

# **Demetri Comino BSc (Eng) OBE**

4 September 1902-27 September 1988

'Nothing can ever compensate a boy for not being born poor'  
Andrew Carnegie

'Nothing can ever compensate a boy for not being born rich'  
Nelson Rockefeller

## ***Synopsis***

This 12-page biography tells how Dimitri, the son of an oyster merchant, came from Australia to study engineering at University College, London in 1920. After graduation he worked for a large engineering contractor in which he was frustrated by the lack of drive, purpose and motivation then prevalent in much of British Industry.

So he started Krisson, a printing business, to supply price tickets and promotional material to the rag trade around Carnaby Street in London. The requirements were for speed, accuracy and service which suited Dimitri's sense of purpose. He eschewed the dead hand of the print unions. He trained and motivated his staff to a very high degree making Krisson an exiting and demanding place in which to work. Evening sessions were held to further everyone's general education.

In the Second World War Krisson continued, but at a low key, and Dimitri turned to making machine parts. During this time he invented and developed Dexion, a slotted angle construction system which has sometimes been mistakenly described as a grown up Meccano.

He began manufacturing Dexion in May 1947 using a standard die press and sold the product initially from a wheelbarrow. The advantage of Dexion in rapidly making adaptable shelves, tables cupboards, space frames etc. gradually became apparent and by the end of 1949 Dexion was well established. The staff were just as highly motivated and educated as at Krisson.

In 1968 Dexion went public and Dimitri used some of the proceeds to establish the Comino Foundation in 1971. Its main activities in the early days were to promote and develop further Dimitri's process for achievement known as GRASP (Getting Results and Solving Problems) and to help change the prevalent anti-industry culture. Both succeeded.

Dimitri retired as Dexion Chairman in 1973 and died in 1988. Dexion is no more but continues to flourish in Australia. Krisson and the Comino Foundation have survived

## ***Origins***

Demetrius John Comino was born neither rich nor poor on 4 September 1902 and disproved both propositions. Like many who have helped to transform British society, he was not English, neither by descent nor birth. His father, John, was born in Perlegianika on the Ionian island of Kythira, also known as Cerigo, in the Greek Archipelago, in 1858 and was himself the son of Demetrio Comino a farmer on that island and after whom he named his first-born.

In 1873 John's elder brother by some fourteen years, Athanassio, arrived in Sydney, Australia, at the age of twenty-nine, probably as a crew member on a sailing ship from New Zealand. In 1884 he leased two thousand yards of foreshore on the Evans River on the North coast and in that year paid for his brother John, then 26, to arrive, also from Piraeus, on the Potosi.

Athanassio reached a prominent position in the oyster fishing industry. He never married and died on 30 December 1897 of a strangulated hernia at the age of 53. He left his estate at Darlinghurst, valued for probate at £5217, to John and to nephews and nieces. Inheriting from Athanassio the title of Oyster King, John then applied a formidable business aptitude to orderly expansion. On 26 March 1898 he became an Australian citizen. He used his wealth to good purpose and with several others he was responsible for raising funds to build the first Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, Holy Trinity, Surrey Hills, where, on 6 September 1901 he married Anna Phocas who became the mother of Demetrius Comino on 4 September 1902. Anna was very well educated being the daughter of Seraphim Phocas, a Greek Orthodox priest, who performed the marriage ceremony.

John Comino died of pneumonic influenza at Belmore Road, Coogee on 21 June 1919 leaving Anna and four sons an estate sworn for probate at £31,872. Demetri was the eldest boy. The others were Athanassio, known as Nasso, born in 1905; Nicholas (Nicky), 1909; and Constantine (Costa) 1910.

