreshments on the coffee table in the unique house she and Richard designed.

"Mother was a Sunday School teacher who traditionally read from Luke on Christmas Eve. Mother said you never say 'No' in the church," said Lynette, who claims that, to this day, neither she nor Lowell have gotten the hang of how to say "No."

Being taller than Lowell (he's dubbed the "Dick Clark of 4-H," in Somerset County) proved advantageous for Lynette, a teacher of high school art in the North Star School District. "Morally, I looked up to him," she quipped, impishly, "but physically ... I beat the slop out of him because I was bigger than he was."

The letters Lowell sent home from Brazil were edited by his sister, and unknown to him, published regularly in the local newspaper. It was so well appreciated by others that she continued the practice when succeeding 4-Hers went abroad. As a result, some nice international souvenirs came her way. Now each cherished memento has a special place in her home.

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Lynette and Richard Ely show a wood carving and wall hanging gift that she brought home from Ecuador. Lynette and her brother Lowell Friedline have been Jenner Township 4-H leaders for three and a half decades.