

Don Torgersen

September 2018

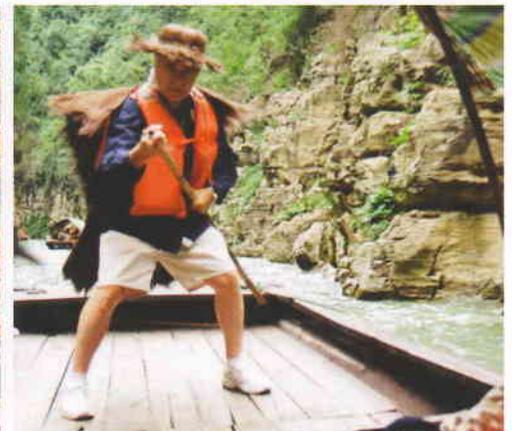
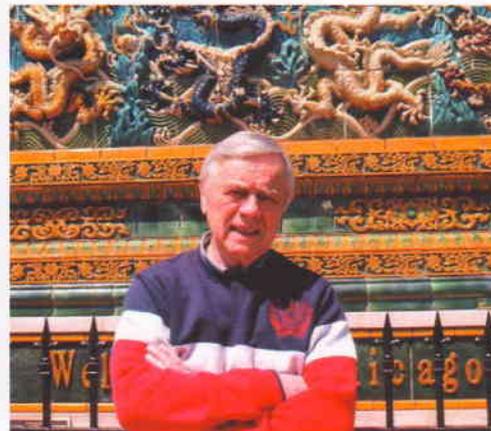
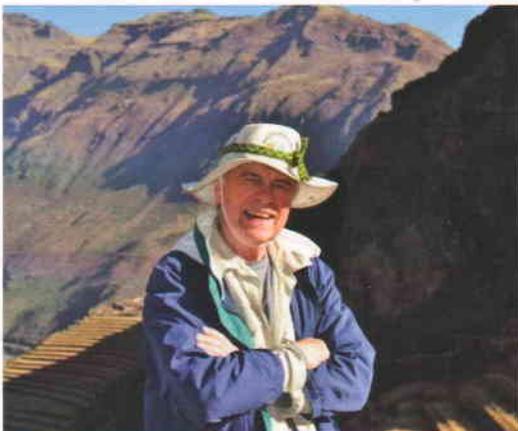
VoyageChicago

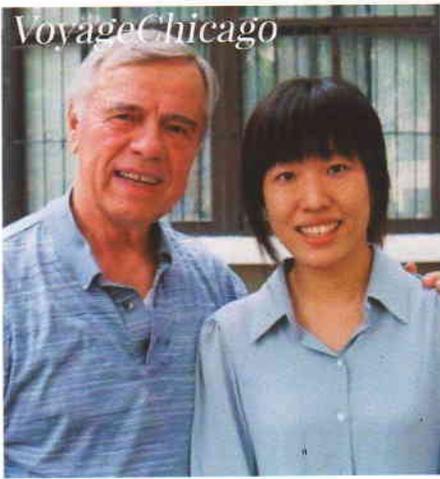
**Today
we'd
like
to
introduce
you
to
Don
Torgersen**

Don, please share your story with us. How did you get to where you are today?

After graduating from the University of Illinois, I was hired to be a writer and editor for Science and Mechanics Publishing Company. New owners showed up and we were told that that the business had been operating in Chicago since 1934, was profitable, and would remain in Chicago.

Four weeks later we were informed that the editorial offices would be relocated in New York City and the editorial force would be moved. I did not want to leave Chicago, so I began interviewing with other publishing companies. During this period I founded, edited and published Catalyst, an international magazine for art, science and philosophy. I was hired as a writer and editor at Science Research Associates (SRA) which was acquired by IBM.





Two years later the head of the department fired me and told me that he "did not like my philosophy.". I was interviewed by a young woman at Playboy Magazine to write Hugh Hefner's philosophy. I had to take an IQ test, write a small article about the meaning of the word "boudoir," and then take a second IQ test. I was not offered the position. I did work on script writing and film production at the University of Chicago. I hosted and produced a weekly radio program called Nine Faces of the Muse on WXXM which featured music, poetry, literature, dance, history and interviews with contemporary artists. Months later I was hired by Allied News Company in Chicago to be the editor and soon the managing editor of the National Tattler, a tabloid newspaper specializing in celebrities, gossip, and unusual news stories. It was the main competition for the National Enquirer.

When I took it over, its newsstand circulation was 300,000. Six years later the circulation had reached 1.3 million. The company published other newspapers and magazines and got into legal problems with Johnny Carson that cost lots of money to defend. The publisher had to let me go. I could not find another job in publishing, so I went to work as a structural ironworker, raising skyscrapers in Chicago. But when winter came, there was not enough work.

