

EDITORIAL CBMAR17

Daniel James Brown, in his non-fiction narrative “The Boys in the Boat” (Pan Macmillan, 2014), tells the story of Joe Rantz, one of nine young men from Seattle in the state of Washington – farm boys, fishermen and loggers – who emerged from hardship and obscurity during the Great Depression to shock the rowing world and Adolf Hitler by winning gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Joe was close to 90 when Daniel Brown approached him to ask if he could write his story. “Joe grasped my hand again and said he’d like that, but then his voice broke once more and he admonished me gently. ‘But not just about me. It has to be about the boat.’”

Brown realised that for Joe “the boat” was something more than just the shell or its crew. It encompassed but transcended both. It was something mysterious and almost beyond definition. It was a shared experience of long ago, when nine good-hearted young men strove together as one, gave everything they had for one another and, in the process, achieved amazing things.

For many of us the College was “our boat”. What Joe Rantz remembered from his crew’s endeavours on Lake Washington through to Berlin – their shared experiences, the striving together, the giving of their all, the overcoming of adversity, the bonds of brotherhood – are memories many of us treasure from our College days, no matter what our academic, cultural or sporting pursuits happened to be.

One day last spring I was thinking about this when an email landed on my desk from **Pat Cullen**, stroke of the 1983 1st VIII, in which he told a story about his recent search for fellow crewman, **Peter Mate** of Dunedoo, who had died in a car accident not long after leaving school way back in 1985. Pat’s story goes as follows:

“I was in Coonabarabran for work this time 12 months ago. I decided to drive home via Dunedoo to visit Pete's grave. I thought/assumed he was buried in Dunedoo cemetery.

When I got to Dunedoo, I sought directions to the cemetery. I found it without too much trouble, and on a hot spring day proceeded to walk the rows looking for Pete. Despite scouring the entire place for an hour or so, and suffering the usual fascination and sadness that cemeteries invariably invoke in me, I couldn't find Pete's grave.

I couldn't leave without really trying to find Pete, so googled funeral homes and called the Macquarie Valley funerals. The lady was very understanding and suggested I call Council as they manage the cemetery. I did as suggested and encountered an extremely helpful council officer who spent a long time scouring both digital and paper records yet couldn't find any record of Pete being buried in Dunedoo cemetery.

After Hail Marys and Our Fathers for Pete, I decided that he was not buried in Dunedoo after all, and left feeling pretty drained.

As I drove down the lane from the cemetery, I recalled that his parents, Colleen and Ted, had moved to Nelson Bay and were volunteers at St Vincent de Paul. I pulled over in the middle of nowhere and googled Nelson Bay Vinnies. I called and asked if Ted or Colleen Mate were available?

The lady asked me to hold. I waited apprehensively thinking/hoping perhaps that one of them would be there. A lady picked up the phone and announced that she was Colleen’s sister. I told her that I was one of Peter's old schoolmates and that I was passing through Dunedoo, and was attempting to locate his grave so I could pay my respects.

She told me that Pete was buried in Dubbo lawn cemetery and that both Ted and Colleen were buried next to him. Ted had died 5 years ago, and Colleen just some months previously. She said that Ted and Colleen were both happy to be "with Pete".

We chatted for perhaps twenty minutes. She was amazed that a classmate of Pete would bother to visit his grave some thirty years after his death. I tried to explain, poorly I reckon, that we were class mates, had rowed together and been boarders together for six years, and that those bonds were unbreakable. She recalled his funeral and the Joeys boys being there in numbers (more than 90 in fact). She described how Ted and Colleen were inconsolable over Pete's death to the day they died. I told her how it took me years to get over his death also.

Pretty soon, she was crying and I was in tears, sitting in my car under a gum tree in the bush. We were both crying our eyes out, both out of love and sadness for Pete and the tragedy and loss that Ted and Colleen had suffered.

We eventually hung up as there was nothing further to say about our sadness, loss and love for Pete. We had developed quite a bond in the previous twenty minutes or so. I sat for a while, then continued my journey home.

I will visit Pete's grave when I am next in Dubbo, and finally pay my respects to a mate who was a good man who died way too young. I am sure you will lament the loss of Pete upon reading my story. It was a very powerful conversation, and I felt pleased that I gave Pete's aunty a sense of support after all these years. RIP Pete."

There are a million stories from our College days that pertain to "the ties that bind". This is but one of them...

- JG