Sharing Their Stories: Lowell Rost

Lowell Rost of Paynesville received this painting from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. While a switchboard operator in the military, Rost worked at Camp David and at the Eisenhower farm in Gettysburg, Pa., in the late 1950s.

When Lowell Rost received his draft induction notice in early 1957, there were many possibilities of where he would end up, but he never would have guessed that he would end up on the White House staff. "I thought it was a miracle from the start," Rost stated. "I thought it was really something. How many people join the army and get an assignment like that?"

Rost was born and raised in Faribault, Minn., and graduated from Faribault High School in 1953. He went on to obtain a degree in education from Mankato State University, at that time called Mankato State Teachers College. Unfortunately, because of the draft in the mid 1950s, Rost struggled to find a teaching position when he first graduated college because he had just received his draft notice.

"I got the interviews and talked to several potential job offers, but at that time the draft was still going strong," he explained. "The last question they would ask was, 'How are you staying with the draft?' and I'd say, 'Well, I just got my pre-induction notice.' And they would just say sorry, and that was goodbye."

Because of this, Rost decided to "just get the military out of the way" and volunteered for the army in a two-year program. "I'll get my two years in," he recalled thinking.

Rost was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado in November 1957, where he did some basic training before flying to Fort Gordon, Ga., in February 1958, to the Signal Corps Training Center, "working communications and all that stuff," as he called it. After some training on switchboard operations at Fort Gordon, Rost was assigned to work in the White House, though only for a week.

"I could learn the switchboard thing there," he explained. "They had a big switchboard in the basement, so I could watch that for a bit and then walk around Washington, D.C., and see the sights."

Rost was then informed he would be stationed at Camp David in Maryland. Former president Dwight Eisenhower had a small farm adjacent to the Gettysburg battlefield, which he often used as a meeting spot with several world leaders, and a weekend getaway for him and his family. Because of Camp David's close proximity to the farm, those stationed at Camp David would be transferred to the farm when the Eisenhower needed them.

"Those of us at Camp David were closer to that spot than Washington, D.C., obviously, so when he would come up to the farm at Gettysburg, meeting with dignitaries or doing whatever, then we would be transferred to the farm and sit with the White House security and take care of the switchboard at the farm," Rost explained. "That was part of the assignment for those of us at Camp David."

"Now, not everyone will know what we're talking about when we're talking about a switchboard," he chuckled. "Back in '58, that's when it was all cords and jacks. The light turns on, you plug it in, you hit the ringer, and that's how it went."

Because of this assignment, Rost was classified as a White House staff member, a position that was not taken lightly. "If there's anything on your record, if you have even a traffic ticket, they go in and check the police department, the sheriff, the courthouse, where you went to school, all of that stuff," he said. "If there's anything on you, you get blocked out right away. If you have any psychiatric problem or any chronic illness or any of that, I'd say about eight out of ten of them get washed out."

"Just to make it through that phase and be considered for that kind of job," he continued, "I think it's the Lord's hand to get chosen to serve at that kind of level. Just wow."

Eisenhower only visited the farm occasionally, but the staff at Camp David were called to the farm each time he did. "Whenever he would be at the farm, there had to be White House staff there, just like in the White House," Rost explained. "So we could go there and there was a little milk house on the end of the barn that was transformed into a security shack, and that's where the switchboard was."

Rost usually worked night duty, with sergeants and other staff taking the regular day-time shift. "I would take care of wherever I could fit in, but I'm not very good at staying awake at night," he joked. "When I was on duty at Camp David, we had to check with the White House security at the farm every hour, so sometimes I'd doze off, and the guard at the farm would call me and say 'Hey, you missed that 1 a.m. check,' and I'd say, 'Yeah...I suppose I kind of did.'"

"Once I was at the farm, and the president of Mexico came in. Another time I was there, they had a staff party, and I got a call (from Eisenhower) while the staff party was going on asking if everyone was in," remembered Rost. "One time when I was up there, Krushchev came. Oh gosh, everything's gotta be secretive; everything's gotta be hidden."

