



Fun With CATS



Fun With CATS #6. FWC is a collaboration between the Social Committee and the Director of Communications. It will be published occasionally until CATS is able to resume playing tennis. It's a way of keeping in touch with each other and remembering how much fun we have on and off the court. We'll look at photos of past events, share news about members or information about tennis instruction—anything we can think of that's fun and relevant to CATS! If you have suggestions, please contact Jim Vahey at jimvahey@sbcglobal.net.

Remember the Dos Equis beer commercials that featured “The Most Interesting Man in the World”? The ad agency that created the character explained: “He is a man rich in stories and experiences....he and Dos Equis share a point of view on life that it should be lived interestingly.” As someone who has lived in three countries, visited 44 countries and all 50 states, is a trophy-winning ski racer, a ski instructor, a photographer, a former Arthur Murray dance instructor, and CATS’ oldest playing member at 84, Dave Herd is surely “The Most Interesting Man in CATS.”

What does it take to still be skiing and playing tennis at 84? Luck, certainly. Staying in shape, sure. Persistence, determination, call it stubbornness. But without passions, without curiosity, there is no point. Dave still has mountains to ski, sunsets to photograph, and countries to visit, so he has no intention of stopping anything anytime soon.

Developing Dave

Dave was born November 13, 1935 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. When Dave was a child, his father played baseball in a church softball league: “I remember watching him come to the plate with determination and singlemindedness to the task at hand. That made an impression. I realized that was how I wanted to go through life.”

His parents divorced when Dave was 13. “My mother went to work and raised her two children as a single parent, so she was the greatest influence in my life.”

Sports and physical fitness were always part of Dave's life. He attended the same high school where his father had been a star athlete, so Dave also played football and baseball and ran track, specializing in the half-mile.

After graduating from high school, Dave went to Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa, to study engineering "solely on the basis that I was good in math -- without a clue what engineers did! -- but when I started to find out, I realized I would not go back to Council Bluffs or Omaha to find employment."

Dave dropped out of school during his junior year because he was short of funds. He was working at Union Pacific when he saw a help-wanted ad for dance instructors at Arthur Murray Dance Studio. He got the job; after working at Union Pacific all day, he went to Arthur Murray's training class in the evenings, taking several forms of public transportation each way. "I was dreadfully shy, so dancing gave me confidence. I can watch any modern dance for a while and then I can do it. I was a super dancer!" (*His long-time friend Carolyn Popp agrees: "At one of Lake Shore Ski Club's dances, he and I danced together a lot and I found out he's also a great dancer."*)

Working at Arthur Murray was life-changing: Dave met his first wife there. They married in November 1957 and had three children. It also taught him how to teach, a skill he would use years later as a ski instructor.

The Fun Begins

Dave returned to school and graduated with a B.S. in Ceramic Engineering. His first professional job was with Frigidaire near Dayton, Ohio, working with the porcelain enamel that was applied to all the appliances the company made.

At the time color picture tubes first came on the market, Dave was hired by RCA. He moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and began dating a woman who played tennis and skied. "I took up my now-favorite sports, thanks to her."

NBC made a bargain with the Soviet Union to allow NBC to televise the 1980 Olympics; in exchange, RCA would provide equipment and technical assistance to the Soviet Union to make color picture tubes. In 1981 and '82, Dave attended meetings in Moscow as part of that project team, and eventually was assigned to live there for six memorable months.

"I tipped my hat to a woman and she smiled at me. I was being the all-American male! I ran into her later and she gave me her phone number...When I went to live there, we dated, and a lot of my experiences were with her. She taught me how to bribe people, when not to speak, those kinds of things. Natasha was one of the great loves of my life."

Apparently, Natasha did not warn him about taking photos. Dave went to a market and started to take photos of peasant women with beautiful, expressive faces. Someone complained, so he was taken to the police station. He tried to explain that he was taking photos because they were interesting subjects, but was held until a translator arrived and explained what Dave had been doing. Needless to say, his film was confiscated! "That was kind of scary!"

(Years later, Dave would become intrigued by portrait photos taken by the Lake Shore Ski Club photographer. He began to explore why some photos can create emotions due to their composition, and took a few photography classes to learn some of the basics. He realized he has "a very good eye to see possibilities and to be able to compose something interesting. I love to take a photo and then edit it to make it better.")



Looking up the hill toward Red Square, 1982

After he left RCA, Dave was hired to be part of a team to sell picture tube technology to China. He moved to Hong Kong, "where I took a hovercraft and the Star Ferry each day, except Sunday, to work."

Tennis and skiing

As Dave's career took him around the country and the world, he skied wherever he could. He joined ski clubs and started racing. He has raced in nine countries, including China and Japan, earned a cabinet full of trophies, and taught skiing for 22 years, 20 at Wilmot—all because of the woman in Lancaster!



When Dave came to Chicago in the late '80s, he joined Lake Shore Ski Club because it offered both tennis and skiing programs, but admits he prefers skiing to tennis. "I like to go fast, I like the feeling of freedom."

(Longtime CATS member Christine Frank recalls, "When I first met Dave, he was a streak of yellow going down a mountain. He looked good in ski racing spandex. I knew him from what was then Lakeshore Ski Club. I have not seen that spandex racing outfit for a long time now, but he was still a streak the last time I skied with him, and I am sure that he would still look good in spandex.")

Dave describes skiing as an "active mind thing, you have to be alert. In racing, I have to be looking ahead all the time, looking for the next gate and the one after that. I found out that in tennis I wasn't watching the ball; I had to learn to follow the ball. It was harder."

