

Imagine this scenario: plain old John Smith recently arrived back in UK from 8 years in Ireland, new in a high profile IT job with a multi-national company, just moved into a house with a long list of decorating needs, with children aged 2, 4 and 6 and a fourth child on the way. One night in the local pub (where else) I met 2 guys who had just come from Lions. They told me about the club and invited me to the next meeting. I replied "Why would I join Lions when I have so much else going on?" The response sealed the deal: he said "because if you want a job done, ask a busy person to do it." That was the start of Lionism for me 33 years ago.

Lechlade and District is a very different club to De Anza, monthly meetings, evening in the lounge of a local hotel, the tail-twister on constant alert for a slip of the tongue or an ill-judged remark. The only similarities to De Anza were the small membership and the vibrancy of the group.

Lechlade is a small town in heart of British countryside nestling in the upper reaches of the River Thames. The nearby villages we served delighted in names like Southrop, Quenington, Filkins, Buscot and Clanfield. The events we attended and the fund raisers we put on were also substantially different from those found in Silicon Valley.

How about the All England Ploughing Championship? And we held a Duck Race. And a Bed Race every New Year's Day - just for the challenge of getting up early on January 1st to run 10 kilometres. The activities sound strange and quaint but our annual budget was very healthy and even supported running a community minibus.

The club's demographics covered the age group from 30's to 60's and included several Charter members from 1963. We had a thriving social calendar and it's that club you have to thank for the Safari Supper, although I haven't had the courage to suggest we hold a Barn Dance in Cupertino.

After several years of various offices I was invited to take the President's Gavel and it was in that year that we held our Duck Race. Held on the river Thames (where else) and ending at a village pub (where else). We sold tickets for 2000 numbered yellow plastic ducks that were dumped into the river half a mile upstream and we draped a 60 foot net across the river to catch the ducks at the end. The holder of the winning ticket won 250 pounds (about 400 bucks) and we raised \$3000 towards a CAT scanner for the local hospital.

That same year I was President I started my involvement with Youth Exchange, leading to hosting of young people from New Zealand, Turkey, Japan, France, Finland, Germany and Italy. We also sponsored local youths to go abroad and one girl was able to include in her visit to India attendance at the eye camp we sponsored that year. When she presented to us on her return she was extremely emotional about the experience and was amazed to see so many patients restored to sight and supplied with eyeglasses.

Probably the most memorable visitor we hosted was a 16 year girl named Fusako, from Osaka in Japan. Even though this 6 week trip to Europe was a lifetime event for her, it did not relieve her of the duties of extra study (known as Juku). Her suitcase was half full of books - and I nearly put my back out when I went to lift it. She was amazed at the open spaces around and one night we found her staring up at the stars. When I asked her why, she said "we never see them in Osaka".

Anyway, 11 years went by and we emigrated, landing in Bay Area on 3rd July 1993. One of my first tasks (this was pre-Internet), was to find all the Lions Clubs and visit the likely ones - Cupertino Host, Sunnyvale, Los Gatos and Saratoga. Despite the ridiculous meeting time I settled on De Anza and have not regretted my decision for a single moment.

It seems a short time later that I was donning a judge's wig and gown to be installed as Club President - this was Lion Jim Gould's idea - at that time he thought everyone from the UK spoke with a plummy accent and wore funny clothes - Hmmm, maybe nothing has changed after all.

During my Presidential year I wanted to host some Youth Exchange students here in the US and we needed to raise some additional funds that year. We figured that a food-based event would probably raise money and when Jim threw in the fact his brother-in-law was leader of a jazz band and that he knew the manager of the Fish Market who was Rotary Club President that year, the Crab Feed was born. It was held at the Blind Center, consisting of one seating and 117 guests. And we managed to score 3 for 3 - we succeeded in running out of crab, beer and wine, although the guests never knew. And the rest is history.

That year, 1997, at 4C-6 Annual Convention our little club walked off with 4 awards, visitation award, best service project, best Club newsletter and the award for our pull tabs, courtesy of Lion Phil. That was when I knew that De Anza Lions Club was the mouse that roared.

I have many satisfying, surprising and amusing memories amassed during 22 years with this club - here are just a few:

Food Drive - Joy Baker almost reaching into pockets to extract donations outside Pak-n-Sav she just would not let anyone pass without hitting them up for a donation. Another Food Drive memory was the guy who came out with 2 trolleys, one laden, the other almost empty. We naturally went to take the one or 2 items from the second cart when he said, "Hey that's my stuff, yours is the full one".

During work parties at Camp Costanoan - listening to the ripe language from Ray Gamma as he tried to coax his reluctant paint sprayer to operate. Usually by the time he got it going the painting was done.

The Golf Tournament - my first exposure was at Boulder Creek, I was directed in my car by Lion Jim to go to the end of the road and park up. Well in the UK we have some pretty narrow roads. I soon found myself surrounded by green and facing this funny little cart. I had managed to drive my Volkswagen to the second tee.

Special Olympics was held one year at De Anza College and our club was engaged to help these young people get to the starting point at the right time for their event and to take them back when the event was complete. I remember clearly these kids' focus on doing their very best, yet showing best humor despite the difficulties they faced.

Mike and Barbara Kedell took Carmel & I up to Santa Rosa for the Service Dogs graduation about 12 years ago. This was one of the most moving ceremonies I have ever attended. Seeing the trainers who had spent every waking hour with their dog during the 18 month training period, stand there while the dog walked to their new owner without a backward glance was so emotionally charged, yet each trainer managed to have the pride in their graduate prevail over all the other emotions they were obviously feeling. Our new home will be only a few miles from the administration center, and I intend to volunteer to help there in whatever capacity they need.

Visiting Redwood Shores Lions Club and getting the idea for a PM group and actually attending the inaugural meeting at the Cupertino Sports Center, realizing that this event would be highly significant in guaranteeing a long future for De Anza.

And of course last year pinning the badge on my daughter, Claire and knowing that another generation would enjoy a life of Lionism.

People who are not Lions think that being a Lion is a high-minded, socially conscious devotion to service. In my case, not at all. I have been privileged to work alongside colleagues of the highest integrity, yet fun loving people who also enjoy meeting socially, and sharing a joke over a pint. The work we do is almost incidental to me as I get so much from it. My 33 years as a Lion has been a blast and I continue to recommend membership to every good person I meet.

Carmel and I move North knowing that there is a Lions club around the corner where we can be pretty sure we will be involved, while continuing as an associate member of De Anza.

I'd just like to close by thanking Lions and partners for their fellowship, which I will always value.