While this added some pressure to his job, Rost took it in stride. "One of the sergeants that was there, one of the first things he told us was 'You know, some people get a little rattled; you can't choke up on anything like that. So it's a general, so it's a president, anyone who comes in, you can't think so much of it. Those guys put their pants on one leg at a time just like you do. Whatever goes on there, it's us there to help," he recalled.

Because of his close proximity to Eisenhower and the world leaders he met with, Rost and the other staff "got a White House pass and top secret clearance," Rost said. "Always keep things secret, don't talk too much. Even after I was out, someone put a $10,000 fine if I divulged any top-secret stuff."

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On a switchboard, I’m not next to the president talking about the battlefields or that kind of stuff, so not really a problem there.”

At one point in his time at Camp David, Rost and the other White House staff received a gift: a painting done by President Eisenhower himself. “All the staff got one at a staff party; everybody got one,” Rost explained. “I was just stunned.”

Painting was an important hobby of Eisenhower, and Rost still has his painting in his home to this day.

Rost says he’s grateful for the opportunity to work on the White House staff. “It was tremendous to have this duty, staying inside, and working in this resort-like environment, following the president around when he goes to the farm,” he said. “Just to get that far and get that top-secret clearance, the highest top-secret clearance you could get because you’re in such close proximity to the president, that’s a pretty special duty right there.”

In July 1958, Rost went home to Minnesota to get married before returning to Camp David with his new wife, Audrine. “Some of the guys would go out to the dance halls and see what was going on. We didn’t really know what we were after,” explained Rost. “Then all of a sudden, this very attractive gal caught my eye. Things started to click there, and we started dancing the whole time, and we had this precious wonderful life for 64 years.”

Their first year of marriage was not easy, however, with Rost still working night duty at the switchboard, but “all we wanted was each other,” said Rost, “and everything else had to just fall into place.”

Rost spent the remainder of his two-year service at Camp David, from April 1958 to November 1959. “It was beyond belief and something I could preach to the kids, saying if they keep their nose clean and behave themselves, opportunities are out there,” he said. “Being able to serve in that capacity, I thought that was really something special.”

When Rost, with his wife and young daughter, returned to Minnesota, he planned to go back to teaching. “I had been out of school too long and had to get refresher courses in, but wasn’t sure how I was going to do it, and now I have a wife and a baby girl to look after, and I’m thinking ‘How am I gonna do this?’ Fortunately, Rost was contacted by a greenhouse, Mums of Minnesota, where he had worked in high school, who needed a new wholesale manager to take over the department. “I went there, and worked for three or four years as a wholesale manager,” he said.

Rost was then contacted by the personnel department at Mankato State University. “They had an opening in Fairmont, and I went there and stayed there for 30 years,” Rost then retired in 1993.

Audrine and Lowell came to the Paynesville area a few years later. “We were thinking of a campground for weekends to get out of Fairmont and found something in Paynesville, and we’ve been there for 22 years,” he said.

Audrine passed away in November 2022 from lymphoma. “It’s quite a blessing that we could give her that kind of life and have a lot of excitement raising four kids who are all doing great,” Lowell said.

Rost is currently living at Koronis Place Assisted Living in Paynesville. “I don’t like to show off or anything, but I’ve got a lot going for me,” he said. “I try to create a little upbeat stuff and joke around in the dining room a bit. You just have to slow down sometimes.”

Overall, Rost looks back on his life with pride. “It’s surreal when you look back,” he concluded.
To Your Health

By: Bill Keller

We have a friend who likes to say that if he knew he was going to live this long, he would have taken better care of himself. Do you feel this way? Well, it’s never too late.

Truth be told, research done on aging is scant to say the least. Until the last decade, people just bought into the bios that told us all our aches and pains were just part of getting old. That attitude is known as ageism, and it is also not based in fact.

