



Princeton Class of 1966

In Fond Memory of and in Tribute to Jack David Bo Coleman '66 Celebration of Life Tributes and Remembrances

The following was collected, transcribed from Jack's Celebration of Life, and adjusted for posting by '66's Memorial Team

Jack David Bo Coleman was with us during our junior and senior years. He was 7 years our senior in age, many travel miles, and 3 years military service ahead of us in his worldly experience and maturity. He lived in a single his senior year and probably did so as a junior. By virtue of that divide, we did not learn much about him to our loss. This posting seeks to remedy some of that loss. Early in the Memorial Team's work gathering information for Jack's Memorial Page, a Princetonian '66er emailed to ask Lauson Cashdollar, "why are you claiming him, he started in the Class of '59, took years off and only graduated in 1966." Cashdollar's response: "Because he is one hell of a good man and '66 is one hell of a good Class." When Cashdollar said that, he did not know the half of it.

It is fitting that JDBC had four names for it would be very difficult for a man with only three to live the full, wise, inquisitive, talented, passionate, mischievous, energetic, teaching, fishing, boating, boat building, unpretentious, volunteering, exploring, aspiring, inspiring, debating, sheep shearing, salmon poaching, nature loving, rambling-about, bagpipe-playing, friend-making, family-loving, and giving life he lived. [That's probably way more adjectives than one should ever use in a sentence, but Jack earned them.] Truly a man in full, Jack mastered every dimension a good and steadfast man could want. He was a veritable human Swiss Army Knife of talents, interests, moral values, and strengths.

Jack adventured always because he was always an adventurer. His adventurous stints in the U. S. Army as a Medic, pedaling through Europe, living on Mackinac Island, and the Outer Hebrides in the Arctic Circle, and in two Alaska towns, Aniak and Shishmaref are instructive. Jack and a friend Kayaked the entire 100 plus miles of the Schuylkill River from its source in Pennsylvania coal country to its confluence with the Delaware River in Philadelphia. He crewed on a sailboat travelling the Atlantic from Maryland to Maine. He rowed a boat around Manhattan Island leading swimming contestants along their course. These are only some of Jack's adventures.

At the South Kent School, he played three major sports in each of his 4 years: rowing, hockey, and football, while maintaining his scholastic pursuits. That

accomplishment makes one wonder if Jack had learned the secret of manufacturing time. He shined in his academic pursuits during his years at South Kent Boarding School, internalized his love of education, and developed a growing interest in teaching that led him to dedicate part of his life to that calling.

In his writing to the Class of '66 for inclusion in our Class 10th Year Reunion Book, Jack described some of his early teaching work in Alaska,

I am presently a field coordinator with the Alaskan Rural Teacher Training Corps Cross-Cultural Education Development Program, the prime objective of which is field delivery of university programs leading to undergraduate and graduate degrees in education to Eskimo and Indian students living in isolated rural areas of the state. A unique program that's being copied in Australia and elsewhere. * * * A very interesting and ever varied line of work with an excellent outfit which turns you loose to get the job done with a minimum of fuss and bureaucracy. How many of you can say the same thing nowadays?! [Exuberant, dual-purpose punctuation in Jack's original.]

Prior to his teaching work in Alaska, Jack ministered to the educational needs of the Indians on Mackinac Island in Michigan and in his own words "spent a superb year in the Outer Hebrides Islands [of Scotland] studying language shift in a Gaelic crofting [farming small, rented, growing plots] community, with a little salmon poaching, sheep shearing, and drinking on the side." Jack's time on Mackinaw Island ministering to the various Indian tribes there --- Odawa, Ojibway, and Potawatomi is further evidence of his dedication to education, and, in his early years getting it to those who had too little access.

In pursuit of his love of teaching, Jack became a beloved, apex teacher guiding, broadening, and opening young minds. In his last teaching post, William Penn Charter School, Jack achieved the title of "Doc Coleman." Doc didn't just train and educate good students. In his own demanding, yet gentle, humorous style, Doc mentored teenagers into proto-adults with learning attitudes, thinking skills, and values that equipped them to move competently beyond the high school level and into the much broader, challenging arenas of adult life. Let's talk about "Doc" Coleman, the mentor.

His students at William Penn Charter School paid him many tributes including several during his Celebration of Life. One of the best lies just below the surface of this yearbook entry in his honor.

Aside from his excellent bagpipe playing, Doc Coleman is also known for his charming sense of humor and warm personality (well, maybe not). In any case, students have come to fear Doc and his cane, which, he claims, has absolutely no Freudian symbolism whatsoever. But he can't be totally bad. After all, he does wear those photo-sensitive John Lennon glasses.
PP: Cynics. **A:** To be a Nardac **KF:** Turning back term papers a trimester later.

