

How Lowell and Manilla met as related to Lee Renier Bjella by Manilla in August 2010

(Read Lowell's version in his life story – in the chapter After the War Years. I think Manilla has a good sense of humor and you can tell from reading the following two accounts, that she is still kind of a rascal.)

Manilla went to nursing school in Minneapolis - Deaconess. They had to do “rural training” and this was done in Bemidji at the hospital there. Every 6 weeks of the course, they had a party, before the group left to go back to Minneapolis.

2 weeks before Manilla left, there was a party. One of the nurses was Gracie Swensen, and she was Lowell's girlfriend. Lowell came to the hospital at the shift change in the late afternoon. Larry Sattgast was with him. They were cruising the hospital and Lowell saw Manilla and asked her and her friend Mae if they would like a ride home. Manilla said no, that the dorm was only 2 blocks away. Mae said yes, and off they all went. They played cards. Lowell called on Manilla at the dorm the next day, and again they played cards. Gracie had charge of the dorm phone and when Lowell would call Manilla, Gracie wouldn't let him talk to her.

Manilla and Lowell went out four nights in a row. One of the dates was a sleigh ride party. Wally Paulson, son of the dorm house mother actually took her on the sleigh ride. Manilla wasn't going to go because she had no warm clothes but Wally let her use a coon skin hat and mitts but said she would have to be his date if he let her use them! On the ride, Lowell kept pushing her off the sleigh. They got about two blocks behind the sleigh at one point. Wally got mad because she was spending all the time with Lowell.

Lowell went to Minneapolis two times to pick up trucks for his dad. He went down on the bus. The first time, March 16, 1950, Manilla just looked on him like someone she knew, not as a boyfriend. Manilla's mom and dad and her sister Ann and her husband all met him at the bus! Pauline said Lowell could stay at their house. The next time, Labor Day weekend, 1950, a Friday night, Manilla was babysitting for Chuck and Ruth's kids (Manilla's cousin) at their house, and Lowell went with her.

Manilla said that in college, (nursing school) she was known as a man hater because she didn't date.

Lowell asked her to marry him at Chucks house. Manilla didn't give him an answer. Then she later wrote to him and said no, that she had too many things she wanted to do like get a car and travel. So he gave her his brand new green car to drive around for two weeks in Minneapolis. Lowell wouldn't let anyone else touch that car! So she said yes after that. So, only 4-5 dates before they were married, but lots of writing.

Chuck, Ann and Butch - her siblings - were all married and had kids by then. Manilla told Lowell no liquor and no kids right away. (Butch and her dad Ernie were alcoholics.)

Gracie was still crazy about Lowell so he took her out, got her drunk, and ditched her and then told her he wouldn't have anything to do with a drunk.

From the time that they first met, they were married 8 months later. Manilla, the man hater, was the first in her class to get married after nursing school graduation!

Manilla mentioned that Scott is most like Lowell. She said Lowell has hazel eyes.

FROM INTERVIEWS WITH MANILLA – TO DAUGHTER PAULA BJELLA JOERGER, JULY 7, 2011

Meeting Lowell

“I met Lowell Elson Bjella in 1950. When I was a student nurse on my “rural rotation” at the hospital in Bemidji, MN. I was off duty and walking back to the nurses dormitory with my classmate, Mae Reese, when Lowell and his friend, Larry Sattgast, drove by in his new Chevrolet. Lowell had been recently discharged from the army where he was a paratrooper overseas during WWII. Presently he had returned home and worked for his father (Tim Bjella) at Tim's Implement Co. They sold AC (Allis Chambers) Tractors, parts and GMC trucks and petroleum products. They dealt with the agricultural farms around Bemidji.

“Grandpa” (Tim) was an entrepreneur around Bemidji. He had built homes and commercial buildings in town. Probably five times Tim went “south” in the winter to Phoenix, AZ and built a home and sold it to make money while he and Grandma Connie wintered in Phoenix. Several times they took their children with them. One winter Lowell worked in a bowling alley after school to help bring in money.

Anyway, when I met Lowell he was the son of a businessman in Bemidji who was well known and a good catch because he had a car.

The first time we met was on a sleigh ride for the nursing students. Lowell kept pushing me off the sleigh. It got embarrassing because at one point the sleigh was a block ahead of us and had to stop and wait until we caught up.

I liked Lowell and was interested, but I thought he wouldn't call after the sleigh ride. Actually he had called the dorm and asked for me, but the girl who answered (Gracie Swenson) had dated Lowell before and just told him I was busy or out.

So, Lowell came driving by the hospital at shift change with Larry Sattgast. Mae Reese and I were walking and I just ignored him because I thought he hadn't bothered to call. Finally Mae talked me into getting in the car. It turned into a nice date because Lowell took us to the parks in the area and I got some pictures for our school (Lutheran Deaconess School of Nursing) year book. He returned us back to the dorm for supper and made a date for the same night.

Our nursing rotation was for six weeks and I only saw him one other time and then returned to Minneapolis.

Lowell found his way to Minneapolis to pick up trucks for Tim's Implement and see me. Over the course of time, his third trip was on Labor Day weekend.

The first time he came on the bus. All were at home for Terri's birthday (Manilla's younger sister) and my mother and two sisters and myself went to meet him. When they asked what he looked like and said he is blonde with blue eyes. (He was dark haired with brown eyes.)

Lowell got nervous being this group of women were there to meet him. We brought him back to the birthday party at my home (627 12th Ave SE, Mpls, MN) and we all had fun and he was well liked. He was impressed with the "togetherness" of my family.

