

Arthur D. Firmes

Biography of a *Daredevil*

Arthur Firmes was born on February 12, 1937 in Alameda, California. Early in life, Firmes showed the traits of a daredevil. He was bold, daring, and adventurous. These traits would characterize his life. This is the brief chronicle of the life of a modern daredevil.



Art Firmes racing at Riverside. Photo: John Wilson

Education

Firmes graduated from Livermore High School in 1955.

Firmes undergraduate studies were done at University of the Pacific and at UCLA. He performed his postgraduate studies at UCLA and SMU, where he studied design and architecture.

Firmes' academic studies were interrupted by time spent in the service.

Design Career

Art began his career with Jacuzzi. Jacuzzi manufactures water pumps and, their now world famous, whirlpool tubs. Art's experience in the whirlpool spa business gave him the idea for a new genre of architecture- the spa resort.

Around 1969, Art left Jacuzzi and started an architectural firm specializing in designing spa resorts and health clubs. The firm, *Health Spa Designers*, was initially located in the City of Industry in southern California. Firms designed over one hundred resorts and spas in the United States and abroad. His design accomplishments include:

La Costa Resort and Spa, San Diego, CA
Marriott Hotel, Palm Springs, CA
Bayview Yacht Club- Newport Beach, CA
Racquetball World Spa- Fountain Valley, CA
Century West Health Spa- Century City, CA
Newporter Inn- Newport Beach, CA
Atop The World Spa- Fullerton, CA
San Francisco Tennis Club- San Francisco, CA
MGM Grand Hotel- Las Vegas, NV
Sands Hotel Spa- Las Vegas, NV
Las Vegas Hilton International Hotel Spa- Las Vegas, NV
King's Castle Hotel Spa- Lake Tahoe, NV
Camelback Inn, Scottsdale, AZ
Profile Health Club- New York City, NY
La Manga Campo De Golf- La Manga, Spain
President's Health Club, Manila, Philippines
Il Picciolo Golf Club, Italy (design consultant, SRI div of Cala)
El Tapatio Resort, Guadalajara, Mexico
Rancho Del Cabo Resort and Spa, Los Cabos, ME (for Cabo West, Inc.)



La Costa Resort and Spa in southern California. Photo courtesy: La Costa Resort & Spa.

By the mid-1970's, Art's reputation had spread world-wide. In 1975, Firms received a commission to design a spa hotel in Spain. He spent a considerable amount of time in Spain during 1975 and 1976. He renamed his architecture business to match fit his new market. *Health Spa Designers* became *SPA Resorts International*.

Business Pursuits

Art Firms led several architecture companies including:

Health Spa Designers, City of Industry, CA. Owner

Spa Resorts International, NV. Owner
sold to Cala Corporation on September 13, 2000 and became
SRI Division, Cala Corporation, Oklahoma City, OK

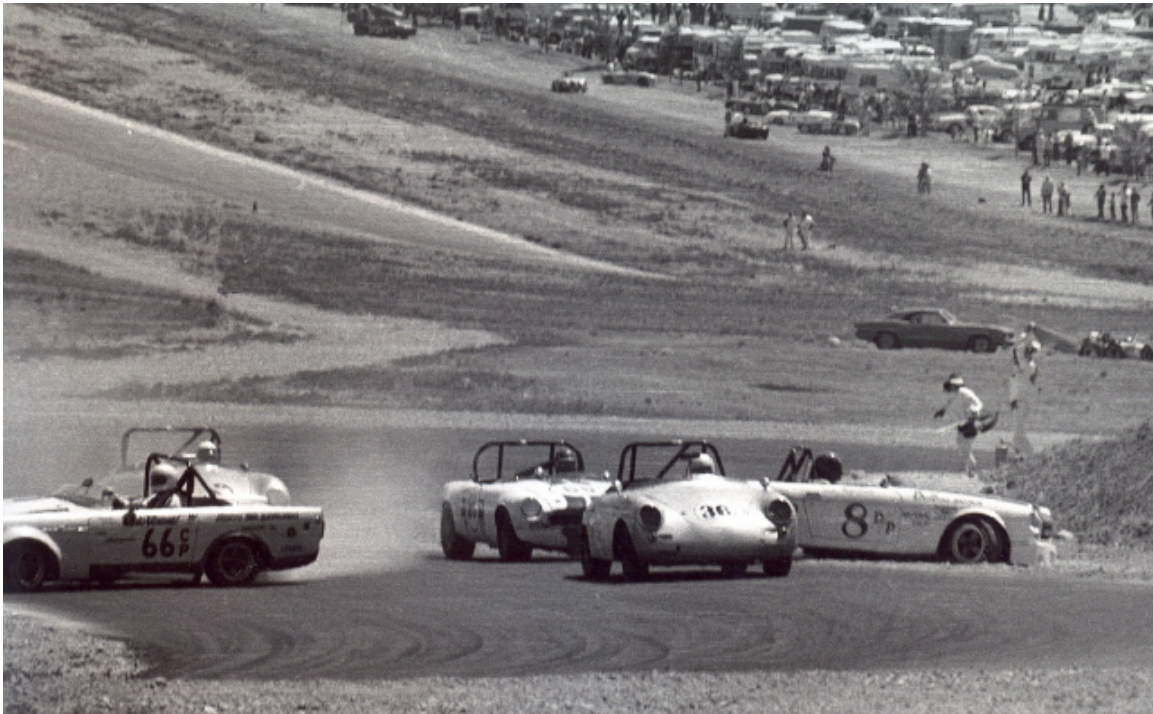
Janus Development Corporation, Marina Del Rey, CA. President
beginning January 13, 1999.

