

This Old House

(Continued from Page B2)

In Belgium while raising three sons, Dave, Jim, and Steve, the family was closeknit. Lew found time to coach Little League games, traveled with them as all three made all-star teams and traveled to other countries. Although responsibilities at Exxon Chemical Company were weighty, there was always time to be with his sons.

The family lived in Belgium until 1977, when the Bowmans were transferred back to the states. In preparation for the move, the parents returned to the New Jersey area for a few weeks in search of a house while their teen-aged sons remained in the care of a trustworthy medical student.

Just as the Bowmans were ready to sign for settlement on a home in New Jersey, they learned their youngest son, Steve, had been killed in a motorbike accident.

The news was devastating to the doting parents. Lew flew back to Brussels to bring back Steve's body while Erla Mae made funeral arrangements in Ephrata — where the family's relatives lived.

"I was always the type that couldn't even attend a funeral of a stranger," Erla Mae said. "The news of Steve's death was so overwhelming that I didn't think I could survive. I cried out, 'Jesus, you've got to help me. I can't bear this.'"

Instantly, Erla Mae said that she was covered with peace and a confidence that nothing happens outside of God's timing. Although she missed her son, a peace and calmness about the situation transcended the hurt.

But her husband did not sense

that confidence. For three more years he was distraught. He lost 30 pounds as he wrestled with the loss of his son.

"I couldn't understand why God had brought me such peace about the situation, but not Lew," Erla Mae said.

The family minister assured her that God works differently with each individual and that emotional healing would come to Lew.

His job required frequent returns to Belgium, where everything reminded him of Steve. One day while in Belgium, the complexity of the situation overwhelmed him. Distraught, Lew opened his Bible to Philippians 4, where he read he should have no anxiety about anything but in everything give thanks.

When he read that scripture, he felt blanketed in peace that extends to this time about the situation.

Since that time, the couple have found it natural to reach out to others who have lost a loved one. Because the Bowmans have experienced the hurt and emotional devastation and have survived, people who have experienced loss feel that the Bowmans understand. Their compassion and hospitality combined with the loveliness of the farm is a place where many find healing. Lew and his wife Erla Mae exude a friendly hospitality to strangers.

Sitting beneath the generous shade of oak and walnut trees, one can absorb the peace, tranquility, and restfulness of a farm that seems isolated but in reality is within two miles of the busy Route 322 highway.

Inviting seating arrangements

appear in many tranquil spots around the home's exterior. Inside, the spacious home is richly furnished with antiques, favorite family pieces, and Erla's own unique interior decorating touches.

Since the Bowmans purchased the farm, it has been used to hold family and school reunions, and occasionally church retreats. By word of mouth, the Bowmans' home has been a haven for numerous people facing dramatic circumstances. Some guests stay only a night or two, while others stay for several weeks.

Erla Mae was accustomed to entertaining in Europe for Exxon, and often had 60-100 people at a time. Although now of retirement age, she still loves to entertain.

Her husband said of his wife, "Among her many gifts, her gift of hospitality shines most."

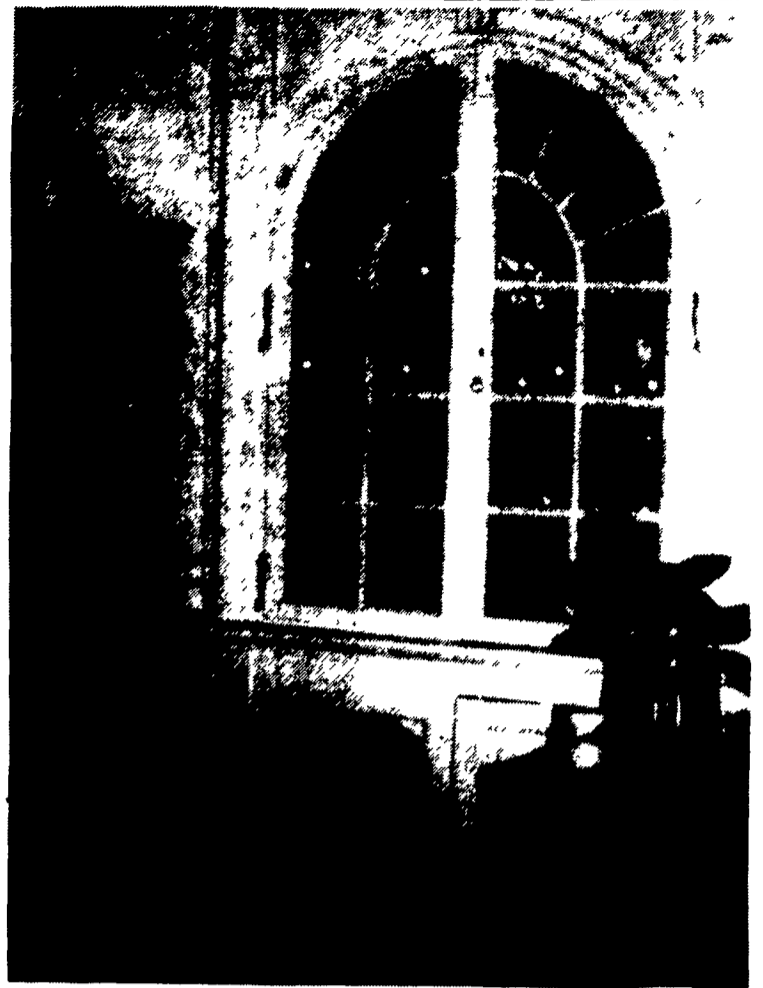
Erla Mae said that her secret for entertaining guests and the upkeep of the property is lots of prayer and the reminder that things don't need to be perfect.

After Lew's retirement in 1988, it was his dream to own a farm. The Bowmans purchased a 29-acre New Jersey farm which had been subdivided. Eventually, they were able to purchase the original 69 acres. Lew converted four acres into a pick-your-own strawberry operation.

Both sons and their families — there're six grandchildren — live on the New Jersey farm.

Although Lew and Erla Mae liked their New Jersey farm, the lure of returning to their roots enticed them to consider purchasing a county farm.

"We had no interest in Willow Spring Farm when we first heard about it because it was too much work both inside and outside," Erla Mae recalled. Nonetheless,



The home has several built-in china closets.

she prayed, "Lord, if you would want us to have this place, open the door so wide. If not, close it so tightly that we cannot make a mistake."

After that prayer, the Bowmans said that things moved quickly.

Since then, the Bowmans have cleared the woods across from the home.

"We hauled away 10,000 pounds of scrap iron and the job isn't half done," Lew said.

They uncovered a stream where they found an abundance of their favorite vegetable — watercress.

The Bowmans removed 11 walnut trees. They hired a man who came on spot and sawed 18-foot boards that were 18-inches wide and 1 1/4 inches thick. These are used in restoring the farmhouse and furnishings.

About 43 acres of Willow Spring Farm are farmed by neighboring farmers.

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