

Ernie & Kay Reunite With RYE Family

Rotary's youth exchange program enriches more than just the students

Article by Tim Carnahan



The Kids', their home country and the year of their exchange (left to right)

Eddy – Brazil – '98-'99
Aurelie - Belgium – '99-'00
Emily – France – '00-'01
Charlotte – Sweden – '01-'02
Jenny – Germany – '02-'03

When Kay suggested awhile back that they gather all five of their children to be together for New Year's, Ernie had scoffed. Considering their busy lifestyles, and the fact that they live in 5 different countries, why it would be absolutely impossible to pull it off, he had reasoned. "So, naturally Kay took that as a personal challenge", explained Ernie as he addressed our club Friday.

From 1998-2003 the Hodges hosted an inbound Rotary Youth Exchange student. The experience of hosting kids through RYE is often cited as one of the best things Rotary offers, but it goes beyond that with Ernie and Kay and these five young adults. They truly did form a family, and forever more they will be Ernie and Kay's children, albeit separated by thousands of miles.

With whatever magic she possesses, Kay was able to overcome the substantial obstacles of such a difficult plan, and sure enough, come Christmas Eve they were aboard a jet to London on the way to making their dream come true. Kay wrote the following poem about the reunion, which Ernie read Friday. She earned a standing ovation at the meeting and a tip of the hat from CHIPS for sharing such a wonderful experience, and for reminding us that 'Service above Self' has its rewards.

A Rotary Reunion

By Kay Hodges

We gather in London, together at last,
We make up quite an international cast.
From Belgium and Sweden, from France and Brazil,
From Deutschland & Woodland - my Lord, what a thrill.

Here's Eddy, so handsome and once more quite slim,
Despite all our "spoiling", he turned out a gem.
He's playing "Big Brother" to four lovely gals.
He's happy he traveled those thousands of miles.

Our Emilie's married, the first of the lot,
We're all very pleased with the fellow she got.
She's still most impassioned by this and by that,
her comics, her drawings, her sweet little cat.

And Aurelie's planning a wedding this year,
Jean Pierre will be serving up whiskey and beer.
The first of five daughters to walk down the aisle,
she'll grace every moment with elegant style.

Now Charlotte's so busy pursuing the law.
She seldom can write us, much less make a call.
She'll be a fine lawyer - we foresee her fame,

And speaking of famous, here's Jenny, our star,
her talent and beauty will carry her far.
Can't wait till she's famous through all 50 states,
and counting George Clooney as one of her dates.

We're here as a family, our hearts full of cheer.
We'll share love and laughter, and hoist a few beers.
There are sights to be seen - a ride on the "Eye",
the girls will hit Harrods's - great goodies to buy!

We'll take in some culture, we'll travel to Bath,
that pound is a killer—have you done the math?
On Friday, we're dancing - the dirtiest kind,
And Eddy has riotous clubbing in mind.

They say that God works in mysterious ways,
so he brought five young people to Ernie and Kay.
After years of just us and our four-legged pets,
we turned into parents with problems and debts!

Our family's a true affirmation of life,
in a world filled with anger, with war and with strife.
More alike than we're different, let's vow to stay strong
and not get hung up on who's right and who's wrong.

In whatever language, our thoughts are the same:
We thank God that into our lives you all came.
For you are our children, so treasured and dear,
together at last to ring in the New Year!