Cabo West, Inc., Los Cabos, Mexico. Vice President

Racing

Art had a passion for racing. One of his close friends in motorsports was Dick Guldstrand. In Dick's words: "We were great friends. We went everywhere together." Dick also notes that Arthur had a tendency to lose control of the Tiger and crash. Art raced the way he lived- with abandon. During the process of restoring the Tiger, we found that Dick had built in reinforcements into the front bumper and valence area to protect the Tiger from Art's mishaps.

On some occasions, while the race cars were being towed to the track by the employees of Guldstrand Engineering, Art and Dick would fly Art's aircraft to the track.



Art losing control of the Tiger at Willow Springs circa 1974. Photo: John Wilson

Personal Life

At Livermore High School, in the eastern San Francisco Bay Area, Firmes took classes in agriculture and joined Future Farmers of America with his friend Jim. On March 30, 1953, United Press reported that Firmes, 16 at the time, won a blue ribbon at the 4H Club Livestock Exposition held at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Firmes won his class in the cattle and hogs category.

Following high school, Art and Jim, his high school friend, joined the U.S. Marines. Jim says of Firmes:

"...he was the crazy one!"



Art's High School Yearbook photo from the Class of 1955.



Jim's High School Yearbook photo from the Class of 1955.

So maybe it was not a surprise when Firmes specialized in explosives while in the Marines. While on duty, an explosion occurred that damaged his pancreas. The damage was so severe that the organ could not be saved, resulting in life-long diabetes. The diabetes required visits to VA hospitals for treatment.

On July 23, 1961, Firmes married Karen Lee Lightfoot in her home town of Alameda, California. At the time, Firmes was 24 and Lightfoot was 19.

Later in 1961, while attending University of the Pacific (then Stockton College), Art met Dolores Jean Cummings. Dolores was a bright, 18 year old, sophomore at the time. Dolores helped Art with his studies, and the intellectual relationship became romantic as well. The romance was consummated, and Dolores gave birth to a daughter, Marjorie, in August of 1962. At birth, a prominent family in the Stockton area adopted Marjorie.

Needless to say, Art's marriage to Karen Lightfoot did not stand the test of time. Art and Karen divorced.

On January 7, 1968, Art married Johnnie Marie Young in Reno, Nevada. Art was almost 31, and Johnnie Marie was 21. Art and Johnnie Marie were together during the majority of years that he spent racing. When the races were close to their southern California home, Johnnie Marie and Art would attend the races together. She remembers going to several tracks in both northern and southern California, including Laguna Seca on several occasions. Overall, she did not relish the experience. Johnnie Marie noted that:

"Art spent a lot of time in the hay bales."

Even though she did not like watching, she understood how much Art enjoyed racing. She realized that:

"Art was fearless. He enjoyed racing- it was his outlet."



