The Best Move We Ever Made

Walter Liphardt and Vlasta Smetana met and lived a few streets apart in Berwyn, Illinois. Vlasta's mother didn't really care for nicknames, however, things changed when a young neighborhood child could not learn to say Vlasta's name correctly. It was this child that began to call her "Val" and the name has stayed to this day.

Walter went into World War II as a photographer, recording history for a nation to remember. Many of his photographs were reviewed by Generals, Admirals and other Top Officials, enlightening them of the challenges already overcome and preparing them for forthcoming battles. Walter has traveled around the world taking pictures with both his heart and mind. The army sent him to Australia, Africa, Italy and many other countries. Taking photos was only a part of Walter's work. He had to set up a place to develop his own pictures. Clarity was undoubtedly the most important factor, and after that came size, depth, quantity, quality, etc. His brother was also a photographer in the service, however, they never had the opportunity to work together.

Meanwhile Val was working in Public Relations for business firms in the Chicago area. Almost everyone worked for the war effort during the World War II days. She was certainly "a real eye catcher" to the single men as they returned from the battlefront, however, her heart belonged to a fellow she was still waiting to come home.

When the war was over, Walter came home with the remaining treasures of his work from around

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The Palesch’s had four children, three boys and one girl. They are all college graduates and are scattered over the country. The eight grandchildren, also college graduates, visit at Hawthorne often. There are now three generations of Cornell graduates in the family.

Following the war years, John joined with his father-in-law in the fruit farming industry. It was 20 years later that he purchased the Glendale Orchards

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the world. After his discharge from the service, Walter and Val made plans for their wedding. They were married on August 19, 1945.

When they had their own home they invited friends in and showed them Walter’s slides. After a while he began showing his slides at schools, churches, and any place that had sufficient room for a large group. Sometimes he would have as many as three slide shows in a row. He was continually culling out his thousands of slides. Today he has 17 boxes of slides and each box contains 600 slides, over 10,000 images.

Walter returned to his civilian life, securing employment with large companies in Chicago, such as Revere and Bell & Howell.

Walter and Val were good friends with Joe and Bonnie Nechvatal who lived in Hinsdale, Illinois. The Nechvatal’s business constituted keeping up with stores they owned in Illinois. As the stores became more organized and the managers became more reliable and knowledgeable, Joe and Bonnie decided to find a “second home” where they could escape from the day-to-day work. The wanted a place where they could relax and be better prepared to return to the north when it was time to get ready for holidays and more business growth. Their Hawthorne home was on Palo Verde Drive.

Occasionally these four friends came together and enjoyed the amenities of Hawthorne. Sometimes Walter and Val would come and stay with Joe and Bonnie, but deep down they wanted their own Hawthorne home. Not far from their friends house they found the perfect house in the perfect community! The homes were pretty and well kept. The common facilities and buildings were always clean and maintained in excellent condition. The park-like grounds were always beautifully manicured. The house they selected had everything they ever wanted. The house was ready for occupancy. They liked the floor plan, the carpeting, and the landscaping. Even the room facing the street corner was air-conditioned for summer and had heat for the chilly days. The house was just waiting for them!

On March 7, 1985 the papers were signed and the new residents were ready to move into their own house on the corner of Ixora Way and Azalea Trail. They loved everything about their new home. It was made for them!

They fit right in because they were very special, friendly people. Both Walter and Val enjoyed playing golf, tennis, and working with their photography efforts. After settling in and making more new friends, Walter started showing many of his beautiful pictures to anyone that wanted to see them.

Just in case you think they may have slowed down in recent years, you should know that they still like to travel. They have been to Europe about twelve times. They rent a convenient spot to put their belongings, next they rent a car, and then they are checking out Europe one more time.

Watch for Walter to be working on his landscaping along the roadside. He loves seeing it all neat and well kept. He will always wave back to you as you walk or drive past.

Life is beautiful! This twosome is always willing to share their adventures with you. Hawthorne is fortunate to have such bright, intelligent, and generous neighbors among us.

Interview by Lee Manausa

Sanibel: a place to renew the soul

No man is an island, poet John Donne reminds us. But every man, woman, and child needs an island sometime to retreat from the daily frustrations of life – and to renew the soul.

For years Sanibel Island and neighboring Captiva, a chunk of paradise some 18 miles off the West Coast of Florida at Fort Meyers, have been my Shangri-la.

I have not been alone. Juan Ponce de Leon discovered Sanibel and Captiva in 1513. So, eventually, did dozens of pirates and cutthroats, including Jose Gaspar, after whom Gasparilla Island is named. Legend has it that Captiva got its name from the fact that Pirate Gaspar used it as a place to stash away his women.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh said she found ways “to live in grace and inner harmony” on Captiva. It was here she wrote Gifts From the Sea, a philosophical, liberated-woman treatise based on lessons learned from collecting sea shells. She wrote the book to cope with the grief she suffered after the 1932 kidnaping death of her firstborn child. “I had to write it,” she explains. “It was like breathing.”

