

Jim Channon

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JIM CHANNON

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Renaissance Man of the Twenty-First Century

By: Susanne Sims

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Often referred to as the "Fastest Magic Marker in the West," Jim Channon is an out-of-the-box strategic visionary and a high-speed graphic illustrator. His unique combination of imagination, wit and intellect has been likened to that of Walt Disney, Jim Henson and Bucky Fuller. Channon's career of 50 years spans the military and corporate worlds where he has developed far-reaching ideas, beauty, and conceptual tools to make Spaceship Earth a better place for us all. Jim has pioneered and perfected a specific set of skills that create an archetype for the new Renaissance Man of the Twenty-First Century. Following our interview, I summarized these primary skill sets into six categories: Eco Warrior, Social Architect, Visionary Artist, Storyteller, Renaissance Man and Global Shaman. I believe the combination of these aptitudes could be taught in a college setting as an exciting course on leadership for change agents. Enjoy ~

ECO-WARRIOR/ ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD "Our earthly inheritance … the plants, insects, animals, geology … and our children are the lasting legacy that each person on this planet has the sacred duty to nurture and to protect. No matter what our profession, it is a matter of courage and will that each of us find a way to cultivate that sacred ground." - J. Channon

In 1978, as a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army, Jim announced "he worked for the planet." He had just published this commitment on the back cover of "Evolutionary Tactics," a field manual he created for the First Earth Battalion, a think-tank in the U.S. Army. Inspired by the human potential and advance human performance movements, Jim had

conceptualized dozens of tactics that involved military units working in concert with nature. It was his version of a Whole Earth Catalog for military leaders. During the late 1980s, media maverick Ted Turner was inspired by the conversations he had with his friend Jim Channon. These conversations led to the creation of the back-story and characters for Turner's leading syndicated environmental cartoon "Captain Planet"; The series played heavily during the 1990s and Jim's signature cheer, "Go Planet," was heard across the globe.

More recently, Jim has been the lead guest instructor for the SAMS course at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This special advanced training program brings together the brightest and most promising officers from all branches of the American military and other allied nations. During this course Jim takes these future generals from eleven nations through large classroom exercises, purposing them to use military resources to reconstitute the Earth's biosphere — a mission he calls "our most unavoidable global task."

At his personal residence in Hawaii, Jim pioneers an eco-homestead and leads his twelve-member family of choice toward sustainability for 2012. On Jim's version of "the shire" he has integrated permaculture, bio-dynamic gardening, ancient land practice, and social architecture to make the land not only self-sustaining but a heavenly experience. With physical nourishment and mental serenity as his goals Jim is unabashedly aiming high and heading for paradise in this lifetime. The primary skill set here is what he calls proto-mythology, or embedding a new idea inside a cultural setting then feeling it into being. His work is a pro-spiracy not a con-spiracy. He organizes concepts that will attract his clients to a positive future.

SOCIAL ARCHITECT Social architecture is a term Jim helped to define and popularize. Social architects are innovators of social inventions and they are concerned with how human beings interact with each other within specific environments, dwellings and in commerce. Social architecture harbors civilization. From spiritual country clubs to community recycling centers, Jim has illustrated and designed numerous new environments. This includes an award-winning green chateau in the Czech Republic, a sacred water palace in Bali Indonesia, and the renovated waterfront plan for Waikiki Beach in Oahu, Hawaii. He has captured the strategic visions (development plans) for dozens of towns, districts, and special zones on the planet. In Lawton, Oklahoma he helped the town reinvent itself and create a new economic identity by conceptualizing Lawton as a global recovery center, able to respond to worldwide natural disasters and civil crises. The plan integrates the airport, warehouses, and even a university where attending personnel can train in crisis response.

The key to Jim's success in this arena is his ability to listen to the emerging ideas of others as they are proposed and discussed in strategic sessions. He then assembles the key concepts and delivers them in a high speed, three-dimensional rendering. He can assemble dozens of ideas in one strategic design in which all participants involved see their respective thoughts in action. This skill set is

unparalleled and among the 50 strategic visions he has rendered, he has received distinction as the only man on the planet to have assembled the visions of 10 of the top 100 multinational corporations. In every vision he requests the group first identify their higher purpose.

Of the many projects Jim has worked on, one of his favorites is the 80 square mile National Training Center for the army which he helped design near Barstow, California. It includes lanes and fairways where military units practice force on force engagements with non-lethal laser adapted weapons and sensors so that simulated battles can be scored with credible measures. He added fireside settings into the structure so that, at the end of the day, members of the units could gather at night to socialize and discuss their performances like athletes do improve their teamwork.

