

Jim Logan: Honorary grandfather

By Susan Ruttan



Interviewed June 2014.

To the Pllana family, Jim Logan is their Canadian grandfather. When he visits their house, he is given the seat of honour and the four grown children come to shake his hand.

And for good reason: Jim Logan has been a true friend to the Pllanas since they arrived in Edmonton as Kosovar refugees in July 1999.

He was there as they first got settled in the city. He and the father, Mustaf Pllana, walked youngest son Egzon to his first day of school. Jim and Elin attended the citizenship ceremony at which the Pllanas became official Canadians.

Today, he speaks with pride of the family's accomplishments - Mustaf Pllana co-owns a company called General Metals Machinery Ltd (a Dan Soročan company). The three older children are married; Egzon is at university and is planning to become a medical doctor.

A few years after the family arrived, Mustaf returned to Kosovo with Jim, who was treated like an honoured elder by Mustaf's family and friends.

It was Jim who got the idea in early 1999 that the Unitarian Church of Edmonton should sponsor a refugee family from Kosovo, a small region being ripped apart by war. Once the idea was endorsed by the UCE board, Jim and a few other church volunteers worked to make it happen. Jim was the family's main sponsor advisor. All these years later, the Pllanas haven't forgotten all he's done for them.

“Jim can do no wrong in that house,” says his wife Elin.

Jim Logan is a guy who gets involved in things that matter to him. To hear everything he’s done in his life is positively exhausting.

Born in Ontario in 1930, Jim spent his childhood in Toronto, mainly living with his grandparents. At age 18 he moved to Calgary to join his dad and step-mom. He completed high school there, and in 1949 went to the University of Alberta to study engineering. On campus he was in the RCAF university reserve, so after two years at university he took a year off to join the air force, training as a weapons officer – the Korean War was on at this time.

Coming back to university the next year, Jim switched disciplines to Arts and Science, and after getting his B.A. he went on to study theology. He was a United Church student minister for five years in the mid-1950s. In fact, for two summers he was posted to rural areas of Alberta where he led three church services each Sunday, in various small communities.

“I had a lot of freedom and I was paid the magnificent sum of \$1 a day, seven days a week,” Jim recalls.

Exhausted by his many commitments, Jim took a year off university and worked construction. When he came back to campus, it was to get a diploma in education – he got his degree in education a few years later by doing evening and summer courses.

So began Jim’s career as a school teacher, first in Edmonton for a year, then for six years in Calgary, and in 1964 back in Edmonton again. When he returned to the Edmonton public school system that year, he had to attend several orientation sessions. At one of them he met an attractive young teacher, Elin Bell, and offered her a ride home. A year later, in August 1965, they married.

As Elin recalls, they left for Africa 10 days after the wedding. Jim had signed up to be a teacher in the British High Commission territory of Bechuanaland, now the Commonwealth Republic of Botswana in southern Africa. The Logans spent two years there, with Jim involved with Math/Science at a newly-established teachers' college. He loved being in Africa, teaching. Elin was less thrilled with it.

Back in Edmonton, Jim returned to teaching, and the Logans had two children - Colleen, born in 1967, and Diana, born in 1969.

As young parents the Logans started attending a United Church, but eventually decided it wasn't right for them. Jim remembered talking to a fellow teacher, Jack Allen, about the Unitarian Church of Edmonton. In 1973 they decided to try it, and found it an immediate fit.

"I had found my, so to speak, spiritual and philosophical home," says Jim.

As he did with so many things, Jim became a very involved church member. Over the years he served on nearly every committee, was board president, was UCE chaplain for a year of two, and did numerous summer services.

Nor was church work all he did. Jim had a deep involvement for many years with the Canadian Red Cross, serving as Edmonton chapter president and taking charge of all the swim classes in the city.

"I've always been a volunteer doing something," says Jim. "I think you have to have outside interests; you can't just immerse yourself in one thing only."

After he retired from teaching at age 56, he taught Red Cross First Aid classes. He did a variety of other post-teaching jobs - supervising student teachers, selling used cars, and selling electronics.

Jim has continued to get involved in things that matter to him. For years he represented our church on the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. Ever since his university days Jim had been interested in other faiths; the Interfaith Centre gave him a chance to get to know people from other religions, and to let them know what Unitarianism was all about. Jim served as centre president for several years, and shared his enthusiasm for interfaith work with UCE members.

Jim remains a man of many interests and a big heart. Our congregation is richer for his presence among us.