

GERALD LEECH HISTORY—2005 to 2009

Dear fellow classmates. It is so nice to be thinking about our 50th Class reunion. I think that it is an accomplishment that we have lived this long. I would like to relate a story along this line. During the dinner in our 45th Reunion, I was talking with David Ower, and someone from the organizing committee was talking about the 50th reunion. David commented something like “I wonder how many of us will be here (alive) to attend the 50th?” I answered something like “I hope we both make it”

When I received the newsletter mentioning his death, I was shocked and very sad. Honestly, I sat down and cried because I was so sad that he didn't make it. That's why I say, it's a blessing just to be alive for the event.

I have organized my report into several sections: Health Issues; Family Happenings and Accomplishments; and Business Events.

HEALTH ISSUES

As we move through life, it seems that the older we get the more concerned we are with health issues and just trying to stay alive. At least that has been my experience so far.

During 2004 and 2005, I was suffering from sever depression. Due to the medicine I was taking to prevent panic attacks, I became a zombie, a person that wasn't really alive. Except for working 2 or 3 hours a day, and eating I was in bed sleeping or trying to sleep. Depression is the worst disease I have ever experienced, and I feel that I lost 2 years of my life. Fortunately, at end of 2005 I came out of the depression.

At the end of 2005, we went to spend New Years with our daughter, Paula, in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. (Playa is 1 hour by car south of Cancun and is part of the Rivera Maya) On January 3, 2006, at about 4 pm, I was sitting on the beach relaxing, watching the water and the pretty girls in their tongas and all of a sudden I felt a sharp pain in my chest. The pain kept getting stronger and stronger, and I thought “Oh my God, I am having a heart attack!! “ As the pain got stronger and started to move down my arm, I thought that I was leaving this earth. I started to pray and ask God to leave me on this earth for my work wasn't done, it wasn't my time.

After about 15 minutes, the pain went away. I called my two daughters, Silvia and Jenny, who were on other parts of the beach and explained what happened and asked them not to leave me alone. After about 15 minutes, I went to the reception of the hotel and they called their emergency doctor. He came and examined me and said that I didn't have any symptoms of having had a heart attack and that he thought I had angina. He gave me the indications of how to take care of myself for the rest of the vacation and some glycerin tablets in case I had more pain. We spent one more week in Playa and then returned to Guatemala.

After returning to Guatemala, I started 5 weeks of tests to determine if I had had a heart attack or not. The last test was a stress test with nuclear medicine, and it was conclusive. The day I picked up the results of the test, I had put my wife Maria Elena

on a plane to attend the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show for 10 days. In the afternoon, I picked up the results and took them to my family doctor. He opened the envelope and read the results and then said, "Well, Jerry, you did have a heart attack, and you are lucky to be alive." I was in a state of shock, and said "what next?" The doctor set me up with a cardiologist whom I met two days later.

The cardiologist explained that my results indicated that I had one artery completely closed and up to 3 or 4 partially closed, and that about one half of my heart wall was dead.. I asked what to do, and he said that I needed an angioplasty procedure to open the arteries to get the blood flowing and try to save the heart wall.

Ten days later, my wife returned the day before, I went into the hospital for the angioplasty. In the operating room, they asked me if I wanted to be asleep or awake, and I said awake, I wanted to see everything. They put in the catheter and then injected a dye to better see the heart, arteries, and blood flow.

Then the doctor said to me, "Mr. Leech, I don't think that I have to do anything to you, for I find your heart and arteries in perfectly good condition". I exclaimed "WHAT!! He said "your heart and arteries are in good condition." I said "Well, since we are in here, please take a real good look at everything." He said," OK, give me few minutes." A little later he said, "Mr. Leech, I found one artery that is beginning to close, and we can open it up and put in a stent." I said" Ok." Ten minutes later he said, take a look in the monitor and I could see the before and after of the artery. The doctor then said, "I'm sending you to intensive care, not for your heart, for it is perfectly good, but for where we put in the catheter, for we have to be careful for you can bleed to death.

That night the doctor came to check me over, and he said" Mr. Leech, before we went into the operating room I was 99.9% sure I would find your heart in such bad condition I would sent you to Miami for a bypass. Why? Your exam results indicated that your heart was in terrible condition, you have been a diabetic for 26 years, and you have a family history of heart problems". (My father, my grandfather, and all my aunts and uncles on my fathers side died of heart problems). I said, "Doctor, do you believe in miracles?" He said "Yes, I do." I said, "Well, I am your miracle for today!! Many people prayed for me, and I prayed for me, and God healed my heart." Well, fellow classmates, that's my testimony of how God healed my heart. I am a walking miracle of God.

