

Ira Dan Kaye (紀艾華), M.B.E.

The 18th Governor of Rotary International District 345 (1977-1978)

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

1 September 2015



Ira Dan Kaye (紀艾華/紀愛華), President 1973-1974 of Kowloon Rotary Club (九龍扶輪社) was elected to serve as the 18th Governor of Rotary International District 345 (Hong Kong 香港, Macao 澳門, and Taiwan 臺灣) in 1977-1978. Theme of the year was “Serve to Unite Mankind” (為結合人類而服務). The next day when he stepped down the governorship, a new District 346 was formed on 1 July 1978 to supervise one half of the clubs located at the central and southern portion of the Taiwan Island.

According to the Club’s historian, Kaye described his presidency in 1973/74 as a “real fun year”. His style was to keep the meetings light and enjoyable: *“I have always believed, as Fred Clemo did, that Rotary provides a diversion during the afternoon where you meet with other Rotarians and forget problems you had that morning.”*

“I made a point of finding out which artistes were in town, and invited them to come along”. Thus one lunch-time saw members entertained until an unprecedented three o’clock by Sammy Cahn, pianist and lyricist for Frank Sinatra. On another occasion, British baritone and ex-Goon Harry Secombe, who was staying at The Peninsula (半島酒店), was even persuaded, with a little general manager-style influence from Gautschi, to sing for half an hour.

Being a past Rotary International officer in the 1980’s, Kaye played a key role in The Rotary Foundation Campaign. During a speech to Rotary leaders in February 1985, then Rotary International President Dr. Carlos Canseco announced what he considered “the biggest news in Rotary” — the commitment to help control polio worldwide.

In June 1986, The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International organized 44 national and multi-national PolioPlus Campaign Committees, and Kaye was appointed to chair the Committee No. 11 for Hong Kong and Macao territories.

These 44 committees had been assigned to raise the total sum of US\$120 million fund for implementing Rotary's PolioPlus Program. Each campaign committee was responsible for: (1) Informing the public of the need to support PolioPlus. (2) Planning and implementing the campaign to raise contributions for PolioPlus, conformable to local laws and customs in fund-raising, auditing and all other matters. (3) Raising funds, utilizing local tax laws to the best advantage. (4) Providing suitable recognition of donors. (5) Accounting for all contributions and transmitting them to The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International.

During the 79th Annual Convention of Rotary International, held at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., on 22-25 May 1988, it was reported that the grand total of fund raised globally was US\$119, 186,869. The 1,266 Rotarians in both of Hong Kong and Macao had raised an average of US\$259 per Rotarian for a total of US\$328,511**.

(**This amount included the contribution of US\$1,000 which made Herbert K. Lau the first time a Paul Harris Fellow.)



13 December 1977 – Ira Dan Kaye, Rotary International District 345 Governor gives his keynote speech at the Tuesday luncheon meeting of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong held at the Mandarin Hong Kong Hotel.

Ira Dan Kaye was a businessman who touched lives. He started his business empire when he arrived in Hong Kong in 1963, leaving behind his humble beginnings in the United States. His other ventures included movie theaters, paging networks and a dairy farm in Guangzhou (廣州). His other accomplishments included his position as Mozambique's Honorary Consul in Hong Kong and the founding of the American Chamber of Commerce. His compassion for the poor, the old and the disabled was shown by his yearly distribution of gifts during Christmas.

Kaye was an ethnic Jewish born on 30 November 1917 in Brooklyn, New York, United States. He was first married to Jean Miriam Wolfe. Jean's brother, Elliott Wolfe, wrote:

Ira graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. He attended one year at Purdue University then dropped out and never received any further formal education.

Jean met Ira while she had come home to Salt Lake City from living in Los Angeles attending college. Ira was there visiting his cousins. This was around 1940-41, and Ira was drafted into the army, so he and Jean married in Salt Lake, and he departed for the European Theater, leaving Jean to live in Salinas, California, since Ira had trained at Fort Ord.

My father and his brothers had a chain of war surplus stores in Salt Lake and Idaho, etc., after World War I. So when Ira came back from World War II to Los Angeles (our family moved to LA in 1943), he was looking for something to do and my father first suggested that he to go out to San Bernardino, CA, to see a man who was operating a 10 cent Hamburger store known as McDonalds since it was for sale. Ira was convinced that 10 cent hamburgers would never be profitable so he passed on that idea. My father then set him up in the war surplus business in San Pedro, CA, in 1946. Ira, his brother Lionel (who went by the name Dick), and cousin Irving Robinson became partners in the Union War Surplus Store, which supported the entire Kaye and Robinson families until all of them later passed on, leaving the store to younger brother Alvin Kaye, at which time the store closed. I used to work there in high school, and the place was an amazing success.

During the next few years Ira became involved in philanthropic issues, and he joined Lions International and the Junior Chamber of Commerce, as well as having been mentioned as a possible candidate for mayor of Los Angeles (early 1950s). Ira eventually became the World President of Junior Chamber International (JCI) where he had the opportunity to meet several world leaders, most notably Ramon Magsaisai, President of The Philippines, and they formed a friendship which led Ira to have the opportunity to open a business in Hong Kong.