Decrypting the yearbook excerpt's bolded headings was a challenge. The conclusions: **Pet Peeves**, **Ambition** or **Aspiration**, and **Known Faults**. Nardac's meaning was not obvious on its face. Further research led to English Literature and Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels. During Gulliver's stay on the island of Lilliput, the Lilliputians awarded Gulliver with the title Nardac -- the highest tribute and status Lilliputian society could confer. Gulliver earned that title by saving Lilliput from naval invasion and destruction by the dreaded Blefuscudians. But that was not enough to preserve Gulliver's acceptance or wellbeing.

Jealous Lilliputs of high station plotted against Gulliver, framed him with false and petty charges, brought him down, and ostracized him. So, Doc Coleman, why did you teach your class you admired and wanted to be a Nardac? You did it because of what Swift taught in this political satire of infamous political betrayals going on in the high political circles of circa 1714-1716 England. [the Earl of Oxford was impeached and imprisoned, Viscount Bolingbrook was forced to leave England.] You did it because Swift's Lilliput Nardac satire was advocating for,

one committed to something greater than oneself; self-respect, but with humbleness and respect of others, self-discipline, and acceptance of personal responsibility; respect and caring for others; caring for other living things.

You did it to give your students the morale foundation of something more than self. And you did it with energy, style, humor, and fun.

This was Doc's master teaching plan as well as his plan for living life. Doc Coleman achieved Nardac status in both arenas: doing grand and proper things regardless of rewards. Doc Coleman was and will remain a perfect example of a Nardac, with one major difference. Wherever Jack/Doc Coleman went he won acceptance, admiration, his kind of success, and life-long friends. He also collected a cadre of former students who will always remember him as a wise mentor who broadened and invigorated their minds.

At his celebration of life, William Penn Charter School students gave moving testimony to Doc Coleman's teaching and mentoring skills. One young woman who did not give her name, said,

He was my favorite teacher. I think to the point of fun, Doc Coleman was one of the people in my life who taught me that something can be fun, and really, really hard at the same time. He was one of those people that challenged you. It's hard to remember when you are not a teenager anymore, but you need those people who teach you things about yourself that you didn't know. And that class did that in spades. He taught me how to write. He taught me how to think critically about history and the world. He showed us Easy Rider which is a really a bizarre movie to show 17-year-olds. And it broke open my world view and my view of art and film.

I don't know how it is possible for one person to do all those things. But he did it!

Another former female student [who did not give her name [orally in the video of Jack's Celebration of Life] in a way that could be understood – possibly *Brennen*] spoke of Doc Coleman using a faux gruff exterior to tell his students that he had standards they must meet while freeing them to participate in and contribute to the learning atmosphere of his classroom. When she appeared late for a Doc's class hoping to be marked present, Doc asked her to explain her lateness in a rough voice, *Well Brennen . . .* She reached back in memory to a prior incident where a student had offered a written lateness excuse from a dentist – an excuse that Doc had refused to accept by asking the student gruffly to offer a better one. Brennen repeated the excuse that Doc had offered to that student saying, “my air balloon ran out of gas.” Doc roared and said in his faux gruff voice “EXCELLENT!”

Brennan finished her tribute saying, “And so . . . Being challenged and him challenging folks in a way that made us comfortable is something I will always remember.”

Jack's brother Francis spoke similarly of Jack in a poem he sent to Jack on his 65th birthday and offered orally by Francis as a gift to the Celebration. The poem was called 65 and contained the following excerpts.

What a brilliant man with a wonderful dry sense of humor. He gives and
cares so much, but always quietly.

So deeply learned! With a wonderful, dry sense of humor, He always
gives and shares so much, but always quietly. * * * So deeply learned.
So rich in dreams in mind and in spirit. So humble! In walking his trail,
he seeks to want less rather than more, against prevailing winds.

Here's to a really special guy on his 65th birthday. With fondest love,
Your brother Francis.

Jack retained his inner child and deployed it to entertain Hannah, Elizabeth, and his nieces: Rosie, Lara, and Lily. At Jack's Celebration of Life, Jack's, niece middle in age, joyously read a story, written by her older sister. The story described a game of “Ghosts in the Graveyard” or maybe “Sardines” -- the older niece could not be sure --- played under rules long forgotten, but with Jack pursuing them with little desire to actually catch them --- waving his arms and roaring faux roars --- while giving those he pursued the time they needed to reach base and safety. The writer recalled the sheer joy and good terror of being chased around the yard in the dark by her special Uncle Jack. She called it “pure adrenalin so fun” . . . “the fun that you want” Uncle Jack made for us. She touted Uncle Jack's incredible sense of fun; she and all the kids would laugh when he

called them “little savages.” Uncle Jack’s inner child served him and his extended family quite well, not to mention his students at William Penn Charter School.

This middle niece – perhaps Lara Carey --- she never gave her name --- spoke of a call she made to Uncle Jack on his 84th birthday. At some point during the call, she asked her Uncle Jack, “what are your words of wisdom for future generations?” He gave her 8 words that she recorded in writing: “Find the things you love and do them.” She described those words as typifying her Uncle Jack’s commitment to searching, finding, and acting on what was found.

