

Biography of Laird Lindquist

When anyone walks in the Lindquist home in Bella Vista, Arkansas, it becomes very apparent who is the boss of the household. It is Barney, a seven-year-old, blind Shih-Tzu. It is not immediately apparent that he has this disability since he maneuvers through the house with great ease. He has Laird and Judy at his command.

Laird "Swede" Lindquist (Written September, 2012)

Laird Lindquist was born on August 28, 1943, in Elkhorn, Nebraska, to Yngve Lindquist and Grace Smith Lindquist. Laird's father emigrated from his home in Borlange, Sweden, in 1938 at the age of twenty-one. When Yngve arrived in the United States, he was arbitrarily given the name "Roy" since his given name was impossible to pronounce to the American emigration agent at the famous Ellis Island entry point in New York harbor. "Roy" had an aunt already in the U. S. who acted as a sponsor to his emigration. Before leaving Sweden, Yngve had the distinction of having been the recipient of the Andrew Carnegie Award for saving the life of a young man who had fallen through the ice on a frozen river and was drowning. For his valor, he was awarded 750 kronas and a gold watch. Yngve had been a part of the Andrew Carnegie Life-Saving Organization in Sweden before coming to America. He was a butcher by trade, and he would find a career in the great, meat-packing industry in Omaha, Nebraska.

A major recreation on the Great Plains was polka dancing. At one of these events at the Millrose Ballroom in the little nearby town of Millard, Roy met Grace Smith, his wife-to-be. They married in 1942 and settled in Elkhorn, which was very near Roy's employment in Omaha. Roy and Grace became the parents of three children: Laird, a son named Monte who lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and a daughter named Mary Lindquist Heiman who still lives in Elkhorn.

With Laird's Swedish background, it is not surprising that for much of his life, he has been known as "Swede." His experiences growing up were typical of most youths of the 1940s and 50s. Since there was little organized or commercial amusement, the kids of his day made their own entertainment. Of course, ice skating was popular in the long harsh winters. Early on, the only time movies were available in Elkhorn was when a local entrepreneur would set up a make-shift screen and show old cowboy movies and comedies such as The Three Stooges. More sophisticated movies were available in Omaha, but they were rarely attended.

Saturdays attracted farmers and their families to town for their weekly shopping and for socializing. As it had been in Laird's parents' time, dancing was a huge part of life. One occasion for dancing came when corn shelling was completed at surrounding farms. Since corn shelling was done by traveling groups who went from farm to farm providing shelling services, the completion of the work would be crowned by fall festivals which included "corn-cob" dances. Almost weekly throughout the year, and especially during festival occasions, dancing was a major recreation. The styles of dancing included the era's big band music and the ever present polka. One group Laird remembers well was the famous Six Fat Dutchmen Band from New Ulm, Minnesota. The band was known mostly for playing the "Oom-pah" style of polka music that originated from Germany and from the German-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia. It was voted Number One Polka Band for seven years in a row by the National Ballroom Operators Association. The band played at the Nebraska State Fair for twenty-

six straight years.

While still in high school, Laird worked at the vast cattle feed lots in Elkhorn. He fed cattle early in the morning, attended school, and then fed again in the evening. It is pretty certain that he enjoyed his employment a bit better when he worked for a while, at the age of seventeen, driving dump trucks hauling hot mix to crews paving the surrounding highways. The surrounding roads had been mostly dirt and gravel to that time. Laird graduated from Elkhorn High School in 1961. For a while he continued working at the feed lots, but in 1962 he joined the navy.

Yeoman Lindquist worked as a clerk/typist with a long-range, patrol bomber and sub hunter group. Interestingly, the only time he sailed on a naval ship was a two-week cruise during basic training. The naval air group he was assigned to used the Lockheed P2V N and the P2V-5 Neptune aircraft in its missions. Laird was stationed for a time at Barbers Point Naval Air Station in Hawaii and later at the Marine Corps Air Station at Iwakuni, Japan. The versatile Neptune aircraft filled many roles for the navy. During Laird's term of service, the planes flew from a base on the northernmost island of Japan on Cold War missions to the edge of Russia.