Drawing on his teaching experience at Arthur Murray, Dave teaches skiing in a positive way. "Don't say, 'Don't do this'. Instead, say, 'That was almost it. Try to do this.' People who try to learn skiing have to want to learn to ski. Some people find out when they go down a gentle bunny hill for ten feet that they don't like it. Skiing is counterintuitive. You're going down the hill and yet you have to lean forward. Then you think you're going to go faster than you want to, so you sit back and then fall down."

With tennis, Dave loves the never-ending challenge of trying to get better. "Because I've gotten old, I try to maintain. I used to go to drills twice a week. The one thing I like about tennis is 'you have to win the last point.'"

Dave joined CATS in 1989, when many members were in advertising. He has served as a team captain, A Coordinator, and has been the Membership Chairman since 2006. "I created a data base for the membership data; previously, it was kept on an Excel spread sheet. A data base is a permanent record."

As vice-president of Lake Shore Ski Club, Dave had urged the board of directors to buy a computer in the early '90s, but was met with “strong resistance to change.” He said he saw the same resistance when the CATS board began talking about creating a website. Dave recalled that he and the board members developing the website met at John Wagner’s house. As a graphic designer, John created the look of the site; Dave was curious about how to build a website, so he took that on. He also took all the photos on the original website.

“I like being on the board. I like expressing my opinion, I like the people, I know how to work with them and they put up with me!” *(CATS’ Board Members can attest to Dave’s persistence in making sure his opinion is heard at board meetings!)*

Judith and China

Dave met Judith Levy on a ski trip and they were married in 2001. Judith is Dave’s fourth wife. Judith recently retired as a professor at UIC, where she excelled in writing



and obtaining grants from the National Institutes of Health. Her students come from China, Indonesian, Peru, and Malawi, and were selected to come to Chicago to get their PhD’s. She makes sure that those from countries where it doesn’t snow receive warm clothing.

Her students are required to propose a study about HIV prevention, then return to their home country to carry out the study (funded by grant money). Judith and Dave and other officials visited the students to see their work and exchange information, so they have visited those countries several times—in fact, they’ve been to China about 35 times, covering east to west and north to south.

Wherever they were, Judith and Dave were always treated as honored guests and escorted to local points of interest. “When I started traveling the world with Judith, the photo opportunities were so prevalent, it became a necessity to have a camera with me. I have a good camera with a telephoto lens which helps me frame the shot.”



I call this photo "Mickey-Mao."



I took at a village near Mangochi, Malawi, prior to the Moslem religious rite of circumcision. I pointed my camera at a few children and suddenly every child in the village wanted in.



From Kruger National Park in South Africa



From the island of Lombok, Indonesia

While in Malawi, Dave was allowed to do something that very few outsiders have done: witness a circumcision ceremony. "And I've done that three times! In order to witness it, you have to be male and circumcised, and they had to check me out!"

Dave said he was told that originally circumcision was a coming of age ritual and a celebration. Several boys would be circumcised in the same ceremony, then recover in a grass hut while elders explained what it means to be a man. More recently, parents are having their boys circumcised quite young, "maybe five or seven, so they've gotten away from the 'now we're going to reach you about sex' kind of stuff."

The Shutdown

Since Dave is also passionate about continuing to learn new things, he used the time to take a couple online courses in philosophy and documentary films at National Lewis Life Long Learning. For many years, he took a course called “Writing for Family,” in which he wrote stories about things he did growing up, his life and family for his children, who are now 61, 59 and 58.

Dave’s motto is “Be rigidly flexible at all times.” The premise is that “evolution is built on the concept that survival is based on how well people adapt to their environment.” That was the attitude that allowed him to move to different countries and states and adapt; it’s the same attitude and self-discipline that has kept him working to stay in shape all these years. Now, instead of sports, he works out at home four days a week. (*Unlike most of us, who have spent six months watching Netflix and eating ice cream*).

Final Thought

Asked which of all his accomplishments he is most proud: “Raising my kids when I was a single father. They turned out pretty damn good!”

“A year after my second wife died, I moved my family from Indiana to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. My son was out of high school and found a job working at Commodore Computers, where he became the chief engineer at age 21 for the second generation of the Commodore 64. One daughter moved from Purdue to Penn State; the other daughter was still in high school and went to Penn State. Both daughters shared an apartment at State College, Pennsylvania, where they graduated from. They now live in Williamsport New Jersey, Boulder, Colorado, and North Hollywood, California.”



“CATS ‘Tall’ Tales” by Jim Vahey

Continuing the saga of how Jim mastered foreign languages during the shutdown...

When the calendar turned to April and already with mastery of conversational Russian I decided to take on another language. This time it should be French; “April in Paris!”

Combien de joueurs de tennis faut-il pour changer une ampoule ? Aucun, parce qu'ils disent tous, « Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire qu'il était sorti, il était dedans! »

How many tennis players does it take to change a light bulb? None, because they all say, “What do you mean it was out, it was in!”

Pourquoi le court de tennis était-il si bruyant ? Parce que tous les joueurs ont soulevé une raquette.

Why was the tennis court so loud? Because all the players raised a racket.

Qu'a dit une balle de tennis à l'autre balle de tennis ? On se voit faire le tour.

What did one tennis ball say to the other tennis ball? “See you round..”

See more of Jim's amazing language abilities in future issues of FWC!

Short Tails

Speaking of **Jim Vahey**...congrats to Jim and Mary, who celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary on August 14. Also, to **Alan and Diane Johnson**, who celebrated their 41st anniversary on August 25.