In Oct., 2006, I had hypoglycemia, low blood sugar, and it almost killed me. I had been in the hospital for 3 days with colon problems, and when I came out, I was not eating normally, but I was taking my normal amount of diabetes medicine. Since in my 26 years of being a diabetic at that time, I had not experienced hypoglycemia , I did not recognize the symptoms. Thursday night I experienced light headiness and during the night I woke up in a drenching sweat, so much so that I had to change the bed clothing..

The next morning, I got up and took my normal diabetes medicine and then took a shower. After the shower, I was in the bathroom shaving, and I felt like I was going crazy, it was very strange. A couple of minutes later, I lost the strength in my legs and fell to the floor. Then I shouted for help. A few minutes later my wife, Maria Elena, and my daughter Silvia came to the bathroom and found me sitting on the floor acting in a very crazy, strange manner.

They got me up and into the bedroom and onto our bed. When they got me to my feet, I went into another world of hallucinations. They called 5 or 6 doctors, and no one was available to come and see me. Since I had never experienced hypoglycemia, I had never discussed its symptoms or what to do for it with my family, so they didn't know what was wrong.

Maria Elena, my wife, called her best friend, and her sister, who is a nurse, said to test my sugar, which they did. The normal range of sugar is 70 to 110, mine tested out at 36. My wife was eventually able to get an ambulance service to come, and when they arrived, my sugar level was 26. I am told that 20 and below is coma and death. Had the ambulance been a few minutes later in arriving, I would not be writing about it today.

When I woke up, I had an intervenus in my arm, and my wife was giving me instant glucose in my mouth. When my sugar level got up to about 50, I went in the ambulance to the hospital for a check up. They gave me a regular Coke and some food, and afterwards, I went to a Chinese restaurant for a big meal with lots of carbohydrates to bring my sugar level back up. After a couple of days of rest I was back to work as if nothing had happened. I must say that I was lucky to survive that one.

In Oct., 2007, I fell down and broke a rib which was painful, but not life threatening.

Since that time, except for a few problems with the colon (Diverticulitis), I have been in good health.

I must say that almost dying twice in 2006 has made me reevaluate my life, and I give thanks every day to God for being alive. Being alive is being ahead of the game, and everything else is a blessing!!!

Well, that's it for health issues, now on to...

FAMILY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & HAPPENINGS

In May of 2006, our daughter, Silvia Maria, graduated from university with a bachelors degree in Marketing with an emphasis in Publicity. She went to work for a chain of retail clothing stores for a month but that didn't work out. After that, she moved back home with us in Antigua and started working with us in our jewelry business, Casa del Jade.

In 2007, Silvia won one of three scholarships given each year to Guatemalan students to study in Japan. On Sept 14, 2008 she left for Japan to study for her MBA in Asian Pacific University. She is studying in the city of Bepu on the island of Kyushu which is the southern most island of Japan. She is about 2 hours south by air from Tokio.

In her MBA program, there are 220 students, and 200 are non Japanese. Of the 200 non Japanese, there are 88 different countries represented—it's a mini UN. Silvia is making friends with people from all over the world.

After each semester, there are 2 month breaks, so we have told Silvia to take advantage of being there and travel Asia. In Feb., 2009, she was in Vietnam, and in March in Thailand. In August, she was in South Korea, China, and Thailand. In Sept. she came home to visit with us. For Feb., and March this year, she visited Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Bali, Cambodia and Singapore. The beauty of her trips is that most of the time she stays in the homes of fellow students.

She will be graduating on Sept. 10, 2010, and we are planning to attend her graduation with our daughter, Jenny. We are planning to take a month vacation for the graduation so that we can see some of Japan, China, Thailand, and Bali.

After graduation, Silvia may go on to study fashion design and jewelry design, for she has a lot of design talent. If she doesn't continue to study immediately, we hope that she can find a position as an apprentice in a major jewelry company like Cartier, Tiffany, etc so that when she comes to work for us she will have work experience.

