

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 88 Longevity, Part Four – Leland Wenzel

As promised, we will finish our series on Longevity by interviewing a few shining examples of a life well lived. We hope to gain knowledge of their secrets while having a few laughs along the way. Enjoy!

Leland Wenzel of Lena was born in June of 1924 near Lena. He attended a country school called Crossroads for 1st thru 6th grade and then moved to Kennedy. On the first day, one of the 8th grade girls tried to kiss him, so he ran across the road which was strictly off limits, so he was in trouble from the get go. He then graduated from Winslow High School prior to the consolidation.

He married Marjorie Ammon of Winslow in 1946. They were married 65 years until she passed in 2012. There is also an established scholarship in their honor called the Leland and Marjorie Wenzel /Kentland Farms Agricultural Scholarship. It is awarded annually to either a Pearl City or Lena-Winslow graduate that is studying some phase of Agriculture. It is also awarded annually to current college students to help them finish college.

Together Lee and Marjorie raised two children, Sharon and Brian, and have 6 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

Susan: Lee, thank you for your cooperation in this. Please tell me a little bit about your childhood.

LEE: I have 2 brothers, Walter, who is gone and Edwin who is 15 months younger than me. I have one sister, Marion, 91, who is doing well, walks upstairs to take a bath and downstairs to do her laundry. I lived on the farm during the Great Depression. Mom told us sometimes she went to bed hungry so we would have enough to eat. I have Dad's old farm records from 1931 and 1932, there was no IRS back then and his gross income in 1931 was \$512.32. An interesting note about a sick cow regarding the following entries: Oil for Cow- 32 cents, Medicine for Cow -50 cents, Doc Rabe (the Vet) \$2.00. Well turns out Doc Rabe told Dad you might as well turn her out to pasture, she won't recover. The next entry was Cowhide - \$4.20.

Susan: What about your childhood do you think contributed to your longevity?

LEE: It made you appreciate what you had. We really worked hard then. I was a farmer and I am still a farmer at heart. That never goes away. Marjorie told me once, if you can raise corn and beans, you can raise flowers, so I have a lot of those now. I guess it's just in me to grow something.

Susan: Tell me a little bit about some of the "firsts" that you experienced.

LEE: I guess it was seeing a man on the moon. I was on the school board in Pearl City and we went to a conference in Atlantic City. There was a guy there named John Glenn, who smartly said, a man cannot do everything all at once, but we can learn from our mistakes and keep improving technology, build knowledge and build on each step. One day very soon, man will land on the moon. Most people there thought he was out to lunch, but we got there. Now we use that similar technology on many of our

local farms. It is mind boggling how far we have come. The GPS is amazing. (Susan- I was impressed how much Lee knew about all the latest technology- very hip.)

Susan: Can you tell me a little bit about your marriage and your children?

LEE: I was told Marjorie and I first met in Riverside, which is a suburb of Gratiot (giggles). My parents went to see friends of her grandparents. She was standing on a stump and I threw rocks at her. I think we were about 8 years old. We reconnected at Winslow High School where I ousted her and became Valedictorian by .06 of a point. I don't think she ever forgot that. We were married 65 years and yes we had an argument or two, but there was give and take. We didn't get into too much trouble; I guess we worked too hard to get into much trouble. I am so proud of my kids, just wonderful kids, both college graduates from University of Illinois. Sharon calls me every night at 9pm. She even has a quilt that she made called something like Dad's conversation quilt that she made while we were talking.

We also participated in an International Farmers Youth Exchange Program. We have had guests from all over the world stay in our home for a few weeks. We learned as much from them as they did us. In Mexico, we kept in contact and we go there periodically. We've attended four weddings and they treat us like family. I have 10 grandkids there. That was a very successful program.

Susan- Lee shared a wonderful photo album that showed a few of his trips to Mexico, including those from the Wedding of one of his adopted family members on a 100+ year old ranch. They call him Gringo Grandpa. The photos are amazing and he had graciously left the album at the store if anyone cares to check it out. On one trip he took along friend Willie Kayser from Lena.

LEE: We also had an exchange student from China who was very against the political regime there. We kept in touch regularly and after the Tiananmen Square Massacre we never heard from him again. We assume the worst happened.

Susan: What made your family life successful?

LEE: We all respected each other. If we said it, we meant it. We didn't have TV until after the kids graduated. We had fun. You know I took care of Marjorie for 15 years after her brain tumor diagnosis and the kids were very supportive. After she passed, Brian took me to Ireland. He asked me about it and I said, "I'll have to check my schedule" and he looked straight at me and said, "There isn't a damn thing on your schedule that can't be changed." There were 4 seats left on the plane and he got me one. I spent a great week in Dublin. Grandson Kerry works there for a worldwide company called Kerry Ingredients which is a food toppings business.

Susan: Did you drink any beer?

LEE: Are you kidding? (More giggles) I went through the Guinness Factory. It was quite nice.

Susan: I heard you were a charter member of the Lena Lions, how did this come about?

LEE: Someone invited me to join. I was 24 years old and have been a member ever since. I joined in 1949. What I enjoy the most is the camaraderie and the volunteer opportunities. We try to do a lot for our communities and our region.

Susan: Tell me a little bit about your spirituality.

LEE: I have been a member of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lena since I was 6 years old. Bible school, confirmation, lector, worship assistant and superintendent of Sunday school and church; that's a few things.

Susan: What was the toughest period of your life?

LEE: Definitely when Marjorie was sick. I spent 15 years care giving for her. I took care of her at home as long as I could. I have made 723 trips to Freeport and 120 trips to Madison. (Side Note from Susan- The look of love and commitment to the love of his life is vast and something of another age. As an interviewer, I wanted to hear more, but the emotion was vivid and as tears welled, I knew this strong man had more to say about the depth of their relationship that I didn't have the courage to ask.)

Susan: How did you overcome this?

LEE: Sheer Determination.

Susan: What are you the most proud of?

LEE: My family.

Susan: Do you have anything in your life you would like to do over?

LEE: Probably not, well, there was that night I was set up to talk smart to my mother in law, but that's a whole 'nother story and not really printable.

Susan: What do you like most about your life today?

LEE: The friends that I have, the support that I have and to play golf. I played this morning and will play again next Monday. I really like Wolf Hollow and I play twice a week.

Susan: What is your favorite activity?

LEE: Fishing and Golf. Nine of us go fishing for walleye at Devil's Lake, ND. I love it.

Susan: I hear you are quite the gardener. How do you think your skills have contributed to your longevity?

LEE: I counted before I came here and I have 31 pots to water. Window boxes, hanging baskets, all kinds of things- you name it. If anyone wants flowers, I have them. A neighbor came over and wanted some lilacs. I told her I would send her a bill in 30 days. (giggle).

Susan: What is your advice for people regarding a long, healthy and happy life?

LEE: Keep active, look on the bright side and believe in God. Be honest and take life as it is.

Susan: Is there anything else you would like to do; is there anything on your bucket list?

LEE: Not really, I am very happy. I just hope when it's my time, I just drop over. Nothing drawn out.

Susan: What would you like people to remember about you?

LEE: Geez, I hope it's good. Just that I tried to be a good example.

Susan: Anything else you would like to add?

LEE: I eat fruit and garden fresh foods. My favorite meal is breakfast and I eat Oat Flakes with raisins, strawberries and bananas.

Susan: Thank you so much, Lee. I wish I could print more of your stories because there were plenty, maybe when we get on HBO. You are quite the pleasure and I appreciate your sharing these experiences. Many blessings to you.

LEE: Thank you.

Please share your other candidates for this series by phone or email.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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