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Just home from overseas, Kevin and Lynn Strachan enjoy a cup of coffee at Spencer Browne’s Coffee Shoppe. They will be at their Liberal home for about a month, Lynn said, before they return to their home in east Malaysia. Daily Leader photo/ Jessica Crawford By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader

Lynn Wilson graduated from Liberal High School in 1975. She was a cheerleader and quite simply, a hometown girl. Her parents owned and operated El Kan Drug. Her life was in Liberal, she loved Liberal. She would have been perfectly happy to stay in Liberal for the rest of her life, but that just wasn’t in the cards. Little did she know she would have worldwide opportunities that would teach her things about other nations – and she would learn even more about herself.

Following her graduation from LHS, Lynn attended college at West Texas State where she ultimately received a master’s degree. A well trained educator, Lynn went on to the University of Texas for further training.

Lynn ended up as the dean of continuing education at a junior college in Borger, Texas. That is where she met Kevin Strachan. Strachan had become an engineer for ConocoPhillips, he and Lynn married, and their journey began.

“What took us overseas the first time, we were married and we lived in Gladewater, Texas,

and then Houston,” Lynn said. “ConocoPhillips, at the time Phillips, transferred us to Norway. I was thinking, ‘I don’t want to do this,’ because I didn’t even really want to leave Liberal – I love Liberal. Kevin is from Nebraska, so we are both farm kids. I grew up here, my folks had the El Kan Pharmacy for 40 years. “We moved to Norway in 1993, we lived there for a good number of years, and we lived in Bartlesville, Okla.,” she explained. “I was the high school counselor in Stavanger, Norway. We left and went to Bartlesville, that was really great. Their high school is 11th and 12th grades only, so I had juniors and seniors for three years there. We left there, and they sent us to China. I thought, ‘Oh my goodness.’ We did learn Norwegian and could use Norwegian, but we both thought, ‘China?’ We survived SARS and bird flu. Many people evacuated, and we didn’t. I was at the International School of Beijing. I was a high school counselor and head of counseling, K though 12.” Although Kevin and Lynn were well educated, education alone cannot prepare individuals to immerse themselves into completely different cultures and thrive.

“Kevin is really fortunate because ConocoPhillips provides language classes,” she said. “You have to acculturate, you can’t just live in your shell. You have to try to love where you are. I think that is something we are both really good at. He is a wonderful teacher as well, I have learned a lot from him. As an engineer, when you are working, if you can teach host country nationals, who are also engineers, that you are working with to love Americans it is a great thing. A lot of countries just don’t like us. When we leave, they are sad to see us go. Wouldn’t it be awful if it weren’t that way.”

Kevin and Lynn were moved once again and although Lynn is, herself an educator, her education just kept coming – Kevin’s did as well.

“We left Beijing and went to Malaysia and Borneo,” Lynn said. “I would tell you that many people go and hate it. The reason they don’t make it are because they don’t decide they are just going to love that nation.

“Where we live now, they say the population of Miri is 300,000, but it doesn’t seem like a bigger place than Liberal,” she continued. “It is very rural and there is jungle all around. Sarawak is the state. You have to believe the world is a very small place.”

The willingness of the Strachans to embrace a different culture, yet again, granted them acceptance and appreciation from those native to their new home.

“I think in Malaysia the thing that helped me the most is being able to speak Chinese,” she said. “You get accepted much faster if people know that you are trying to speak their language at least. What Kevin and I do are very different things, but they are very similar as far as people skills. I think that has helped both of us because you see it from a kid’s eyes, then you see it from an adults’ eyes, too. You can really pass those skills back and forth.”

Although Lynn and Kevin truly enjoy their travels, there is just a little bit of Dorothy Gale inside of both of them.

“It is nice to come home,” Lynn said. “I think we have more wanderlust now than we used to. I

remember one time Kevin said, 'I am going to kiss the ground when we get off the plane.' That was back when we lived in Norway.

"The only time I am ever blue is Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July and Friday afternoons when it is time to go to a pep rally, and I don't have one to go to," she added with a chuckle. "And Friday evenings when it is time to go to a football or basketball game – I miss that sometimes."

Kevin believes living abroad has truly made him appreciate being an American. However, he has come to appreciate many other cultures as well.

"I think the one thing that made a big impact on me is the more you live outside your culture, the more you learn about your own culture," he said. "You can objectively compare and contrast the host culture versus your own culture. It really makes you appreciate the freedoms we have as Americans. We are still in a place where you can work hard and advance. There are a lot of inequalities that we don't have to deal with."

Lynn never thought of herself as close minded, but she really had no idea until her travel began what truly was outside of Liberal.

"I wasn't a closed person, but I was a Liberal, Kansas girl," she said. "I don't think I ever would have dreamed that I would have said I really love Chinese people, and I really love Norwegian people, and I really love Malaysian people."

"Every group of people has so much to offer," she continued. "If it weren't for local people where we lived, we would have hurt ourselves many times over. I just think that we all just come from little slivers of a pie, it meets in the middle. We all have a common ground, we are all humans. Everyone loves their kids, everyone loves their family and most people love their culture and how they grew up."

When asked if all of the travel and adventure was his plan for his life, Kevin had a very simple answer.

"I didn't have a plan," he grinned as he looked at his wife. "I still don't have a plan."

This internationally travelled couple are still a Nebraska boy and Kansas girl at heart, however, by exploring many other ways of life – they have come appreciate their own heritage that much more.

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