### ***Environment and education***

Demetrius Comino was thus brought up, not only in an entrepreneurial atmosphere, but also a very cultured one. To some extent the criteria implied by both Carnegie and Rockefeller were met, the need to get on and the example of success. His mother was very good at painting and had painted the ceiling of the church where they worshipped. Dimmi, as he was called in the family, inherited her good taste and was brought up very strictly. He had to attend church although he had the luxury of going by hired car because the trams stopped at 11.0am on Sunday. He received no pocket money and saved his weekly tram fare by walking to school. He was allowed no comic papers or adventure books but, being good with his hands, was always making things.

He designed and built many toys to occupy and entertain his three younger brothers. These included kites, one big enough to lift him off the ground in a good wind, swings and even submarines which were sold to local schoolboys. He led his brothers in the many games he was always inventing and in outdoor activities. They enjoyed surfing and canoeing but when they were nearly drowned at sea they were forced to sail only in the river. His family life was a very happy one.

In these early years Demetri exhibited many of the characteristics which remained throughout his life. His restless inventiveness was one, another a meticulous attention to detail. He rarely constructed anything until he was satisfied with its design on paper. When built, it was subject to continuous improvement, again, often thought through in numerous handwritten notes before being tested in reality. He was fun to be with but could be a tiring companion.

Demetri was educated initially at Brighton College, Randwick, then in preparatory school in Coogee and the local grammar school before moving to the Sydney Grammar School in January 1917 when his mother felt he needed a more demanding academic environment. The move to Sydney Grammar, especially at the somewhat late age of 15, was a great culture shock, as the transition to academically

oriented secondary education often is to the more practically inclined child. He sank back to about the middle of the class. He also suffered some teenage ailments which held him back and was too ill to attend his father's funeral in the June of 1919. He was beginning to reconcile himself to his class position when, in December of that year, an event of great moment which affected his whole life occurred.

As he wrote himself:-

"I very rarely missed lessons but on one occasion I had such a severe cold it was quite impossible for me to go to school. On my return I discovered the class had started a new section in maths on which we would be tested the following day. I was panic stricken since I had not the faintest idea what it was all about. So I did something it had never occurred to me to do before. I took my maths book home, read all it had to say on the subject and tried some exercises. I soon got stuck but re-read the material and tried again. I found I was making progress so I persisted and succeeded in finishing all the exercises in the section. The next day to my great surprise I came out top in the examination."

This showed him what he could achieve if he really tried. The raising of his self-esteem, and especially the self-help way he had gone about it, not only gave Demetri the motive power for his commercial life, but also his belief that others could do the same if only they were motivated to do so.

That year, 1919, he came out not only top of the class but was awarded two prizes of £100 each, then a considerable sum. These were the Jack Rich Memorial Prize for general proficiency, given in memory of an army lieutenant killed in action in 1915, and the Rennie Memorial prize for science, also given for the death of a beloved Royal Flying Corps lieutenant killed at Salonica in July 1919. Demetri was thus the first recipient. In his next and final year, he won the Wigram Allen prize of £200 for mathematics bequeathed by an old boy of the school who became the Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament

After John Comino's death Anna, his widow, who had no family other than her own in Australia, wished to return to her roots in Rhodes. She naturally waited until her eldest son, who she now regarded as brilliant, had completed his school education and would be able to proceed to a Greek University.

Demetri had, however, inherited his father's interest in engineering and applied for an electrical engineering course at University College London, passed the necessary entrance examination and was admitted in October 1921. Earlier that year his mother had taken the family to Rhodes and had a house built on the outskirts of Trianda. She then left the two youngest boys to stay with relatives and go to local schools and came to London with Demetri and the second brother Athanassio.

Anna first settled in a flat at 11 Hunter House, Hunter Street to be near the University. No doubt she kept up the strict regime she had imposed in Sydney and her first born studied hard. At the end of his first year he was a Prizeman in 1st Year Engineering and awarded a Jews Commemoration Scholarship, a two-year award of £15 per annum. He was a Prizeman in 2nd Year Mechanical and Electrical Engineering and the Jews Commemoration Scholarship was renewed for a second year. In the final examinations of 1924 he was awarded the Electrical Engineering Diploma with Distinction and a First Class Honours B.Sc.(Eng).

