

FFNC HISTORY PRESENTATION

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(Shortened Version)



I've been asked to give you a little history about The Friendship Force. It's quite an interesting story, but I'll make it brief, because I want you to all stay awake.

In the middle of a distant land to the south, Brazil to be precise, and more than thirty-five years ago, an American fellow named Smith lived with his wife and 4 children. He saw tourists come and go, and heard them bragging about 'knowing' Brazil. But he had lived there for some years. Mr. Smith knew that one could not hope to know the country without knowing the people **and** understanding the culture.

After giving much thought to the problem of how people can get to "know a country", he came up with a plan. He eventually envisioned an organization that would enable ordinary citizens, people just like us, from the US and many other countries, to learn about each other through dinner table diplomacy. He envisioned travelers who were interested in faces, not just places. Travelers who could spend time with folks in the hosting country. Travelers who were open to new ideas, but who would learn as he had, that people's hopes, goals and concerns are the same everywhere.

Upon returning to the States, Wayne met and became friends with Jimmy Carter, who was running for Governor of Georgia. Wayne convinced Jimmy that an exchange between Brazilians and Georgians was feasible, and in 1973 the plan was enacted by sending 200 regular Americans to visit 200 Brazilians. At the same time, 200 Brazilians came to Georgia! Rosalynn Carter went to Brazil and was hosted in Pernambuco. Governor Carter stayed home at the Governor's mansion and hosted Brazilians.

Three years later, in July of 1976, Wayne Smith went to *by then* presidential candidate, Jimmy Carter, and explained his plan for a world-wide organization through which people could meet citizens of other countries around the world, to become friends. It was to be called, simply enough, The Friendship Force. Wayne explained that with the way the world was going, we needed a force for friendship. He believed each single person could make a difference, and that the original exchange of citizens between Georgia and Brazil would be the template. So he asked his friend, Jimmy, for a favor. He said, "When you become President, will you help me start The Friendship Force?" Mr. Carter demurred, saying, "You mean **if** I become President." Wayne responded, "No, I do mean **when** you become President." In the face of such a positive outlook, Jimmy Carter replied in the affirmative.

On March 17, 1977 a couple of months after being sworn in, President Carter, true to his word, asked for each State Governor to appoint someone to institute a chapter of The Friendship Force in his respective state. As he met with foreign heads of state, he made the same request. What a success story! The

first true Friendship Force exchange was in 1977, between Atlanta, Georgia and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. It was 381 Georgians who left on a charter flight to England, and 381 English people who got on the same plane the next day, headed for Georgia. The exchange lasted 10 days.

Since 1977, The Friendship Force has grown to 60 countries and has been responsible for bringing together millions of people worldwide.

Our own Northern Colorado club started in 1986 and there are a few of us charter members still around. We have made great friendships, and have had the most wonderful fun hosting and representing our country as we traveled to meet folks in other lands and had the privilege to host them here. The Friendship Force is now in 60 countries around the world, and our local group has either hosted or been ambassadors to quite a number of them. I'm here to tell you, those friendships made over the course of a week's home stay really last. Our home always feels empty when our new friends leave, and we always want to see them again.

Through the years, The Friendship Force has been given US Department of State approval to take ambassadors to Cuba, we've taken humanitarian aid to developing countries, and Friendship Force has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

There are several types of exchanges of varying lengths:

- club exchanges, usually for one week of home stay, often followed by touring
- all-USA & all-World discovery exchanges, the type I usually lead, with very short home stays of 2 to 3 nights, and a tour of a particular country, lasting a total of 2 weeks
- missions, when we stay in hotels, but meet and eat with families; special interest, for weavers or bowlers to visit like-minded folks in another country
- mystery exchanges, before you sign up and pay your deposit, you don't know where you're going
- teachers' exchanges, for our educators to visit other educators.

We no longer send large numbers of people at one time on exchanges. The typical club exchange is 21 to 25 people. All-USA exchanges can be between 14 and 30, but are typically about 20, also.

Another thing about The Friendship Force is the number of ways to make friends. Sure, foreign exchanges were the original focus, but we now have domestic exchanges within the US. One can participate with FF by visiting abroad without hosting, or one can host without traveling. You are always welcome to take part in exchange activities whether you are hosting or not. Or just become a member to make friends locally, and enjoy our monthly educational programs about other cultures. We're a pretty convivial bunch!

Despite the fact that it was the Reverend Wayne Smith, a Presbyterian minister, who founded our organization, and despite the fact that an elected president helped to give it a good start, three no-no's in TFF, per Wayne Smith, are: no pro'selytizing of religion, no partisan politics, and no commercialism. These topics can be discussed, but the focus should not be on buying and selling, or changing a person's religion or political party.

Friendship Force is not for everyone. But it is for those who want to really learn about other people. To see each country, not just at face value, but through their host's, or ambassador's eyes. Paul Jones* is quoted as saying, "...friendship is not an opportunity, but a sweet responsibility." Well, I personally disagree. I think friendship **is** a great opportunity, **and** a sweet responsibility. But either way, I do believe it is up to us to practice our "dinner table diplomacy", to dispel the myth of the Ugly American, and to show the world that we are normal, friendly people.

And there you have it. The story of how an ordinary US citizen put into action the **extraordinary** idea of how people around the world could get to know each other and become friends.

Thank you for your kind attention.