Until this day, it comes back to haunt me and bother me that I quit something.” It seems inconceivable that Garry Neil Drummond ever said this about himself. But he did. As a high school graduate and newly wed, Drummond enrolled at Auburn University. But lonely for his bride and frustrated with adjustments to college life, Drummond returned home. Now, as chief executive officer of Drummond Company, Inc., one of the largest, independent, privately owned coal companies in the United States, Drummond reflects on that time as one of the integral turning points of his life.

Born in Sipsey, Alabama, Drummond was one of five sons born to Heman E. Drummond, founder of Drummond Coal Company. After returning from Auburn, he worked with the company for a time and then entered Walker College (Jasper), where he earned his Associate Degree in 1959. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Alabama in 1961. Drummond joined the family business full time after graduation. Working with his brothers, they built the company into one of the leading coal producing companies in the nation.

The company's big break came in 1970 when it ventured into an agreement with a trading company representing major steel producers in Japan. They needed metallurgical quality coal that was found in the eastern half of Alabama’s Warrior Basin. Drummond negotiated a $100 million contract, more than 12 times annual sales at that time. After becoming chief executive officer in 1973, he negotiated many more ventures with the Japanese steel industry.

Drummond was the twelfth largest U.S. coal producer for 1995. In addition to its Alabama mines, Drummond operates a large surface mine in the Powder River Basin of Wyoming, and in 1995 began shipments from a new coal mine and port built by Drummond, Ltd. in Colombia, South America. Shipments from Colombia totaled 4.5 million tons in 1996. Total 1996 production from all Drummond mines was in excess of 26 million tons.

Now in its sixty-second year of operation, the Drummond Company employs over 2,800 people world-wide and has annual revenues in excess of $700 million, making it 268th on Forbes’ list of largest private companies. Still, the company follows the basic philosophy established in its founding year: the emphasis on doing one thing well. Throughout all the years of expansion—from surface mining to underground mining and coke production; exploring alternative uses for phosphate mining; and creating a real estate division—things have been kept simple. Said a company spokesman, the company “has grown by remaining focused on its primary business and its two related businesses while staying alert... when opportunities come along.” Coal still occupies a strong position, and prospects are extremely good for the Drummond Company into the 21st century.

Mr. Drummond is civic minded and devotes considerable effort to education and community affairs. He serves on several boards of trustees/directors for business and professional associations, including the University of Alabama System, Southern Research Institute, Boy Scouts of America, Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, and the Corporate Foundation for Children. Among his many honors is the 1989 induction into the Alabama Academy of Honor, and Honorary Doctorate of Science degree from the University of Alabama in 1983.

Mr. Drummond has four sons and one daughter. He is married to the former Peggy Snoddy and resides in Birmingham, Alabama.