At that time engineers could not complete their professional education without serving an apprenticeship and so Demetri obtained a three year student apprenticeship with British Thompson Houston (BTH) at Rugby.

## ***Into business***

In the 1920s even major British engineering companies like BTH were not renowned for effective utilisation of young engineers. Young people want challenges. They welcome responsibility. They want to use the knowledge they have so painstakingly gained and wish to release energies previously constrained within the long years of education. Little of this was offered to Demetri. He was used as a progress chaser. The management inefficiency exemplified by his job appalled Demetri who spent most of this time persuading shop-floor foreman to schedule and carry out tasks which should have required no such exhortation. He became disillusioned with the complacency of habit and internal politics of large engineering organisations and determined to start his own company.

He returned from Rugby in July 1927 to live again with his mother who had moved during his absence to 9 Trentishoe Mansions, 90 Charing Cross Road. She was in contact with a Greek and Turkish expatriate community around the Charing-Cross Road. One particular friend was making cigarettes using Greek and Turkish tobacco and he suggested that Demetri could buy a small printing press and produce the wrappers and labels he needed cheaper than he had to pay. Printing needed machinery, much variety of work and hence frequent problem solving, and involved physics and chemistry which Demetri enjoyed. His mother was anxious to see him started. She had confidence in Demetri to succeed anywhere but was less sanguine about Athanassio who was reaching the end of his time at the German University and she wanted the option of a place for him in Demetri's business.

So she bought a machine. It was installed behind the tobacconist's shop and Demetri got started. He took to printing very swiftly. It was an expanding business towards the end of the first post Great War boom, growing at about 30% a year. He discovered a flair for selling; with the enthusiasm he always exuded and soon reached the capacity of the small press. He learned of an established firm, Forbes J Taylor, Printing and Advertising, at nearby Oxford Circus which was in some financial difficulty. His mother now saw the opportunity she had been seeking. The company was just big enough to warrant employing Athanassio so she bought a partnership for her sons and they settled into the 200 square foot basement at 4 Market Place under a Carter Paterson parcel office. Taylor managed the marketing and promotion, Demetri the printing and Athanassio the accounts.

Market Place was an advantageous location because it was then the centre of the rag trade mainly run by the Jewish community. They needed price tickets in abundance because of frequent changes, invoices, statements, and advertising leaflets, all the minutiae of the clothing industry. They needed them fast and they needed them cheap. Demetri saw the opportunities for expansion but could not enthuse Taylor so; again with his mother's help he bought him out in late 1928 and rechristened the company Krisson. Although in modern Greek this means 'gold' the name was suggested by Athanassio who knew that in ancient Greek it meant 'usefulness'. When asked Demetri always asserted it meant 'better'.

## ***Expansion***

In 1932 the economy was beginning to recover and Krisson started to recruit. Demetri knew he had to build up a core of young skilled men before he could take on more work. In 1934 another basement of 4,000 square feet was found in Craven House, 34 Foubert's Place, behind Liberty's store in Regent Street and across the way from Carnaby Street.

Demetri was a devotee of Frank Taylor and Fred Gilbreth, the US work-study gurus. He behaved as the Japanese do in seeking continuous improvement. He kept everyone involved in all the innovations. This now made the company great fun to work in. All the employees from then on, no matter how humble, felt part of the action. They were proud to call themselves Krissonites and all wanted to contribute new ideas. Training was intense; it was no lip service operation. Discussions on current affairs were introduced into evening sessions which resulted in exciting meetings when members of the Fascist and Communist, as well as the Conservative, Labour and Socialist parties were invited to present their case. This included one rowdy meeting with Sir Oswald Moseley during the height of the Spanish Civil War. These meetings were so popular that friends and relatives often requested invitations to attend.