Our daughter Jennifer finished her course work in November, 2008 and graduated in May, 2009 as an Industrial Engineer. She graduated Magna Cum Laude and was No. 1 in her graduating class. Upon finishing her course work, she started to work with us full time here at Casa del Jade. She is our special projects manager, and for the last two years has been in charge of implementing a bar code system for our inventory control and invoicing. She has had to create the data base for the program, and she tells me that we have 24,000 items in the data base. It took about 1 ½ years to create the data base. This month, April, we will be ready to start using the system for invoicing our sales. Jenny is also in charge of marketing and publicity and has been doing a great job.

Jenny plans to work till the end of this year with us and then go on for her MBA as well. Right now she is preparing her paperwork to apply for a scholarship in New Zealand.

Our daughter Paula has been working in Playa del Carmen, Mexico (one hour South of Cancun) for 4 years for a small, boutique hotel, the Blue Parrot, as an event and wedding planner. She has found her niche, for she loves her work, and she is very good at it. She is planning to get married November 13, and in another year or so become an independent wedding planner so she can work from home and start her family.

My older daughter, Laura has been divorced since 2004 and has been working in Marketing and Sales positions. In Sept. 2008, she lost her job and called and said she would like to visit us here in Guatemala for a few months and work with us in Casa del Jade. Since she was 5 years old when I came to Guatemala 35 years ago, I said come on down for it will give us a good chance to know one another. She arrived on Nov. 12, 2008 and stayed till May 23, 2009. It was a good time for us to get reacquainted again. After returning to the US, it took her 6 months to find a job, so she has had a very tough time.

My son, Jerry, now 44 has had a very tough time these last few years. Since the computer industry implosion in 2001, he has worked less than half the time and went through bankruptcy in 2004. In 2007, he separated from his wife and 4 kids and entered into divorce proceedings which are still ongoing. He has given up on the computer industry and in August, 2009 began studying to be a Psychologist.

In the separation with his wife, his eldest daughter, Samantha, went to live with him. Since he was in such bad shape, we invited Samantha to come live with us, and she came to live with us on Feb. 12, 2008 and stayed till late March, 2009.

Having a grand daughter whom we hardly knew come to live with us for over a year was a very interesting experience for us. She was a very sweet girl, but had many problems due to the divorce and a poor upbringing. It was a very difficult period of adaptation for all of, but when Samantha left, we all felt that it had been a worthwhile experience and that we had been able to help Samantha move forward in life.

In July, 2007, I was asked to join a Rotary Club in Guatemala City, Club Rotario Guatemala de la Asuncion. For me it is an honor to be a Rotarian. Our club is very active with a number of high impact projects. As I begin to reduce my work load, I hope to participate more in the Rotary projects.

My wife Maria Elena keeps very busy working almost full time at our jewelry store as well as offering free walking tours of Antigua to humanitarian groups that visit Antigua. She has also been very active in a womens Christian ministry for about fourteen years. The ministry helps about 600 women. She also runs a wonderful household and takes very good care of our two daughters and me.

On April 7, 2009, my wife Maria Elena and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. We celebrated with a renovation of our vows in April---with a very nice ceremony in a beautiful hotel garden, and afterwards a lunch with about 50 of our friends. We had great food, live music for dancing, and our girls put together a very nice slide show of photos of our 25 years of marriage.

One of our biggest accomplishments is that during April, 2010, we will finish construction of the first and last house I will ever build. We have been living and renting our current house for the last 27 years. We always had the idea that we would buy it, but for many years the landlady wasn't interested in selling.

In Dec. 2005, she finally said that she was interested in selling. We asked the price, and although it was a fair price, it was a lot more than we had planned to pay. We decided to check out our alternatives, and we spent a little more than a year looking at lots all around Antigua. In January, 2007 we purchased the lot where we are building.

We worked for 1 year and 3 months with an architect that just didn't get what we wanted. We fired him and found a brilliant architect who in 3 months got our ideas, and we started construction in June, 2008.

We have a nice lot, about 13,000 sq. ft. with a wonderful view of all three volcanos that surround Antigua. We are building three structures, the main house, a guest house, and a store house. The three structures total about 6,000 sq. ft.

All the windows on the front of the house have a wonderful view of the three volcanos, and all the windows at back of the house have a view of a beautiful wooded mountain. We have a lagoon and a large garden in front of the house. It is a very beautiful house

with many special features. We moved into the house on May 15, and are still getting settled in.

