

Memories of “Jack Cuddon”

I had two ‘heroes’ at Emanuel. One was the tragically short lived Andrew Tilley who defused my fear of boxing and rugby tackling, and the other was ‘Jack’, schoolboy nickname, Cuddon, who simply infused fear! With perhaps very few exceptions back in the ‘50’s, the student body was quite wary of Mr. C.

He was different from other masters. Somewhat aloof, detached, individualistic, non-conformist, contrarian and seemingly pre-occupied in that ‘do-not-disturb’ way! (Much as I have been accused of myself).

Walking down a school corridor with his trademark frown, gown billowing from a self generated wind, such was his pace, he presented a veritable Christopher Lee persona prepping for another Dracula role!

Of the two ‘A’s’...athletics and academics, my stronger suit was the former! My parents showed great forbearance by constantly forking out for extra tuition. Such a case was English Lit. Mr. Cuddon’s *very strong* suit!

He was also involved with two sports that I played for the school, as a coach for Colts’ cricket and SecondXV rugby.

I recall a soggy cricket match, I believe against Haberdashers, and being a tricky spinner I enjoyed a particularly good afternoon.

Monday, however was a reality check when faced with a lunchtime tutoring session with J.C.

It was a sunny day which entailed meeting on a grassy knoll along the driveway, adjacent to the old bicycle parking. I arrived first, having already handed in my dubious assignment in the morning. Seemingly out of nowhere, his figure appeared, practically flying towards me, gown billowing in overdrive! (think Dracula!)

And at the top of his voice, I heard, “Powell...how can you take six wickets for four runs on Saturday, brilliant by the way, and be such an illiterate dunce on Monday!!”

Then I saw it...a tiny smile with a twinkle in his eye...Mr. Cuddon was human after all!

From that Monday on we got along well until I left in 1960.

Many times I have thought of him while trying to structure the perfect sentence in a proposal of one sort or another.

Some twenty years later, having moved from London to New York to Toronto, I was walking alone along the King’s Road in Chelsea while on a ‘catch up with family visit’.

It was a perfect summer day as I strode past the pub opposite the old Chelsea Pensioner's Hospital. When out of the corner of my eye...it couldn't be!
I backpedaled the ten paces to the alfresco table...

"Mr. Cuddon",

"Yes" came the reply.

"Powell, Adrian Powell, sir, do you remember me?"

"I do indeed, do you have time for a beer?" he responded, with the same slightly enigmatic smile I saw long ago.

I sat nervously next to this fearsome fellow, and ordered a pint, or was it two!

"Call me Charles", he offered!

Gulp. I felt my throat constrict. Even running a successful communication business and being on a first name basis with several well known company CEO's at the time, calling Mr. Cuddon by his real first name, seemed, well daunting!

The sip of the tasty Whitbread soon gave me to relax and we spent a genuinely warm, wonderful hour together. Although I do recall going from Charles to Sir and back to Mr. Cuddon, when I bade him farewell.

I am blessed with a spectacular compartment of memories thanks to a life full of adventure! Having a beer with Charles is one that lingers large, just as the man has for these many years.

It was the last time I saw him and my last connection with the school.
How appropriate that he would cause me to re-connect with Emanuel, via this posting!

Thank you, 'Jack'.

Adrian Powell

Clyde,

1954-1960