



EULOGY AT BROTHER BERTRAM'S FUNERAL MASS

Brother Norman Cook

(Brother Norman Cook delivered the following eulogy on October 12, 2002, at the conclusion of the funeral Mass for Brother Bertram Coleman. Ed.)

As Christian Brothers and as a Lasallian people, we respect, love, and honor our Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, because he founded teachers committed to making the school a place of human and Christian education. For this extraordinary accomplishment, Pope Pius XII, in 1950, declared John Baptist de La Salle Patron Saint of all teachers!

The teacher person is special, and the art of teaching is, indeed, a most honorable profession! And so it is most fitting that we acknowledge and celebrate the person and the life of Brother Bertram Coleman, a Lasallian teacher and educator who taught his classes and instructed his students according to the way and in the manner best exemplified by the Lasallian tradition. Brother Bertram gave himself away in

service to his students and to his fellow Brothers simply because he loved young people and he loved the Brothers! Bertram did this for more than sixty-five years with a deep and trusting Faith and a most ardent and generous Zeal, qualities and virtues which Saint John Baptist de La Salle most admired in his teachers.

Always and at all times, Brother Bertram sought to touch the hearts of young people by his words and by his example. And so he became not only teacher but also friend and counselor to his many students! Each September of the school year, as Principal of Christian Brothers High School, Sacramento, and when he was Principal of Cathedral High School, Los Angeles, he made it his focus, his passion, to learn the first name of every student throughout the student-body from the most humble Freshman to the most self-exalted of Senior students. Under his watch as headmaster, the Principal's office became for him the school yard during class-break times, the cafeteria during the lunch period, the athletic arena during interscholastic sports events, the auditorium during school dances, and sundry geographic locations on the occasion of school club excursions. Brother Bertram would go anywhere at anytime with anybody for whatever reason under any circumstances to be with students! Truly, he enfolded in his heart Saint La Salle's exhortation to the Brothers to be with their students from morning till night!

Students loved Brother Bertram because they knew he respected and loved them and was always, always there for them! Older alumni from our Lasallian schools so very often affectionately refer to themselves

as "Brothers' Boys", a self-appointed title which they esteem and cherish and proclaim with much pride and poise. The meaning and significance of this title finds a most worthy expression in the life, the times, and the person of Brother Bertram Coleman. Being a Brother to so many of his students for so many years really made his life of Vows and his dedication and commitment to the dream of Saint John Baptist de La Salle all worth while for Bertram over both the short haul and the long haul!

"Precious in the sight of the Lord God are those men and women who choose to serve Him from the earliest days of their youth." Brother Bertram entered the Brothers in 1930 while still in high school and he made final vows nine years later, when he was informed that his high school sweetheart, Helen Smith, was getting married! Helen knew Bertram better than he knew himself! When, as a high school sophomore, he told Helen that he was going away to study to be a Christian Brother and join them for awhile but she was not to worry, because he would come back to marry her, she said, "Oh no you won't!" And she was right!

Bertram served the District of San Francisco as teacher, high school prefect of resident students, vice principal, athletic director and coach, director of student Brothers at Saint Mary's College, Principal of CBS and Cathedral High schools, District vocation director, Director of Education for the District's schools, Provincial, Director of High School Development programs, alumni director, Director General of Mont La Salle, and most recently, District Archivist.

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In a very real sense we can say of Bertram as a Christian Brother, "he has seen that, been there, done that!"

His availability and adaptability to the Will of God in taking upon himself these many and varied assignments made most real for him his Vow of Obedience. In his position as Brother Visitor of the S.F. District, he had a way of challenging the Brothers to be the best that they could be—by way of the assignments he gave them to do. I'll never forget a telephone conversation I had with Brother Bertram, Visitor, while on retreat at Saint Helena, June 1973. He wanted me to be Principal of Saint Mary's High in Berkeley. At that time, known to Bertram but unbeknown to me, De La Salle Hall, the main three-story classroom building on the Berkeley campus, was being demolished because it was a high seismic risk. As we conversed on the phone, and I eloquently protested the possibility of my going to Saint Mary's High, Bertram interrupted my train of thought by instructing me to go to the retreat chapel and pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance and enlightenment. "It is not a question of what you want, Norman, but what God wants!" He went on to say that he was also going to the Provincialate chapel to seek guidance regarding this matter. I hung up the telephone, and in a spirit of "Bertram obedience" headed for the chapel to converse with the Holy Spirit. I got about ten steps from the phone when it suddenly rang. I retraced my steps and answered it. Bertram was on the other end of the line. He said, "I just had a very nice conversation with the

