

JOHN CLARK ALDEN

“Speak for yourself John”!! These famous words were spoken by Priscilla to John Alden, an assistant to Miles Standish. The shy Mr. Standish had dispatched his assistant, John Alden, to propose the marriage of Priscilla to Mr. Standish. Fortunately, John did take Priscilla’s advice and spoke for himself, married Priscilla, and one of the outcomes of that union is our very own John Alden.

Our John Alden has had an interest in music for his whole life. His maternal grandfather was William F. Clark, a professional quartet man. “Poppy” Clark sang in a quartet that worked for Thomas Edison. Edison employed many quartets whose job it was to sing and record popular songs that could be played on his Victrola. In creating the cylinders (think CD) for the Victrola, a master recording was made, and from the master they could produce about fifty copies. To obtain the twenty thousand copies to be distributed, a quartet would have to sing and record the song four hundred times! In those days there were as many as eight hundred quartets making a living in the United States singing “barbershop” music. His Grandfather traveled with his quartet. He was also a skilled harmonica player, an inventor, and a student of mechanical motion, writing a book on the last subject. His influence on young John was profound.

John began singing at an early age. He became adept at imitating popular singers and was well known for his imitation of Frankie Lane (Mule Train, etc.). His sister, Virginia, was also a gifted vocalist, who shared the leading roles with John in operettas. John sang in a quartet in high school and competed as a soloist in music festivals in up-state New York. In high school he began to play the ukulele, which he found to be helpful in getting groups to sing. He took his ukulele with him to college at Hobart where he studied economics and sang in an a capella group called the “Thirteen Statesmen”. At college he obtained a banjo and added that skill to his repertoire. He says he was not a great banjo player and not a great singer, but he was a pretty darned good entertainer. After college he briefly joined SPEBSQSA at Niagara Falls but that experience was very short because he was transferred and he did not hook up with the society again until he joined the Chordsmen.

He was born in South Orange, New Jersey to Ralph Mason Alden and Martha Clark Alden. By the time he entered school, the family had relocated to Lewiston, NY. He graduated from Lewiston Porter Central High School and Hobart University.

Shortly after college he married his college sweetheart, Susan South, and this young couple soon found themselves in Alabama at Fort McClellan. He was in the Chemical Corps and learned all the finer points of flame throwers, chemical munitions and such, and he became an instructor in those subjects at Fort McClellan. After leaving the Army, he continued to work there for a while as a civilian instructor. The Alden family decided to move back up North and soon the B.F. Goodrich Company employed him where he enjoyed a significant career in sales and marketing. During his career he sold every product Goodrich made except tires. He is very knowledgeable in the areas of rubber, latex and adhesives.

He started his career with Goodrich at the headquarters building in New York, but as he climbed the ladder he moved around quite a bit. He and Susan had four children. John E. was born in Alabama, Adele was born in New Jersey, Scott was born in Ohio,

and Susan was born in Pennsylvania. The family moved to Charlotte in '77 and they enjoyed life in the Carolinas.

John hit a rough spot in the road. After thirty-eight years of marriage, he lost his wife Susan to cancer. These were also days when B.F. Goodrich (and most other corporations) was being broken up, sold off or shut down. John's portion of the company was sold twice in two years and John stayed with the business both times. The next event would cause him to leave Charlotte and he elected to stay and find a new career. He took a position with Embassy Suites where he was involved with hospitality training. He thinks highly of the Embassy Suites organization.

Having been a widower for four years, he met Joanne and they were married and together they made the very good decision to move to Wilmington. It was his good luck to have a dentist appointment on a day when Dr. Tom Head was substituting for the vacationing dentist. Before he was even "numbed up", Dr Head had determined that he could sing (he had him sing Lida Rose) and "extracted" a promise that John would accompany him to the Chordsmen meeting the following Tuesday. The rest is history.

John has two companies and is still active in each of them. One company recycles rubber materials that would otherwise end up in landfills. This is a fascinating business with the prime customers being in Lagos, Nigeria. You should ask him to tell you about it some day. He also has a company called "Awaken" that provides professional services in training, writing, facilitating and teaching selling skills.

John enjoys the spirit and camaraderie of the Cape Fear Chordsmen and is gaining skills every week. He was a participant in the second annual Pla-Tune event and, along with every other participating Chordsman, accorded himself admirably in a very tight competition. He is rapidly learning the lead part to our repertoire songs. You should grab him at the break and harmonize a song or two with him.