Okay, I know what you are saying… people get old, and they slow down. They need more help. People have to watch over them. Each year, they get worse; it’s natural.

Most of you also probably believe there is nothing that can be done to stave off aging. Well, you are wrong.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recently published guidelines for adults over 65 when it comes to cardio and muscle strengthening. Each adult in this group should have two muscle strengthening workouts and also 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity cardio work. Your cardio can be a brisk walk, but the key is that you put in the time and effort, regardless of age.

So, who works out? In the age group 25-64, 27.3 percent of men meet their CDC guidelines, and 21.1 percent of women also meet their goal. Perhaps you are starting to see why over 40 percent of Americans are classified as obese. Maybe you can see why diabetes is so common.

Then maybe you retire at age 65. For the age group 65-74, 18.5 percent of men and 14.7 percent of women meet the CDC goal of healthy activity. Retirement actually gives you more time to focus on yourself, to center on your mental, spiritual, and physical health. Yet with these percentages, most have decided to look at other activities; or just maybe no activities at all.

Okay, then we have the 75-plus group and again, the numbers are disappointing…13.3 percent of men and just 7.9 percent of women meet the CDC guideline for healthy lives.

Yes, your body is older, not able to like your own weight, unable to lean, a tall building; but it is never too late to stop or put roadblocks in the way of the aging process.

The loss of muscle mass generally starts at age 30. It ramps up (or down) at 60, picks up speed at 70, and by the time we hit 80, we have lost about half the muscle mass we had in our early years. Yet research tells us that we can turn the around, even in our 90s.

Dr. Maria Fiatarone studied using resistance training with people over 90. After eight weeks of leg training, these participants increased their leg strength by an average of 174 percent. The circumference of the thigh increased by 9 percent. Even if you’re only 10 percent, you cannot lose muscle mass. These participants were able to stand up, walk on one leg, and carry groceries.

And if this happens at 90, think what could happen at 60, 70, or 80.

Now I know what many of you are saying, “I’ve never been in a gym; I wouldn’t know what to do.” I hear you, but there are people that can help. Personal trainers or your doctor may have people that can refer you to the basics. The R.O.S.E. Center in Paynesville offers activities. Even the CDC has a publication, “Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults.” Seek and ye shall find, and the benefits are great.

The CDC would tell you that muscle strengthening exercises help your blood pressure and blood sugar, they aid brain health, and help ward off depression. Lifting helps with bone density and pain; it improves your cholesterol and helps our help against heart disease. Working with weights also helps our metabolism, self-confidence, thinking, and learning skills. Yet what it can’t do is make us start the resistance training activity; we need to do that.

Physical activity is not a panacea, but it sure has a lot of upsides. While you are at it, drink more water. You need to stay hydrated, and beer doesn’t count. But fruits like watermelon, oranges, and berries do, so stock up. And, oh, by the way, drop the sugary beverages please.

Then your diet. Yup, same old menu. Lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grain, lean protein, and healthy fats.

Now is a great time to get fresh food from the farmer’s markets. Research also tells us that frozen fruits and vegetables are equally as good for us as fresh. Hey, you may want to live on the edge and add avocados and chia seeds to your yogurt. Dump the Doritos; pick up the Acai.

A team of researchers tracked 650,000 people. The people that exercised half of the CDC recommended 150 minutes added 1.8 years to their lives when compared to the inactive people. People that actually hit the recommended 150 minutes added 4.2 years versus the sedentary. Does it sound like regular exercise is worth it?

Last, but not in importance, diet and exercise can help you with your mental health. You can walk outside, sit on a bench and read, sit on the deck, and schedule your week of training. You can work in the yard, practice yoga or meditate in your garden, but take care of yourself. It is never too late to take care of ourselves. Start caring for your health today. You’ll be happy you did. Thank you.

