



# The Bakersfield College Archives Newsletter

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# John J. Collins

## Soldier, Teacher, Mentor, Friend

September 26, 1917—May 13, 2011

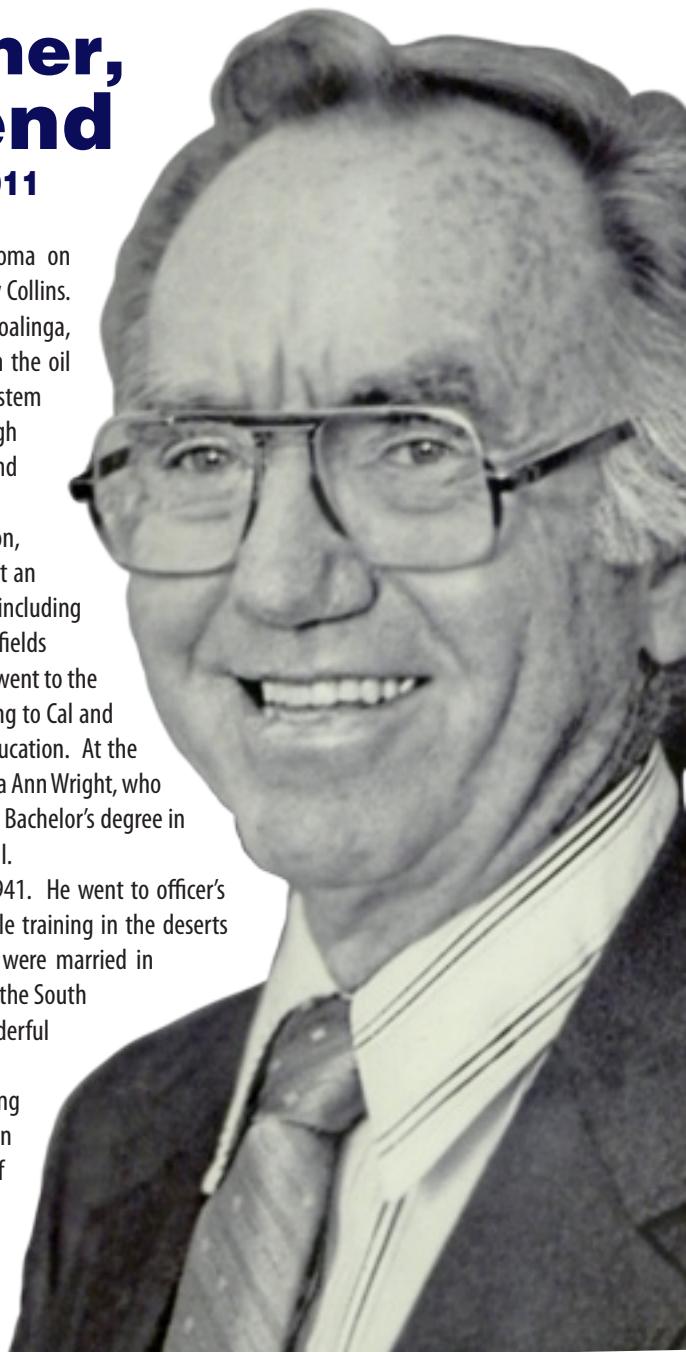
John Joseph Collins was born in Bramen, Oklahoma on September 26, 1917, to Loretta Rose and Charles Anthony Collins. He had three sisters and a brother. The family moved to Coalinga, California, where John grew up and his father worked in the oil industry. Coalinga was blessed with a good school system and John received an excellent education at Coalinga High School and Coalinga Junior College. He loved sports and participated in track and basketball.

Having lost his father during the Great Depression, John had to help support his family by starting to work at an early age. He delivered ice and worked a variety of jobs, including pumping gas, bucking hay and working in the Coalinga oilfields

After graduating from Coalinga Junior College, John went to the University of California at Berkeley in 1937. He loved going to Cal and the University inspired in him a lifelong love of higher education. At the University of California, John met the love of his life, Patricia Ann Wright, who was also a student at Cal. John graduated from Cal with a Bachelor's degree in 1940. Later, in 1953, he received a Master's degree from Cal.

John was drafted into the United States Army in 1941. He went to officer's training school and soon was a Second Lieutenant. While training in the deserts of Southern California, John courted Patricia, and they were married in 1943, immediately before he had to ship out for service in the South Pacific. Pat and John's war-time marriage lasted 64 wonderful years until her death in 2008.

John served in the Army in the South Pacific during World War II. He commanded an Anti Tank Company in the 165th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division of the Army. He was involved in operations on many islands in the Pacific Theater of the war, including fighting in the terrible battles on Saipan and Okinawa. John was honorably discharged as a Captain after the war and was always proud of his Combat Infantry Badge.



See JOHN J. COLLINS, page 2

# John J. Collins continued

After the war, John and Pat were reunited. They added to the baby boom with three children: John (1946), Margaret (1949) and Charles (1952). John and Pat moved to Bakersfield in 1947 where he taught at Bakersfield High School and Pat worked as a librarian for the Kern County Library.

In 1955, John began teaching and coaching at Bakersfield College while it was still at the Bakersfield High School campus. In 1956, Bakersfield College moved to its present location "on the hill". John taught history and sociology, was a counselor and was the Cross Country and Track Coach. In the fall of 1957, Bakersfield College won the State Cross Country Championship and in the spring of 1958 the Bakersfield College track team won the Southern California title and was second in the State Meet. John was intensely proud of the young men on these teams. He was particularly proud that almost all of them received baccalaureate degrees and have done well in their careers.

