

## ACK Story: Damien Meredith (1971-74)

### 1. *Please share with us a brief overview of the past few decades of your life?*

The last thirty years have been a whirlwind of building a career, marriage and three children. I have spent nearly all of that time in the Automotive Industry working at a corporate level for Honda, Volkswagen and The Hyundai Group (Hyundai and Kia). I have been incredibly lucky to work in an industry that is very dynamic and challenging. For the last four years I have been the Chief Operating Officer of Kia Motors Australia. Being part of a successful business turnaround gives you a great deal of satisfaction and continued drive. Kia in Australia is now a highly respected Brand which has doubled Sales in four years to over 60,000 vehicle sales a year.

### 2. *What years did you attend ACK and how did ACK prepare you for your current role?*

I attended ACK from 1971 to 1974. There were very few “luxuries” at Assumption in those days, but an incredible *esprit de corps* amongst the student body. There is no doubt my time at Kilmore taught me many things (mostly good), but the main thing was how to work effectively in a team environment, most importantly respecting everybody and everything around you. In many ways, living in a dormitory with 60 others positioned me very well for my career in business. It was imperative to be respectful of other people, their belongings and their space at all times. We got it right most times! Looking back, the school was teaching us advanced leadership skills, but in a very unstructured manner. Life and business consistently get messy and you need effective leadership to get things back in order.

### 3. *What did you think of your teachers/coaches at ACK? Does anyone in particular stand out?*

The three standouts for me were Ray Carroll, Br Ambrose Reilly and Br Arthur Maybon. Ray never actually taught me, but his kindness, caring and memory for sporting trivia were amazing. Br Ambrose was my Dorm Master for the majority of my time at ACK. He had a great ability to read me and knew when to inspire me and bake me! Truth be told, there were probably more bakes!! Br Arthur was my Under 15A Football coach and Ag Science Teacher. I loved the way he taught and coached. Always fair but firm. All three of those teachers still show interest in my career and my life. I am extremely proud and thankful for that.

### 4. *Are there many people from your days at ACK you still remain in contact with?*

The Class of '74 were academically deficient, but socially brilliant. I am very proud to say my best friends in life are all Assumption boys and we are still in constant contact. Being based in Sydney hasn't stopped us from getting together on a regular basis. Tennis, football, birthdays and weddings are all good reasons to celebrate together and share current (and past) stories. They have all had great careers, married well and produced fantastic kids. I have been incredibly blessed with many wonderful friends and I'm very proud of them all.

### 5. *Some people believe success is merely a product of luck and coincidence. Looking back on your journey after ACK, and all you have achieved, would you agree?*

There is a well-known saying: *"The harder you work, the luckier you get."* I firmly believe luck and coincidence are by-products of hard work, persistence, consistency and making right decisions on the road to whatever you aspire to achieve.

### 6. *What values are most important for you to live by?*

Take responsibility for your own actions. Think carefully before you act and make the right decisions (ensuring you always do what's in the best interest of your family, business, friends and others you influence and touch). Respect and teamwork are also values that are incredibly important to me.

7. *Which people have had the most influence on your life and why?*

My Parents and my brothers. They taught me about unconditional love and laid the train tracks of my life which set the morals, work ethic and social responsibilities I now live by. In addition, my wife and children keep me grounded and my ACK friends have always been a great source of encouragement.

8. *When did you consider yourself to be successful?*

That's a very difficult question to answer. If you are talking about career, then I felt I had achieved a fair level of success when I became a Director of Hyundai Australia. All other aspects of life and road to success remain 'Works in Progress'. Achieving success in any field requires enormous support from others. My family was "dragged" around Australia 11 times in my earlier days and cannot be thanked enough for their love and trust during this period. Also, my friends have always been there for me with great advice and positive encouragement. At the time I received the call from Korea with the offer to become COO of Kia, I remember seeking the counsel of three of my close ACK Friends (Mark Birrell, Gerard Cassidy and Peter McCormack) who were with me at the time. After due consideration, they responded I should take the position... "we will all get Australian Open Tickets!!"

9. *Is there a particular failure you remember most vividly? And what did you learn from the experience?*

I have known many failures along my journey - missing sales targets, market share targets and profit targets. The main message I have learnt from this is to never miss sales targets, market share targets and profit targets!

10. *If you had one piece of advice to share with the current Year 12 ACK students preparing for life after school, what would it be?*

Work hard to find the right balance between career and family. Family and friends are precious and the reality is you spend more time with work colleagues than you do with family and close friends. Every successful person I have ever spoken to will always say the same thing. "If I could change anything it would be spending more time with family and real friends". The reality is most work colleagues are great people but there is a transient and transactional aspect to it that doesn't occur with family and friends.