

Good evening Madam Chairman, Professor Davies, Dr. Abrams, Dr. Brown, Mrs. Adams, other speakers, family, and special guests all, I am here this afternoon to represent the children of Aaron Joseph Matalon, Barbara, Janet, and me Joe. Our youngest sister Janet was unable to travel from Connecticut and could not be with us. We miss her.

I would first like to thank Neville Ying for those kind words about our dad. Neville has been a key player in the establishment of IMP. He also played an important role as Human Resource Director for ICD.

But I must tell you a joke about Neville which he may not know. For many years West Indies Home Contractors Ltd., WIHCON was a separate entity from ICD. We had no HR department. A “personnel officer” dealt with all day-to-day worker issues. And as we were unionized, with a staff of about 3,000 every 2 years, senior management negotiated a new contract.

When we were to be merged with ICD Neville came to brief the senior engineering staff on HR policy and rules much to the humour of the rough and tough crew who ran the site operation.

The next day a very short Matrix Table was placed on the engineering staff’s noticeboard. The Five column headings included Performance Factors such as, “far exceeds Job Requirements” to “Needs some improvement” and row headings included Quality, Timeliness, Stamina, etc. For example, “Under Quality Far exceeds Job Requirement” workers were said to “leap tall buildings in a single bound”. The document was quite creative and humorous. The title of the document was appropriately named WIHCON Workers don’t Speak YINGlish.

But now to my father. He was born in 1920 and died in 2009 at 89. Dad’s earliest memories of his life were of his home in Marine Gardens when he was 4 or 5. He describes it as a lovely residential area of about 20 homes on Harbour St. adjacent to Myrtle Bank. The family then moved to Victoria Avenue, “a nice residential area between South Camp Rd. and Elleston Road”.

In 1933 disaster hit his father’s business because of hurricane and flood damage and he was unable to negotiate a settlement with his creditors and he eventually became bankrupt. The family found itself in a destitute state. The family moved to Rae Town. His father was unable to pay my dad’s school fees and he was sent

home. He was over thirteen at this stage in his life and was unable to sit for the scholarship like his younger brothers.

So off he went to Justin McCarthy as their messenger for the princely sum of 8 shillings per week. He was now deprived of a secondary education. He learned a lot at that store under the guidance of the manager and soon was promoted to a full-time job earning 15 shillings per week. Most of his salary went to supporting the family, but he managed to save 1 shilling per week. When he collected his first 20 shillings, he paid his first year's fee to Kingston Technical School and attended night classes in Commerce and Accounting.

He told us that his daily schedule was to work at Justin McCarthy from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm, get home at 6:15, bathe, eat, do his homework, and get to school by 8:00 where he was in classes until 10:30 at night.

His education in the "School of Life" continued when with the help of some close friends, his father was once again able to set himself up in a dry goods wholesale business.

His father offered him a job for 25 shillings per week. He tells us that he had visions of grandeur in his father's business, only to discover that despite the "large" salary he had a rude awakening when he was introduced to Freddy, the storeman who was told to teach him everything from sweeping the store to packing and dusting the shelves. Dad was indignant at this apparently demeaning relationship. But in it was a message my father never forgot.

Dad handed down to my generation his father's twofold message First, that none of those jobs that you are going to learn is degrading, and second, you will never be able to gainfully employ people if you can't instruct them. The message was simple, there is dignity in all work and the importance of training in the workplace.

He also taught us to ensure we were right before we made a decision. He referred to a bad decision as a Hirkam decision. He explained to us that the elderly Mr. Hirkam and the debonaire young Mr. Solas were business partners in a dry goods business. Every day at noon Mr. Hirkam went for a long luncheon at a nearby fashionable restaurant. He left Mr. Solas and Mr. Hirkam's beautiful young wife to run the store.

One day his faithful storeman came into his office and said to him that while he was at lunch, Mr. Solas and Mrs. Hirkam would frolic on the couch in his office. Mr. Hirkam announced that there was only one way to solve the problem. Get rid of the dam couch. That ladies and gentlemen is a Hirkam decision.

Life progressed for Dad as he learned the business and he became manager of the store when war broke out in 1939. 5 members of his family became involved in the war, 3 saw active duty and 2 worked with the US Army in Panama. While his brothers went to fight in the Second World War, Aaron supported the rest of the large family of 11. He worked at his father's business, Matalon & Company until 1949.

When his father died unexpectedly in 1944, he took over the role of patriarch and cared for his mother and younger siblings until they were able to manage on their own.

After the war when the family members returned, they decided to join as a group and form Commodity Service Company. They collectively had £3,000. They were able to get a line of credit from the Royal Bank of Canada for £4,000. They formed Commodity Service Co. because they didn't know where business would lead them.

