

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

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Liz Grossmann Rung and The Grossmann Family Farm

By Jill Gellerman

Editor's note: The Grossmann family will be honored at our rescheduled Honoring Traditions program on Sunday, March 28th at the Hillwood Commons Cinema Auditorium at C.W. Post. See "Honoring Traditions" article for more information and ticket order information.

Liz Grossmann Rung is a fourth-generation farmer, whose mission is to preserve the last working farm on the south shore of Nassau County. Grossmann's Farm is one of the three remaining "century" farms in Nassau County over 100 years old. The farm was founded by Liz's great-grandfather George Grossmann. The Grossmanns came to America from Busbach, Germany, a rural town in the Bavarian Alps where the Grossmanns had been farmers. They settled in Malverne, where they purchased over seven acres of land in 1895 and started to grow various crops. Once or twice a week farmer Grossmann harnessed up the horse drawn wagons and brought his produce, including potatoes, cabbage, peas, beans and spinach, to the Washington Market in Manhattan. Barbara Grossmann, Liz's ninety-year-old aunt and co-owner of the farm, tells the story of the family farm:

I grew up on this farm. I was born in the bedroom upstairs. We had pigs, a cow, horses, chickens and geese. We grew corn. There were no tractors then. That came later on. They worked the land with a hoe. Everything was done with a horse and machinery. We had five acres

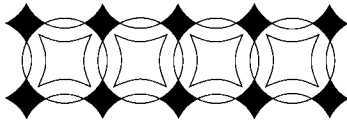
see Liz Grossmann Rung on page 3

Honoring Traditions

Due to the blizzard that struck Long Island on December 5-6, Long Island Traditions has rescheduled its annual awards program for Sunday, March 28, 2004. The program will take place at 2:00 PM, at the Hillwood Commons Cinema, C.W. Post College in Brookville. The event will feature performances and presentations by the Rathi Raja and The Young Indian Culture Group of Manhasset, Dominican composer and musician Luis Cordero of Freeport, Jewish activist and author Evelyn Pike Rubin of Plainview and Liz Grossmann Rung of the Grossmann Family Farm in Malverne. Journalist Pete Goodman of Newsday will be the program emcee. Tickets are \$15/person and \$25/couple with a discount of \$5 for Long Island Traditions members. For more information call us at (516) 767-8803. ■



The Grossmann Family Farm c. 1925. The Grossmanns will be honored at Honoring Traditions on March 28th.



Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

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Castaneda Colombian Harp Apprenticeship & Concert

Music continues to play an extremely important role in the lives of Colombian born harpist Pavelid Castaneda and his family. Over the years he and his family of 4 children have performed as the La Familla Castaneda, participating in many cultural events and concerts here on Long Island, New York City and beyond.

Now, master Llanera harpist Pavelid Castaneda and his elder son Edmar have begun a 14-week apprenticeship funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and coordinated by Long Island Traditions.

Pursuing a musical education degree from Five Points University, Edmar, is very much committed to continue learning about the harp and its role in keeping the traditional llanera rhythm alive. The focus of the apprenticeship will be to explore more advanced, complex uses of the harp in the llanero traditions. They have already begun learning the *quirpa* and later will proceed to the *carnaval*. Once these instrumental rhythms are established, Edmar will focus on learning how to accompany a vocalist within this context. Both father and son are also committed to writing their music down on paper (via the computer) so future generations will have access to this beautiful tradition.



On Sunday, March 14 at 2:00 PM, in the Long Island Museum of Art, History and Carriages in Stony Brook, La Familia Castaneda will be performing for the general public. Adding the accordion and guiro or guacharaca (scrapers), they will also play the more well known Colombian vallenato rhythms of cumbia, son, paseo, merengue and puya. A *poema* or poem, accompanied by music will also be presented. For more information on the concert call the LI Museum at (631) 751-0066 x214. ■

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that we farmed, fifteen acres that we worked on this side. We had twenty acres that we rented across the street. My father met my mother at a wedding of his sister. Within a short time they were engaged and married.