Eleanor Roosevelt too found refuge on the magic isles, and Playwright Thornton Wilder, who gave the world Our Town, had a habit of disappearing from Broadway when the heat got too hot in the kitchen, and recharging his batteries at The Colony, an old-fashioned resort near Lighthouse Point on Sanibel.

What attracts the multitudes to Sanibel?

Many things, but first the broad, smooth beach of white sand. You can walk blocks out into its shallows and sandbars – and it’s soft sand all the way; no rocks. Here you can commune with pelicans, sea gulls, sand pipers, and an occasional passing dolphin.

The warm water of the Gulf of Mexico invites swimmers, waders and shellers. The beach is ideal
for jogging, surfing, swimming, wind surfing, kite flying, or just walking to the lighthouse to marvel at the sunrise over the bay. Sanibel light station was first activated August 20, 1884, when a tender entered the tower and climbed 127 steps of spiral staircase to the iron watch room and lantern above it. When he lit the wick of the great lamp, ships 16 miles at sea saw its powerful beam for the first time. Until the 1940’s it was fueled by kerosene. Today it is a museum piece and subject for painters and photographers.

Sanibel’s most irresistible lure, however, is shelling, for which it is famous around the world. A visitor soon develops the “Sanibel stoop” from walking around in a bent-over position, ready to pounce on those treasures of the sea. Shelling is best after a storm or a low tide preceding the full moon. The island’s commitment to nature preservation is everywhere. You see it on roadside sign asking you to “Save Our Racoon” by driving with caution. And the sign at the edge of the pond behind the church: “Don’t Feed the Alligator.” They’re not kidding; small dogs have been dispatched by hungry alligators. There is also – in season – a beach patrol that watches for egg-laying loggerhead sea turtles. The patrol’s Jeeps are the only motorized vehicles allowed on the beach.

An estimated one-third of Sanibel is a nature preserve, including more than 5,000 acres named after J. Norwood (Ding) Darling, a conservation-minded Des Moines Register editorial cartoonist who won Pulitzer Prizes in 1924 and 1943 and designed the Federal Duck Stamp. He and his wife, Penny, arrived on Captiva in 1936, drawing a trailer, the Bouncing Betsy, behind them. They returned later and eventually built a winter home at the end of a dock with a drawbridge on it – which was pulled up when Ding was at his drawing board.

We passed this white bungalow on pilings, completely surrounded by water, when we took a two-hour boat trip to Gasparilla on the Catherine Theresa.

The Ding Darling Nature Preserve is a nature-lover’s dream. You can visit it by automobile, stopping at designated turnabouts to admire the birds and the beasts, or you can take a boat trip guided by an island naturalist who explains what you’re seeing. Or, if you are truly adventurous, you can paddle your own canoe at sundown or sunup.

Don Dornbrook in Leesburg Commercial

November 30, 1986

Footnote: Don is a retired feature editor from the Milwaukee Journal. He served as a reporter; TV and movie editor; and music and drama critic for 38 years. He now resides at Hawthorne-at-Leesburg.

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from his in-laws. John was the owner-operator of his firm for ten years when he retired. Marge served for a period of 7 years as a truant officer in the central school. Both retired in 1976.

The Palesch’s heard about Hawthorne while visiting Marge’s parents, across Lake Harris in December 1974. They took the tour, although the bridge was not complete. They saw the beautiful copper-roofed clubhouse and sales office, and the six model homes just off SR 27. It was a short time later when John received “an offer for Glendale Orchards that they couldn’t refuse”. They were guaranteed ownership of their home in NY and free to retire. The Spec home at 317 Palo Verde was perfect for them, an Oxford model. Louise Hutchinson brought a full pitcher of lemonade as they unloaded their U-Haul in July 1976.

Dr. Kauffman established many activities for the residents at Hawthorne. Marge taught sewing classes, both were involved in Round Dancing and swimming. John taught German and was an avid bowler in league competition. Marge worked on quilting, making wedding quilts for each of her children and later Christmas quilts.

Settling in Hawthorne was one of the best decisions of their lives. Marge states, “This is my Garden of Eden. It’s secure, everyone seems to love others and we have a great fire department.” John feels that our new residents should never take for granted our heritage. Those residents who were here in 1982 had so much foresight. We must remember that and be thankful.

Leesburg has grown from a small town with a great Hardware store to a newer, prettier town. Maybe Mt. Dora influenced this. The Palesch’s remember when the Dora Canal was pristine; gasoline was 21 to 23 cents a gallon.

