

Brief Biography of Donald H. Sanborn



Don Sanborn was born October 18, 1937 in Washington, D. C . His family moved from Virginia to Illinois in 1946. Graduating from Springfield High School there, he studied Chemical Engineering 1955-57 at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and discovered he would be happier in the liberal arts. After brief travel around the country with a CIT friend, he finished a year off working in the Illinois Division of Highways Department of Materials in Springfield, as a lab technician testing cement, inspecting pre-stressed concrete beams, later filing Illinois reimbursement claims for the Interstate Highway System then under construction.

Don transferred to the University of Chicago in 1958 to study Philosophy and Humanities, in hopes of finding out what great thinkers of the past had to say about the meaning of life. He soon discovered that the UC Philosophy Department was more interested with producing respectable Analytic Philosophers skilled in "Ordinary Language Philosophy." But he was fascinated by the life, times, and philosophical dualism of Descartes, beginning a lifelong interest in the mind-body relationship. He wrote his 1961 BA thesis on the materialistic mind/brain "Identity Theory" then in vogue. He subsequently rejected the physicalist view as inadequate to the ongoing embodied interaction with environment that European existentialists called "being-in-the-world," which America's John Dewey differently termed culturally mediated "experience."

Traveling briefly in England, Denmark, and France with his old friend (later best man at his wedding), Don completed a year off by again working for the State. He married in 1962, returning with his wife to UC for graduate work in Philosophy,

with an informal minor in Psychology. During that time he formed a strong interest in Freudian psychoanalysis as a lifelong path of "inner work." Furthering this interest much later, he returned for UC workshops on dream interpretation and hypnosis in 1992. After his 1964 MA in Philosophy, he continued in UC's doctoral program until 1967. He completed all work but the dissertation, having become more interested in phenomenology, existentialism and American Pragmatism courses than Analytic Philosophy. During that period of graduate work he wrote a 60-page paper on John Dewey's view of the meaning of life and considers himself an American Pragmatist. Don also took courses with noted Aristotelian scholar Richard McKeon, who had studied under Dewey at Columbia and identified himself in class as a Pragmatist.

Don then taught Philosophy and interdisciplinary General Humanities courses for 32 years in the City Colleges of Chicago, an urban community college multi-campus system offering two-year Associate Degrees. He served eight years at Wilbur Wright College (1968-76) on Chicago's northwest side, then at the downtown Loop College (renamed Harold Washington College upon the death of Chicago's first African American mayor) for 24 years, 1976-2000. In teaching Plato's dialogues, he became especially interested in Socratic dialectic and developed a format for Philosophy students to write their own dialectics. He adapted John Dewey's problem-solving logic of inquiry for student use in analysis of works of art presented in the two-semester introductory Humanities General Course sequence. During 1972-74 he also taught night courses in Philosophy of Education at Indiana University northwest in Gary Indiana. But his special academic interest was in general education, so he returned to UC in summer 1972 on an NEH grant to study in that area. He wrote a long paper on John Stuart Mill's philosophy of general education and became an advocate of reforming general education in the City Colleges of Chicago.

Don was active on CCC local and central faculty councils and their curriculum committees. He chaired for two years a central faculty council committee in which he drafted with faculty input a long report quite critical of a Central Office Master Plan for vocationalizing the City Colleges along lines more appropriate to the business world than academe. The CCC was unionized and he took part in five strikes during his teaching years and two strikes in retirement, to support the dwindling number of full time faculty being replaced by ill-paid part timers. From all those bitter struggles he emerged a leftist. Despite his activism, Don was named Chair of Humanities at HWC, 1997-2000. During that period he travelled twice to England with HWC faculty in a project to help City Colleges Birmingham install a two year general education associate degree program, so that their technical students would also have the option of continuing for a baccalaureate degree at a university.

During 1974-76 Don had, with two other CCC faculty, worked on statewide course articulation between two and four-year colleges and universities in Illinois. An outgrowth of that work was formation of the Association for Development of

Philosophy Teaching, of which he was a founding member and later a president (1987-88). Once statewide, ADOPT's initial focus was upon problems of curriculum and instruction not then discussed in local and national philosophical associations. He is now the only original member still active and ADOPT'S smaller meetings are now confined to the Chicago metropolitan area, sometimes in conjunction with Central Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association. The group's range of topics has expanded to include a wider range of topics, including public issues of current interest. Don continues to present papers at ADOPT, on topics as diverse as Realities of Peak Oil and America's Future, Issues for a Philosophy of Death and Dying, The Implicitly Radical Politics of Ecological Ethics, and most recently The Irreconcilability in Principle of Capitalism and Democracy. He revised an earlier ADOPT paper for publication in the journal *Sacred Web*, No. 25 (June, 2010) on "Peter Kingsley's Philosophical Mysticism and Mystical Philosophy."

Now 78, Don has been married 53 years to wife Georgia, a retired Anglican Church organist/choirmaster. They have traveled to Mexico, Canada, Greece, its islands, Turkey, and France. They have twin grandchildren, a girl and boy age four. Their son Donald III, a composer, works in the music publishing business with his wife.