In 1923 the family opened a roadside farm stand at the corner of Hempstead and Ocean Avenues in Malverne, which has continually operated and sold homegrown fresh produce, homemade baked goods, and a variety of apples and plants. In time the stand moved into the barn, which now includes a country store. Liz's Aunt Barbara reminisces:

I used to be behind the counter there since I was ten years old. We started underneath the three maple trees on the side of the house along the path. We had three tables. My father's sister had a similar set up over on Eagle Avenue by the pond. All the summer crowd would come with their chauffeur and bring the entire family from the city to buy fresh produce. At that time we didn't have a lot of paper bags. We had burlap sacks. They would put the beets, carrots and corn in loose. We didn't have any scales. We'd say, 'Tante, what do you think?' She'd say, 'Put in another handful.' It would be wrapped in newspaper with string. All those packages would go in that burlap bag—not the corn or the potatoes. That all went in loose. And that was the way we began.

The Grossmann family witnessed the region's transition from a largely agrarian based economy to today's suburban landscape. To adjust to consumer demand, they also sell country crafts and specialty crops such as basil and a variety of lettuces, and greenhouse plants. According to Liz Grossmann Rung, this is the farm's 81st year in retail business. Corn and tomatoes are the main summer crops; that's what keeps the farm in business.

Even now, we are known for our corn, but we don't grow it here. We contract grow it in Manorville. My father drives out to Huntington. The contractor drives from Manorville into Huntington to meet him. He picks it up fresh every morning. We just don't have the property to grow it. The land is basically the same, except that now we are totally surrounded by traffic. We have two major roads on either side. The LIRR borders us in the back. We try to develop a niche, offering fresh produce-things that are just picked. You can't get the corn I have in the supermarket. The apples now are all fresh from upstate in the Hudson. We're open May through December. In the early spring, when local things aren't

available, we're closed.

The Grossmann Farm is a real family-run business, with every member of the family serving at the farm from their earliest years. Liz Grossmann Rung recalls:

As a child I would build forts and houses and things out of cardboard boxes and be up at the barn Gradually, I came in behind the counter to learn about the money and wait on people. My son, age seven, is doing that now. By the time I was twelve, I worked every summer on the farm, six days a week. I didn't go away. We took vacations in January. Once I went away to school, I thought college was a vacation.

My father needed somebody to help him. I was willing to experiment, to learn, to do. Now, I take care of all the seeding, all the ordering of all the different varieties that we're growing. He's there with me, but I'm the one that's doing that. When you're working for yourself, for your family, you don't mind putting the extra in. You have a personal stake in it. It's yours.

Liz and her husband Scott are in charge of the gift shop. Her Aunt Barbara began the flowers which Liz has developed into a large greenhouse operation. Her father George does the actual field planting and growing. Her mother Mildred does the bookkeeping. Her sister Barbara bakes special pies and breads which are very popular with the customers. George remembers, "Years back, you had a very nice family-type relationship with customers. A lot of our customers are seniors," Liz continues. "We have their children or grandchildren coming in as customers, and that's kind of a neat thing. People will come in and say, 'I used to come here when I was little and go see the chickens and rabbits. Do you still have them?' Other employees, currently about eight people, are mostly local and mainly related by marriage. To them, the farm represents their family's core existence and the preservation of an important Long Island landmark. ■



Ethnic Folk Arts in the Schools

As a result of an ongoing arts-in-education partnership between Long Island Traditions and the Freeport School District, LI Traditions has developed a series of ethnic folk arts programs, in addition to its ongoing maritime folk arts programs. This year 3 expert traditional artists are working with a select group in each of the district's elementary schools.

During the fall and winter, quilter Ina McNeil, a direct descendant of Chief Sitting Bull of the Lakota Sioux tribe of South Dakota, and longtime resident of Hempstead, shared her life history, art and Native American language with 4th graders. The students developed interview questions and wrote some outstanding short essays about what they learned from Ina.



Ina McNeil

Martha Cooper

Joan Hodges, a craft artist, quilter and doll maker, also from Hempstead is currently working with these same 4th graders. Like Ina, she is sharing her own life experiences and artistic pursuits with the children. She is structuring her program around some key elements of the African American experience such as migration, sharecropping, segregation and integration. Joan speaks with a quiet strength which engages all who are present in the classroom.

Theo Torres, a skilled Peruvian musician who now lives in Brentwood, will bring his rich cultural heritage during April - June. He has worked with students and teachers for many years, including participating in a Latino immigration unit, in which he shared his experiences with immigration and the effect it had on his music.