By now, Krisson had become a general printer of stationery, letterheads, business cards, advertising matter, accounting statements, and the like but still concentrated mainly on the local rag-trade. The territory extended from Park Lane in the West to Tottenham Court Road in the East. Demetri had long decided that while he would run a business he would not be dominated by its needs and in September 1935 with the company running smoothly he went to Rhodes for six weeks at the request of his mother who was there on holiday herself. She had resolved that it was time for her son, a successful businessman of 33, to marry. She had had her eye for some time on a lovely local girl, Katina Georgiadis, some ten years his junior.

Arranged marriages were still common in that Greek community and Mrs. Anna Comino had already been asked to be an intermediary for Katina with a local lad who she considered a much inferior match to her son. She had done her duty however and had put the proposal to the boy's mother urging her at the same time to turn it down. This was done but it made Anna realise there was no time to be lost. She was sure Demetri would love Katina, whom he had met briefly at social occasions in Rhodes and so it proved. Within a week of seeing her again he wrote to his Krisson colleagues to say he was engaged and enclosed a photograph of his mother's home at Trianda, which made them envious. The wedding took place on 22 September at Profitillia Church in the Rhodesian village of Scalacos.

After a honeymoon in Switzerland the couple arrived in England to the astonishment of his staff that had not expected the marriage to follow the engagement so swiftly. The newlyweds settled in a flat, 4 Princes House, Kensington Park Road at a rent of £4 per week. The mother then moved to 30 Burnham Court, Moscow Road, near the Greek Cathedral of St. Sophia with her other three sons.

### ***The dawn of Dexion***

Dexion was registered as a company on 21 October 1937. Dexion is the Greek word for 'right', in the sense of perfection, chosen, once again by Athanassio from a Greek dictionary. The origins lay in DC's fundamental dissatisfaction with printing despite its challenges and excitement. It is unique in that every job presents a new set of problems. While this suited his penchant for problem solving he hankered after a simpler and more certain way of making money. To increase income Demetri set about marketing some of his patented ideas to improve the efficiency of the printing industry and this was the original output under the Dexion name.

He made a Dexion gauge which was a plastic sheet for checking the square ness and register of a printer's forme. He produced Dexion trolleys and chutes together with a number of practical ways of saving time and space in the letterpress industry such as interlocking frames to hold print in place inside the chase. A Dexion Chart was designed to hang over a compositor's desk and constantly remind him of the simple but methodical tasks to improve performance. All the material was sold by direct mail in a very simple fashion. Little money was made because the market was small and conservative and there was no purpose in reviving the products after the war because of the rise of other printing techniques. None of these items, in any case, satisfied the criteria which Demetri had set himself. He wanted a real engineering product, divorced from printing, which he felt could justify his training as an engineer.

With his obsession for efficiency he had been concerned about the inflexibility of the wooden shelving used in great quantities for storing paper etc. and the waste of timber when it had to be dismantled and reconstructed in a different configuration. He conceived the idea of readily demountable shelving. By 1939 he had developed a long channel section with slots cut down one side and a very long slot or groove down the other. Accles and Pollock Ltd in Birmingham was then commissioned to make a first batch of one ton which arrived in late August a week before the declaration of the Second World War on 3 September 1939. Even so Demetri did manage over the next few months to sell the channel to the local stores of Lilywhites, John Lewis and Selfridges, an experience which helped him after the war.

### ***Wartime interruption***

The first year proved very difficult for Demetri. Almost everyone in London expected an immediate onslaught, a fear emphasised by the sounding of the air raid sirens within an hour of the Prime Minister's address to the Nation. The West End businesses on which Krisson relied closed down for two weeks. Income ceased. Many employees volunteered for the services or went to work for companies directly involved in arms production. As stalemate seemed to be established on the Franco-German border confidence returned and printing orders resumed. When the War really began with the fall of France paper was rationed and the Krisson establishment shrank further. To keep his business alive and being left with mainly girls in bindery and despatch Demetri retrained them to operate the machines.