So I searched and searched for other employment. It was tough because my wife and I had a son and had purchased a new house with a mortgage, I taught one course in poetry at Wright College in Chicago and looked for a more stable position. During this period I edited and published my first book—Port Chicago Poets, a new voice in anthology, featuring Gwendolyn Brooks, Guy Trail, Worthley Burbank, Paul Carroll, and thirty modern writer-poets who lived in the Chicago area. I was hired as a writer and producer by Society for Visual Education (SVE), a major audiovisual firm in Chicago that produced educational films and programs for the school-library market in the U.S. and Canada.

I was soon appointed Manager of Producers and led a team of writers, producers, photographers, artists, illustrators, freelancers, filmstrip makers and sound engineers. We produced more than 100 documentaries and educational films a year in social studies, careers, and language arts. The sales of educational products increased from \$12 million a year to \$17 million in four years. The Singer Corp. had acquired SVE and sent a young woman from New York to be its president. She immediately flattened out the executive force, eliminated my position, and wrote me a nice thank-you letter. The company was soon sold off.

We now had three sons, a mortgage and a backlog of medical bills. I learned the hard way that working for a corporation was probably not in my best interests. I decided to form my own marketing communications, production and publishing company. I was able to offer print, audiovisual and film services to new product development groups at Kraft, W.R. Grace, Motorola, International Harvester, Electronicast/Escast, and other firms. But I wanted to develop my own original works, so I ventured into publishing. I formed The Tree of Tales and wrote and sold a series of books to Children's Press in Chicago about trolls, gnomes, elves, dragons and giants, illustrated by Tom Dunnington that were very successful in the school-library market. I wrote a biography and philosophy of Gandhi for the People of Destiny series. I wrote and developed the Animal Safari Nature Library.

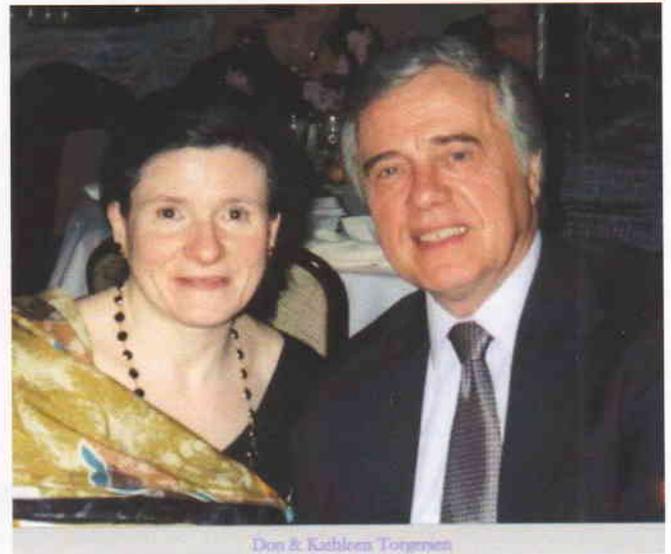
Photos by Lee Trail and Don Torgersen. I wrote a series of twelve stories about animal behavior for Encyclopaedia Britannica, and produced twelve films for Coronet Instructional Media. In the early 1990s, like many Americans, I was greatly dissatisfied with the pettiness and inefficiency of Congress, its lack of a balanced budget discipline, and the soaring national debt.

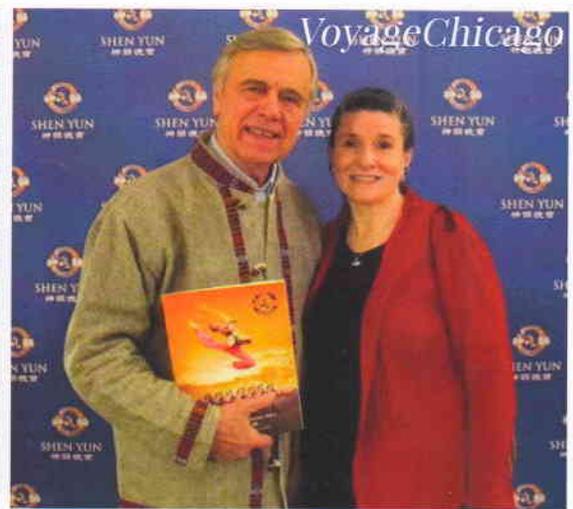
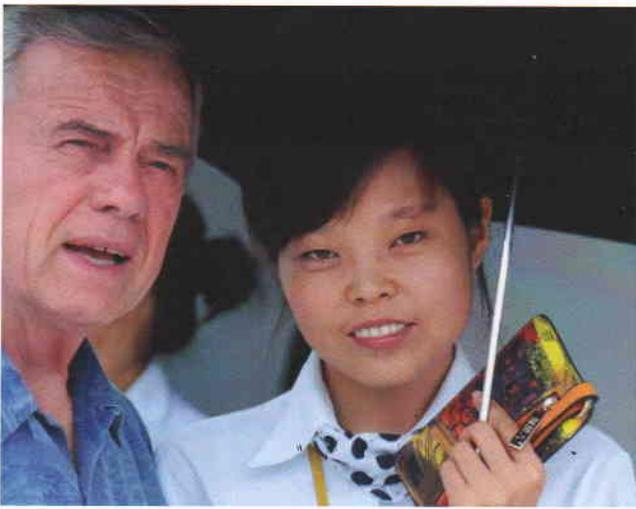
Neither major party represented issues of interest to my life. I decided to get active in national politics, organizing for the independent candidacy of Ross Perot in the 8th and 10th congressional districts. Perot recruited me to be the Illinois executive director of United We Stand America, his political and economic educational organization. Perot's reform and renewal movement was of great interest to independent and dissatisfied voters. Perot ran for president in 1992 and 1996. I was also the Midwest campaign manager for former Colorado governor Dick Lamm and California congressman Ed Zschau when they ran as a team to win the nomination of the Reform Party for president of the USA. In 1998, I won the Reform Party primary and ran for the US Senate seat in Illinois, but I could not overcome the \$18 million spent by Peter Fitzgerald's campaign, who won the election as a Republican.