Easy Chicken Marsala

INGREDIENTS
- 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
- 8 chicken cutlets or 4 chicken breasts, sliced in half (about 1.5 lbs)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 (8-ounce) package sliced mushrooms
- 1/3 c. chopped onion (about 1/2 small onion)
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/2 c. dry Marsala wine
- 3/4 c. chicken stock
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme, plus more for garnish

DIRECTIONS
- Step 1 - Place flour in a shallow bowl. Use a meat tenderizer or the bottom of a sturdy cup to pound chicken to about 1/4 inch thick. Season with salt and pepper. Dredge chicken in flour, turning to coat all sides. Heat oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Cook chicken in batches, turning once, until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a plate and tent to keep warm. Reserve skillet.
- Step 2 - Pour off oil from skillet. Melt butter in skillet over medium heat. Add mushroom and onions. Season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Add wine, stock, cream, and thyme. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 14 to 16 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Return chicken to pan and toss to coat. Serve immediately garnished with thyme.

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How to handle selling a home when moving into an assisted living facility

Families must make a number of important decisions when an aging relative decides the time is right to move into an assisted living facility. Such facilities help older individuals who are having troubling living independently. In addition to finding the right facility for a loved one, many families have to decide what to do with their aging loved one’s home.

Aging individuals with companions such as a spouse or a live-in partner may not need to sell their house if that person will not be moving to the assisted living facility with them. However, many partners choose to move as well, and family members may need to sell their current home in order to pay for their loved one to stay at an assisted living facility. The senior care experts at Caring.com note that selling a home when a loved one decides to move into an assisted living facility can present some emotional aspects that will not necessarily be present when selling one’s own home. In recognition of that and some additional difficulties associated with this unique situation, Caring.com offers the following tips to help families navigate the process as smoothly as possible.

- **Consider assigning someone power of attorney.** Individuals move into assisted living facilities for a number of reasons, so not everyone will do so because of diminishing cognitive abilities. However, Caring.com notes that selling the home of a loved one diagnosed with dementia can present unique challenges, as only a homeowner can transfer a home to a new owner. In such instances, someone may need to step in and assume power of attorney. Contact an elderly law attorney to facilitate that process, if necessary. Such professionals also can provide insight into laws that can help families determine if it’s best to sell the home or hold onto it if proceeds from a potential sale are not needed to pay for a facility. Arrange for power of attorney or even a guardianship prior to putting a home on the market.

- **Discuss the situation and the sale.** Aging individuals should be given ample time to process the idea of selling their homes before moving into an assisted living facility. Homeowners make untold sacrifices to buy and maintain their homes, so the decision to sell could elicit a range of emotions that aging individuals have a right to process before a “For Sale” sign is erected in the front yard. Caring.com recommends maintaining an open and honest dialogue about what can be achieved by selling the home and how their quality of life will benefit from moving to the assisted living facility.

- **Sort through belongings.** Caring.com notes the significance of allowing aging relatives to take special items with them into the assisted living facility. It will be impossible to take a lifetime’s worth of possessions into such a facility, but sort through belongings with your aging family member and decide on everything possible to ensure that especially meaningful items can make the move. Remaining items can be donated, sold, given to younger loved ones, or discarded.

- **Make sure all relevant parties remain in the loop.** If one person accepts power of attorney or a similar level of responsibility, that person should ensure all interested parties remain in the loop about the sale process. Aging adults without diminished mental faculties should be routinely updated on the sale process. Keeping all interested parties in the loop reduces the risk of objections or other problems when the sale is set to go through.

Selling a home before moving into an assisted living facility presents some unique challenges that families can tackle together to ensure the process goes smoothly.

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Potential dangers of mixing herbal and prescription medications

Medications improve the lives of billions of people across the globe every day. Without access to medication, millions may die while countless others would experience a dramatic decline in their quality of life.