In 1958, John was promoted to Director of Student Activities. Three years later, he was named Dean of Students at Bakersfield College. In 1965, John received a Doctor's Degree in Education from UCLA. Soon thereafter, he accepted a position as the first President of Moorpark College.

John became the founding President of Moorpark Community College in 1966. Moorpark Community College opened

in 1967. The 1960's were very difficult times for college administrators given the many changes occurring in the society and the prevalent student unrest. Nevertheless, John laid solid academic and athletic foundations at the new college. Moorpark Community College has grown into a thriving and respected institution.

In 1972, John returned to Bakersfield as president of Bakersfield College. During John's presidency, Bakersfield College was strong both academically and in athletics. John served as President of Bakersfield College until he retired in 1983.

After retiring, John started his second career as a consultant for the Kern Community College District. He worked in this capacity for 25 years. During this time, John was active in the Bakersfield College Foundation and the Bakersfield College Archives. He greatly appreciated the people with whom he worked whom he referred to as his, "BC family".

Education has been the great equalizer in our society.. Even the disadvantaged can start at a community college and end up with professional training at the highest level....Trained minds make a return on the resources invested in them that has benefited our society in a profound and lasting way....We have always believed in a strong system of public education and this belief has served us well. Keep the faith. ☺

~The Bakersfield Californian, August 22, 1982.

*Obituary reprinted with permission of The Bakersfield Californian*



John Collins and Bill Thomas

John with Buck Owens (standing) and Sam McCall

John and Bob Covey at work in the Archives

# Principle and People

## A Eulogy For John Collins

By Jack Hernandez

In the fall of 1972 John had just become President of Bakersfield College and had asked me to be Assistant to the President. I quickly accepted because I was interested in college administration and knew that John would be the perfect mentor and teacher.

Actually, eleven years earlier, in the spring of 1961, fifty years ago this spring, he had offered me another administrative opportunity. I was then a graduate student at Michigan, had accepted a teaching position at BC, and was low on money when I received a letter from Dean of Students John Collins offering me the position of Resident Advisor of Prator Hall, the BC dormitory for men. That July as I drove cross-country to Bakersfield, my head was filled with an image of the well-appointed apartment that awaited me. What, in fact, greeted me was a small room near the back exit, with a narrow single bed, stained washbasin, and dim light bulb hanging from the ceiling. For years after, John and I laughed at how he had conned me into that shabbily monastic room.

But fall of 1972 was not a matter of laughs; instead it was filled with two very serious controversies, and it was from the way John faced those controversies that I learned what an extraordinary leader and person he was. In early December a group of parents and citizens appeared at the Board of Trustees meeting to protest a book that had been assigned in a course on Mexican, Chicano, and Latin American literature. The book was *The Death of Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes, and the protest was over its graphic language and politics. John promised to investigate and report to the Board at its December 21st meeting. Before that meeting he met one evening with the Dean of Instruction and me to discuss his action and report. By that evening we had all read the book and researched it and its author, discovering that both were held in very high regard by critics and literary experts. John decided that he would defend both the book and, more importantly, the academic freedom of faculty to



choose the reading material for their courses. In our discussion, he was concerned with the integrity of the college, the professionalism of the faculty, and the good of the students. Not once did he talk about how his personal and professional life might be affected. And this was the stand he took before the Board and protesters on December 21st.

Coincidentally, a month before this controversy, a student club had invited Jane Fonda, then known as Hanoi Jane, to speak on campus. As you can imagine, there were vigorous and outraged protests from the community, but John defended the value of speakers presenting all points of view on a college campus, again acting from principle and for the good of students, not from his own interests.

The great Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* said this about life: "Life is short, and existence has but a single fruit to yield--holiness within and selfless action without." By "holiness" he meant a commitment to truth, to justice, and to the good of all, and that our actions should be based on these without regard to our own advantage or disadvantage. And that's what John so vividly taught me in the fall of 1972, as I watched his life bear that single, most important fruit that Aurelius describes. In all of the years I knew John as mentor, colleague, and friend, in matters large and small, he always acted from "holiness within" and "selfless action without," always acted from his deep commitment to principle and people.

And I will always carry that with me...thank you, John! ☺



### **Dr. Don Johnson**

John Collins hired me as the veterans' coordinator in 1973. I was proud that he hired me for a job he once had. He was an outstanding advocate for the community college, respected widely as a leader, and arguably the best president to ever fill the chair at Bakersfield College. And, he was the best person you could meet, coming down the hall. RIP.

### **Herb Loken**

#### **Director of Athletics 1968-1983**

In 1956 when I first met John Collins, he was the Director of Student Activities. He was totally committed to see that students received the best possible education and he never waivered in that conviction. Dr. Collins always had an open door policy and even as he advanced in his professional career, his open door policy prevailed. His first greeting to colleagues seeking his assistance remained the same..."SO....WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO LAY ON ME THIS TIME?" Whether I was representing athletics or later as Executive Secretary of the B.C. Alumni Association, I knew I would receive positive assistance with my concerns. He was the finest administrator I ever had the pleasure to serve under! It was fitting and typical of the many tributes paid to him when the BC Alumni Board inducted him into the Alumni Hall of Fame.