Laird made several flights as a passenger on the Neptunes. His most dangerous episode occurred when the plane he was on required that an engine be repaired on Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean. After the engine was worked on, the engine oil was "cleaned" by a magnet to remove metal particles that might have been left in the oil. It didn't work. When the plane, with Laird on board, attempted to take off with two jet-assist engines, one of the two main engines, the one which had been repaired, sounded an alarm and the plane began to yaw back and forth. Laird, who didn't have a regular seating position, had his head snapped back and forth violently. Fortunately, the plane and Laird landed safely.

His primary job was to maintain log books at the stations. His ability to type sixty-five words per minute, error free, made him much in demand. He was good at his job. When an officer from another command needed him to type some special documents which had to be perfect, Laird's commander refused to loan him to the other group. Naval documents required perfect typing and each document had seven, carbon pages. It would be impossible to correct errors without completely retyping each page, so expertise was at a premium. In 1964 Laird's enlistment expired. He was offered \$6,000 to reenlist to be sent to a school in Memphis to receive advanced training. He refused the offer and headed back to Nebraska.

When Laird arrived in Elkhorn in February 1964, the temperature was -17 degrees. He stayed anyway. One of the first things he did, besides getting a job, was to purchase his first automobile, a 1964 Chevy Impala. A school friend of Laird's was the head of the employment department at the John Deere parts distribution branch warehouse in Omaha. He gained employment and began his career with the company on April 13, 1964. The eight-story warehouse covered a block and had a railroad track running through the middle of it. In 1966 and 1967, an interesting duty for him was his part in John Deere Day shows in several states including Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. He, along with a sales team, traveled to dealerships in several states to introduce new developments by John Deere. The events were to show customer appreciation and to present movies of new products.

While living in Elkhorn, Laird became reacquainted with Judy Bryant, a girl he had known in high school. They enjoyed attending the ever-present dances in town and in surrounding ballrooms. In 1971 they married, and Laird became an instant father. Judy had five children, which included twin daughters, by a former marriage. The children's ages ranged from four to twelve; so being a parent was a new experience for Laird. Sadly, one son passed away about two years ago. Incidentally, by doing a little math, one can see that Laird and Judy have celebrated their 41st wedding anniversary as of 2012.

During many of the years Laird and Judy lived in Elkhorn, Laird showed his community spirit by

becoming an integral part of the volunteer fire department. He was with the department for sixteen years. He also participated in team bowling and enjoyed poker games with friends. Laird greatly enjoyed his job and home in the Omaha area, but it was not to last.

In 1982, it was with some concern that he learned that the warehouse in Omaha was being closed, mainly because the much larger John Deere parts now required could not be handled in the elevators of the warehouse. He was transferred to Kansas City, Missouri, to work in the warehouse there. Judy said he dragged his feet all the way to KC in the process of moving. For a year, he and some other workers lived in an apartment in Kansas City during the week and drove back to Elkhorn on weekends, a trip of about 200 miles one-way. Finally, Laird consented to the move to Overland Park, Kansas, just to the west of Kansas City. Laird's memorabilia from his employment with John Deere includes several awards for his exemplary work, including citations naming him as a key instructor in safety matters, such as in forklift training. He also took a lead in emergency medical matters, an area of expertise he learned and practice from his years as an EMT with the fire department in Elkhorn. After refusing retirement for a couple of years, finally in 1997 he accepted and ended a career spanning thirty-three years in John Deere warehouses.

Retirement lasted about one month. When he been frequently asked what he wanted to do in retirement, he had said he and Judy planned to travel. John Deere gave him the opportunity, with pay. After completing a school to learn the ins and outs of combines, he became a part of two teams giving support to the combines which followed the harvest throughout the Midwest. One team would go in one direction and the other in another. Each team had a fifty-three foot long trailer carrying spare parts and even engines for the combines. They worked all day and into the night during the harvest season. A disabled machine was disastrous to the owners. The parts trucks were vital. The John Deere teams worked hand-in-hand with local dealers to keep these machines running. Laird and Judy went ahead of the trucks and placed advertisements in dealerships to let the itinerate harvesters know of the service and parts being made available by John Deere.