Holy Spirit in our chapel here, and He said to me that you, Norman, are going to Saint Mary's High as Principal!" And then he hung up! And I wept! Though reluctant and skeptical at first, my five years as Principal of Saint Mary's were some of the most adventuresome and joyful for me as a Brother. Truly, Bertram and his "Buddy", the Holy Spirit, knew much more than I did!

When Brother Bertram was seventy-two years of age (some fifteen years ago), he told me that he wanted to retire to Mont La Salle to prepare for his next career in eternity, whatever that was supposed to mean! My response to him, "Bert, you are not going to retire! You are too lively, you have too many things to do! Besides, knowing you as I do and you knowing yourself as you do and God knowing you as He does, you know and I know and God knows retirement is an impossibility for you, an unacceptable option!" And so, Bertram became District Archivist, eight hours a day, six days a week for the next fifteen years! Prepare for eternity? His whole life prepared him for God and eternity!

Brother Bertram holds the distinctive honor of being the first Brother Visitor in the history of the San Francisco Province to be nominated by a District Chapter and elected by the Brothers District-wide. As Brother Visitor, Bertram held to the conviction that the schools were our chief instrument for carrying out the Lasallian mission and witnessing our Lasallian vocation! And so Bertram fought to maintain this position, this stance, at the National Visitors' Conference for the USA major superiors! Many religious orders of men and

women were, at this period of time of the sixties and seventies, pulling out of schools in favor of other types of social services. Brother Bertram, representing the Pacific Coast District at these national assemblies, "stuck to his guns" when questioned and challenged by the delegates from the other National Districts regarding his stance! With a sly smile on his lips and a "little-boy mischievous glint in his eye," he responded, "We came to the first Regional Chapter as babes in the woods from California to listen to you 'wise men (guys)' from the East, but like little Red Riding Hood, we found that it was not Grandma in the bed."

Bertram exercised strong and decisive leadership tempered by humor to maintain the San Francisco District's conservative position despite more radical movements in the rest of the country! He always believed that the school is and will always continue to be the best way for the Brothers and their lay associates to be with kids and to touch their hearts and their minds!

Richard Little, a friend and protégé of Sir Thomas More, desired a prestigious career where he would find fame, glory, and recognition. Sir Thomas More's response, "If you become a teacher, Richard, you will be noticed by nobody but God and your students. Not a bad audience, Richard!" For over sixty-five years of service as teacher and educator, Brother Bertram was most certainly noticed by God and by his students! Not a bad audience, Brother Bertram! Not a bad audience! ♦



The following pages are remembrances from a few of the many peoples' lives that Brother Bertram touched throughout the years.

BERT THE BARBER

by Stan Gilliam '41



Just to have known Brother Bertram Coleman was blessing enough in itself, but to have done so on three different levels was a matter of truly incomparable good fortune. I'm happy to say that I was that lucky.

Here's how it happened.

Back in the 1930's, when hiring lay teachers was an expense the Brothers couldn't afford to bear, many of the young monks had their college studies interrupted and were sent to try out untested skills as educators. Young Brother Bertram was one of them.

Thus it was that when I enrolled as a freshman at Christian Brothers in 1937, he was already in his second year of teaching. Because it was a small school, we got to know each other quite soon even though I'm not sure I ever was a student in any of his classes.

For most of my four years in high school, Brother Bertram was on the faculty, and that was the

first level on which I knew him, that of teacher and student.

By the time I was a junior at Saint Mary's College in 1943, those Brothers who had been pulled from the scholasticate and sent out to teach were returning to complete work on their degrees. Among them was Brother Bertram, so now we were associated on a second level, as equals in a student-to-student relationship.

That put us together in the classroom, but now as colleagues. We sweated equally, too, over those weekly philosophy papers from Professor Jim Hagerty.

But I mentioned three levels, didn't I? If you've read this far, you must be wondering just what the third one could be. It takes a little explanation.