### **Jerry Ludeke**

When I joined the Bakersfield College faculty in 1959, John Collins was the Dean of Men to Peg Levinson's Dean of Students, housed in the Administration Building. Because 2/5 of my assignment was Director of the Residence Halls and 2/5 counseling, I not unexpectedly dealt with Peg and John often. They were two gems, quite student oriented and each of them very savvy. In those days of conservative, strict, and monitored dress codes, one of the really big discussions was how to deal with the returning vets appearing in Campus Center wearing, horror of horrors, raggedy cut-off jeans. Their wisdom came to the front in finally deciding simply not to deal with it.

**Pictured above from left to right:** Dr. Don Johnson, Herb Loken, Jerry Ludeke, Ray Gonzales. Dr. Robert Allison

### **Ray Gonzales**

To the Collins Family,

I certainly have very fond memories of John from my years at BC. In fact, it was John who got me there. When I was a student there '59 to '61 upon my return from the Marines, I won a scholarship from the veterans' association. That year it was planned that top administrators would pick up the scholarship winners at their homes and drive them to the awards banquet. John was then Dean of Student, I think. He picked me up and met my parents. It was a great evening. A few years later, after I had earned an M.A. I was teaching at a private high school in the Bay Area and taking some classes at Stanford hoping to earn a doctorate. John and Ed Simonsen visited the school on a recruitment trip and John remembered me from the BC days. They signed me up on the spot for the following year, 1965. I have nothing but wonderful memories of BC, primarily because of the wonderful people like John Collins who had so much to do with making it one of the most outstanding community colleges in the state. We will all miss him so much, but his legacy will live on forever. God bless you all.

### **Dr. Robert Allison**

Since John was so perceptive about peoples' strengths and weaknesses, he was good at placing them in positions in which they could use their abilities most effectively. Even though he could be quite tough-minded about such matters, he also was kind and tactful. In all the years I knew him, I never saw him intentionally demean anyone in face to face encounters, even those he may have not cared for or respected. Indeed, after any kind of exchange with John, one was more likely than not to go away feeling better about him/herself.

John was my friend, mentor, role model, and, for a while, my boss. But I never thought of him much as my boss. I saw him more as a colleague, even when he was BC president and I was a faculty member. During the 48 years I knew him, he provided guidance with such deftness that if it was an order you often didn't really know it. And since it was John, you wanted to do it to please him anyway. He was even responsible for my being an administrator at Bakersfield College. Recently it was said about someone that the person was "a man for all seasons." I cannot think of a better description for John Collins. BC was fortunate to have him, and I was fortunate to know him.



### **Dr. Kenneth Fahsbender**

John Collins was in the room in 1959 when I interviewed for my initial position at Bakersfield College. John was BC's new Director of Student Activities and, thankfully, voted YES to begin our 52-year relationship as colleagues and friends.

When John became Dean of Students, he and President Simonsen encouraged me to pursue a doctorate and become a leader for the college. That encouragement changed my career as it had for many members of our staff.

John returned from Moorpark College to become President of Bakersfield College. I was Assistant Chancellor and served with John on Chancellor Young's District Advisory Committee. Through difficult financial years, John did not waiver in his concern for the effect of our decisions on students.

On the day prior to his final accident, John and I sat together at our Archives Steering Committee and shared pre-meeting comments about our health. Finally, John said, "Ken, you and I are needed on this committee."

I know he meant that our past experiences could be of use, although our health issues presented new challenges. I'm certain that the influence of John Collins will continue at Bakersfield College for many generations.

### **Don Rodewald**

I was chatting with John years ago, and he told a story about when he was a captain in the U.S. Army during WW II. He said there was a sergeant in his company that every time he would bring him a report he would say, "Will you verify this for me?" .John didn't have the heart to correct his combining certify and verify, since he was so sincere. I've never forgotten that story and often kidded John by using "vertify" when reporting to him at B.C.

### **Ron Allsman**

Dr. John Collins returned to Bakersfield College as an applicant for the position of President . He was recommended by all branches of the college community. He was faced with the difficult task of reducing staff following the approval of Prop 13. His successful performance warrants our respect.

### **Yvonne Milliken**

I arrived at BC while John was still at Moorpark College, but upon his return to BC, I soon learned the reason for all the accolades that preceded his arrival. My happiest years were during his presidency as I experienced and admired his unique ability to distill a problem or issue down to its essence. As an administrator John was perfection, in my estimation. He had all the attributes in large quantity. For example, the growth of the BC Foundation. I remember, with pleasure, participating in the small group of BC personnel and community leaders who formulated its beginnings. His leadership was the spark that made it thrive. I hope he was proud, and I have reason to believe that he was.

I will treasure always the memory of John as the friend he became after I retired from BC. His holiday greetings came regularly with a personal note and an added cogent remark on the state of politics on the national level. My most cherished recent memory, however, is John's insistence upon publishing the news of my husband's death in your local press so that our many friends in Bakersfield would learn of his passing. That act of kindness brought forth an outpouring of cards and letters that brought great comfort to me at the most painful time of my life. I am forever grateful for that most generous act of kindness. And, finally, during John's hospitalization following his accident, his daughter Margaret called me, at her father's request.

John Collins is alive and well in my heart.

