



Manuel "Pops" Palacio

"Mentor, Friend & Father to Alumni"

By Rosie Martinez & Joe Cano '75

There are many words that can describe Manuel Palacio, or as he is lovingly known to us as 'Pops'. Disciplinarian, coach, mentor, and surrogate father. For more than five decades any Phantom that has passed through Cathedral High School halls on the road to manhood can attribute some lasting influence from knowing this man.

Manuel Palacio has given over 50 years of service to Cathedral in many capacities. 'Pops' was the one you wanted to wrap your ankles before a game, the bus driver that got them to the games on time, and the man who fixed you up to get back in the game. He later became responsible for the care and maintenance of our beloved alma mater, but continued to help mold boys into men. "Pops" was the disciplinarian for the ones lucky enough to join that exclusive after school club known as "detention." He prepared many of us for the world that waited after graduation.

We appreciate how he has helped many generations of Phantoms in special ways. Throughout the years, he has paid the tuition of many boys that he knew were struggling financially, helped buy books if you could not afford them, got shoes & equipment for the various teams, brought in donations like pianos and surfboards for the school plays, built sets and booths for festivals, and was otherwise at the core of many fund raisers. Although he had "retired" from Cathedral in 1999, he stayed involved and continued to "drive the bus." He still goes to the football games

We are proud to say that Cathedral has the original "Manos De Piedra" (hand of stone). Yes, we stayed out of fights to avoid being picked up with those famous hands, hands that were shaped by hard work and hard play. There has been two constant themes throughout 'Pops' life: athletics and education. A brief glimpse of his rich life experience will show how these themes became essential elements that would forge the

life and character of the man we know and love today.

He was born in Tucson, Arizona in the 1920's. With desert in all directions, he ran everywhere! Like a blacksmith's hammer and anvil, the geography and elements would help shape the young Palacio into an athlete and, later, a formidable soldier. After moving to Los Angeles, he attended Belmont High and excelled at gymnastics. He got an athletic scholarship to University of San Francisco, but then World War II started.

He enlisted in the Navy, but was allowed to stay a few months to finish up his engineering classes at LA City College. In the interim, he parlayed his ability fixing cars, like his '37 Pontiac, to working in Lockheed's Burbank machine shop. After graduating from the Naval Academy in 1944, his athletic ability got him recruited for commando training, specializing in underwater demolition. He piloted amphibious landing craft that landed troops in advance and during the battles on the beaches of the Pacific, including Guadalcanal.

Having experienced the loss of brothers in arms during WWII, he came home with a commitment to others and a strong resolve to not miss the opportunities life afforded you. When he got out of the Navy, he coached at Echo Park & his wife Mary Lou mentored the girls. Few people know that he was also accepted to the LAPD, but declined after some unfairness to one of the neighborhood kids that attended the park he worked at. Loving the outdoors, he decided to study for his contractor's license and started his own business; "Palacio Pool Plastering". He and Mary Lou traveled and donated time to All Saints Parish in El Sereno and Sacred Heart High in Lincoln Heights. Pops continued to play Semi-Pro Football until the mid 1950's; he loved to "Hit 'them hard and

Tear them up!"

"Pops" began to "help out" at Cathedral when Mary Lou's brother, Mike Enriquez '52, attended Cathedral. Although, Pops himself did not attend Cathedral as a student he did contribute four Phantoms to the fold; Gilbert '62, Manny Jr. '73, Joe '75, and Paul '82. He also encouraged the Palacio grandsons; Benjamin '97 & Jon Paul 2000 to attend. They ensured that all seven of their children would attend college.

Once you got to know Pops on a deeper level, you got to see his soft side, a person that you could come to for advice or a strong shoulder when things were not going well at home. To many he was the father figure that was there when we needed it the most. He did not claim to know all the answers, but would dispense enough wisdom born of a rich life experience to let you see things a little more clearly. We did not get all our education in the classroom.

Manuel "Pops" Palacio and the history of Cathedral are inseparable. He helped to make boys into educated, productive and responsible men. Now that many of us are fathers, even grandfathers, we can still look back and see the wisdom of his vision and take pride that his influence has been integral in our lives. See the world through "Pops" eyes, you see the potential in everyone, but most of all let you see it for yourself. To know that you have the power within yourself to succeed and you will always have a supporter in him. We are proud to be Phantoms and fortunate to be part of the rich legacy of Cathedral. But most of all we will always be proud to be "his boys".

The alumni and the friends of Cathedral would like to thank "Pops" for his dedication and years of service to our Catholic youth.