Though there's no denying the positive effects of medication, the efficacy of herbal supplements and prescription drugs does not mean each are risk-free. Risks may even be compounded when individuals take herbal supplements and prescription medications concurrently. According to the Mayo Clinic, herbal supplements do not always interact well with prescription medications. For example, herbal supplements can interact with medicines utilized to treat issues affected the heart and blood vessels. That includes conditions like high blood pressure, which estimates from the World Health Organization indicate affects nearly 1.3 billion adults between the ages of 30 and 79.

Mixing medications has always been risky, but a growing reliance on herbal medicines has potentially elevated that risk. That's perhaps due to perceptions of herbal supplements as wholly natural, leading some to conclude that a substance that's wholly natural cannot jeopardize the human body. However, an analysis published in the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology detailed more than a dozen instances of adverse drug reactions affecting individuals who took herbal medicines alongside various prescription medications. The medications taken, some of which were antidepressants, were prescribed to treat various conditions, including HIV, epilepsy and heart disease.

The potential dangers of mixing herbal and prescription medications underscore the need to engage in honest and open discussions with a physician before taking any herbal or prescription medications. Individuals currently taking a prescription medication should consult with their physician before taking any herbal supplements, while those who take herbal medicines and supplements should bring that up with their physicians if they are prescribed a new medication.

What are some symptoms of herbal and prescription interactions?

The Mayo Clinic notes that a fast heartbeat and changes in blood pressure are two indicators of drug interactions. But many additional side effects can indicate a potentially dangerous or unhealthy interaction is taking place. For example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration notes that increased dryness or irritation of skin when taking more than one topical acne drug at the same time indicates an unhealthy interaction is taking place.

Herbal and prescription medication interactions can be dangerous. Individuals are urged to contact their physicians before combining medications and to bring up their existing medication regimen whenever they are issued a new prescription.

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Financial strategies that can help seniors grow their money

Investing is often portrayed as something people need not worry about after retirement. The theory that people should avoid risk as they approach and reach retirement age makes sense, as the unknown of investing can expose aging individuals to losses that compromise their ability to live comfortably on fixed incomes.

Though conventional wisdom regarding financial risk and aging still makes sense, the effects of inflation over the last year-plus have highlighted how important it can be for seniors to keep growing their money even after they retire. Fortunately, various strategies can help seniors grow their money without exposing them to considerable risk.

• Look into high-yield savings accounts. Interest on savings accounts was once a great way for individuals to grow their money, but interest rates on standard, no-minimum-balance accounts are now so low that the growth in interest is negligible. However, individuals with sizable savings, such as seniors, can explore high-yield savings accounts. High-yield savings accounts offer much higher interest rates than standard accounts. The rules governing eligibility to open such accounts differ between financial institutions, but many mandate that account holders have high minimum balances, typically in the neighborhood of $250,000. So long as account holders maintain that minimum balance, they can accrue penalty-free interest without exposing their money to the risks of the market.

• Consider other exclusive bank accounts. High-yield savings accounts are not the only way seniors’ banks may be able to help grow their money without necessarily taking on market-related risk. Products such as Chase Private Client CheckingsSM offer exclusive perks, including a dedicated client advisor who can work with seniors as they navigate life changes, including retirement.

• Consider low-risk investments. Risk aversion is not the same thing as risk avoidance. It’s wise for seniors to be averse to risk, but they can still consider low-risk investments like short-term bonds as a means to growing their money in retirement. Low-risk investments can be vulnerable to inflation, not unlike money sitting in a savings account. However, certain short-term bonds, such as Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities, are designed to mirror inflation, which makes them an option worthy of consideration for seniors who have been concerned by the ways inflation has affected their financial status in recent years.

According to the Department of the Treasury, the principal of a TIPS can go up or down over its term. When the bond reaches maturity, if the bond’s principal is higher than the original amount, bond holders get the increased amount. If the principal is lower at maturity, bond holders still get the original amount.

Seniors looking to grow their money after retirement can consider a host of options that can make them less vulnerable to inflation.

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