### **Nancy Edwards**

It is a devastating loss in realizing that this amazing and generous, remarkable man is gone. To know Dr. John Collins has been a great and treasured gift. I value every time I was able to see him and talk with him---he was always an inspiration!

**Pictured above from left to right:** Dr. Kenneth Fahsbender, Don Rodewald, Ron Allsman, Yvonne Milliken, Nancy Edwards

# *Some Remembrances of* John J. Collins

Collected and retold by his daughter, Margaret Collins

Editor's Note: Because of space limitations, this article was shortened and edited from the original. The original article will be available on the BC Archives website.



In the time after my dad died, many people shared details of his life with me. I found numerous notes to him, especially on his first and second retirement. I think all the written things he kept had personal meaning and revealed the importance of the relationship with the person who wrote the note.

During John's early days at Bakersfield College, an old friend and colleague Herb Lokens, former Athletic Director, recollects that one time when they went to an away game, they had some concerns about the behavior of the rooting section fans from BC, fans who had gone to the game at Long Beach. Herb said he recalled standing with Dad on the track looking up at the stands and saying, "I hope we won't have any problem tonight." Dad said, "If there is, I will be right behind you."

Also in his personal memento file was a copy of a 1962 resignation letter from Betty Judy, then the Student Center Coordinator. The letter was addressed to Ed Simonsen (then BC President) and explained that Betty was marrying and moving away: "I want to express my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to work with John Collins. Here, I feel is the 'heart' of not only the activities program but student personnel as a whole. His spirit, enthusiasm, initiative, and faith are constant sources of inspiration. To him must be credited the growth and development of those who work with him."

Upon Dad's first retirement, Bob Clark wrote that he would "...never forget the "little grass shack" at the famous dance or anguishing over the Blat." I don't know what the "little grass shack" was, but I bet some of the alumni remember.

Some of John's "Track Boys" called with condolences after he died. One of the first people to call was a BC alumnus and member of 1953-1954 track teams, John Ornalez. Bill Priddy, another early "Track Boy" from 1947, wrote, "The first time I had the privilege of working with him [was] as a 17 year old athlete at BJC in 1947. . . . What a great, calm, moralistic man! I had no idea he had a war story. He never sounded his own horn. He

was a welcome, balancing member of the coaching staff."

Jim Wren (1956-Cross Country) recalled having no intention of going to College, but Coach Collins recruited him. And because he had no familial financial support, his coach got him a job on campus and then a summer job and then convinced him to graduate from BC and transfer to Sacramento State. For me, "the first one of all my family to graduate from High School, to get a degree from BC and a degree from a university was nothing short of a miracle, and I owe it all to John Collins."

Miles Eisenman (1956-Cross Country) remarked that "Coach Collins' leadership determined, blessed, and enriched my entire life far beyond our running experience. I am and always will be thankful for John and BC."

Jack Navarov (1956-Cross Country) said, "John Collins was an outstanding individual who treated people fairly and with respect. I am proud to be one of his runners."

Ken Napier (1956-Cross Country) remembered "the long trips over the Grapevine to LA and back. John always drove, and we had lots of conversation among us and really bonded. I remember John would always stop to eat at an all-you-could-eat buffet, but he would caution us not to eat too much so that we would be welcomed back. He also warned Gerry and me to watch our Navy language, as the other runners were just young kids."

Gerry Strong (1956-Cross Country) recollects that when he contacted "Mr." Collins "...he had a very serious look on his face and said if I wanted to perform on his team, 'You will have to lose twenty-five pounds. After a few long and hard months of Coach Collins' training, I trimmed down enough to become a participating member of the 1956 BC National Championship Cross Country Team. Through all this, I remember his pure honesty and integrity."

Because of that long bond of friendship with Dad and with each other, the guys gave him a plaque in April of 2007, fifty-one years after their winning season, which read: "Presented to John Collins, Coach of the 1956 Cross Country Team from your boys." Jim Wren recalls the 90 year old coach and the 70 plus year old teammates all coming together for the BC Hall of Fame induction. What an enduring bond of friendship between teacher and student and between man and man this was.

My dad had other interactions in the world of athletics throughout his time at BC. Ray Newman, former BC head football coach, had to make a choice about track or football as his focus and he chose football, which eventually led to a larger stage where he ultimately ended up in the NFL. Ray said that, "John meant so much to me as a coach and a very close friend for the past 54 years. I will remember him always."



1956 Bakersfield College Track and Field Team

When I talked to Vernon Crawford (1956-Cross Country), he reminisced about how being on the track team was a real education about our society. One time coming back from LA, one of the guys asked to be let off at Cottonwood Road. Vern warned him that it wasn't a very safe place to get off. His colleague said that he knew that, but as he lived there, there was no helping it. Vern also recalled that Dad had told him that the team members "would always be his boys." BC President Rick Wright wrote to Dad sometime after he retired and pretty much captured Dad's philosophy of leadership. "You have been more than my friend. You have treated me like one of your own boys, as well as being a role model, mentor and teacher. Thanks for teaching me to be more human and patient in dealing with others. Time can be an ally; listening always pays; humor relieves the strain; invest yourself in others—these are a few of the lessons you demonstrated for me."