It was the custom at that time to select a young novice who displayed an aptitude to serve as the community barber through the subsequent years of college. Brother Bertram was the choice among those in his group.

When he returned to Saint Mary's in the mid-1940's, there was a barber chair -- usually unmanned -- in the dormitory. Haircuts, meanwhile, at the professional tonsorial parlors had risen to an astronomical 50 or even 75 cents.

As a usually impecunious student, it galled me to lay out such exorbitant sums on haircuts, and having heard of Brother Bertram's skills with clipper and shears, I put the question to him. And he not only agreed, but with a vow of poverty, there was no charge.

So that's how Brother Bertram became, for me, plain Bert the Barber and how I came to know him on that third, ultimate level. How lucky can a guy get? ♦



My father (shown above) introduced me to Brother Bertram when I was attending Immaculate Conception grammar school. Bert and Father Jim Mulligan, my football coach at IC, and Bishop Francis Quinn were to become my religious heroes. All had great concern for the welfare of others and truly lived holy lives.

As my principal at CBS, he had occasion to call me into his office for disciplinary purposes. I screwed up and was scared. Bert informed me that more Keatings had graduated from this school than any other family. He added that more Keatings had been kicked out of CBS than any other family! I survived that one. Sure glad Bert and my father were good friends.

Bert and I became close pals over the years and became involved in fund raising at about the same time. At a fund raising conference, I learned of a very successful method of developing bequests from alumni groups and passed the idea on to Bert. I proposed a "Brother Bertram Society" for our school. He said, "No." I told him that no other teacher in this school's history was held in such high esteem. Refusing to allow the use of his name would result in serious sin. He relented. The Society today has many members, thanks to this great man.

"Live Jesus in our hearts, forever."

-Jim Keating '55

I am honored to have been given this opportunity to reflect on my association with Brother Bertram Coleman. I first met Brother Bertram when I was asked to serve as President of Christian Brothers High School in 1993. I had just retired from California State University, Sacramento, and, because of other obligations, was forced to limit my commitment to serve as President of Christian Brothers High School to one year. However, after one year as President, I found the position to be so attractive and the associations so rewarding that I rearranged my outside obligations to permit me to continue as President for a total of three years.

Among the many wonderful friendships established within the Christian Brothers community, my relationship with Brother Bertram was special. The manner in which he welcomed Betty and me into the Christian Brothers family made my short affiliation an important part of my overall career. I am so pleased to have been involved in the establishment of the Brother Bertam Society and the naming of Bertram Hall. Although my official association with Christian Brothers High School was a total of three years, I consider that affiliation to be a very significant part of my career in education.

Brother Bertram's name is synonymous with the education of our youth. He devoted nearly sixty years to that profession and played a major role in the education of many successful graduates. Common among these former students is their dedication to caring and service to others, a reflection of Brother Bertram's personality. The November 1994 issue of the "Connection" contained an article which introduced the sixteen founding

members of the Brother Bertram Society. In that article we included a sketch of this special person with the caption "Brother Bert...In our hearts forever." How fitting an expression, because, he certainly will be in our hearts forever.

—Dr. Donald H. Gillott

"Brother Bertram - My Boss, My Friend!"

It was 1950 when I first heard of Brother Bertram. I was a senior at St. Joseph Academy, and he was Principal at Christian Brothers High School, then located at 21st and Broadway. My husband, Dan, was a senior at CB and had a great deal of respect and admiration for Brother Bert.

Much later when my sons, Mike and Steve, attended CB, I became very involved in the Brothers' "Family." I served on the Parents Service Organization Board for many years and later was hired by Brother Richard Camara to assist Brother Bert who was the Director of Development. I worked with Brother Bert from June 1982 until he left CB to become District Archivist in Napa.

Brother Bertram had an amazing work ethic. He often worked six days a week. His lunch breaks were short and quick. He was a man of few words during work hours. He was a great boss. He never said a bad word about anyone, and I never heard a bad word about him from anyone. He would listen (and I mean listen) to people with great concern. After he left Sacramento, he never failed to drive to Sacramento to attend a funeral, a party, a wedding, a meeting, or a celebration at the school. He was always there.

— CB alumni loved Brother Bert.

