

HOW DID IT ALL START?

Back in 1958, I had just left the Army after three years' service and was working as a painter and decorator in Birkenhead on the Wirral. My father had just retired after 15 years in the police and wanted to start a detective agency. We did both jobs for a few months but in 1959 decided to move into Trent House, a small office in a block above four shops, to concentrate on the agency. Subsequently, my brother Malcolm joined us.

WHEN DID YOU MOVE INTO TRADITIONAL BAILIFF WORK?

In 1980. My father had been doing rates collection work for the local council for some time but when he left I found loads of unactioned warrants in his drawer. I went to see the council who explained what they were - and promptly gave me handfuls more so I left with more work than I went in with (there were no tenders then!). I needed help so asked my wife, Cora, and a college friend, Judith Powell, to join the business. Our client base doubled when Sefton Council appointed us.

It was obvious we needed a decent administration system so we were among the first bailiff firms to install a 'state-of-the-art' Wang mini computer system. In 1983 we moved over the River Mersey into State House on Dale Street, Liverpool. At this stage I persuaded my other brother Bernard to bring his successful enquiry agency to State House and work alongside us. However, this did not last as Bernard won a large national contract in the mid eighties and moved out, taking Malcolm with him.

WAS IT ALWAYS THE INTENTION TO INVOLVE YOUR CHILDREN IN THE BUSINESS?

As with any family firm this is always an option, but not essential. It is important for people to make their own decisions and way in life. In 1988 we moved back to the Wirral in readiness for the soon-to-be-introduced Poll Tax. Our eldest son, David, worked in the business for a short spell in the early nineties but he left and is now an IT specialist living in Gibraltar.

Our daughter, Paula, came to work pending going to university in 1988 but never got there, and our other son, Simon, came to assist with the implementation of a new computer system in 1989 and is still here too. In the mid nineties Cora stepped down as a partner and I felt it appropriate to retire in 2001.

HOW DID JACOBS BECOME A NATIONWIDE FIRM?

We had built a solid and loyal client base in the northwest but Simon and Paula had the initiative and willingness to take the firm forward. This, coupled with the advent of Poll Tax and greater scrutiny of bailiffs and their actions, meant that better firms prospered.

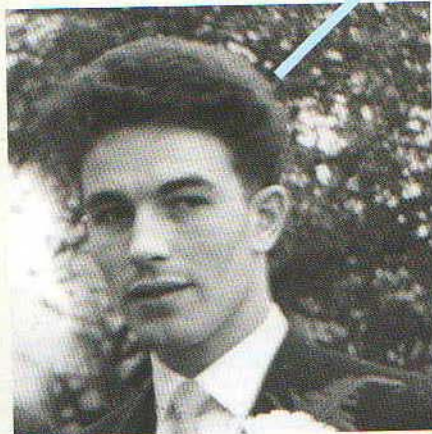
In 1999 Simon and Paula asked Dave Comes to come aboard and use his local authority revenues and management experience to assist in increasing our standing in the market place. It was important for clients and prospects to realise that the firm was adapting with the times and becoming a market leader in terms of transparency and reliability of service delivery.

It's a family affair



Alan Jacobs, founder of Jacobs Certificated Bailiffs, tells *Insight* how he went from decorator to debt detective as the company celebrates 50 years in the business

"The advancement of targets and performance indicators were rarely heard of in the seventies - you were given a rates case and went and got it paid"



WHAT NEXT?

Times have changed greatly and there are huge challenges ahead for the bailiff profession. I know this firm has strong leadership and will continue to be a success in the future. Simon is also Vice President of the Enforcement Services Association and will have an integral part to play in implementing any regulations that may affect bailiff work in practice.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAIN CHANGES OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS?

Fifty years is a lifetime and only about 10 per cent of family firms last this long. The major change has to be the huge advancement in technology and this is changing at a greater pace than ever. Simon and Paula have greater skills than me in this area and I am glad that in my time things were slower paced. The advancement of targets and performance indicators were rarely heard of in the seventies - you were given a rates case and went and got it paid (collection rates were extremely good then as everyone was in fear of being in debt).

One thing that hasn't changed is the Jacobs family principles - the aim is to collect debt in a 'firm but fair' manner. Our staff has always been integral to Jacobs' success and this remains today, even though the infrastructure has had to expand greatly to accommodate the extra workloads. We have come a long way and I could not have imagined that my family would have achieved what we have when I put my paintbrush down in 1959 and decided to enter the detective agency field. ❖