A much later colleague and friend, David Bezayiff, History Professor at Porterville College, recollected what they had in common: *"The Central Valley, and a small town youth, which "gave us a direction about life that helped us to be able to change, take on challenges, appreciate our roots and look to the future with hopes and promises for a better day. One of the things I most admired and came to respect about John was that he never left his integrity in the parking lot. It's something I think he knew intuitively that it forms the very essence and fabric of a person. A lot of people try to be good human beings, some try to imitate it in some way, most fall short of the mark. Dr. Collins didn't. That's not a bad legacy."*

Another long-time friend and colleague, Jack Hernandez, said at John's first retirement something that seems a fitting way to close out these recollections: *"I will mention one trait of his that seems to me the key that unlocks the secret of his extraordinary career at BC. He above all understands that colleges are unique and exciting institutions with exceedingly important work to do. They are not collections of buildings; rather they are people striving for excellence as students, teachers, support staff and administrators. He has known this and has cared for and nurtured, as he has characterized it, this special, fragile quality of a college, of Bakersfield College."*

Jack spoke again at the memorial service, and he spoke to the heart of the matter when about Dad's defense of the freedom of expression for teachers to choose what they teach based on

their assessment of the merit of the work and the suitability to the curriculum. Dad gave a well reasoned defense of academic freedom to the KCCD Board that may have been one of his finest hours; I know it mattered to him because of all the things he could have kept during a more than 50 year career in education; that was one of the few things he did keep in his personal files.

One of the other important things which touched my dad to the core was when BC named the Student Center, "The John J. Collins Student Center." I know he thought of himself from then on as a small-town boy who made good and the community noticed. He received the plaque at the dedication event and hung it in a private corner of the house where he could see it. I don't think this was an egotistical act but a reminder to himself that his work for students and the community had been valued and his life had contributed to the betterment of our American society. Based on recollections shared with me, he contributed to the growth and accomplishment of many individuals as well as his community.

Many people recalled Dad's sense of humor: he loved Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, but he also loved the subtle, ironic, or wry. One of the get well cards written when it looked like he would recover after his auto accident in April probably tickled him. It was pretty relevant to what had just happened. Ray Hearon, one of Dad's original staff at Moorpark College wrote, "Sometimes life takes sudden turns...without using its turn signals...You have now become a major newspaper feature. I will keep it between us that you intentionally created the story by driving into the canal just for the publicity."

Another get well card from Clayton Rippey (retired BC Art Faculty member) read: *"By now it's probably just water under the bridge. Now that you are finished with doing everything an old fart can do to get your name in the paper, you might just as well get your butt out of that bed and get on with it."*

Dad's dearest wish was to do just that, but at 93, the insults to the body by accidents, rescues by helicopters, hospitalization and surgeries were just too much for a 93 year old guy at the end of the race.

I imagine his one lingering regret in a long life full of experiences well lived, was that he was going to miss the 100th anniversary of Bakersfield College by less than two years. He was on the planning committee, and I am sure he will be there in spirit. ☺

# Community Voices

## Gerald Haslam shares his story about Collins

John Collins and Bakersfield were a good fit. Both rewarded hard work. Both had roots in the southwest and in the oil industry. And both had a hard edge if pushed.

John, who died May 13 at the age of 93, was also part of what has been America's most pragmatic generation, the World War II survivors who took nothing for granted and who, in the old Western vernacular, "paid for what they broke." He was absolutely a straight shooter who expected you to be one, too.

John Collins was, moreover, utterly without any visible ego, despite all his accomplishments—empathetic adviser, effective teacher, gifted coach, remarkable administrator—and a pretty fair jock in his youth. He was my faculty advisor when I enrolled in Bakersfield College in 1955, and he quickly understood that I wasn't ready for college. I was just going through the motions in order to move from party to party on the weekends. "You're wasting your time," he told me.

I went out for cross-country and track, both of which he coached, and he told me that, unless I was willing to train, there was no point in issuing me a uniform. I had gotten away with minimal efforts in high school, but he made it clear that this wasn't high school.

One thing he understood well was the value of higher education. Many folks in the Central Valley then were from levels of Southwestern society that had no tradition of formal education, and Coach Collins found himself explaining to dubious parents why their strapping 18-year-old might be better off in college than in going to work.

Luckily he had the patience and the experience to do that, and the larger community has much benefited. For instance



two outstanding ex-Renegade runners, Jim Wren and Miles Eisenman, credit John with having convinced their folks to allow them to enroll at BC. Jim eventually graduated from Sacramento State and became a much admired coach at West High before he was principal at North High; Miles graduated from Oklahoma State University, then Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. John was also colorblind at a time when overt racism was still not uncommon in Kern County. Willie Warren and Cruz Ibanez were treated exactly like Vernon Crawford or Gerry Strong. There was no room for favoritism or discrimination on his teams. "That stopwatch doesn't lie," he said.

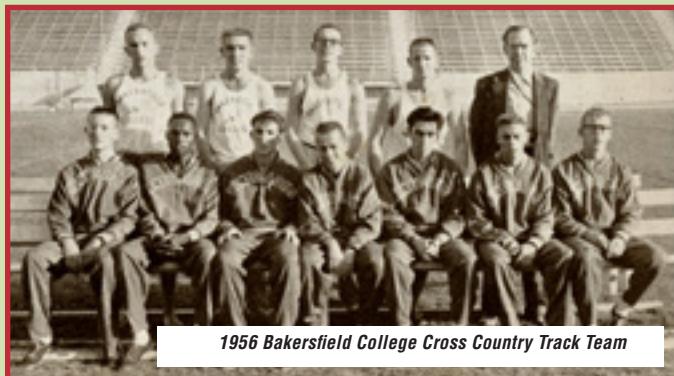
Somehow it came as no surprise to his ex-athletes when John moved into administration, then became president of Moorpark College and finally of BC. He was a natural leader without having to make a show of it. You really did feel he wouldn't ask you to do anything he wouldn't do himself.