Their family has always been close. Their sons are a credit to their country. A unique experience might be their meteorologist son that handled weather predictions for the U.S. President’s travel plans to Camp David and NATO, advising when maneuvers are possible. Another son served with the Navy as a civilian nuclear engineer.

Today, John and Marge are appreciative of our EMT and Security. When they were younger they were more interested in the activities. Dancing especially brings fond memories. They wouldn’t change anything about Hawthorne. They feel the success of Hawthorne is because everyone encourages establishing new friends.

John and Marge offer this advice to new residents: “Try out different activities, then get involved. Enjoy!”

Interview by Nancy Apsey
Our Hawthorne Chorus

Dateline · April 15, 1988, Hawthorne’s closed circuit TV. Paul E. Newman presented a historical record of our Chorus. Paul was a long-time member and participated over the years, lending his rich tenor voice to this group. We have for you the text of his presentation, taken from the Historical Society archives.

The beginnings of the Hawthorne Chorus go back almost to the very beginning of Hawthorne itself. In the first Hawthorne Weekly Bulletin (sometime in January 1974) this message was carried from Don Brown:

“All singers and instrumentalists are invited to a meeting at 10 AM, January 31, 1974 in the Clubhouse. We hope we can become known as the ‘Singing Community’.

I could find no reference as to the size of the turnout, but Don Brown became Director and Elizabeth Speicher accompanist for this first vocal group. Don resigned the following October but Elizabeth Speicher carried on as both Director and Accompanist.

It was at about this time that the group took the name ‘The Hawthorne Chorus’. The first performance was a Christmas Concert in December 1974. The Chorus has presented a Christmas program each year since then, either at Christmas time or as a part of the Christmas Pudding.

In January 1975, Ed Merrill became Director. It was also in January 1975 that Bob and Mabel Lenox came to Hawthorne. When Ed Merrill and Elizabeth Speicher left for the summer Bob and Mabel took over, placing their indelible stamp on the Chorus. Bob was Director for ten years and Mabel is still our brilliant accompanist.

Ten Charter Members are listed. Three of these – Merv Black, Herb Rotberg and Jim Scullin are still active Chorus members. At one time the number exceeded 70 and it was decided to limit the size of the Chorus to approximately 70.

The Chorus participated with special music in the first Easter Sunrise Service at Hawthorne. This too became an annual tradition.

On April 24, 1977 the Chorus presented its first Spring Concert that likewise has developed into a third annual tradition.

Over the years the Chorus has appeared in many events and programs both at Hawthorne and outside our community. A page in the Chorus Scrapbook titled “Have Music – Will Travel” lists early outside appearances at the Ocala AARP, Leesburg Rotary, First Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church, Hillcrest Memorial Services, Lake County Fair in Eustis, Telephone Pioneers and Leesburg Shriners.

Paul and Julie Newman are no longer here at Hawthorne. Paul died in 2005. They were a vital part of our ‘Singing Community’. Hawthorne takes pride in our support of the arts including vocal and instrumental groups. We endeavor to bring excellence to our residents and friends through the musical productions. You may wish to investigate participation in one or more of our groups. Visitors are always welcome at rehearsals. A phone call to the Activities Office will advise you the times and places.

Words from Rae Paxton

“Incidentally, the first Chorus Concert was on December 12, 1974 at 7:30 PM. There were 26 voices: 10 sopranos, 8 altos, 4 tenors and 4 basses. Elizabeth Speicher directed this group. This was also the unveiling of the huge Christmas card, the lighting of the Christmas Tree in the darkened auditorium as a record of ‘O Tannenbaum’ was played.”

Perhaps we will share the life of Rae Paxton with you in the future. She was a delightful resident in our community for many years.

Commentary

Today’s edition begins our 11th year of publication. So, welcome back if you’ve been away – or hello again if you’re hanging around. We’re glad to have you aboard the Hawthorne Express. Hope we all move along, singing a song and enjoying each day. Keep Smiling!

In the Palesch article we failed to mention their hobbies. John is into needlepoint oriental rugs – 12 to 18 stitches per inch. Marge goes one better – needlepoint pictures using computer images to designate the colors. Come to the Activity Fair on October 24th and see the Historical Society Display for more details.

Wanted

We are looking for a photographer/journalist for the staff here at Hawthorne Remembers. Bob Mann has been our photo expert for several years. We are deeply indebted to him. But Bob has found it necessary to curtail his activities due to medical reasons. This edition contains a couple of images by your editor. This is not my area of expertise – can’t really figure what my expertise is. If you can help us out, it would be greatly appreciated. Call George Wolf at 728-8956.

Hawthorne Remembers

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