With his engineering background and managerial status he was offered a position as a manager in one of the aircraft factories by the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Because of his determination never to work for anyone else he refused and, being an Australian citizen, he could not be directed. Instead he decided to help the war effort directly by installing a lathe to make aircraft parts.

Gradually the printing machines were mothballed and more lathes installed but enough capacity was retained to keep a minimalist business in operation. He was allocated lathes, drills, milling machines etc and a bevy of young ladies directed into industry by the Ministry of Labour. Demetri had a ball. He set about training them in the Krisson mould. At a low point of the war Demetri married his wife again in a Kensington Registry Office on 9 January 1942 to ensure that, should anything happen to him, she would be a British subject. On May 4 1944 Katina produced a daughter, named Anna after Demetri's mother. The birth was very difficult and although Katina and Demetri had hoped to have several children they decided not to risk any more.

He persevered with his desire to produce a more effective money-spinner than the printing industry and set himself the objective of producing an innovative product which would sell by the million. With the two tons of channel he had had made before the war Demetri had made various edifices but these proved to be not very rigid. Fiddling one day with two of the larger angle brackets, each with a six inch flange, he suddenly realised that by fitting one into the other and bolting them together he could produce a very rigid joint. This was the breakthrough which had eluded any predecessors. He realised that the angles could be developed into a much simpler constructional system than the channel, more versatile, economical, adjustable, re-usable and transportable.

In the evenings and during his fire-watch duties overnight at Craven House he would make many drawings of the kind of structures which could be produced and how they could be joined etc. At home he shared his thoughts with Katina. She naturally thought of him as a printer who would return to the business once peace was declared. Seeing him poring over his diagrams one evening she said 'Do you really think you'll look at all those sketches after the war.'

### ***Back to Dexion***

When the war ended Demetri's first task was to reconstruct Krisson. All the old team came back except for one who had been killed in the invasion of France. Return to a previous employer was indeed a requirement on demobilisation but none of them wanted to do otherwise. Increasingly, however, DC left the day to day running to the senior staff. So he was able to devote himself more and more to the Dexion Slotted Angle concept.

He examined many combinations and sizes of slots and holes and their positions. He realised that the combination of slots and holes would have to be worked out very carefully to meet the necessary conditions of strength, clearances, positive fixing and versatility. The first Dexion was made in miniature versions to help sell the concept.

By 1946 he had designed the whole process and was ready to go. He bought a second-hand Henry and Wright standard die press of the type used to punch out parts such as ashtrays but for the Dexion strip he was keeping the part normally thrown away. His main innovation was to adapt the press so that the steel strip could be continuously fed into it and be followed by a paint line.

### ***Production starts***

The war had been good to Demetri in that he had been able to save money from the cost plus manufacture of aircraft parts. Towards the war's end he had started buying war damaged printing machines and refurbishing them. They found a ready and profitable sale when printing came to life again. He still had to borrow from his mother and brother Athanassio to raise £7,000 to match the same sum borrowed from the branch of the Midland Bank with the Krisson account. The money enabled the purchase of a 3,500 square foot garage at Chingford, N E London which had previously been a stable. Production commenced in May 1947, the first day's output being 600 feet with a sales value of £17.25.

Despite Demetri's flair at selling Dexion, little was sold in 1947 and only 20,000 feet a week in 1948, less than a tenth of capacity. Money was tight and the cash payment required with each order tended to limit the clientele. Sales and production increased to 50,000 feet a week in 1949 and by the end of that year turnover had reached £500,000; a twelve-fold increase on the previous year.

Dexion began to participate in exhibitions. The sales campaigns were so successful that output leapt to half capacity in 1950, 125,000 feet weekly. Exhibition designers seized on Dexion with gladness as did show grounds and the growing sales team made every use of press photographs of Royal openings on Dexion supported stands or sheltered under Dexion constructed awnings. Its use expanded to hospitals, agriculture and forestry. Cash flow improved and from his profit margin of 25% Demetri was able to repay the £7,000 bank loan in that year, a new factory was opened in Enfield.