They often praised him and many gave financial support, donated items or volunteered hours to help CB, largely because of him. His complete loyalty, his religious example and guidance, his friendliness, his compassion, as well as his being able to enjoy a party, a good joke, and a social gathering all made up one beautiful person. I am thankful to God that I knew him for as many years as I did. I once said "he does everything right" and he did. In my view, Brother Bertram is an ideal Brother. I will never forget him. He was so well thought of that a building on the campus at Christian Brothers High School was named "Bertram Hall." A couple of weeks before he died, I was fortunate to visit with him for about an hour. In our conversation he said, "I have no regrets, I have no regrets." And I believe him.

—Jean Lahey

"My Impressions of Brother Bertram Coleman"

I first met Brother Bertram in 1948 while attending Holy Angels grammar school.

Brother was at the school recruiting students for Christian Brothers High School. At that time I had my heart set on attending Sacramento High. Brother suggested I give Christian Brothers some thought.

After much consideration I decided to attend Christian Brothers. It was the best decision I have ever made because the experiences I had at Christian Brothers were some of the best of my life.

Brother Bertram influenced my life like no other person ever has. In his eyes every student was equal and that's the way he treated them.

Brother had a gift for communicating with people and always remembered their names—parents as well as the students. He made you feel as though your relationship with him was a special one. He also had the ability to hire outstanding people for the teaching positions at Christian Brothers.

Brother Bertram would have excelled at any profession he had chosen. We are most fortunate he aspired to become a Christian Brother.

Brother Bertram and I remained close personal friends for over 50 years; I feel honored to have been his student and friend.

—Sal “Chado” Vasquez
Class of '52

It was August of 1935 when I was blessed to have Brother Bert as my 7th grade teacher at old Christian Brothers School, 21st and Y Street. Our class was the first class he taught.

Coming from a public school, I didn't know what to expect. (I had heard that the Brothers could be pretty tough.) When he walked into class that first day, he looked too young. He was 21 although we didn't know it. The class found out very soon that he was well prepared and ready to teach. We knew he was in charge. Years later, I realized just how difficult the first few weeks must have been.

He also taught me in high school and was my counselor at Saint Mary's College. As the years went on, he became very close to our family, vacationing with us and celebrating family occasions. During the last few months of his illness, I called him or he called me.

On September 15 my wife Stasia, two of our sons, and I

visited him in Napa. He was pale and weak, but his mind was sharp. We reminisced about old times. He said he was praying for the last three months that our Lord would take him. We said our goodbyes and kissed each other. I knew that would be the last time I would see my old 7th grade teacher who was the most important part of my spiritual and scholastic life for sixty-seven years.

—Paul Bernardis
Class of '41

How can a few words describe what Brother Bertram meant to so many? He was a true friend, a confidant and an honorary member of many families. Brother Bert was always there - from baptisms, first communions, confirmations, graduations, weddings, even divorces, to funerals. Brother would be there, never to judge or condemn, just to listen and give support.

If anyone loved people, Brother Bertram did. He would travel miles to attend class reunions or family parties.

His faith made us all stronger, not by preaching but by the way he lived it. Even in Brother Bert's last few weeks here on earth, he comforted us in his preparation and excitement for his new journey. In his own words he was “finally going to meet my boss,” something he was preparing for his whole life.

There have been four generations of our family touched by his love and Godly influence. The emptiness in our hearts will be there until we meet again.

