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Former health and exercise science professor Jack Bowen tells stories about his time at Truman at his home Sunday. Jack has a form of lymphoma, and has battled cancer for a decade.

Reflections of a Truman legend

BY BRENNA MCDERMOTT
Editor in Chief
index.editor@gmail.com

Jack Bowen is a mentor, a coach, a husband, a father and, most importantly, a teacher to all. As a part of the Truman community for most of his life, he has taught countless students for three decades.

Today, Jack is living with a terminal illness and no further plans for treatment. After a decade-long battle with cancer, Jack was given a report marked 'final' from his doctor. He was told to go home and spend his remaining time with his family.

When Jack leaves this world, he'll leave behind a legacy of his wife Melba, 3 children, 8 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren. But he also will leave a legacy with his second, much larger family: the students, faculty and staff of Truman State University.

This family is made up of health and exercise science majors who had to make up missed classes with him at 6:30 a.m., students who threw cow patties for western-themed homecoming events, janitors who kept a stash of pop Jack gave to them, the graduate assistants who helped him equalize male and female intramural activities, the basketball and softball players he taught jump shots and bunting to, the countless students he taught and tried to set an example for every day, the former interns he drove around the Midwest to check up on, the athletes who fought through the last of segregation and the random Truman alumni that Jack's family runs into who

know and remember him. A family spanning more than four decades, and Jack remembers many, if not all, of their names.

On Saturday, more than 300 of those family members showed up to celebrate Jack. The department of health and exercise science organized the affair, "Celebrating a Lifetime of Touching Lives: A Toast to Mr. Jack Bowen." There, Jack and Melba shook hands with a line of people that went out the door, family who came from all around the country. Undergraduate students, graduate students, secretaries, colleagues and even Jack's high school basketball coach came to support the family.

Donations were made to the Jack and Melba Bowen Scholarship, available to senior health and exercise science majors, something

Jack's son said the family will make sure continues.

Since 1998, Jack, Melba and two faculty members have awarded 2 scholarships a year. The scholarship helps them honor their lifelong connection to the University, as many family members before and since Jack and Melba attended Truman.

Jack, a native of LaPlata and

graduate of what was once Northeast Missouri State University, served in numerous positions at Truman from 1966-2000, including assistant professor of health and exercise science, Director of Intramural Recreational Sports and Student Research Director. He spent more than 30 years at Truman teaching and coaching.

For Jack, teaching is something that is in his blood, but something he said he had to practice to improve upon. He said his biggest educating influence was his mother.

"I really enjoyed teaching," Jack said. "In fact, I have a lot of notes coming back thanking me. Thanking me for preparing them to be teachers. And the way I taught."

Jack tried to run his intramurals with the same passion he brought to teaching. He made sure every student had an activity they were interested in. Jack worked four nights a week until 10:30 p.m. for 18 years, making sure students had the opportunity to participate in athletics, which he said helped keep students focused and out of trouble.

As he reminisces about his decades of service at Truman, he still shows his Truman pride, wearing a purple shirt with a

bulldog on the left breast. As he reflects on his beginnings in intramurals, he remembers every name of every student, every funny event with a smile on his face. Thinking about the old days brings up thoughts of Jack's legacy in both of his families, a legacy that he hopes will be of strength and respect.

"I hope I've had a good life," Jack said. "I know I've had a good life, but I hope I've treated people right. And I hope I was a role model, which I hear that quite a bit on messages and notes."

For Jack's first family, he has upheld those hopes. Melba said that everywhere the Bowen family goes they see someone who knows and speaks highly of Jack. Jack said it is because he always has tried to give respect.

That respect and a positive outlook have become part of Jack's legacy. Once, a staff member was trying to drag the baseball diamond perfectly for an intramural game, but didn't realize that he was dragging it incorrectly. Jack didn't correct him then and there. Instead, Jack told him he did a good job. Jack said that has always been Jack's attitude.

Jack said he hasn't given up fighting his disease, a form of lymphoma. He is taking life one day at a time, meeting friends for coffee, going to the Bowen's 80-acre farm with his grandchildren and hopefully going to the rec center because he said this is the first time in his life he's had flabby arms.

Jack said he isn't in any pain, although he does feel weaker at times. His appetite has decreased. But despite these setbacks, Jack is staying positive.

"I can't find anything to eat except ice cream, and I do pretty good on that," Jack said.

The e-mails, phone calls and drop-ins from both his families are what he calls the best medicine. He knows he has a far-reaching support system and that he and many others are praying.

"I've asked Him for help," Jack said. "And a lot of people have too. We'll see. Sometimes you never know. Whatever His plans are, I'll do it."

Jack said he hopes he has been a role model for his grandchildren and that they might follow the way he has always tried to live his life.

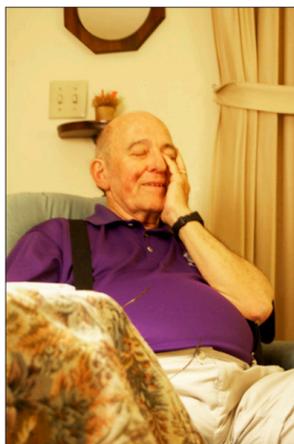
"You treat everybody like you'd like to be treated," Jack said. "And I've tried to live like that. If you can't say something good, don't say anything. I've had a hard time sometimes with that one, but I've tried to keep that motto for a long time."

Jack Bowen remembers all the moments of his time at Truman, good and bad. He remembers the games that were lost and won, the students who faltered and succeeded, the athletes who were hurt but got up again. As he admires photos he's taken of his Truman community family throughout the years, he remembers each face and each moment. Because they are all moments Jack shared with his family.

Jack and Melba Bowen would like to thank the health and exercise science department, Northeast Missouri Alumni chapter the administration, faculty, staff, alumni and students of Truman State University for a memorable evening of celebration Saturday and for a lifetime of memories together.

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Jack Bowen
former Truman health and exercise science professor



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Jack and his wife Melba discuss their memories in their home Sunday. Jack taught and coached at Truman from 1966 to 2000 and the BOWENS have a scholarship in their name for senior exercise science majors.