### ***The imitators arise***

In February 1951 Demetri suffered a severe blow when an employee who had been one of the main driving forces behind the production at both Chingford and Enfield decided to leave to form a rival company, Handy Angle. Dexion had already stimulated many imitators. There were 170 in Italy alone which ruined the market in that country. Handy Angle was one of about a dozen in the UK. Superficial imitations were possible because the patents were mainly concerned with the slot and whole configuration. Other companies used different versions as well as altering thickness.

The prior existence of Meccano made a generic patent impossible. In August 1953 Dexion achieved a major publicity scoop. A series of violent earthquakes rocked the Ionian Islands. Demetri donated 20,000 feet of Dexion for new housing; a prototype house was designed within three weeks and construction started two weeks later. Called Operation Ulysees the story was broadcast worldwide and even made an article in Time Magazine.

By 1956 Dexion had reached what Demetri called its adolescence. Turnover was more than £2 million and the total employment 700, 200 being outside the UK in factories in Belgium, Germany and Canada with licensees in many other countries. The next few years showed steady growth from £2.5 million in 1958 to £5.7 million in 1962. Growth brought its own problems. Too much money was spent on sales promotion and steel stock. There were cash flow difficulties. The financial position was not helped by the generous action following the 1963 Skopje earthquake. As with Operation Ulysees Dexion equipped and built two complete villages, one being called Dexiongrad. This action and the high reputation of Dexion resulted in Demetri's appointment as OBE. in that year.

Hambro's merchant bankers were brought in who arranged an injection of £250,000 from the Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation (now 3i) a wholly owned venture capital subsidiary of the major clearing banks in return for an option on 11% of the shares which was exercised when the company went public in 1968. The company could no longer afford the enthusiastic amateur approach which had been so successful when it was smaller. The time 'for everyone having a field marshal's baton' had gone. Thus began the process of weaning Dexion, not only from Demetri's physical domination but his psychological and cultural one as well. Krisson, with fewer than 50 employees continued to resonate to the Comino tune.

## ***The end of the dream***

The new emphasis on tight planning, budgeting and control at Dexion brought in a systems analyst, John James. who was later to marry DC's daughter Anna. In 1969 turnover soared a further 40% to nearly £21 million. Profit was £1.5 million. Within the company attention was being increasingly turned to warehousing and distribution. The product spread meant that slotted angle was now providing less than half the UK income from an output of more than one million feet per week. Wharton Cranes of Stockport was purchased early in 1971. This proved a buy too far. Dexion was too inexperienced to manage and co-ordinate the advanced engineering developments required.

1971 and '72 were difficult years and had been observed with great interest by the bosses of Interlake NICO Chicago, a highly diversified steel company ten times the size of Dexion. In August 1973 Interlake made an offer to purchase Dexion which was refused. However 1974 opened in an atmosphere of considerable gloom. There was the miners' strike which brought down the Heath Conservative Government. Three day working was imposed to preserve electricity. The stock market had not taken kindly to Dexion's troubles despite the good 1973 results. All shares plummeted in early 1974, from an all-time high the year before, Dexion's along with the rest. Money for vital future investment was becoming hard to find. The industrial logic was accepted and the sale to Interlake was agreed in July.

The price paid was a keen one, £9.4 million, which valued the company at some £4 million less than at its flotation despite a nearly threefold increase in sales but it was very commensurate with the balance sheet of £9 million. It had been a half that in 1968 and less than a third before going public.

Demetri remained on the Board until 1978 when he finally left the future of his most innovative venture in other hands. Although for a time it flourished and in 1996 reached sales of £200 million, Interlake began to use it as a cash cow. Vital new investment was neglected and the company ceased trading in the UK in 2003.