I have to admit that I found out about John's toughness the hard way. In 1956, he kicked me off the national championship cross-country team due to an indiscretion of mine. I was guilty and didn't complain, but I hated it. I didn't hate him, though, because he was right and I knew it. Fifty years later that team was inducted into the BC Cross-Country Track Hall of Fame, and John readmitted me to the squad. I guess he thought I had finally learned my lesson. He was right.

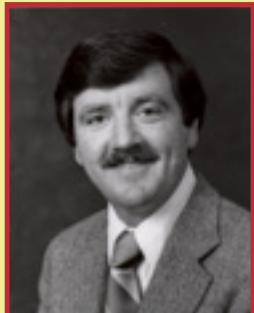
For many of John's aging ex-students, their own parents already gone, he was the final father figure. We couldn't have picked a better one. So long coach. ☺

(From the *Bakersfield Californian*, May 23, 2011. Reprinted with permission.)

*Gerald Haslam, a native of Oildale, is the author of "Working Man's Blues: Country Music in California," "The Great Central Valley: California's Heartland," among many other works of fiction and non-fiction. His biography of S.I. Hayakawa, the writer, educator, and U.S. Senator, is due out this fall from the University of Nebraska Press.*



1956 Bakersfield College Cross Country Track Team



## More Praise for John Collins

by Greg Goodwin (Letter to the Editor: The Bakersfield Californian)

I would like to add to the chorus of praise for longtime educator John Collins, who died May 13. His accomplishments are well-noted, but one had to know him personally to get the full measure of the man. His intelligence was matched by his concern for humanity, and his public service did not detract from his commitment to family. He had a wonderful sense of humor as well as complete sincerity.

His contributions to Bakersfield College continued into his 93rd year as a leader of the BC Archives. He was working hard to prepare for the college's centennial celebrations in 2013. While I am sad he will not be there in person, I know he will be in spirit.

# The Death of Artemio Cruz and the Fight for Academic Freedom at BC

By: John Marshall Collins and Charles F. Collins

As two of the progeny of Dr. John J. Collins, it fell to us among other tasks to go through and sort out his files after his death. The files were thorough to a fault, and there among personal matters like "2010 Taxes" and "Appointment with CPA" and so many others, there was one that stood out. Handwritten on the label were the words "Artemio Cruz."

The file wasn't about Artemio Cruz at all. He was a fictional character in a novel called "The Death of Artemio Cruz." The novel, by the great Mexican author Carlos Fuentes, chronicled the last hours of a wealthy survivor of the Mexican Revolution. Dr. Collins' file addressed the controversy that erupted at BC when this book was included on an optional reading list in a Mexican literature course taught by Ramon Melendez.

It was early in Dr. Collins' presidency, January 1973. Although it wasn't required reading, some in the community were upset at the book's "bad language," which culminated in a page that repeated a short, blunt Anglo-Saxon word, well known to army sergeants. Critics of the College were demanding that the District's Board of Trustees discontinue the use of the book, discipline Melendez, and create a citizens' advisory panel to evaluate the books read by students.

As Dr. Collins saw it, the controversy went further than one book, or one teacher who put it on a reading list. If the book was pulled, that would leave the administration (maybe even the Board of Trustees) responsible for vetting ALL of the books assigned and for censoring the choices of the faculty.

Our father wasn't shocked by the author's choice of words. No man who served in the U.S. Army could be shocked at the protean uses of THAT particular word. And though he was unimpressed with the book as a matter of personal taste, he knew it was recognized by scholars as a very worthy part of Mexican Literature.

Bakersfield was a conservative city in those days, as it still is today. It had a relatively conservative Board of Trustees for the Community College, and Dr. Collins had to work with those Board members, year in and year out. It would have been simple enough to back off on this particular book.

We don't know if there was any soul searching on this one. Our father was nothing if not practical. But what we know is that he went to work on the situation, to convince the Board that he was right, not in his selection of the book – he had never selected it – nor even in his approval of the book – he might not have approved – but in his judgment that the only way to run this particular railroad, this college, this place of ideas and inquiry, was to maintain the academic freedom of professors to pick the books, within a broad liberal tradition.

Dr. Collins built his case methodically. He and our mother, Pat Collins, an honor student at U.C. Berkeley and a career reference librarian, read the book. Although they found some of the language crude and unnecessary, they could tell that "The Death of Artemio Cruz" was world-class literature. He learned that the novel was used at Harvard, Notre Dame and a number of other eminent universities. In our father's mind, Harvard was a synonym for excellence and Notre Dame's approval was untouchable. He knew that, if a book was used at both Harvard and Notre Dame, he had a powerful argument that the book could be used at BC.

At the Board meeting, it was a standing room only crowd as well as faculty from BC. Dr. Collins reported his findings: (1) that no questionable passages in the book were read aloud in class; (2) that the course is not required for any student, although it meets a literature requirement that could be satisfied with other courses; (3) that critics and scholars have said that this book and others by the same author are some of the best in current Mexican literature; and (4) that all textbooks are approved by both the Department Chairman and the Dean.

