MY ROTARY FOUNDATION ADVENTURE - PANAMA TO EDMONTON ACROSS 50 YEARS

The Serendipity:

On Monday, November 19, I was having lunch at the UA Faculty Club with a colleague and noticed the Edmonton West Rotary Club setting up for their 12:15 meeting.  When I happened to looked down at my lapel, I noticed I had used an older dark suit coat that had my Regina Rotary South Past President lapel pin on it. I approached the Rotary folks getting set up, pointed to my pin, and mentioned that I had been a Rotarian, and had begun my Rotary experience in 1967 when I was awarded a Rotary Foundation Fellowship by the Panama Rotary Club (District 424) to study International Law at the University of Alberta, where my host club was the South Edmonton Club, and it’s then president Kenneth R. Ford.

 I was kindly asked if i might come by the following week and tell the club about my experience. I was happy to agree.    Then….on my way home from the Club that same day, on 109 St, I saw a hand-written sign advertising a house for sale in McKernan at 11334-75 avenue -  the address where Ken Ford had lived, and where my wedding reception was held almost 50 years ago!  Talk about serendipity!

The Story:

As mentioned at my talk to the club a week later on November 26, I had applied and received the Rotary Foundation Fellowship for Graduate Studies from the Panama Rotary Club to begin in 1967, and on arriving in Edmonton in August of that year, was greeted at the airport by an amiable gentleman with white hair - Club President (and later District Governor) Kenneth R. Ford . Ken took me first to his home for me to phone home, then to my graduate Residence (Athabasca Hall), and had me over for dinner at least once a week. A few months later, I met a young lady at the women’s graduate residence, Pembina Hall, and after dating some, we decided to marry. When I told Ken Ford of this and of her name, he immediately told me he knew her, because the South Edmonton Club and the Edmonton Journal had annually held an International student event  which my now fiancee attended, and who he and his wife had met at such an event some months before I arrived in Edmonton. Hence, Ken Ford had actually met both my wife and I before we had met each other.  Ken and Rotarianne Evelyn were witnesses at our civil ceremony in March of 1969, and a small wedding dinner was held at their house -11334-75 avenue -with guests from the University's International Student Office, some of our professors, and friends.   During these two years, I regularly attended the South Edmonton club meetings at the Whyte Avenue Inn On Whyte, and travelled to various parts of Alberta to speak about Rotary and Panama, one of the functions of a Rotary Fellowship ambassador at that time.

As my award required me to go back to my home country for two years after completing my fellowship, my wife Marietta and I moved to Panama, in late 1969 where we had two children and I  taught university there. I  immediately joined the Panama Rotary Club that sponsored me and later became its secretary.  We decided to leave Panama and return to Edmonton after 5 years so I could complete my doctoral degree at the U of A. I was appointed as Asst Dean of Residences at Lister Hall (then unfortuantely called “Warden”) to live in an attractive  designated suite, which took care of our lodgings and covered other costs as well. During all this time we kept quite close to Ken and Evelyn Ford. After I completed my degree and started to teach at the U of A, and  while also working with the Alberta Government in International affairs, I joined the South Edmonton Rotary Club.

Very sadly, our dear friend and Rotary mentor Ken Ford Passed away in 1993, just before we decided to move to Regina to take up an administrative post at the University there. In Regina, I immediately joined the Regina South Club, and later became its president.

We returned to Edmonton in 2001, when our daughter and her family moved back to Edmonton from Montreal, so we could help look after their two small children.   I started teaching again, but did not re-join Rotary as I had always done no matter where I was, as teaching often involved noon-hour classes, and it would have been incompatible with attendance requirements of Rotary.  After retiring from the University, I became involved in a number of advocacy efforts involving seniors health, diverse seniors issues, community crime prevention, and others.

The strong and unbroken thread binding this half-century story is, of course,  Rotary -  it allowed me to come to Canada as a young man, meet my wife here, raise our children, complete two post-graduate degrees, become a Citizen, belong to-and work closely with- Rotary, meet and become close friends with our Rotary host family Ken and Evelyn Ford for so many years, and instilled in me a love of community work and of giving back to the community.

The Corollary:

The day before my talk to the Edmonton West Club, I passed by Ken and Evelyn’s old house in McKernan. I  took a photo from outside, and knocked on the door. I told the owner why I was there and he graciously invited me in……so after almost 50 years of having had our marriage reception at that home I returned to that same house and walked around inside. Little had changed; and I was back - half a century later- to my  early Edmonton and Rotary days, and could almost hear Ken and Evelyn bid me welcome.

This corollary I did not relate to the club on November 26, as it would have been too moving for me. But now you know.

Morris Maduro

Past Rotary Foundation Graduate Fellowship awardee

Past Rotarian

Past Regina South Club President