## ***GRASP***

At the age of 69 Demetri had increasingly relinquished day to day management of Dexion and Krisson and devoted more effort to defining for posterity his method of solving problems and achieving results. In 1971 he also established the Comino Foundation to pursue the promotion of his methodology and also address the concern he felt about the decline of manufacturing industry in the UK. In his many discussions with staff to motivate them to even greater efforts he used acronyms which could be easily remembered and applied. One was MOTS (Motivation, Opportunity, Trial, and Success). Another was ITGBE (Intolerable, Tolerable, Good, Better, Excellent or Better Still). The message he was always trying to convey was the same divine dissatisfaction he felt about any current situation. However good it was he always wanted to improve it. He was exasperating to work for. Staff would bring to him work over which they had sweated blood to achieve perfection and he would say 'Let's do better next time.' The acronyms did not satisfy him. They seemed too static for what he knew was a dynamic process. He was searching for a problem solving procedure and produced many diagrammatic forms of increasing complexity which he knew instinctively were too convoluted.

In 1971 he began to write his book on problem solving which he never finished because he was not satisfied with what he had written. What he did do was to come very close to achieving his objective by defining the essential ingredients for problem solving and achievement in yet another acronym PACRA (Purpose-Alternatives-Criteria-Resources). Finally this developed into what the Comino Foundation has promoted as the GRASP Process (Getting Results and Solving Problems). This acronym, however, might be better described as Getting Results and Seizing Potential because it is most used by the Foundation to help people in achieving their full potential.

The ingredients of the process are

- 1) Define Purpose i.e. what you want to achieve, not what you want to do. These are often very different. To help in defining purpose keep on asking the question Why? each time you think you know it;
- 2) Examine alternate means of achievement;
- 3) Establish the criteria by which you will know if you have succeeded;
- 4) Carry out your chosen plan;
- 5) Reiterate the process if you think you can do better or have redefined your purpose, which often happens.

This all sounds simple and to some extent obvious but is difficult to carry out in a disciplined way until it really becomes part of everyday thinking. Children can take to it very well and through its educational centres the Comino Foundation has demonstrated it can greatly motivate children to learn and also improve teachers abilities to manage their lessons and indeed the management of the school itself.

### ***The Comino Foundation***

Following the public offering of Dexion shares in 1968 Demetri Comino, his daughter Anna, and other members of the family began to receive substantial dividend income for the first time. Demetri was angry at the punitive tax rate of 98% then levied on 'unearned income'. He complained about this to an auditor friend who pointed out that if Demetri thought he could use the dividend income more effectively than the Government he should set up a charitable trust and reclaim the tax.

The Trust Deed established The Comino Foundation with the following objects

- a) To encourage, advance and promote education in the study of the science of Management Organisation and Administration.
- b) To set up educational or training establishments in the United Kingdom or elsewhere at which persons may obtain education in the study of such sciences.
- c) To carry out such other legally charitable purposes for the advancement of education and in particular to give assistance to any charitable institution engaged in
  - i) the study of principles of economics and finance.
  - ii) research into the study of thought processes.
  - iii) the study of the educational difficulties of persons who by reason of subnormal or abnormal intellectual ability require special assistance.
  - iv) the provision of primary, secondary or tertiary education.

On legal advice it was decided, to be most tax-efficient, to use the shares beneficially owned on behalf of Demetri's daughter Anna to fund the trust. The Trust Deed was dated 1 November 1971 and on 5 November Anna assigned to the Trustees, by Deed of Gift, her life interest in 4,658,500 Dexion-Comino International Ordinary shares to yield an annual income of some £50,000, By this means the Comino Foundation could receive a tax-free income but Anna's children would not be deprived of their heritage.

The mills of the Charity Commissioners and those of the Inland Revenue grind small and slow and it was not until early 1974 that The Comino Foundation came into full legal existence with the Registration Number 312875. In January 1975 the first grants of £5,000 each were made to the Cranfield Institute of Technology and the Administrative Staff College at Henley, the former to support Management Education the latter its problem solving work. Further grants were made to Cranfield but the support for the problem solving work continued until 1985 and cost a total of £185,750. Their programme followed a different approach to GRASP and was more akin to puzzle solving. Demetri finally accepted this and from then on attention switched to very active promotion of GRASP within education.