As an aside Moses when he returned from the war Joined with Bill Masterton and formed a small engineering works and machine shop on Luke Lane, the start of the family engineering & construction companies.

As the younger members left school, they joined one or other of the two family businesses.

I quote my father "It was easy for us to stay together, because we came from a close-knit family, so in our business dealings, as we did in our family the older took care of the younger. The stronger took care of the weaker".

He told us that when his father was on his deathbed he sent for a deck of cards. He took one card and tore it to pieces, then he took the rest of the deck and tried to tear it. He explained that the siblings should stick together, as the strength found in that unity was like the pack of cards. They may be weak as individual cards, but as a unit, they would have the strength of the entire pack. My sisters and I were raised in that tradition.

Commodity Service Co. became the owner of all the family businesses and as the company grew WIHCON was formed providing affordable housing for the lowest income earners. That's where I was placed. All the trading and manufacturing companies were grouped into ICD, which went on the stock market, the majority shareholder was Commodity Service Co., still family owned.

Dad felt that he deserved to retire from active duty after working for 60 years. He retired at 74 in 1994. Dad and Ma lived for a few years in Jamaica until they were invaded by robbers at their home in Hopewell above Newcastle Dad moved them both to Florida, Ma never really recovered from it and I don't think she ever came back to Jamaica.

He had seen ICD grow by leaps and bounds. There was Facey-Commodity Trading, Facey Hardware and Facey Drugs, Tropicair and Extrudofom, W. I. Paints Jamaica Cocoa Products, Homelectrix, Prime Life, P.A. Benjamin, Serge Island Dairies, British Caribbean Insurance Company, G.I. Industries Hofab Manufacturing, Industrial Finance corporation, International Insurance brokers, Redimix Concrete, Universal Stores Supermarkets And of course IMP, the forerunner of UCC.

He also personally established the MultiCare Foundation. The MCF was established under the theme "Creating Hope, Empowering Many" and with endowments by the ICD Group. It focused on youth and mentorship, particularly in The Southside, Rae Town, and Tel Aviv areas of downtown Kingston.

Throughout his career, he has helped shape many aspects of Jamaican life. Outside of his very busy work schedule he served as President of the Jamaica Manufacturers Association from 1953 to 1957 and again from 1960 to 1965. And organised the first-ever Trade and Industrial exhibition in Jamaica.

He was a director of the Caribbean Assoc of Industry and Commerce which culminated in Carifta. Four years later as President of the Association, he toured the region, examining the performance of Carifta. It was as a result of the recommendation of this committee Caricom was established.

He was chairman of the Edna Manley Foundation, the National Gallery, and a member of the board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica.

He is the recipient of the Order of Jamaica, an honorary Ph.D. from the University of the West Indies, The Pelican Award from the Guild of Undergraduates of UWI,

the Norman Manley Award for Excellence, The Gold Musgrave Medal, and the Carlton Alexander Award for Excellence from Jamaica College, his very brief Alma Mater.

Dad was a workaholic. That was his life and Joy. He had no hobbies or sports activity, it was work, work, work. But he did enjoy Jamaican Art. He liked the Jamaican Masters, Barrington, Huie, and Parboosingh. But if he saw a piece of work by an unknown artist, he would hang it in his collection. Growing up we all remember his painting of a man drinking a water coconut. This work of art hung with pride in his living room. It was by an unknown artist, an agronomist named Topper, which had hung at an exhibition at one of the early JMA expos. He loved that painting and never got tired of seeing the man drinking from the coconut.

My mother was slightly more cynical about his art collecting. I can still hear her say "What has he bought another piece for, where is he going to hang it?"

But My sisters and I became collectors of art because of our environment. And we all anticipated dividing up his wonderful collection. But that was not to be. He donated his collection, minus a few pieces he kept for himself, and added a few pieces he purchased and gave to the National Gallery.

He also published a book of his collection to the National Gallery titled "Gifts for the Nation, The Aaron and Marjorie Matalon Collection" with photographs and descriptions of the art he had donated, with comments by Dr. David Boxer.

It gives me Great Pleasure to donate on behalf of my sisters and me, to this library my own personal copy of that presentation.

We say a big thank you to The ICD group who donated \$4 million in his memory to the development of the library.

My sisters and I thank the UCC and its management and staff for the great honour bestowed today by naming the library in his honour. It is particularly notable that today is his birthday, he would have been 104 if he was with us on this occasion, I know that he would have been so proud to be here, but I am sure he's looking on from above with a great sense of Pride

Thank You all so very much.

