

The Road to International

Good Morning. I hated history when I was in school. I actually hated all subjects, and still hate math. For me, doing math is like watching a foreign movie without subtitles.

But history.... I have come to appreciate history. I have come to love history. So, if you will allow me, I'd like to share a little history with you.

I joined Lions when I was just 20 years old. I'll tell you that story in a bit.

But being in this wonderful organization for that long, I've met, gotten to know, and come to love many outstanding Lions. I feel I take a little piece of each Lion that guides me, I store it away and it becomes part of who I am. As these leaders and mentors, icons and legends began to disappear, I found myself sad that newer Lions didn't have the opportunities that I had to learn from these fascinating, service minded men and women. So, I have been on a bit of a mission these past few years to do my part to keep them in our memories.

I'd like to play for you a little history now about the Lions who have gone before us and taken their service to a next level, that of International service.

PLAY VIDEO

I served as Governor in 1988 – 89. The District then, was 30-N, one of 4 in Mississippi, having just downsized from 5. I served with 4

unbelievable Lions and their spouses. Jack McCart, 30-L, whose wife Ann is in the Mississippi Lions Hall of Fame. Tom Gregory, 30-I, Hall of Fame, Turner Trapp, 30-O, Hall of Fame; and our Council Chair, Howard Jenkins, Hall of Fame and eventual International Director.

What an honor it was to serve with not only these individuals, but with many others. PID Tommy King was my Deputy District Governor, the term used back then, which is now 1st Vice District Governor. I like to tell people that I taught Lion Tommy everything he knew. (laugh).

For years after, Lions would fondly remember some of the happenings of our term, especially our Midwinter convention. That is what determines your place in history, what people remember, how they remember and if they enjoy those memories. In the years to follow, as those memories would be discussed, the subject of international service would come up. I would always shy away from the conversation because it was one of those commitments that I felt you needed to be married, independently wealthy, retired, and be a bit of a politician to achieve. I am none of those. I worked on campaigns for Buster Crider, Pat Patterson, Tommy King and Howard Jenkins. I didn't see it at the time, but they proved you didn't have to be wealthy, retired or political, you just had to want to serve.

The thought of serving at the International level still wasn't comprehensible to me. My time had passed. I moved on to the Sight Foundation and am still proud to this day, that our year as White Cane

Chair, we had the single largest increase in donations in the foundation's history, exceeding our budgeted goal by over \$15,000, a record that still stands today. Years later, thanks to John Wagener from Kosciusko, I became an officer with Mid-South Lions Sight and Hearing Service, eventually serving as President. My term as President was nothing spectacular due to Hurricane Katrina wiping us out just before I took office and thus my time and focus was split for several years to come. I always wanted a second term as District Governor, because I enjoyed the heck out of it. I also have wanted a second term as President of Mid-South, not only because of the enjoyment, but also because I believe I could have done better, much better.

Maybe now is a good time to go back to when I joined Lions. Why I am, where I am, and who I am.

Many of you have heard this story, so please indulge me as I tell it again. It was Saturday morning, March 1, 1975. My dad was driving me to the Edgewater mall about 7 am for the March of Dimes Walk-a-thon. We were talking about the pledges I had gotten for the walk. There weren't many. I wasn't walking to raise money. I was walking because there were a couple of cute girls that I wanted to spend time with. That walk from Edgewater to the lighthouse and back took several hours, at least the way we walked it, it did.

When my dad heard how little I had raised, he said to put him down for \$1.00 a mile. Back then, 5 cents a mile was an exceptionally good

pledge, and here he was giving a dollar. Anyway, we arrived at the parking lot and I said Goodbye and my mind went back to the girls. We walked from Edgewater to the Lighthouse and back to the mall. It was one of the best Saturday mornings of my life.

Now, I'm sure you're wondering how I can remember the time, day and place that such an insignificant thing happened. It's because I played that day back in my head over and over for many days, weeks, months and years to follow, because you see, my Dad never made good on his pledge. That night around midnight, my dad died. I was 14 years old.

Now, when something that major happens in a kid's life, things can go 2 ways. You can become bitter and give up or you can be inspired to higher aspirations. The people around you help formulate your direction. I watched my fantastic mother step up and take on everything my Dad was involved in. She took over the family business and the strength she showed through the years continues to inspire me today.