His second visit to Mpls was not memorable.

The third visit was on Labor Day and he proposed marriage.

When I had attended Deaconess, I didn't go out on dates or pursue a relationship, so my classmates called me the man hater. It was, therefore, quite amazing that I agreed to marriage.

I started thinking about the haste of this after Lowell left and told him I'd changed my mind about marriage. Lowell telephoned right away when he received the letter and asked why I'd changed my mind. I told him I wasn't ready to settle down, and I wanted to travel and have a new car. (I had already gotten two used cars, but not in good shape.)



He immediately drove his new car to Mpls to pick up a truck and left his new car for me to drive indefinitely. His sisters and Mother were not happy about this because he never let them borrow his car.

One of his friends, Allen Fox, came to Mpls and Lowell asked him to bring me back to Bemidji to meet the Bjella family. I got to Bemidji and saw Lowell and was angry with him because I could smell alcohol on his breath. I didn't want anything to do with that because my father was an alcoholic. I stayed the night at Al's (and wife Marian) place instead of the Bjella's.

The next day Lowell came over and convinced me he wasn't an alcoholic and the relationship was back on.

(Nov. 10, 1950, Mpls, MN)

We met late 1949, early 1950. I got to travel. Our honeymoon was down to Kentucky, east to Washington D.C. and up the East coast to stop into my sister Anne's (husband Ken) home in Brooklyn, NY. While there, our clothes were stolen out of our car parked in front of our hotel.



Another memorable part of the honeymoon in Kentucky was our tour of a monastery run by monks. Lowell was taking my picture by a monk and the monk kissed me! This monastery had an oath of silence that is why we stopped to take a picture of the monk working in a field. One of my Catholic friends in Bemidji was angry that we had a picture of this monk kissing me.

(Photo: Manilla in Oakridge, TN, Nov 15, 1950, honeymoon)

Washington D.C. was very interesting. We also saw New York City.

Our first year in Bemidji went well. At first, we lived in a second floor apartment across the street from Tim's Implement. Lowell was a lot of fun. We had a great couples' club at First Lutheran Church. Our pastor (Evans) even entered into the fun of our get-togethers.

But Lowell did have a bad habit of cheating at cards. We were playing cards our first month of marriage. I figured out he was cheating. I was so angry it started a fight. The result was a promise from him that I could go to Mpls once a month to visit my family. Of course, it didn't happen every month, but I made many trips to Mpls for "parts" for Tim's Implement.

Before we were married, we agreed to no children for two years. I was pregnant three months after the wedding. Both Lowell and I were happy and content with our six pregnancies and children.

I think back to women friends who were upset being pregnant and some even asking me because I was a nurse, how to abort their pregnancies. I was appalled and thought that was a sin.

Lowell and I were grateful and content with our family and considered each of the children a blessing.

The only time I remember being discontented was over a house. There was a house on Lake Irving that was started. I wanted to buy that and have Lowell and my brother Butch, complete it. We had the money, but Lowell didn't like fixing things or carpentry so we didn't get it.

Our first house was moving out to the Bjella farm on Old Cass Lake Highway. It was a two story house without an indoor bathroom. There was a front porch and a rear sun porch with windows all around. One night we had just gotten into bed and a bat swooped across the room. I asked Lowell to get up and take care of it. He replied, “they don’t hurt you..” It kept swooping, hit the window above us and fell on Lowell’s head. He moved fast and took care of it.



Photo of a painting of the Bjella Farm.

We saved and refinished the floors of the farm house. We painted all the rooms. I think we painted the outside also. We fixed the furnace. Lowell worked, made repairs in the barn and the out house. We put a big sink in the kitchen but still got the water from the pump on the back steps. We pumped water and heated it on the wood stove (for cooking) and poured it in dishpans for washing dishes.

I was talking with my daughter-in-law, Lee, about when Tim and Connie first lived on the farm and had an ice box for the refrigerator. They made and cut their ice during the winter and stored it through the summer packed in hay. They had electricity by a generator in the basement. We had electricity in the house from the rural power source.

When we lived on the farm, I learned how to drive a tractor. I explored the farm driving through the woods. The farm had around 200 hundred acres. We had a big garden.

Lowell enjoyed living there and wanted to buy it. Tim was willing to sell the farm to us but Connie wouldn’t. There were hard feelings about that.

Lowell got property to build a house through a truck deal. The property at 16th St. and Park Ave (Bemidji) was a down-payment on a truck. The basement was already in the ground. My brother Butch (Ernst Jr.) Meyer lived with us and built the home during the day. Lowell would work after work and I did what I could being pregnant. The house was completed on the first floor just before Paula was born 11-18-1951. There was a big issue with Connie because I demanded an indoor bathroom and hot water, not just cold water in the sinks.

There were two bedrooms on the main floor. The upstairs was not finished or used until Scott (fourth child) was two years old.

Our home was in the middle of a huge double city block, flanked by a field and deep back yard. It was private and spacious.

I had wringer washing machines and an outdoor clothesline. Paula, Karmon and Linda were thumb suckers while holding their blankets. One day when I had taken the blankets away to wash, I looked outside to the clothesline and the three were standing under the lines holding on to the blankets and sucking their thumbs.

Sam, Butch's four year old son, was staying with us and the clothes line fell down loaded with small clothes. Sam looked at me and said, "Don't worry Aunt Manilla and I will fix it." He went out and picked up and held the line from the mud and rain."