During 1997 and 1998, Laird and Judy traveled extensively in support of the combines. They began the harvest season in Yuma, Arizona, and ended it in Devils Lake, North Dakota. One interesting thing Laird and Judy saw was experimental farming near Yuma where five-acre plots were planted with exotic plants. One was a Japanese plant with seeds so small they had to be harvested with a combine fitted with a diaper-like screen to catch the seeds. A fifty-five gallon drum of harvested seeds would sell for one million dollars. Between Arizona and Canada, they visited dealerships in many places including Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and South and North Dakota.

After completing their circuit at Devils Lake, Judy and Laird decided to sight-see to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Canada. In North Dakota and Winnipeg they experienced the disastrous floods of April and May 1997. Flood waters broke through levees and inundated surrounding areas so that dump trucks hauled fill dirt to build up the roads to provide passage to neighboring towns. At one point, Judy and Laird were attempting to go a few miles along one of these built up roads with water stretching into the distance on both sides. Judy realized the danger when she noticed that she was looking at the tops of utility poles just under water along these narrow, built-up roads. They realized the prudence of having life jackets available when motoring throughout the area.

Laird retired for good from John Deere in 1999. His concern was for his brother Monte in New Mexico who had contracted cancer. Laird and Judy moved to Las Cruces to be near him and to help with his business, a Coors beer distributorship. Since the area being supplied included most of New Mexico, Laird was able to see much of the state on business for the company. He and Judy enjoyed visits to such places as White Sands, Alamogordo, Albuquerque, and Palomas, Mexico on shopping trips. When Monte was out of danger from his cancer, Laird and Judy were ready to look for greener

lands back east. Judy's parents had retired to Bella Vista, Arkansas, earlier along with six other families from Elkhorn. Judy and Laird had visited Bella Vista several times and liked the area. They made the decision to move there in 2002.

Anyone who knows Laird will understand that he would not stay unemployed very long. The home he and Judy bought needed some remodeling; so he hired a local contractor to do the work. They became friends and Laird joined him in his business doing carpentry for a while. He also did shop work at a local golf club where he maintained the mowers, edging machines, etc. At one point he injured his back and had to stop carpentry and machinery maintenance. During the time he was recovering, he made numerous trips to the local Village Home Center hardware store. When he was offered a job at the store, he accepted. He wasn't told what duties he would have so he started stocking and learned the products and business practices at a hardware store from the ground up. The job was to be three days each week, which suited him perfectly, but he often worked full weeks when needed. He had some concern for his job when he learned that the store was being bought out by the T. H. Rogers lumber and hardware company. The transition was smooth, and Laird continues to work at the business.

As one can imagine, Laird's interest in collecting resides in things John Deere. A 1941 John Deere A he proudly owned was sold when the move was made to New Mexico. He would love to have it back. Most Tired Iron members have seen the beautifully restored 1987 AMT 600 all-terrain vehicle Laird rescued from a very rusty condition. The AMT was found at the store where he worked and was bought by Laird. He had it professionally restored into a like-new condition. He recently bought a 1985 John Deere S92 yard tractor, which he plans to use for transportation at Tired Iron shows. Not least of all is Laird's John Deere toy collection. Well displayed in his garage are a 1957 John Deere 620 pedal tractor and other memorabilia. The pedal tractors were given by John Deere to people who bought full-sized 620 tractors in that year. Admittedly, much of his collection is packed away, but Judy has plans to devote a guest bedroom for the display of the toys. It should be impressive to all, especially to John Deere enthusiasts.

Laird joined Tired Iron in 2011 and stays busy in support of the club. He drives from Bella Vista to the club on almost all scheduled work days and makes special trips to work in between those. One part of his support has been to repair a riding lawn mower to keep at the club grounds. He has outfitted it with a charger to keep it ready to start whenever it is needed. It has proven valuable for the upkeep of the grass around the buildings. Many thanks go out to Laird for his work and friendship.

Footnote: Judy Lindquist may be the most amazing of all. She is preparing to make her third parachute jump soon. So far, she has made two jumps, the first solo and the second in tandem. It is no secret that some of us are in our 70s, as is she. Wow!



Laird, Judy, and Barney



1957 John Deere 620 Pedal Tractor