Ira Dan Kaye was the World President 1957 of Junior Chamber International, when he was in the United States, and remained to be a life-long Senator affiliated with the Junior Chamber International Hong Kong (國際青年商會香港總會).



Kaye was chairman of Lark International Group Ltd. (立基集團), which he founded in 1963 in Hong Kong. The Lark Group involved in diversified business throughout Hong Kong, Macao, China Mainland, as well as overseas. Business areas ranged from entertainment to online E-commerce, milk and dairy products, themed wining and dining, as well as property investment and management. The group operated more than 30 subsidiaries globally and employed more than 1,500 people worldwide. The Lark Group offered a wide range of unique and premium products and services, including: (Entertainment) UA Cinemas, UA Films, UA CineHub, Silver Screen Media; (E-commerce) Cityline; (Dairy Business) Trappist Dairy (十字牌牛奶), Flower Fresh (香滿樓牛奶); (Wine & Dine) Cross Café (十字冰室), Thai Orchids (泰蘭花), etc.

Kaye also owned a travel agency---Lindblad Travel which was headquartered in Westport, Connecticut, and with an office in Hong Kong headed by Sonya Lindblad. Before he bought Lindblad in 1990, the agency used to charter cruise sailing on the Three Gorges along the Yangtze River (長江三峽). After the June 4th 1989 Tiananmen incident in Beijing (北京天安門事件), Lindblad fell on hard times financially and Kaye eventually bought the company.

Founded by Kaye in 1983, the first multiplex cinema chain---UA Cinemas---opened its first cinema in Sha Tin's New Town Plaza (沙田新城市廣場) before expanding to major malls including Times Square in Causeway Bay (銅鑼灣時代廣場) and Telford Plaza in Kowloon Bay (九龍灣德福廣場). Later it has expanded to more than 30 theaters in the former colony and has cinemas in China Mainland, Taiwan and Singapore.

Ira Dan Kaye, one of Asia's multiplex pioneers and the founder of Hong Kong-based Lark Entertainment, was conferred the "Humanitarian of The Year" Award at the CineAsia movie convention in Hong Kong on 8-10 December 1998. The fifth in the series of CineAsia confabs moved to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center for the first time after being based in Singapore. It featured screenings of new films, seminars and an equipment and concessions trade show.

"Ira is incredibly deserving of this Award. His efforts have influenced the lives of so many individuals, and he is a shining example of the good that members of our industry are capable of doing," CineAsia co-managing director Jimmy Sunshine said.



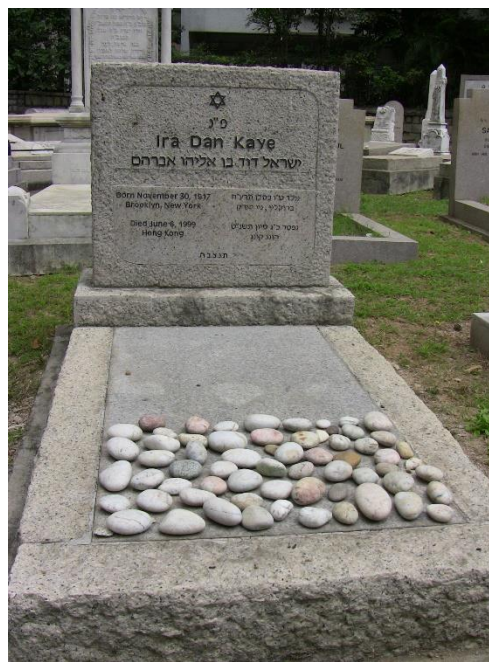
For more than 30 years, Kaye had been involved in a variety of charities, mostly relating to children. Among his good deeds, he had served with organizations that immunize children against polio and brought orphans from Macao to Hong Kong to repair split lips and open palates.

Kaye was in 1968 a founding member and later Chairman 1986 of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Hong Kong, and a trustee of the AmCham Charitable Foundation. In 1986, AmCham in Hong Kong introduced an annual award to recognize individuals who have performed outstanding service to the Hong Kong community on a voluntary basis. Recipients of the award receive a check for HK\$30,000 for a charity of his/her choice and an engraved silver plate. The Award was renamed by AmCham the “Ira Dan Kaye Community Service Award” to pay special tribute to their past chairman.

In June 1992, Ira Dan Kaye was decorated an Honorary Member of The Most Excellent Order of The British Empire (Honorary M.B.E.) by Queen Elizabeth II, United Kingdom, for services to the public. On Monday, 7 December 1992, the Hong Kong Governor, the Right Honourable Christopher Patten (香港總督彭定康), presented the insignia at the Government House.

At his age of 82, Ira Dan Kaye, M.B.E., passed away on 6 June 1999 in Hong Kong.

Kaye’s daughter Elizabeth (Lisa) remembers his father: *“Henry Wong, my father’s best friend and Jenny’s first husband, and my dad were involved a number of business prospects together. Henry died in a plane crash in 1968 and it was at that time that my father became integrally involved in the Wong family — as did my mother and I — for many years and continuing to this day.”* Jenny Cheung (張紫珊) was Kaye’s second wife.



The grave of Ira Dan Kaye in the Jewish Cemetery, Happy Valley, Hong Kong Island.