

PeerView



Peer Learning Partnership at AACCC – Member Profile – Spring 2009

Jim K. Don

By Angela Smookler

Enterprising and engaging, Jim Don began collecting life experiences from a very young age. Born in London in the year of Edward VIII's assumption and abdication of the English throne, Don had a privileged upbringing.

His father, Kaye Don, served in England's Army and Royal Flying Corps in WWI. A motorcycle racer before the war, he began car racing in 1920 and became the British Motor Racing Champion in 1928 and 1929. Don's father also held several World Water Speed Records in the 1930s and received the International Motor Yachting Union Medal.

As WWII erupted in England, Kaye Don sent the family to live with grandparents in Greenwich, Connecticut. By then, Jim's father operated two car dealerships and two motorcycle factories. To support the war effort he turned one of these factories into a small arms munitions plant. By the 1940s, Kaye Don was Chairman and Managing Director of U.S. Concessionaires, Ltd., and the Ambassador Motorcycle Company.

With the war winding down in 1944, 8-year old Jim sailed back to London with his mother and sister. "I remember the convoy accompanying us across the Atlantic. It all seemed so strange to go back to England."

Don's studies had begun in Greenwich at the Brunswick School. Back in London, he attended day school and then boarded at Feltonfleet where he excelled in academics and sports, especially cricket and soccer.

Separated by war for over four years, his parents' marriage deteriorated, and in 1947, Don was again en route across the Atlantic with his mother and sister. They settled at North Tor, his grandparents' 34-acre Greenwich estate.



Jim Don

In Connecticut Don attended the Choate School, shining scholastically and integrating soccer, squash and baseball into his schedule. Skipping two grades at Choate, Don received a full, two-year, Ford Foundation scholarship and attended Yale University.

Two years into his political science studies at Yale, Don decided to travel around Europe for the summer. "I was on the Lido beach in Venice in 1954 when I saw the most fantastically beautiful woman." His transatlantic courtship with Margaret Gray would last two years. "Three weeks after my graduation from Yale we were married."

During the summer after his first year at Yale Law School, Don had an opportunity to experience the west as a wrangler at the Snake River Ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Completing his second year, Don thought that he, his wife and baby daughter Hilary should spend one year in Europe before finishing his final year at Yale and embarking on a legal career.

Setting out for Europe to look for job opportunities, he accepted a training position for an overseas career in finance with Shell International Petroleum in London. "Shell was a wonderful company and I decided not to return to law school. After a year in London they offered me a position in Kenya. I looked on it as a great adventure!"

Don's first African adventure would last two years with a son, Andrew, being born in Nairobi. Fluent in French with a little Swahili under his belt, Shell sent him to Zaire for four years as treasurer of Shell's marketing company, where his second daughter, Sophie, was born. During his two years in Algeria as controller of Shell's Algerian company, a second son, Timothy, was born.

With four children now in tow, Don returned to the United States, accepting a finance position with IBM World Trade in New York where he evaluated computer leasing opportunities in Europe. He would continue his forays in computer leasing with executive positions at Bradford National Corporation in New York, and later in Bethesda with Leasco Response, where he served as Director of Finance and Administration and Director of National Franchising Operations. A third daughter, Jennifer, was born.

Four years later, he assumed a series of high-profile positions at psychiatric hospital management companies, first in Washington, DC, and then in Nashville, where, as president of HCA Psychiatric Company, he directed 55 psychiatric and substance abuse facilities and oversaw 8,000 employees nationwide. Several associations appointed him a member of their boards of trustees, and two of these selected him as secretary of their executive committees.

Returning to the Washington area, Don founded American Day Treatment Centers in Annapolis with 26 facilities in seven states. In 1995 the State of Maryland awarded him Health Care Entrepreneur of the Year. He continued working in health care, retiring in 2003, but consulting part-time until 2005. "I retired to spend more time with my family. I

wanted to be involved in a lot of interesting activities."

Not missing a beat, Don assumed presidency of his community association. Ginger Cove appointed him treasurer and a member of their board of directors. He attended continuing education classes at AACC and the senior centers, stepped up traveling domestically and abroad, and expanded his activities with Yale alumni.

Joining the Peer Learning Partnership (PLP) in 2004, Don's strong leadership skills made him a natural for treasurer and chairman of the Marketing and Public Relations, Nominating, and Long Range Planning Committees. "I'm attracted to the PLP because of the classes, the enthusiastic facilitators, and the interesting people."

Sharing his knowledge of Africa and Antarctica, Don has facilitated five classes thus far: African Independence Movements; South Africa: An Overview; South Africa: An Emerging Superpower (to be repeated in the fall of 2009); Africa Emergent: The Path to Independence; and Explorers of the Antarctic: Triumph and Tragedy.

An opera buff, Don regularly attends the Washington Opera as well as the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Shakespeare Theater. Added to the mix is his deep love of sports, especially baseball. "One of my goals is to attend every major league baseball stadium in the country."

Retirement for this man for all seasons is an adventure he relishes with gusto. And if by chance some warm, sunny day you see a powerboat whizzing along the South River, towing a tentative youngster on skis, it will probably be this Renaissance man teaching one of his eleven grandchildren how to water ski.