Hannah Coleman’s tribute, read from the Pulpit by one of Clergy officiating the Celebration of Life is:

One of the things her father taught her was to persist in pursuing what she wanted. He always tried really hard and worked very hard regardless of how much natural aptitude he had. He felt you should pick your things and then throw yourself into those things you thought were important.

Dad’s greatest lesson to me was that one’s path isn’t linear, and there is a beauty in that roughness, difficulties and disappointments. It doesn’t mean you’ve failed, but you need to regroup, and pause, and make something of it. Maybe you pivot and go in a different direction, but always keep trying. Do your best.

Elizabeth Coleman’s tribute, also read from the pulpit is:

When training for a marathon I had a 20-mile run to do. Jack surprised me by showing up at Falls Bridge with orange slices and water. He was so supportive and had an adventurous spirit and that meant a ton. He also surprised me when my lemon curd cake from the night kitchen for my high school graduation was inscribed, “Give ‘em hell Liz!” Always be kind, be polite, do your best and have a lot of fun while doing it. That was instilled in us. He did a good job.

Throughout life Doc Coleman, gathered and kept a number of good friends. He held them close. Many provided praise and tribute.

Doc’s good friend Elliot wrote,

You have long enjoyed the reputation of being a character. Your reputation has considerable depth. But bagpipe players are relatively rare and can be heard from a very long distance. On New Years Eve of the Millenium, we had a party and you brought your bagpipe. As midnight approached, we marched up and down our street with you in the lead playing your bagpipe. It was quite a way to ring in the New Year, the New Century, and the Millenium.

Jack’s oldest friend Henry said of Jack in tribute,

Jack, you have continued to exert a mythical hold on my imagination, reporting exuberantly from exotic, and at times not too comfortable spots. How unsurprising, a couple of years ago, to get a call at home, grab the binoculars to scan the mighty Hudson River, and lock on a figure in a skiff smiting the sounding furrows on the way to circumnavigating Manhattan.

To arrive, to seek, to find -- And not to yield. – You are an example to us all.

Friends Patricia and Jim wrote,

Jack, You have lived an adventurous life always ready to fly, but wisely grounded by Roxanne, Elizabeth and Hannah. You haven't yet crossed the U. S. by motorbike, but you've rescued and rebuilt a classic bicycle, you've built a boat, you lived in the Artic Circle in the Outer Hebrides. You've always embraced life's intellectual pursuits and friends, and we love you for it.

Another male friend who did not give his name said,

I got to know Jack later in life. Roxanne [Jack's wife also known as "Rocky"] recruited me to walk with Jack around the area known as the Reservoir. He was having trouble getting home from those walks around the Reservoir. It had been a Philadelphia reservoir in prior years but had been repurposed as a large green space with a long walking trail around it. Jack was an inveterate walker. I was not, but I tried to keep up with him. One day I became exhausted and collapsed. I sat down hard and Jack's military medical training clicked in. He got me settled, found someone with a cell phone, called for an ambulance, and then ran to meet it so he could bring the first responders to me. I am grateful and I am glad to have known Jack.

This lightly edited tribute highlights Jack's reserves of mental and emotional strength and spirit at a time when disease was robbing his brain of its former mastery over space, distance, and location. Jack David Bo Coleman '66 still had a lot left in the tank. To echo the substance of a friend's tribute, Jack, as always, *arrived, sought, found – but did not yield – He is an example to all.*

To sum up, Jack was a magnificent and inspiring man. He wrote a bit of poetry embracing his love of physical and active enjoyment of the outdoors and boating. One such poem he sent to a friend is the "Boys on the Bay:"

The Boys on the Bay

By "Doc" Jack Richard Bo Coleman 1937 - 2024

My voice is hoarse, my side is sore

My energy is on the floor

The day is cold, I'm feeling old

I fear that I've become a bore

I hope there will come a day
When I can go once more
And play upon the river or the bay
Paddles flashing in the air
How could a day be more fair
To move across the water fast
And in good time to come at last, to shore
When everything is said and done
It's all about having fun
One feels a certain satisfaction
After such a time of action
And when we put our boats away
We can upon reflection say
It's been a very pleasant day
So let the boys go out to play another day
Ole!

Other instances give us insight into Jack's character or raise a desire to know more. One of the first type was his practice to fire of a small cannon on his desk to mark the beginning of an exam. As to the second type, who wouldn't want to learn the story behind the following yearbook excerpt: "The seniors thank [Doc Coleman] for his intense class actions, especially Rick, who still has the chalk mark on the back of his neck." Boys will be boys.

In its correspondence with Jack's extended family, the Class of '66 reported giving Jack and Rocky these parting tributes, *Ave atque vale!* Hail and Farewell! Godspeed! We also thanked both of Jack's daughters, Hannah and Elizabeth, and Jack's extended family including his three nieces and brother Francis for taking care of our venerable Classmate, "Doc" Coleman '66.