



EDITOR'S NOTE — Larry Phillips is in Olney to cover the British perspective of the International Pancake Race festivities. This is a first-hand account of Phillips meeting a Liberal High School classmate in Olney this year.

By LARRY PHILIPS

• Leader & Times

When Ruben Longoria was attending Liberal high school in 1966 and '67, he didn't imagine he would be diagnosed with inoperable cancer in 2013. Neither did the friends he ran with, Terry Wares and yours truly. We did nearly everything together in high school. I was the oldest being born in 1950, Ruben in 1951 and Terry in 1952. Terry and I go back to when he was a newborn,, as our mothers were great friends and both in the LHS Class of 1950.

Once I graduated, we started drifting off in our various directions. I took off for Oklahoma University in hopes of becoming a petroleum engineer Ruben ended up joining the National guard and the regular Army and Army reserves. Terry took off hitchhiking Europe and all of Asia.

I ended up in the oil industry for 32 years and traveling the world, living in Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia: Ruben ended up traveling the world and fighting on four battlefields, from Iraq

(twice), Afghanistan and Bosnia. Terry lived throughout Europe and the far east, and he became a ministry pastor about 25 years ago, ministering in India more than a decade, in Ireland and for the last three years in Winslow, Great Britain – 25 miles south of Olney, home of the International Pancake Day Race.

I had been fortunate in the last decade to see Terry and Ruben at various times, as Ruben lives in Wichita but still has family in Liberal. Ruben was diagnosed with liver cancer last year and had what he believed to be a successful surgery. The doctors had told him they were sure they had removed all the malignant tumor. It was only several months later, they discovered it had returned with a vengeance. It was then he was told it was inoperable.

He has tried a specialized treatment plan with chemo and pills and was just recently removed from that plan to see how things go.

Terry and I have gotten together at the Olney Pancake race in 2011 and 2012.

I fortunately got a chance to return to Olney this year and cover the race again for the Leader & Times. When Ruben discovered I was going, he immediately had his wife, Karen, book a similar flight to London Heathrow. He was determined to see the three of us together again – it had been decades since all three of us were together. In high school, we were known as the Good, the Bad and the Ugly, or as we called ourselves, the Trio Leos, having all been born under the sign of the lion.

Ruben and Karen arrived about two hours before me Saturday, and when I got through customs, I was met by them both.

Terry delivered us to Olney, via a few missed turns on the roundabouts, but we made it to High Street safely.

Ruben, Karen and I hit the market place Sunday to shop at the Farmers' Market. It was a delight and it swarmed with the odors of different foods being cooked to fresh flowers being sold in bundles. As we prepare for Pancake Day – a race we had grown up with in Liberal –we

contemplate the centuries it has been feted in Olney – from 1445.

Time stands still for no one, but this Pancake Day, we three friends realize, it could well be our last time shared together. It promises to be a Pancake Day none of us will ever forget. We feel very honored to be in such a wonderful place as Olney for this special – in more ways than one – occasion.