Art in the driver seat of the Tiger at Sears Point in 1973. Johnnie Marie, whom he wed in 1968, is given credit (albeit mis-spelled) on the door of the Tiger as "Crew".
Photo:Willis.

When asked about the being given credit as "Crew" on the side of the Tiger, Johnnie Marie responded that:

"Racing is a very expensive pursuit. I was given credit as crew chief because I was in charge of the check book!"

She recalled that her favorite memory of the racing the Tiger was when it was on the trailer.

"When it was on the trailer, the work had been completed, the car was done, and it was not costing any more money".

In addition to racing cars and explosives, Art's other high-risk activities included flying airplanes. Art and Johnnie Marie had a twin engine Cessna 310. To mitigate the risk of Art's flying, Johnnie Marie learned to fly. In case something happened to Art while in flight, she wanted to be able to get the plane out of the air. She took lessons and learned the basics: take-offs, landings, and communication with the tower. She practiced "touch and go's". For one trip, their aircraft was in for service, so they rented a single engine Cessna 172. Despite

Johnnie Marie's effort to reduce the risk of flying, Art crashed the aircraft on landing. Johnnie Marie suffered injuries to her neck and back.

During 1975 and 1976, Art was in Spain working on a spa hotel project. Art's Sunbeam Tiger race car was at Guldstrand Engineering. Guldstrand had prepared and stored the car, but had not heard from, or been paid by, Art. Art also had unpaid invoices at Wally Cartwright Engines, who retained one of his engines as collateral. According to Guldstrand:

"In late 1975, Firmes vanished without a word. I never heard from him again. I had no choice except to sell the Tiger by a lien sale."

When told that Art left the Tiger at Guldstrand Engineering and never picked it up or even called about it, Johnnie Marie said:

"That sounds just like Art!"

In August of 1976, Art and Johnmarie divorced in Los Angeles.

Art did not race again, but he did try marriage again. In 1980, Art married Linda A. Scott. Linda learned her way around deals as an escrow officer. She used that knowledge to become a successful business broker. When Art and Linda married, Linda had a son and daughter. Linda said that Art was very good with the children and that the children enjoyed Art.

Art's business was worldwide, so Art and Linda traveled frequently. Art had an aircraft, so they would fly to job sites in Las Vegas, Mexico, and Carmel, among others. In Carmel, Clint Eastwood spoke to Art about a potential project. During trips to Carmel, Art and Linda would try to stop by the races at Laguna Seca or the one of the concours events. While at these events, Art and Linda met many people from Art's racing years.

Even later in life, while married to Linda, Art remained something of a free spirit. Linda tells the story of an expensive, collectible, Jaguar that Art owned. Art took the Jag in for service, and never bothered to pick it up. The Jaguar, like the Tiger before it, was sold via lien sale. However, Linda notes that:

"Art was smart and ambitious. He could do anything he set his mind to".

The diabetes caught up with Art, and his vision deteriorated. He could no longer pass the physical exam to fly, so he sold his aircraft. The sale was probably a good thing. Art had crashed two more times- for a total of three. But by then, he had adopted another high-risk hobby: ocean sailing. Art and Linda acquired a fifty-nine foot Pilothouse Ketch sail boat, which they kept at the harbor in Marina Del Rey.



An example of a Pilothouse Ketch.

After fourteen years, the travel required by Art's business took its toll on his relationship with Linda. Linda needed to raise her children and travel was often not practical. In 1994, Art and Linda divorced. As Art's business took him across the globe, Linda lost track of him.

Subsequently, Art and Beatrice Lee Brody, Ph.D., of Redondo Beach, met and became romantically involved.

In 2000, Art's daughter, Marjorie, then 38, located Art and met him for the first time. Art and Marjorie enjoyed time together on the sail boat

in Marina Del Rey. Remarkably, and supporting the argument of genetics versus environment, Art and Marjorie shared the same interests and pursuits. Independently, Art and Marjorie pursued racing, flying, and sailing- daredevils both!

After 25 years in business, Firms sold his company, *Spa Resorts International*, to *Cala Corporation* on September 13, 2000. Less than a year later, Art fell ill and entered the VA Hospital in Long Beach, California. On April 19, 2001, Firms passed away. His daughter, Marjorie, his girlfriend, Beatrice, and many other friends attended his wake to celebrate Art's life as a daredevil.