As part of our work with after-school arts in education programming Ian Jaspí, lead musician of the Trinidadian steel band, Steel Sensations has been

diligently working with students at Dodd Junior High and Atkinson Middle school in Freeport. They are learning how to play steel drums and the cultural history behind this instrument. In late May and early June the students will be participating in a culminating performance concert showcasing their new skills and talent.

For more information on these programs, and how they can be brought to your neighborhood schools, please call us at (516) 767-8803.



■ Theo Torres

Portuguese Music Program

Long Island Traditions and the Mineola Memorial Library will present a lecture-demonstration program about Portuguese traditional music and dance Saturday, April 24 at 2:00pm at the Mineola Memorial Library on 195 Marcellus Street in Mineola. This free event will feature performances by master concertina player Aventino Da Costa and his son Elvis who recently completed an apprenticeship funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and coordinated by Long Island Traditions. Portuguese dancers from the Mineola Portuguese Center will also demonstrate some of their skills.

Aventino Da Costa, originally from the Minho region of northern Portugal began playing the concertina (button accordion) at age 18. He has devoted close to 17 years playing this and other instruments with the Mineola Portuguese Center dance groups and has since taught his son to accompany him. During the past year Elvis spent 14 weeks learning new traditional songs and perfecting several songs on the concertina already in his repertoire. Elvis will show off his new skills at the program. For more information call the Mineola Library at (516) 746-8488. ■

West Meadow Beach

There have been many developments in the past few months. On Friday, March 26th the Advisory Board of the State Historic Preservation Office will be reviewing Long Island Traditions' national register nomination for the historic summer bungalows. The meeting will be held on Peebles Island near Albany. We expect the nomination to be approved, placing the cottages on the state and national registers of historic places. If you would like to have your voice heard, please send letters in support of the nomination to Commissioner Bernadette Castro, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, NY 12188.



Martha Cooper

Our new book, *West Meadow Beach* is out and available. You can buy it at the following locations: The Good Times Book Store at 130 E. Main Street, Port Jefferson and at the LI Museums in Stony Brook. You can also order it directly from Long Island Traditions by filling out the order form and sending along your check. ■

ORDER FORM

To order send your check payable to Long Island Traditions, 382 Main Street, Port Washington, NY 11050. Copies are \$15 each plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling of first copy, \$17.00 for each additional copy.

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Bay House Tours

On May 23rd, June 19th, and September 19th, Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual Bay House Tour in the Town of Hempstead. Don't miss these opportunities to visit these reminders of Long Island's nautical past that are still used today by the area's baymen. A comfortable passenger boat will leave from Freeport for the 1½ hour trips to the houses. Tours will depart at 10:30am and 12:30 pm. The tour will be led by LI Traditions director Nancy Solomon. Those on board will be treated to a brief history of the bay houses, the first of which were built in the 1700s. Bay houses were traditionally used by fishermen who harvested clams, oysters, crabs and other species from local waters. The surviving houses date from the period between 1870 and 1950. Each tour will visit two bay houses including the Magnus-Milek house. Their owners are renowned duck boat builders and decoy carvers. The boat will then proceed to other nearby bay houses.

For an excellent preview of the bay houses and their environs, visit the Long Island Marine Education Center, 202 Woodcleft Avenue (Nautical Mile) in Freeport, where a diorama by Jeff Blossom is on permanent exhibit. The center's number is (516) 771-0399. You can also buy or read at your local library *On The Bay* written by Nancy Solomon which documents the history of the bay houses in the Town of Hempstead. Copies can be purchased at the Sea Horse Gift Shop on Woodcleft Avenue in Freeport or by calling the Old Bethpage Gift Shop at (516) 572-8415. **Telephone reservations are required!** (sorry, but this trip cannot accommodate children under the age of 10.) Tickets cost \$25 per person and \$40 per couple. Members of Long Island Traditions will receive a \$5 discount. The tour is not suitable for those who have difficulty walking or climbing into small boats. For more information call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803. ■



EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of October, January and April.

March 14 Colombian harp program with The Castaneda Family. LI Museum. 208 Route 25A. Stony Brook. 2pm. Free with museum admission. Call 631-751-0066 for more information.

March 28 Honoring Traditions program (see accompanying article).

April 24 Portuguese Music Program. Mineola Public Library. 195 Marcellus Street, Mineola. 2pm. For more information call (516) 746-8488.

May 18 Bay House Tour (see accompanying article).

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