

James Blackburn

A native of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Jim Blackburn graduated from Wake Forest University with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Political Science and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of North Carolina Law School at Chapel Hill.

Jim became an Assistant Attorney General with the North Carolina Justice Department under Attorney General Robert Morgan, becoming an advisor to multiple state agencies and arguing criminal appeals for the State in both the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court as well as arguing federal constitutional cases in various federal courts across North Carolina.

In 1974, Jim became the Director of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division and a Special Deputy Attorney General until 1976 when he joined the office's Special Prosecution Division, handling criminal cases across North Carolina.

In the fall of 1977, Jim became the First Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina, which represents forty-four of North Carolina's counties from Raleigh to the coast. For four years he prosecuted federal criminal cases in Raleigh, Fayetteville, New Bern and Wilmington. In 1979, he was the lead prosecutor in the triple murder case of former Green Beret Dr. Jeffrey MacDonald.

In the spring of 1980, Jim was appointed United States Attorney and remained in that position until late September, 1980, when he resigned to enter private law practice in Raleigh. Throughout the 1980's and through 1992, Jim was a prominent North Carolina attorney, handling both criminal and civil matters.

In 1993, Jim left the practice of law. Although appearing to be at the top of his profession based on all standard measures of success, inwardly, he suffered from the pressures that often come with that success. A drive to win at any cost, a strong desire to be all things to all people and an underlying depression took their toll, ending his legal career suddenly and spectacularly when a number of ethical misdeeds were discovered.

Jim's subsequent surrender of his law license, guilty pleas to state charges, and a three and one-half stint in state prison were well publicized in the media. He was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder and was placed under a psychiatrist's care for over three years. Upon his release from prison, Jim began to slowly rebuild his life.

Jim started by waiting tables for tips at the very restaurant in Raleigh where he had spent many hours as a paying customer and eventually was hired by then State Treasurer Harlan Boyles to serve as the Assistant to the Director of the State's Teacher and State Employees' Retirement System.

In 2000, Jim wrote and published a book about his difficulties, and that book, entitled Flame-out: From Prosecuting Jeffrey MacDonald to Serving Time to Serving Tables. Just recently, the book entered its fourth printing, with a new Afterword that discusses what Jim has experienced and learned during the last years. It is now available in either soft cover or in e-book format.

Starting out as a guest speaker for the North Carolina Bar Association on the subject of “Quality of Life”, Jim has continued as a motivational speaker across several states and now has his own business “Jim Blackburn Seminars, LLC”, which provides seminars on ethics, professionalism and mental health to several professions in different states as diverse as New Mexico, Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and South and North Carolina.

In addition to the educational seminars, Jim speaks to a wide area of individuals, businesses and trade associations. Several of the primary topics are set forth as follows:

Landmines on the Way to the Top...and How to Avoid Them: Getting to the top and staying there can be a tricky journey. This presentation will explore ways to keep your ego in check and avoid taking yourself too seriously. Learn how to recognize when stress – both personal and professional – has reached an unhealthy level. Be prepared for the fleeting nature of success. Find out how to rebound when you hit rock bottom.

The Unforgiving Minute: Choices that dramatically determine your life’s direction often come down to a single unforgiving minute – and sometimes even less. Taking a page from Rudyard Kipling, this program examines how to stay focused, trust yourself, face the truth, keep your virtue, regain your passion for your profession, or, in other words, “fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds’ worth of distance run”. Learn how to keep your personal and professional ethics in check and make the right ethical decisions under stress.

Back to the Future: If I were 25 years old, and starting my professional career all over again, what would I do differently? What have I learned that might help young people just starting out?

What if You lived Your Life this Way? What are the traits and characteristics that you can develop that can lead you to a happy and successful life? I have put together my own thoughts and ideas, based on my own personal experiences.

I was from Venus and my Lawyers were from Mars : An Ethics and Professionalism program for lawyers and paralegals based upon my experiences as a client. I learned as a client that what most people want is to somehow know they are going to be okay. How do you square this wish with the practicalities of the real world?

Living your life in Technicolor: When was the last time you were carefree and happy? What in your life is in technicolor and what is in black and white. It is never too late...to

start over or to be happy. These are two questions my doctor asked of me. These planted the seeds of my recovery from depression. It can work for you as well.

Ethics in Life, the Marketplace and Business: How to do the right thing, and why that can make a person, employees and indeed businesses successful, honest and productive. I use my experiences as the lead prosecutor in the Jeffrey MacDonald murder case as the basis for successfully doing the right thing.

Night Falls Fast: As someone who became very ill, suffered major depression, was hospitalized for a short time, thought about suicide and ultimately rejected it, I can tell you my story, and what I remember from a dark time in my life. Eventually, I became well. I was able to start my life over. I did not do it alone.