VISIONARY STRATEGIC ARTIST Jim began painting in his early twenties while in Vietnam. His exquisite oil paintings were displayed in the Army War Art Collection and the chief of staff's office. While on combat missions, his mapping of terrain and illustrations of combat zones proved to be extremely useful. He first mapped the Viet Cong underground tunnel systems. It was this extraordinary graphic overview skill, eventually recognized at top levels, which pulled him out of the trenches and landed him in the strategic design centers of the military world. As he worked he included his mission to bring warfare to a new level of sanity. He furthered the invincible in war and persuasive in peace concept. He worked with other concepts that took a wider range of new thinking such as non-lethal weapons, peaceful interventions, and remote viewing to new levels of acceptance.

The picture machine inside Jim's head can capture not only what he sees, but goes well beyond to include imaginary worlds and environments unseen. From unseen ideas and vaguely understood structures, Jim explains how he CAD/CAMs (rolls the idea around in his mind) until he lands on the perfect view or perspective then instantly renders it onto a large white board. "I've drawn automobile assembly lines after just one walk through the space," he tells me while assuring me that this is not a photographic mind or a God-given talent but something others can do as well. "People can load images into their brain just like words," he claims. He calls this Visual Language and has written manuals and produced videos that explain how it works.

Jim has imagined and illustrated airfoil sailing ships, folding wing dirigibles, and buildings that seem to come from a combination of "tomorrow-land" and the "shire." He is a futurist who insists on cherry-picking the past. He engineers like a Bucky Fuller with the social charm of Jim Henson.

John Strand, a client who worked with Jim on designing a new Sprint Communications Center describes why this skill is so valuable. "What Jim can illustrate in a few hours allows a planner, for example, to

initially calculate the number of work stations, count the workforce members, cost out the building requirements and infrastructure, and define the scope of the work. This allows decision-making, rapid prototyping, and concept development to proceed at light speed.” Walt Disney called this “Imagineering” where concepts could become a built reality overnight.

STORY-TELLER/PRANKSTER We have all been trained by the movie industry to desire and expect a high level of stimulation; it is almost a prerequisite to motivate us to action. For this reason, Jim adds story telling, heraldry, mythology and costuming into his bag of tricks. He creates a total immersion experience for the ideas people have decided they want to realize.

It is common, at the end of his strategic visioning sessions, for him to flip on a CD, crank up a rousing musical theme and appear suddenly in costume to tell a legend as a bold character. The legend might be about how this group of committed workers surmount the odds and push forward, united on their heroic journey to make the world’s best computer, create that healing hospital, or develop innovative strategies to get them through a downturn in their industry.

Playing with every tool he can muster –gesture, tonality, accents, humor, and even the lighting – Jim sends people on their way, inspired to fulfill their mission. He embellishes the adventure story of their upcoming success with a navigational map and a cheer to help them remember their higher purpose and their commitment. Channon takes his inspiration from Joseph Campbell's hero's journeywork and his foray into the magic kingdom of fairy tale and myth helps override one’s current reality and creates a psychic shift in one’s state of being. “These were their ideals, I just help them believe they are possible,” he says. One client describes Channon’s summation process as ‘riveting and motivating, leaving a lasting impression.’

Jim’s theatrical work began early in his army career when, contemplating how to dramatically make his point about “energy” being as powerful as “concepts” to a room of 1000 Army officers, he boldly played Pink Floyd’s “The Wall” while spray painting his message in fluorescent colors on a large 60 foot black lit backboard. “It was then that I realized the power of ‘out of the box’ storytelling and its use as a key piece in communication,” he recalls. “There is a huge difference between simply discussing a concept and otherwise giving people the experience of it,” he says.

His story telling grew to new heights when he flew 300 mutual fund executives by Indonesian military aircraft into the Great Western Desert in Australia and had them believe they were lost. Just before panic and sunset set in, Jim emerged in an orangutan outfit and gave them the opening to a three-day challenge course. This was six years before the show “Survivor” and reality TV. This gave the participants

of Seal Corp the 'reboot'; they needed to accept their new values and vision.

RENAISSANCE MAN (Adapted from Magical Blend Magazine) The early Renaissance in Europe was a cauldron of beliefs. While Christianity had consolidated its power during the medieval period, large pockets of pagan beliefs still thrived, and a new spirit of scientific investigation was taking hold that, when technically applied turned city states into nations and nations into empires. It was a time when the dragon, the cross, and the human mind vied for the future and stirred the imagination of a continent rethinking a thousand-year-old-paradigm. Perhaps we are overdue for another rethink of our world as a unified global civilization? 'Indeed,' says Jim. 'For the first time in history we are a united planetary civilization and have been for thirty years. But you cannot expect nation states to announce this, it will diminish their control.'

That hasn't stopped the World Business Academy from pursuing such a notion. Jim has been an Academy fellow for ten years and completed the first positive vision for planet earth 100 years out. It was called PROJECT EARTHRISE. This vision is very much more a cultural vision than an economic one with the essential idea being that we see earth as fully capable of being paradise. 2000 Leaders participated in the polling on the final 12 solutions. See youtube series.