Dr. Collins argued that the book was used at Harvard and Notre Dame. He also explained that, "Authors simply chronicle the acts of their characters. We do not have to agree with or approve of those characters, what they say, what they think, or what they feel."

Our father's presentation must have been compelling – we never heard him speak in public when he wasn't compelling – as the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to keep the book in use. The Board also passed a resolution which covered the following four points: (1) selection of school materials is the responsibility of the college staff; (2) alternative books will be available in cases where "excessive use of language" may be offensive; (3) the college staff should consider the maturity level of the students; and (4) the Board has the right to question materials, while the public's complaints will have to first be directed to the administration.

Our father often said that in WWII, he was no hero. Maybe not – we weren't there – but when he moved up into the breach to defend the right to read and discuss "The Death of Artemio Cruz," he engaged in an authentic act of heroism. We all could do well to learn from that example. ☺





## More RETIRED FACULTY MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

### Gary Cox

Where do I begin? I was hired by John Collins to teach Woodworking Technology in the Industrial Technology division in 1973. It seems that John was always there for guidance during tougher times. I recall that I was at a loss to come up with an interesting marketing solution for promotion of my classes. I mentioned this to John and he came up with the seed ingredients for a fold-out brochure!

Perhaps the closest moment that I shared with John was when he retired. He decided to take all of my woodworking courses to pursue his interest in that area. John had always dabbled in furniture repair and refinishing but he wanted to build something from scratch that he would be proud to give to one of his children or display in his own home. Those who know him (especially his children) see the results of his accomplishments.

What a pleasure to receive calls from John regarding some woodworking questions: *How do you cut a machine dovetail?* *What does the moisture content of lumber have to do with stability?* *Where can I locate quality materials for my projects? Etc., etc!*

I've always admired the skills John had. Some were natural and some required focus, hard work, and dedication. The result was the same---Excellence.

Thank you John for being my friend.

### Lucy Clark

I would run into Dr. Collins at Stars, at lunchtime, and would always go over to his table and speak to him. One day he had another man with him, and I had to walk right past them to leave. So I timed my exit to a lull in their conversation, and said, "Hello, Dr. Collins, I'm Lucy Clark from Child Development!" He replied as if he, of course, remembered me. I said to his lunch companion, "He was the best President I ever worked with!" And Dr Collins said, "Of course, I was the one who hired her! Of course, I'm going to be the best!"

We three laughed, especially when I struggled to say, "What I meant by that was..." and he kept saying, "It was because I gave her a job!"

That was the last I saw of him, as I didn't get to the retirement party this year.

### Lowell Dabbs

I will always honor my heart-warming memories of John Collins as a fellow veteran, a ready friend, and a true colleague. He was a true guide to Bakersfield College's growth and success over many years.

As is well known, John was in the infantry in WWII and had some combat experience on one of the Pacific islands. I remember swapping stories with him on one occasion, and he volunteered that in the fights he encountered with the Japanese army, "They didn't take any prisoners. And neither did we." On reflecting upon his survival under these conditions, and keeping his sanity, my admiration for him rose enormously.

### Merriem Palitz

John Collins was a lovely, modest man. He didn't make a fuss about his position or his authority. He never called attention to himself. He didn't seek power. He used persuasion and impressive problem-solving skills. And he enjoyed the members of his staff—as heterogeneous a group as they were. He said, "If the faculty is with you, you can do anything." He rejected the notion that the college is a business. Said he, "A college doesn't make money; it spends money to fulfill its purposes." How fortunate we were to serve under John's encouraging leadership.

### Don Stansbury

John Collins always impressed me with his kindness and great inner strength of character. I always saw him as soft-spoken and quiet, a good listener, and a man who was imminently practical and intelligent. I had the especial good fortune as English Department Chair in the summer of 1989 to work with John and Stephen Smith, Chair of the Sociology Department, in the remodeling of the Humanities Building and English Department offices.

John would always listen to our suggestions for change and make us feel as partners working as a team, never as boss and workers.

Later on after retiring from BC and when I became a member of the Archives Committee as newsletter editor, I often sat next to John at the meetings and felt his strong presence as a leader in the group, yet he made us feel he was just one of the gang. Occasionally afterwards he and I had time to share some quick memories of the oil towns we both grew up in eighteen miles apart, he in Coalinga and I in Avenal. These moments were very special to me.

John Collins will be missed by us all.

**Pictured above from left to right:** Gary Cox, Lucy Clark, Lowell Dabbs, Merriem Palitz, Don Stansbury

# The Archives Needs VOLUNTEERS



*Gaylen Lewis*

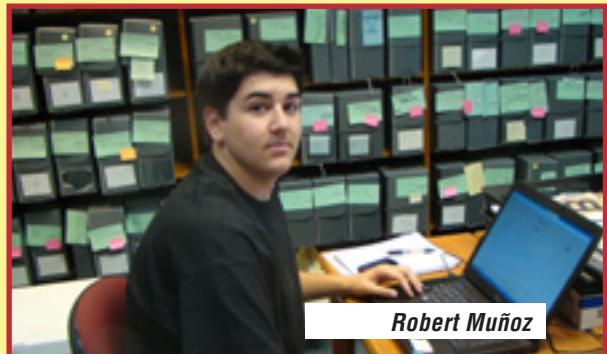
Gaylen Lewis, retired Social Studies professor and tennis coach, volunteered to help identify the people and events shown in our many unidentified photographs. This is a big service as all of us old-timers recognize faces that the young student workers do not. When you are on an outing in the Bakersfield College vicinity, stop in for an hour or two and do a quick project for us. All help is gratefully welcomed.

