

**Tribute to My Friend Jack Bowen**  
**By Larry Boleach**  
**(Presentation at the dedication of the memorial garden)**

This beautiful place is a fitting tribute to my dear friend Jack Bowen. It is symbolic of a life well-lived. The hard work of Chris Lantz and Melba in designing this garden, the physical labor of all the other Pershing People, and the generosity of the Summers Family have produced a beautiful homage to the memory of Jack. When strangers see this remarkable area and read the name on the plaque, they undoubtedly will surmise that “this Jack Bowen person must have been someone very special”—and indeed they will be correct.

I feel blessed to have been a colleague and friend of Jack Bowen’s since Fall term, 1966 when he came here to work for what was then Northeast Missouri State Teachers College. When it was announced in the Spring of ’66 that Jack had been hired, everyone on the staff who knew him just raved about what a great person he was, what a hard worker he was, and how professional he was. Not having met him before, I was thinking to myself, “I can’t wait to meet St. Jack!” When he moved in and we started the fall term, he and I were office mates and it didn’t take long for me to realize that he was everything they said he was and more.

We served five different presidents and went through three University name changes. We experienced a great educational transformation when Northeast Missouri State Teachers College—an open admission, regional teachers college—ultimately became Truman State University—Missouri’s Liberal Arts and Sciences University, with highly-selective admission and a national reputation for excellence. Jack used to joke about how we now taught at a school into which we would have difficulty gaining admission. This was typical of his sense of humor. It was never mean-spirited or denigrating of others. It was usually self-deprecating.

We enjoyed 46 years of friendship which served to forge a bond between us where he was more like a brother to me. Not only did we work together, we were close friends in our personal lives as well. We coached Little League together, we were Cub Scout leaders together. I couldn’t begin to accurately estimate the number of sports contests we attended together at Truman, Kirksville High School, other high schools, state tournaments and Cardinal games. We shared the joys and accomplishments of each other’s families, and we shared times of crises and sadness as well. I have thought about him almost every day since his passing.

I believe I developed a pretty good notion of who Jack Bowen was. One of the things I learned was that Jack had a pretty good idea of who Jack Bowen was. Neither one of us was disappointed with who Jack Bowen was. He was very comfortable in his skin. He was never artificial or superficial. What you saw was what you got—and what you got was a lot. I don’t believe I ever met a better person than Jack Bowen.

As a teacher and administrator, he had all of the essential qualities. He was a good communicator, he had a grasp of the body of knowledge, he had the tools and skills required to deliver his message, etc. His greatest strength and the thing that separated him from many educators was his unreserved commitment to the student. The skit performed by Jerry, Melody and Jana at Jack’s “Celebration Of Life” was spot on. Although it was exaggerated and funny, it clearly depicted Jack’s nature and his philosophy. Since we shared an office, I was a frequent observer of that very scene where some student would come into our office with some problem—frequently of his own making—and offer Jack some flimsy excuse of why he couldn’t do this, or couldn’t meet that deadline, or must have a course that had been closed in order to graduate at the end of the semester. I would often think to myself that here’s another student who will take advantage of Jack’s good nature and caring attitude. Jack was not naive—he understood what was

happening but he looked beyond the obvious and saw a kid with a problem. He was going to do everything he could within the bounds of professional ethics to help the kid. He internalized the educational charge of “in loco parentis” (Latin for “in the place of a parent”) and thought of himself as a parent in extension. This undoubtedly explains why every time I ran into one of our majors somewhere, the conversation eventually would include the question, “How is Mr. Bowen?” This happened because he genuinely cared for them, always treated them fairly, and with dignity and respect. And to be perfectly honest, it is a big reason why we are gathered here today.

Another of Jack’s great qualities was that he was so dependable. You could count on him to be with you until the task was complete. In the words of that great American, Larry The Cable Guy, Jack could “git ‘er done.”

He was also a person of unwavering loyalty. That loyalty was extended to his family, his community, his profession, and his friends. His most passionate institutional loyalty was shared by La Plata High School and Truman State University—he was a Bulldog Forever. I think that his deep affection for those places resulted from the fact that he gave them much credit for helping mold his character and philosophy and developed his education and skills that allowed him to have a better life and provide his family opportunities that they might not otherwise enjoyed.

Along the same lines, he was extremely patriotic. He proudly displayed his flag, and every vehicle he owned had those magnetic strips that encouraged us to “support the troops” or contained the words “God Bless America.”

Jack was a man of tremendous grace and humility. He was so unassuming. I recall one time when I sat with him as he took chemotherapy, he said to me “Don’t you have anything better to do?” I replied “What could I possibly have to do that would be more important than spending an hour or so with a friend?” He was always a gentleman and his actions were guided by courtesy, politeness and civility. He was gentle, sensitive and caring. He was “THAT GUY”—you know, the guy your mother wanted you to be like. My mother was not a physician but she seemed to know a lot about the heart and its location. She would have described Jack as someone who had a good heart or that his heart was in the right place. Even though he was a gentle person who always demonstrated consideration for others, he also had a competitive streak. When we were younger and could still run and jump, we used to enter faculty teams in various intramural sports. He not only demonstrated good athletic skills, his competitiveness would emerge. I observed his competitive spirit again when he was battling his health issues. He approached that challenge in the same way that he faced every other challenge—with courage, determination and an unwavering Christian faith.

An acquaintance of mine once told me that the world contains two kinds of people—givers and takers. If our world did in fact consist of givers and takers, Jack would have been deeply entrenched in the “giver column.” He spent so much of his energy and resources in the service of others. He did so not because he had to but because he chose to. His generosity directed toward his family and friends reflected the fact that he truly loved them. He clearly understood that “you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.”

There are many of you here who also endorse this concept because you have “given” this beautiful garden as an expression of the tremendous “love” that we all share for Jack Bowen.