—The Jack Ryan Family
Class of '43

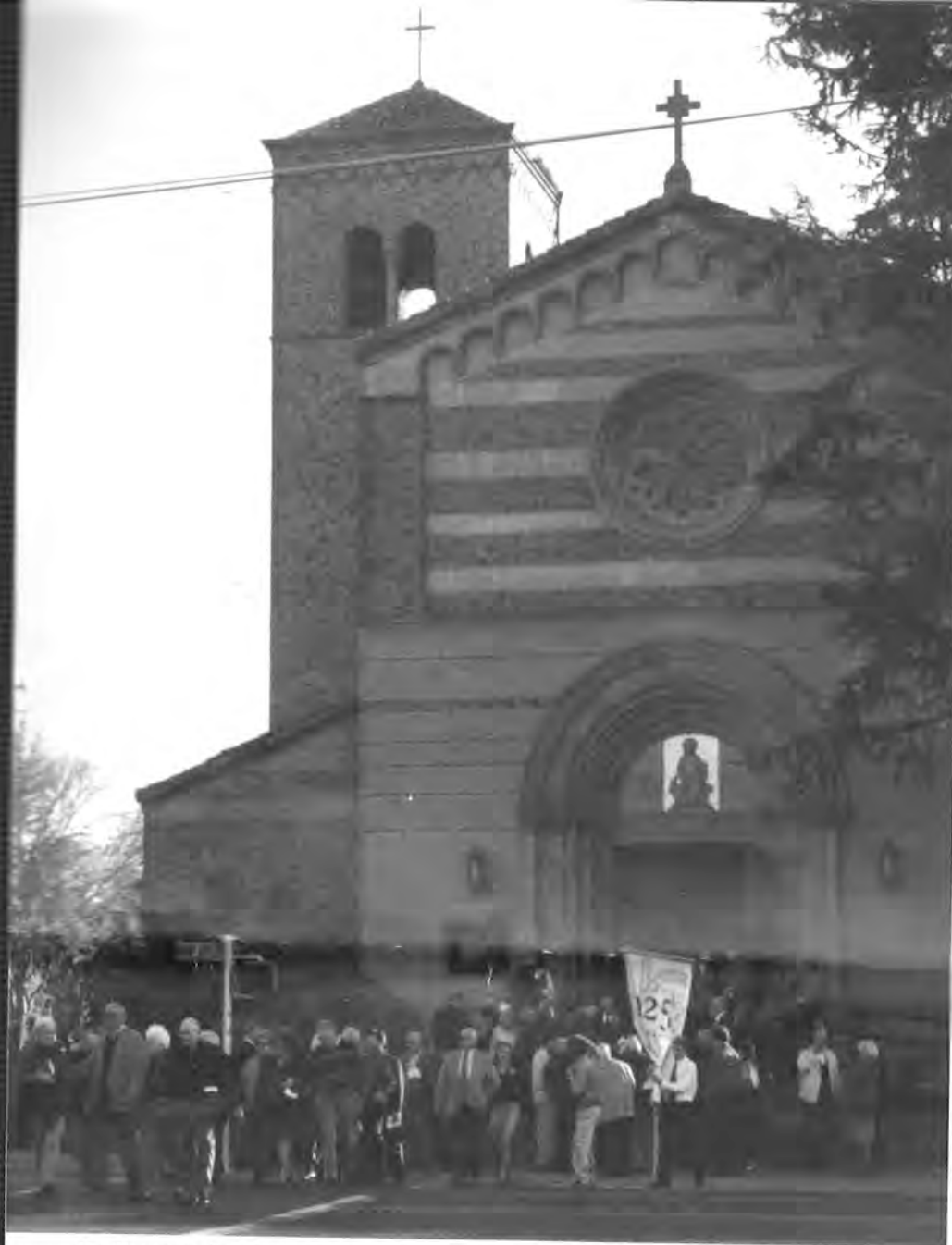
I am told this is not to be a eulogy but rather a reminiscence of some events that involved Brother Bertram. There are many events that occur to me — from a time in our junior year when he learned that a group of us had had too much to drink and how he handled it, to the time when the last remaining three pupils in the Latin class so frustrated Father Connor that he threw down his book and exited with the immortal comment word “Bastardi” and how he handled that, to many other events. The truth is that there is no single event that capsulizes what Brother Bertram did for us or what he meant to us. My class was fortunate enough to have him with us from the freshman year until we graduated. The simple fact is that he was there for us from the first day that we entered the freshman class until the day he died. And that is the way I shall forever remember him, a friend who was there for me and for every student who was fortunate enough to know him.

—Jim & Joanne Winchell
Class of '51

A Special Memory of Brother Bertram Coleman, FSC

Last fall we had the privilege of sitting next to Brother Bertram at Cathedral High School's Annual Scholarship Banquet at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles, where our son, Br. John Montgomery is Principal.

It was a well-attended event and Brother Bertram was honored as a past Director/Principal of Cathedral and for his continued presence and interest in the school and its programs.



Br. Bertram's Memorial Service at Sacred Heart Church, November 17, 2002.

For over 20 years we have had a wonderful relationship with Br. Bert, who has been a mentor to our son, Br. John Montgomery.