Another major activity in the early days of the Foundation was a joint effort between Demetri and Edward de Bono of lateral thinking fame to attempt to establish a Royal Society of Thinking. From 1976 to 1980 many discussion dinners were held, first at the Athenaeum Club and then in an Albany apartment provided by the Foundation, with distinguished guests from many walks of life. The dinners were very enjoyable but no progress was made and the project abandoned after spending £54,000. A much longer term project began in 1975 when Demetri attended a consultation at St. George's House, Windsor Castle. This House, previously for clergy residence was refurbished in the 1960s with the help of Prince Philip on the understanding that it could be used to house weekend consultations for examination of issues of major National importance. It was an attractive venue which few could resist despite busy lives.

The consultation Demetri attended was discussing the decline of British industrial power. This was very dear to Demetri's heart and to enable the work to precede the Foundation set up a Comino Fellowship at St. George's House. This was later transferred to The RSA (The Royal Society for the Promotion of the Arts, Industry and Commerce) as being more appropriate to its own aims. The Fellowship was awarded to Kenneth Adams, himself a businessman, who continued the series of consultations which addressed the reasons for Britain's industrial decline and helped to set up many organisations to promote the cause of Industry. The campaign reached its peak in 1986 with Industry Year 1986 spearheaded by the RSA and the UK Government Department of Trade and Industry, (the DTI). This cost more than £3 million, mostly from the DTI with £50,000 from Comino and £250,000 from the RSA. This was not the only close association between the three organisations. In 1978 the DTI set up the Industry/Education Unit to foster a more positive attitude to industry in the education system which was not encouraging the learning of the skills required for wealth creation. The RSA set up and Education for Capability movement supported by Comino.

The Head of the DTI Unit, Eric Bates, met Demetri at St. George's House and was enthused with the possibilities of GRASP to enhance children's potential and enthusiasm for learning and achievement. A pilot project was set up in the Midlands borough of Dudley with a very poor education record. Teachers in primary schools were taught GRASP principles and within a few years Dudley had a high reputation. This inspired the Foundation to offer the post of Education Fellow to Eric Bates and before his retirement in 2003 he had set up six Comino Centres across the UK to promote GRASP, not only in education but in other areas where achievement is low and needs enhancement.

On 27 September 1988 Demetri died of a heart attack while on holiday in Rhodes. On 5 June 1989 an evening of special tribute to Demetri was held at the RSA with 100 invited guests from all walks of life and levels of society, together with his widow, Katina, daughter Anna, her husband John and own daughters Olwyn and Marina. Twelve of his closest colleagues and friends paid their special tributes in a most moving occasion. He had changed all their lives.

Over the years many changes have been necessary in the financing of the Foundation and its objectives. In 1979 the capital base was made more secure by a settlement which transferred a share of the family trust which held Anna's shares into the Foundation's permanent ownership. The Trustees were then able to invest on the Foundation's behalf and through skilful advice now have a portfolio worth some £7 million and are spending more than £400,000 a year.

In 1994 the trustees adopted the following clarification of the Foundation's purposes "The vision of the Comino Foundation is that people in Britain should live more fulfilled lives within a prosperous society." The Foundation contributes to the realisation of this vision through its educational activities:

- a) by encouraging and enabling groups and individuals to motivate and empower themselves and to develop progressively their potential for the benefit of themselves and others, and
- b) by encouraging a culture which affirms and celebrated both achievement and responsible practice in industry and commerce.

This could more simply be expressed as a wish to leave the world a better place and this was Demetri's aim throughout his life. The Foundation has produced several pamphlets describing its purpose, activities and achievements. Up to date information can be found on the website [www.cominofoundation.org.uk](http://www.cominofoundation.org.uk)

Like many entrepreneurs before him Demetri's lasting legacy will not be in the businesses he created but in the Charitable Foundation he endowed.