On his own three acres in Hawaii, Jim set about creating an amphitheatre in his back yard. Known as Artesia, the amphitheatre has provided his community with a venue for some 20 mini festivals. It serves as a laboratory for social inventions and was designed and built primarily with a backhoe. 'Painting with tractors,' is what Jim fondly refers to when he recalls the building of Artesia. The seats, walls and stage are all terra-formed and surrounded by seven fresh water ponds. He designed the village like buildings and rooflines and made the cheerful masks that adorn them along. He even creates new costuming for each occasion.

Jim's approach is to provide 12 to 15 layers of stimulation when putting on an event, going well beyond just the sound and lighting to include the birds, croaking frogs, wind chimes, fire pit and other natural elements. He then digs into a box to show me a dozen puppets he recently bought together with a portable puppet stage.

Where did Jim learn about stagecraft and production design? He laughs and says: 'I garnered that skill first as the social chairman of my college fraternity and then later from having personally directed five different 50 man rifle platoons in the army. My voice and arms can move people or back hoes convincingly at a distance. But why is it we can't get a degree in event production in college?' he asks.

Community venues are disappearing, he laments. It is horrifying to him that people shuffle from work, to mall, to sub-division without places for community to gather. "The renaissance happens when and where we celebrate together ... in beauty ...with music...with dancing. And that means everybody, not just the people on stage," he says. When asked what a Renaissance individual is, Jim responds: Expansive, inclusive, expressive, and extra-ordinary! My personal approach is to assemble the most viscerally rewarding civilization about me and my friends while alive. It is life force living in a time of magic. It is the need to delight ourselves with the situation we are in. It is the anti-thesis of the industrial economy." He turns on some Italian music then launches into a Michelangelo character who tells me about the Renaissance Humanists and the development of their romance language.

GLOBAL SHAMAN I asked Jim how he sees fully employing all his five skill sets and he replied: "I recently underwent a review of my life during a seven-year archiving process which turned out to be a highly satisfying pursuit. I recommend every elder take part in some kind of life review. The unexamined life is not worth living, it has been said. During this time I discovered that I had been using a similar overall strategy in all my work. To my great surprise, it turned out to be a classic shamanic practice.

Of course no one imagines they can be a shaman in the 21st Century but that's because we have all been raised with a project manager mentality and we are stuck there simply because the Industrial Age had its way with us," he chides. "Change Agent is as close as we get, but that job is not defined as such." Like every shaman, his first objective has always been to discover the deep need of the organization or individual he was serving — whether that be military, governmental, collegiate or corporate. Knowing their angst or unfulfilled desire, he could calculate a solution or response by soliciting and generating the answer from within them. Using whatever culturally dramatic forum he could, he was a mirror, there to present them with the life and death story of their destiny.

"The process is dynamic, instinct based, and requires the preparation of more than one solution. But what always emerges is magical and often I just need to step out of the way to let it birth itself. I like the odds. Eventually it all leads to some sort of initiation, ritual or rites of passage to assume this new identity," he continues.

"I have now completed four positive strategic plans for our planet Earth. They are each important because each activates a different dimension of the citizenry, the institutions, and the concepts needed for the global overhaul. I'd like to take this skill set onto the world stage but I don't know how to reach that level. The Internet is such a gift and at the same time such a hairball — it's hard for any one person to punch thru," says Channon.

But punch through he has and now Channon's work is about to go very public. Jim's First Earth Battalion is the inspiration behind a soon to be released major motion picture called "The Men Who Stare at Goats." The movie is based on the book of the same title written by Guardian columnist Jon Ronson and it stars four of the most brilliant actors of our time: George Clooney, Jeff Bridges, Kevin Spacey and Ewan McGregor. Bridges plays Channon in his role as Bill Django.

"The film is being billed as a satire and a dark comedy," says Channon who wonders if his life's work is about to be terribly twisted and misinterpreted. "I've read the script and let's just say they took wide artistic license. You know, they gotta sell movie tickets," he says. Early reviewers privy to the pre-release version of the movie report that they love Channon's character, as portrayed by Bridges, and say that he is one cool dude. And that should abide well for Jim Channon as he proceeds along on his own hero's journey.

Go Planet!

FYI Jim has 75 videos on you tube press the button for high definition for best downloads.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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Susanne Sims is the author of Healing Vacations in Hawaii and the founder of the New Millennium Institute. Her passion is interviewing maverick minds of the future and spiritual healers, to interpret their words and worlds to others. She worked extensively with Terence McKenna before his passing in 2000, and with Hank Wesselman and Native Hawaiian elder Hale Makua, teaching Hawaiian Shamanism. She is also a vocalist and has performed at Jim Channon's Artesia.

Professional photo's of Jim available from Monica schwartz photography honolulu.