—Helen & Norman Montgomery

Brother Bertram has had a huge impact on my life. We first met in September of 1936 as teacher/student. He came to CBS from St. Mary's College while still a student. I was a freshman, and he was my English teacher. Then in December of 1943, we graduated

together from St. Mary's. In September of 1948, he hired me to teach at CBS thereby launching me on a 35-year career as an educator — the first seven years at CBS. So he was my teacher, my fellow graduate and my employer, but more than that HE WAS MY DEAR FRIEND! Now he's gone, and I shall miss him tremendously, but I will never forget him. In the language of my ancestors, Bert — va con dio, mio amico!

—Roy U. Cortopassi '40

I have had the good fortune and pleasure of having known Brother Bertram for more than 60 years. I not only knew him through his tenure as a De La Salle Christian Brother but as a mentor, friend, patient and as a fellow member of the Brother "Hoods." His smile and presence was often with me during my times of joy and in my times of need. His talents and ability as a teacher, counselor and administrator is to be honored. His remarkable aptitude for not only remembering the names of his alumni and their vocation's but remembering their spouses and children's names as well, was admirable. Brother Bertram assisted many of us in finding our objectives. He was a caring person and friend to each of us. May God hold him in the palm of his hand. He will be missed by all.

—Dr. Joseph E. Farrington

It is one of life's wonders that a person who touches our life only tangentially can affect us far beyond the few moments of shared experience. I first met Brother Bertram on his birthday, October 1997. The event was the annual Br. Bertram Society dinner. It was an appreciation dinner of Christian Brothers High School for members of the Brother Bertram Society. On this evening I was being formally inducted and received a framed certificate which hangs today in my study. For five years I was privileged to attend Br. Bertram's birthday celebrations. I have continued to grow in appreciation of the Lasallian tradition of service through education and in wonder at the man who celebrated his birthday by recognizing others. Each dinner was enlivened with reflections of warmth, hilarity, a

dedication by Br. Bertram and his former students. As a teacher myself, I know that the real joy of teaching lies in interaction with students. I also know the amount of preparation, meetings, and administrative tasks that go into the recipe. Br. Bertram performed more than his share of these tasks, but he maintained an obvious joy in the individuality of his students. Br. Bertram combined the best of Mary and Martha in his teaching career. He is an inspiration to me.

—Jerry Ann Marinovich '60
Bishop Armstrong High School

If there were anyone who truly represented the epitome of the Lasallian cause, it was Brother Bertram. He truly believed in fostering young men's and women's characters and abilities.

He was a fine teacher, educator, administrator, and dear friend. Even in his "retirement" he drew us back to the ideals of the Christian Brothers and their institutions.

We shall miss him but never forget him.

—John M. Babich, M.D.

So many people knew and respected him. He was quite a guy! I knew him for over half a century. In 1947, my sophomore year, Brother Bertram came to CB as principal. He took more than an average interest in his students, and he made it a point to remember all of his students' names as well as their background, personal likes, dislikes, actually anything special about you. In my case, Brother Bertram knew I was raised by a single parent and had a

history of boarding and military schools.

My first year out of school, Brother Bertram and I had a conversation about my future. I couldn't afford to go to St. Mary's so I enrolled in City College. I had an opportunity to go into the grocery business. Brother Bertram was a lifelong guide and counselor and during our conversation, he was against my entering the grocery business. Stating that you may have to work on Sundays and what about church? I felt his concern but had listened to my gut feeling. As time passed, I was promoted and became the youngest store manager and ultimately a district manager for over 20 years, therefore earning my Sundays off after all.

50 years later, I took him out to lunch to a very nice restaurant. We spent about three hours reminiscing together looking at my family photos. At the end of the lunch, I asked him what he was doing and he told me he made Dean of Archives at Mount La Salle. He personally invited me to look at his work and a few months later I went to Mount La Salle. I am still amazed at his being 85 years of age and not in the best of health but still took the time to share his passion for the Archives at Mount La Salle. He spent all day showing me photos, books, memorabilia, and told me endless stories of all the Brothers. Toward the end, Brother Bertram stopped and said, "Parker do you know what you've done to me today?" Jokingly in the Brother Bertram sense of humor, he said, "You made me miss my nap."

He always made you feel as if you weren't just another kid... you were special.

—Lea James Parker '50

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