

It was a great weekend with a mix of Canucks, Aussies and Yanks. And although we came together from different countries, we all spoke the same language and shared a common interest in the same bride and groom.

My uncle went to the land down under many decades ago when they needed an engineer to help develop irrigation in Australia. He met a special Aussie there and planted roots in a land that would become home for the rest of his life.

Uncle Bob and Aunt Gail raised their family in Australia. It was always a treat for us when they would take that overseas venture to the U.S. where we got exposure to their fascinating accent and learned terminology that was different from our form of English.

Decades later, Rob, the oldest of my three Australian cousins, put his computer mind to work in the United States, making this home for him in his adult life.

His new bride, Angela, also chose the U.S. for her teaching career, venturing from her homeland in Canada. They found each other and gave us all reason to come together in Colorado to meet people from across the globe at an event of celebration.

Covering the wall behind the head table at the reception were three flags—Canadian, American and Australian. As we mingled, I couldn't help but think how there was no language barrier, where in Europe, there are so many different languages within each country.

I recall looking for information on European languages once to find more than 50.

Despite the common language, there were still interpreters at the ceremony and reception. It was fascinating to watch them present a beautiful story in sign language.

The bride has hearing loss herself and works with deaf children. Some of her deaf friends were present. It opened my eyes to situations such as two deaf parents communicating with a hearing child.

I've seen how effective sign language can be for infants who learn to communicate their needs, but I hadn't ever thought of an infant learning sign language as the primary language in the home. They obviously need exposure to the outside world to learn to speak, but they can "speak" in sign with their parents quite early.

I'm always amazed at interpreters and how sharp they have to be. I think back to the days when I studied shorthand and how challenging and stressful a three-minute dictation could be. And I didn't have to translate it until returning to the typewriter after the dictation was finished.

To interpret in sign language, the signer has to tell the story at the same time she's listening to the continued conversation. Now that's called giving the mind a good workout. No wonder there were two interpreters who switched off.

I hadn't seen my cousin, Leanne, for 13 years when she was a teenager. She married an Aussie since her last trip to the states and is mother to four beautiful children. Pictures of her daughter show a replica of her as a child.

Like our grandfather, she is a great storyteller and her accent adds a delightful spark. It was such a joy to connect in person once again as it was to reunite with other California and Colorado relatives. I have a Colorado cousin whose daughter joined us with her husband from Africa, bringing representation from yet another continent.

People make the world go 'round. Whether we live in separate countries or whether we speak with our voices or our hands, we all have personalities to share and connect.

It's a small world after all.

LORI PANKONIN is co-publisher of Johnson Publications newspapers in Imperial, Wauneta and Grant, and part-owner of the Holyoke Enterprise in Holyoke, Colo. E-mail: ljpank@chase3000.com