At this point, over 5000 collection items are listed on our website. Of those 1150 are digital items including 850 photographs. Probably ten times that number of items are in the archive boxes. Visit our website at [www2.bc.cc.ca.us/bcarchives](http://www2.bc.cc.ca.us/bcarchives) and come visit our greater holdings in the Archives room of the Grace Van Dyke Bird Library.

We would be glad to put your photo in this spot in the next Newsletter. We have many varied jobs that would benefit from a volunteer's help.

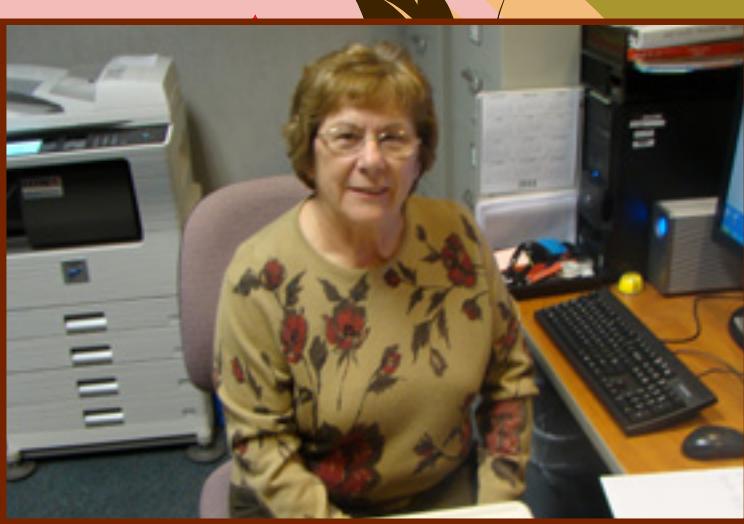


*Gloria Hill*



*Robert Muñoz*

Student workers are an invaluable addition to the Archives team, working on all facets of processing and documenting materials that are donated. Gloria Hill is shown at one of the six computers that are kept busy as new entries are recorded and placed on the website. Robert Munoz is a freshman at BC who comes to us with great training from having worked with Ken Hooper in the Bakersfield High School Archives Academy as a senior.



Helen Harp works as the Archives database guru. She attended BC in 1962 before her long career with AT&T and retiring after 32 years. She began working in the IT Department at the Kern Community College District in 1995 and retired from there after 13 years in 2008. She joined the Archives staff in March, 2011.

## Come See The Archives

The BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE ARCHIVES has photos and memorabilia on display and a wealth of fascinating old documents on BC's history. We are located on the 2nd floor of the new Grace Van Dyke Bird Library.

**Director:** Jerry Ludeke

**Office Manager:** Rosalee Pogue

**Email:** [bcarchives@bakersfieldcollege.edu](mailto:bcarchives@bakersfieldcollege.edu)

**Phone:** 661-395-4949

## HOURS FOR FALL 2011

Tues, Wed and Thurs

8:30 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.

Other hours available by appointment

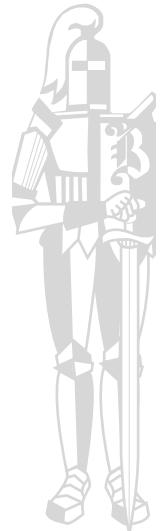


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## *People We Will Miss*

**John Collins** began at Bakersfield College in 1955 as a counselor and coach, remaining active at BC and KCCD until he died (except for 6 years founding Moorpark College).

**Tom Yale** was instrumental in developing the cannon tradition at football games. For 44 years he was professor of microbiology, physiology, anatomy, and the nursing program.

**Charles Carlson** was the founding Dean of the BC Downtown Center and served as Dean of Instruction and as Planning Director over 30 years.

**George Driver** retired in 2007 after 22 years teaching in the Computer Studies Department and receiving the Shirley Trembley Distinguished Teaching Award.

**Al Noriega** graduated from BC in 1970 and became Staff Photographer for over a decade, particularly enjoying covering BC football games.

**Walter Burnett** was in the M&O Department as an Air Conditioning Tech for 14 years.

**Fred Doehrn Jr** was an alum who went on to be team manager for the Renegades' 1954 Junior Rose Bowl championship team.

**Elizabeth "Betty" Loseman** was a teaching assistant in the Jerry Ludeke Learning Center for 28 years and a tutor before that.

**Lucille Sautter** became Bakersfield College's Placement Director in 1960 and remained 28 years during which she was also a softball coach and a head timer for track meets.

**Vern Walck**, equipment manager/trainer for several years, was the husband of Vesta Walck, Women's Athletic Equipment Attendant for 20 years.

**Connie Pollard** worked for 19 years in the Bakersfield College Business Office.

**Yuvonne York** for 27 years was the Food Service Manager for the Cafeteria and Coffee Shop.

**Readers Please Note:** Send information about former BC people to Charlotte Cox at [ccox@bak.rr.com](mailto:ccox@bak.rr.com)