

Dr. Phil Lange, Freedom Baby, Worked for UN

Tales of Earlier Days, No. 451

By Bob Dewel

This column is a follow-up to the previous article two weeks ago about a North Freedom baby who in 1914 was allowed to remain permanently in the care of a loving but childless couple, the Richard Langes. The birth parents, with the mother nursing a broken arm, had been transferred to Northern Minnesota, and the sickly baby needed more care than they could give him.

The agreement, signed by the birthparents, the receiving couple, the family doctor, and the birth parents' Catholic priest, contained responsibilities for the receiving couple and the birth parents alike, as previously mentioned. As we shall see, the child future life was productive and significant.

Phil C. Lange

Never adopted but soon known as Phil Lange, the child grew to become a healthy and robust youth, graduating with honors from North Freedom grade schools and from the North Freedom High School in 1930. This was followed by Bachelor's (1934) and Master's (1936) degrees in English at the University of Wisconsin. The next few years found him teaching and coaching in Reesville, Beaver Dam, and then Beloit High School.

Lest you think his was an ideal youth, the Baraboo News-Republic reported in 1933 that Lange, as a student in Madison, foolishly accepted a dare to walk around on the edge of the roof of a four story building on the campus. Somehow he fell, and clung to a ledge by his fingers for a long time until rescued by the ladder of a Madison fire company.

In more responsible days in about 1938 he married Irene Oyen at the First Baptist Church in Madison. Two children, Dena Rae and Richard, were born to the union. Always moving upward, Phil received his PhD from the University in 1941. Just before entering military service (Navy), Lange reports that he and his wife got his and the birth families together before leaving for a military assignment.

If the previous paragraphs proceeded at a breathtaking pace, from childhood to marriage and a PhD, it is because there is much more to be said about Dr. Phil Lange, things North Freedom and Sauk County can be proud of.

A Meaningful Life

How can one condense this significant life into an article of this length? Significant positions in universities in Arizona and New York were followed by military service in WW II on a destroyer. After the war Dr. Lange continued his participation in several educational pursuits. Now a professor in New York State College in Fredonia, he was allowed time for detached service with the U.S. State Department and the War Department so as to establish a Teacher Training in Seoul, Korea. This also provided an independent voice to that of General MacArthur in dispatches to the State Department.

Lange's service to his country did not end there. Now a Professor at Columbia University in New York City, he also worked with UNESCO in establishing an advanced education facility in Chili. His specialty by this time was educational psychology, and behavioral objectives. He had a part in national

YMCA affairs and the Olympics in Rome, as well as international work with USAID in Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

Space does not allow us to elaborate on these achievements, some of the many which are chronicled in Joe Ward's book on North Freedom, including a personal letter to Ward. Some of Ward's five pages about Lange are quotes in Lange's own words. It is impressive reading, beginning with the unusual birth events mentioned in the previous article, and ending with participation in continued public affairs. Even shortly before his death in 2010 at the age of 96, Dr. Phil Lange was engaged in public service activities..

Remember Dr. Wetmore, mentioned above, who managed the agreement between the birth family and the Richard Lange's? In a future article we'll hear more about Wetmore's son, another youth of whom North Freedom residents then and now can be proud.

Besides Lange, the Dickie twins and others were part of that little class of 1930 North Freedom graduates whose lives were significant. Perhaps sometime we will write about them also. Thanks again to Joe Ward, (another son of North Freedom), who generously allowed me to use his material for this story.