Dad was the best. He always found time for me. We took family tennis lessons. We had season tickets every year to the Biloxi High football games. He took me on business trips, started taking me deep sea fishing with his Lions buddies, when I was only 11 years old. Taught me how to drive when I was 12, even bought us a small boat to run around the bay in, and he'd kick me in the butt anytime he caught me being disrespectful. He was the best kind of Dad.

And now he was gone. But he left me with an amazing example to live by ... and his friends.... His wonderful friends, each stepped in, in some way, and continued to provide direction and inspiration for me.

One of those friends was John Collins. Lion John Collins.

Lion John, for the next 6 summers, would make sure I made at least one fishing trip with the infamous 'NOWS'. Never on Wednesday Lions Fishing group. Why Never on Wednesday? Because they did it once, missed the weekly meeting and never heard the end of it.

It seems so minor, taking a kid on a charter fishing trip once a year.....

How could that possibly affect a life. Well, after those 6 summers, I had graduated college and Lion John came walking into our family business and said it's time. Time for what? Time you joined Lions. I wasn't given the option of saying no and didn't want to. I already felt like I was part of the family, because all those guys on those fishing trips were all members of the Biloxi Lions. I was by far the youngest member of our club and 75th in seniority when I joined. I jumped right in. Was President 3 years after joining and District Governor 3 years after that, at the tender age of 27.

All because my Dad's Lions family wanted to keep his history alive in the Biloxi Lions.

Today, I am 4th in seniority. Those 71 Lions who aren't there anymore have a history of their own to be remembered. The hundreds that have

come after also deserve to be remembered. As was said in the play HAMILTON, who will tell their story?

I believe we each tell the stories of those who came before us by simply living the life they helped shape, to the fullest extent we can.

A year ago, at the Midwinter for 30-S in Hattiesburg, Director Jay Moughon pulled me aside and asked if I knew PID Jerome Thompson. He wanted to know if I had ever considered being an international director. My answer was simple, that question was posed many times before and no, I never seriously considered it as a possibility. As we spoke, I'm hearing voices that seemed to be all those Lions before me asking, "What the Hell?"

Over the next few weeks, I pondered the thought and talked with Howard Jenkins, among others. The support and encouragement I got from all, was mind boggling. I called Howard back and said 'Let's go'. He didn't waste any time. He called me back within 15 minutes and said, PIP Frank Moore wants to talk to you.

It wasn't 'When you get time'.... It was 'he's waiting on your call'. I called PIP Moore and we had a good talk. He asked me to send him some info and explained the process to me. Since we had already missed the Midwinter's, it would be a year before we could actually start. That gave me 12 months to wonder, am I up to this? Well, I'm still here.

This past January, I was honored to receive unanimous endorsements from both 30-S and 30-M. Now I ask for the endorsement of the Multiple. There aren't any guarantees that I will attain the office. But my resolve to try is stronger than ever because my biggest supporter isn't going to be here to see it. For the first time in my 43 years as a Lion, Mississippi does not have a member who sits or sat on the International Board. It has been 20 years since we last elected an International Director. But boy was it a good one. Lion Howard Jenkins served us admirably for those 20 years and filling his shoes is not something I take lightly. Over the past 12 months, I have tried to make it known that if someone else wants to do this or feels more qualified, I will step aside. I am not looking to do this for me. I am doing this for Mississippi and I am happy to support the best candidate possible to represent Mississippi the best way possible.

But if you do think I am that Lion, then I ask that you not only vote for my endorsement, but if I am endorsed, please join the team to help Mississippi regain representation. I have asked PCC James Wilkerson to chair the campaign and Lions Tony Nettles, Jerry Lightsey, Richie Dickson and Elijah Mitchell, among many others to serve on the committee. We have a website set up for information and sign up. We made it as simple as possible: ID4MS.org. If you want to see the video again, it's on the site. We also have a dedicated email address:

ID4Mississippi@gmail.com

We will need voices spreading our story, we will need funds as any campaign does. We will need encouragement and support to keep the faith. Please volunteer in whatever capacity you can. This could potentially be a 3-year journey just to get elected. It will take commitment of us all for the long term, but I promise you this. If you make that commitment. If you work the campaign, if you help raise and donate funds for the campaign, I will do everything in my power and use every last ounce of energy to live up to the legacy of the Lions you saw on that video, Lions like Pat Patterson, Tommy King and most especially, Howard Jenkins.

This isn't Lion Greg wanting to be an International Director. This is Mississippi shouting that we are here and we are strong!