BUSINESS EVENTS AND AC COMPLISHMENTS

On July 9, 2007, La Casa del Jade, our jade jewelry store, celebrated 30 years of doing business. To celebrate, in July we had a cocktail party at the store for our friends and good clients. We had approx. 250 guests for the evening who were served wine, rum, and scotch along with a plentiful amount of hor dourves. We had live music for listening and a nice program with a raffle, a short oral history of the store, and singing. A great time was had by all.

In Sept, we had a lunch for about 80 of our top tour guides. Since we are a tourist business, about half our clients are brought to us by our guides. At the lunch, we had a very good dance band, great food, and we raffeled off 30,000 Quetzales (our local currency) The guides had received raffle tickets on their store visits during the previous year. All in all, a good time was had by all

Our third celebration was for our staff. We normally close only 2 days a year, Christmas and New Year, but at the end of Sept, 2007, we closed 1 ½ days so we could take all of our staff to a very nice, all inclusive, beach resort in El Salvador called De Cameron.

We left Antigua about 4 in the afternoon and arrived at De Cameron about 8 in the evening at which time we registered and then had a beautiful seafood & steak buffet dinner. After dinner there was entertainment by a dance company, and after that disco dancing to the wee hours of the morning.

The next day most of us were around the swimming pool for the morning. We had a very nice buffet lunch, and then a group picture and then back to Antigua. About 70 of us made the trip. All of our staff really enjoyed the trip.

During the celebration, we implemented a program to recognize our employees for length of service to the company. At June 30, 2007, we had 55 people on our formal payroll (we have about 35 to 40 who work off payroll, by the piece as well). The statistics were very impressive, and they are as follows:

39 employees with more than 5 years of service
23 with more than 10 years of service
16 with more than 15 years of service
7 with more than 20 years of service
4 with more than 25 years of service
2 with more than 30 years of service (we have two ladies who started with us about a year before we opened the doors to the public.)

I am very proud of the staff we have, and it makes it easier to run a business with people who have been here a long time.

In Sept, 2007 we were offered the opportunity to operate the hotel store for one of our two best hotels in Antigua, Porta Hotel Antigua. We took the opportunity, and it has

been very successful for us. Up to that time, we just sold our jewelry to many hotel stores, but we didn't actually run the stores.

With the success of this store, we have changed our ideas, and are actively seeking other stores to run, and in May, 2008 we opened in Hotel Soliel, Antigua, and on Jan. 11, 2010, we will be opening in Hotel Camino Real, Antigua. With these three stores, we will be in 3 of the 4 best hotels in Antigua.

In November of 2007, we opened La Casa del Jade de Copan Ruins, Honduras. This is our first store in Honduras and has been doing well. Copan has some of the most beautiful Maya ruins in the world..

In 2008, we organized the 1st International Jade Convention with the theme of "Jade Throughout Mesoamerican History." We organized and sponsored this convention which was held on June 20, 21, and 22. We featured 11 conferences with 8 of the finest Archaeologists from Guatemala, and 4 from the United States. We had an average attendance of 350 people per day, and the Convention was a smashing success.

2009 was also a very busy year for us. We had to reengineer the company to withstand the downturn, some say crises, that affected tourism here in Guatemala due to the world situation. Our business was down 25% in real terms compared to 2008, and at the end of July, we had to fire 10 of our 25 jade carvers. Firing anyone is always the hardest thing to do as an owner of the business.

We were very busy with a Fiscal Reorganization to save taxes that took us over a year to implement for it meant changing many of our accounting procedures and many legal aspects of our 4 operating companies.

We also spent a lot of time preparing for the succession for the future generations in the business. Our vision is that the business will last for decades and centuries, but for that to happen, we have to set up all the ground rules and legal structures.

We have finished our "Family Protocol" which sets up all the ground rules of how the family should be managed, and how the family can interact with the business. Once that was done, we had to set up the statutes for our Panamanian holding company which will be the legal owner of our companies. Above the holding company there will be a "Special Interest" Foundation which will be the owner of the Holding company and which will control everything. The Foundation is the entity from which all future benefits will flow to the family members.

It has been a fascinating process, and we feel very good that we are getting it done so things will run well in the future when we are not around.

Well, that sums up the highlights of what we have been doing the last 5 years. It has been a very good time for us. We have received many blessings these last 5 years and we are very grateful for them. Our philosophy is that our business belongs to God, and we are just the administrators. He has blessed us greatly!!!

I am looking forward to seeing all of you in July.. . . .