Politics has a way of eating up your life, and a wise person stays away from it. I am a US Navy veteran, former lead-off hitter for the University of Illinois Chicago baseball team, and former Palatine Park District head coach. I was recruited by the Palatine American Legion post to establish and manage its Legion baseball team, the Palatine Blue Jays. The post also hired me as its finance officer. I recruited former Chicago Cubs, Randy Hundley, Glenn Beckert and Bill Campbell, to coach and help develop players, ages 17 to 19. The Blue Jays became State champions twice, runner up five times, and fared well in national tournaments.

The State American Legion commander appointed me Cook County Commissioner of the Legion baseball program (Chicago and Suburbs) and Tournament Director for State and County finals. I have returned to literature, poetry, and the beauty of the arts. Condoleezza Rice, an accomplished concert pianist, teaching professor, golfer, diplomat, and former secretary of state, has called the arts, "The greatest of human endeavors." I have traveled to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Hawaii, Canada, Mexico, China, Tibet, Thailand, Peru, Machu Picchu, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia.

I love languages and have some fluency in French, German, Norwegian, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian and Hawaiian. My recent books include: Nine Dragons to China Anthology, The Maya Plisetskaya Suite, and a Chinese Pavilion of Tales and Poetry. My writings support the missions of the Chinese-American Museum in Chicago and the Plisetskaya-Shchedrin Foundation in Munich, Germany. I am planning a new book called Pow Wow, featuring American Indian culture, dance and tales. I also have fun in writing and telling stories to children about trolls, gnomes, elves, dragons and giants. Herewith is a family of trolls sailing down the Chicago River in a Viking ship. I am holding a wonderful walking stick that was once the tail of a troll I tussled with while skiing in Norway.





Overall, has it been relatively smooth? If not, what were some of the struggles along the way?

I believe the previous statement expresses some of those struggles. It's a tough thing to face when you do a good job for an organization, but lose it in spite of your performance and ability. Superiors can take the bread off your family's table. But a bad experience forces you to seek new opportunities and find something better.

Please tell us about Don Arthur Torgersen Productions.

I have had the good fortune of working with many competent individuals and suppliers in the publishing field. I have a knack for recruiting and managing editorial and production teams, political and baseball teams. I produce new works in print, film and video, and I am often invited to the lecture platform. These associations have helped me advance my literary and visual publishing interests and make contributions to world cultures and the public good.

How do you, personally, define success? What's your criteria, the markers you're looking out for, etc?

The previous paragraph sums it up. Success is in being happy with your life, health, activities and good intentions. Success is in producing works that enrich the lives of others. Success is watching your children become independent and self-sufficient. Success is in being able to witness the continuity of generations. Success is never taking on more debt than you can manage comfortably or, better, not taking on any debt at all. I am happy to live in the Chicago area where I was born and raised. Chicago was the home of my family for five generations.

The city is the architectural jewel of the world, the birthplace of skyscrapers. The Chicago skyline is unequalled. Every cultural resource imaginable is at your hand. The colleges, universities, museums, theaters and libraries are superb. Commerce and finance thrive. The climate for innovation and creativity is always favorable. Its motto—I Will.

The transportation grid is efficient. The symphonies, orchestras, soloists, operas, and free concerts at Grant Park on summer evenings are beautiful. The sport teams are exciting, frustrating, but sometimes champions. We have a beautiful lakefront accessible to all people. Lake Michigan at times is so blue that you want to gaze and wonder at it.

When the waves come, the lake changes its personality. In winter, "the gulls are cold but seldom frozen." The pop artist and sculptor Claes Oldenburg created the great Chicago Bat Column to express the ambition and vigor of the city. I'm gonna need a bigger bat. Paris embraced me, but Chicago is the sweetheart of my cities.