



ACK Story: Bernard Curtin OAM *(vale April 2018)*

[Posthumous interview with Bernard's sons, Peter ('82) and Jack ('93)]

1. What years did Bernard attend ACK? 1950-55

2. What are some of the stories your Dad used to tell about his time at ACK?

Brian Forrest (ACK 1955) shares the tale of a time when the ACK cricket team travelled to Wandong. "Our transport was the college farm truck with two benches on the tray for seating. As the old truck struggled up a hill near Wandong, some of the boys jumped off the back and ran along behind challenging each other to be the last to climb back on before the truck gathered speed downhill. To the amusement of all of us, Bernard Curtin known to all as "Bunger", left his run too late to get back on board. The driver, Brother Finan, heard our shouts and finally stopped some distance down the road to be told Curtin had fallen off. When he drove back to find the somewhat forlorn, but unharmed figure of Curtin, the relief on Br. Finan's face was palpable, so much so that he offered Curtin a cabin seat for the rest of the trip! I do not know whether Br. Finan was ever told what actually happened that day."

Dad would often tell us stories of boarding at ACK. He had the utmost respect for the 12 Marist Brothers who were his teachers, as well as his boarding masters and football and cricket coaches. They were required to do everything. Despite administering punishments questionable today, Dad had great respect for how difficult it must have been to control 350 boarders for 14 week stretches, three terms per year.

When I think about Dad's time at Kilmore, his stories about playing in the 1st XI & 1st XVIII are most vivid for me. Playing cricket in the Kilmore & District Assoc., Br Celsus was also a player on the team. Br Celsus was a great disciplinarian. Dad was batting at No 3 and was going through a rough period, so he mentioned to Brother Celsus it might be an idea to drop down the order to get some confidence. The next match Dad found himself batting at No 11! Dad loved to talk about the 1st XVIII, how cold the winters were, the gale-force winds and the various games won by narrow margins off his own boot! He spoke fondly of the camaraderie he had with the likes of Brian Forrest, Gus Brannoff and Ray Brooks (and the Marist Brothers featured regularly in conversations.)

We also heard the story about the time he and Ray Brooks broke the statue of the Virgin Mary and were required to write a letter to their parents to explain what they had done and what the replacement cost was. It turned out that the letter was never sent by the brothers, to Dad's eternal relief, as the implications had his father ever learned, were too dire to imagine. We learned all about the spartan boarding houses, without a single heater and the torturous early morning rising for daily mass. The extra motivation to join a sporting team in hope of getting extra food at the away games! The expectation of writing letters home every Sunday night and 14 week terms without a home visit... no wonder they formed such strong bonds.

3. Did he remain in contact with many of his friends from Kilmore?

I don't think "remain in contact" is the right phrase! Dad was a connector. He was a champion of ACK, its people, the Marist brothers and anyone involved with the school. He made it his job to keep in contact with everyone. All the ACK old collegians knew there was an open invitation to come and visit us in Berrigan, and most did.

ACK was in his blood. The College and everyone associated with it were family. This included Dad's own family; his mother Mabel Powell attended as a girl boarder in the early 1900s, (when girls attended what is now the international school); his brother Father John Curtin, who was there in the 1930s; his sons Peter, Michael and John who were there in the 70s and 80s; and his daughter Marianne, the first boarding coordinator for boarding girls in 1990s. There were also his close friends, Bill and Val Daly, who were Bursar and boarding coordinators during the 80s and 90s.

He was the first Captain Coach of the Assumption Old Collegians Football Club in the Amateur Association in the 1960s. He had great friendships with Brian Harding, Brian Forrest, Ray Brooks, Gus Brannoff, Crash McMahon, Des Tehen, Matt Burn, Norm Nugent, Des Koschel and so many other names we would often hear about. He was awarded a life-membership of the Old Collegian Football Club for his services over many years.

4. How do you think ACK prepared him for his various roles later in life?

So much of what our father did was based upon the lessons he had learned from the Marist Brothers. He had the utmost respect for the sacrifices the Brothers made to give country boys a catholic education. They gave their lives for the benefit of others. He never forgot that act of service. It taught him to cherish people; his friends, his foes, his family, the teachers, the cooks and the cleaners. It taught him to respect people and to treat others equally, regardless of their station in life. It taught him the importance of leadership, self-belief, optimism, resilience, contribution to the greater good and the ambition to strive high... the school credo was dear to his heart.

5. Can you share with us some of his notable achievements after leaving ACK? In what ways did he positively impact on the lives of others?

We may need a few pages here! He was awarded the OAM for services to Berrigan & District, particularly the Health Services, Local Government & the Berrigan community. He was the Mayor of Berrigan Shire Council from 2012 – 2016, during which time he worked tirelessly to help build a new Hospital, an Aged Care Hostel and a Retirement Village.

Dad was a friend to everyone. He looked for the best in everyone and that's why people loved him. He took an interest in you, no matter what your age or status. He was genuinely excited by other people's achievements and their individual happiness. He was a mediator, a healer. The art of forgiveness and the strict confidentiality he afforded people, meant he could work with everyone and almost always achieved a positive outcome.

His positivity was infectious. When advised by his oncologist in 2005 the stem cell transplant he had received was touch and go, he responded, "Doc, we are only in the third quarter and we can still turn this game around in the fourth!" His 'can-do' attitude had much to do with him managing to live another quality 13 years. He strongly believed, "it's never too late to apologise, to fix something, or to mend a strained relationship"

6. What were the values he demonstrated most strongly throughout his life?

The values Dad consistently demonstrated were the importance of looking out for others, being courageous, kind, resilient, humble in victory and gracious in defeat. He also showed great empathy towards others, always trying to view issues from the other person's perspective.

7. Some people believe success is merely a product of luck and coincidence. Would your father have agreed with them?

A favourite quote of Dad's (I think attributed to Thomas Aquinas) was; Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny. He viewed hard work, more than luck, as being the key ingredient in sustained success.

8. Would your father have considered himself to have been successful?

Absolutely. Family and community were everything to Dad and in this sense he accomplished great things. He had a wife he adored, seven children he loved dearly, 16 beautiful grandchildren, an enormous network of friends and the wonderful community of Berrigan, which he cherished. One of his endearing qualities was whenever anyone tried to praise him, he would quickly point to others around him and the role they had played in the success.

9. Did he ever speak of failures? What did he learn from those experiences?

He wasn't one to focus on failures. He spoke instead about whether you had tried your best and what you could do next time to improve. He often told us, experience is a great teacher.

10. Apart from being a great character, what are the sort of things people will remember Bernard Curtin for?

Dad didn't need an iPod to start a party! He loved to sing with friends and was able to create an amazing atmosphere that people would flock to. He was very much a magnet for people at social outings. He was as comfortable talking to politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra as he was at the local footy game or at morning tea after mass on Sundays. He was respected by people from all walks of life.

He will be remembered as an empathetic, caring leader. He was a person the police would seek assistance from following a dreadful accident and a family needed to be notified. Whether singing the National Anthem on Anzac Day in Berrigan, or sharing a quiet conversation, his hospitality, generosity and friendship will long be remembered by all who knew him.

If your Dad was asked to share one piece of advice with the current Year 12 ACK students preparing for life after school, what do you think it would be?

To the current boys and girls of Year 12, I'm sure he would say something like;

"I'm delighted to see you in the Assumption uniform. Make the most of your opportunities and never, ever forget the sacrifices your parents made to send you to a great school like Assumption College. Show them your love and appreciation by being the best you can be, in whatever you do. I hope you are fortunate enough to have the same enduring friendships I have been privileged to know for over 60 years. Strive for success, study hard and reap the rewards. Always remember our motto (Quae Supra Quaere - Seek the things that are above.)" I expect he would then close with his favourite quote; .. "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."