

Gordon Rochford was born in 1932, the same year, he often reminded us, that the Sydney Harbour bridge was opened. He was eldest of three brothers, born to parents Patrick & Eileen in 1932. His brother Barry predeceased Gordon and his other brother Kevin is watching the live stream today. He has been away from his family in NSW and more specifically, the Manly peninsula for many, many years as all of his working life has been in Queensland. That said, there are few more loyal sons of NSW and the Manly Warringah football club than he.

Gordon Rochford, by today's standards, made the incredible decision to join the Christian Brothers as a 14 year old in 1947. When he entered the Brothers Novitiate, the first year of formal training, he was given the name of a patron saint as was the custom in those days. His given name was Palladius. I hope that he was not particularly fond of or had a deep devotion to St Palladius (whoever he was) because he was always known as 'Rocky' which went so well with Rochford.

He began his teaching career in 1957 in Ingham. His educational career is outlined on his Obituary Card.

After completing two Principalships at St Kieran's Mt Isa and Marina / St Stans' in Rockhampton, he did a couple of short stints in Brisbane and Dalby & PNG before arriving in Bundaberg in 1988.

Rocky found his home in Bundaberg. His journey here was not always easy. Initially, Rocky was on the teaching staff at Shalom but ill health and a changing world made it clear that his days in the classroom were drawing to a close. Before the days when Campus Ministers became

popular in Catholic Education, Br Rocky made that role his own at Shalom.

Rocky loved routine and structure. He was very much a 'creature of habit'. For many years at Shalom, he ran his famous 'Snowy Trips' by bus to the snowfields and Sydney. I am told that the organisation and minute by minute schedule rivalled the precision of the D Day invasion.

Rocky loved Shalom and its students and staff. He loved the local community and the members of this parish where he worshipped faithfully and daily.

It is hard to overstate the impact he had on the Shalom community. For probably thousands of young women and men his was ***the wrinkled but smiling face of God***. It was easy to recognise in him and perhaps probably more so even in his later years, a genuine authenticity and goodness – maybe even saintliness.

He was a companion to young people but in a low-key type of way. He greeted hundreds every morning as they arrived at school with 'Shalom, my friend' and the response of 'Shalom, Brother' was just part of the fabric of life at Shalom for dozens of years.

His mornings were busy. His day always started with prayer and generally Mass. A simple breakfast followed and, for most of his years, before beginning a dangerous period when he drove to school, a ride on an antique bike to Shalom which enabled him to ready, early, for the day.

His journeying with the young women and men of Shalom started at the front gate. On the famous small whiteboard which settled around his neck were written the names of students whose birthdays fell on the day. He sought out and tracked down all of those he did not find before school and made sure that they received his congratulations on the anniversary of their birth and one of his famous Book Marks. Birthdays were a big thing for his and he left no stone unturned to ensure that he did not miss one.

Interestingly, he did the same for his Brothers. As a Christian Brother living in Queensland, you knew that you could guarantee that you would receive a birthday call from Rocky early on the day and before he left for school.

Remembering birthdays is not a remarkable thing or, really, of great significance. But it was the little things that mattered to Rocky and I know that so many students at Shalom cherished being remembered by Brother on their day. It was a low key action that had high impact.

Shalom students had their lives chronicled by Brother. He took about 3 million photos and almost as many videos. He videoed them on their Orientation Day, their first day of Yr 8 or 7. Then he followed their lives by attending almost every sport event, dance, Shalom Day, Carnival or competition. Always with his video camera or instamatic. At appropriate times, Brother could be relied upon to share another episode of the 'Rochford Files' that were compilations of photos for Retreats or Graduations or other noteworthy event. Rocky took the concept of a 'family slide night' to a whole new level!

When his death was announced, I read through a lot of the hundreds of comments on our FaceBook page. It was clear that Brother's time at Shalom spanned generations.

I wonder if our current students had any clue as to what earlier past students meant when they referred to Rocky as 'Br Fuji'. If the younger set present today still have no clue, ask someone with a few grey hairs.

Brothers' gift to Shalom was one of presence. He was just there. Quietly supporting and encouraging. He never took a central role or demanded attention. Like his hero, Edmund Rice, he believed in the transforming power of education and of the importance of walking beside those who need help the most.

Like Edmund, he had a particular soft spot for the battlers. When Edmund Rice Camps came to Queensland, they rivalled the Manly Warringha Club for his affection. Those Camps, where young people in high school and the couple of years beyond, give their time to ensure that a bunch of young people from really disadvantaged families, could have a great time for a few days, were his passion.

Because of his passion for Edmund Rice Camps, Shalom students have provided the backbone of the Eddie Rice Campers. For years, he encouraged, nagged and cajoled Shalom Yr 11 & 12 students to travel with him to St Brendan's Yeppoon to support the Camps there every Christmas. And they did so in droves and willingly gave up their school holiday vacation time to be involved.

About ten years ago, he came to me with a cunning plan to continue to support the St Brendan's Camp but also to run our own at our Outdoor Ed Campsite – Chaverim. This has been a very significant initiative for Shalom and one he loved and supported. He never missed one – ever.

Through these Camps, he taught young people about Service Learning and about their responsibility to do something positive for those less fortunate.

Br GP 'Rocky' Rochford was an icon of Shalom and all for which it stood. He was an unparalleled gift for this community and one for we will be forever grateful. He was wonderful for Shalom but, Shalom was wonderful for him. Shalom changed Rocky.

There was *an 'evolution of grace'* in this man over the years.

He was born at a time in history of Australia and the Congregation of Christian Brothers when compassion and empathy were not the prized values that they are today. His training as a Brother was hard and demanding. Second best was not good enough. My friendship with Rocky began many years before I arrived at Shalom in 2009. He and I were Christian Brothers together. I was a young man when he was in full flight. The God that he believed in, in those times, was demanding and exacting. Obeying the rules was never a choice for him – it was absolute. He relished the world being very 'black & white'. There was no shades of gray for him. He was demanding of himself and the Brothers with whom he lived. When he arrived in Bundaberg in 1988, he was not a well man in body or in spirit.

But the young women and men of Shalom were as great a gift to him as he was to them. They changed and softened him.

In his many years before Shalom, to have identified Br Rochford as a 'conservative catholic' would have been a significant understatement. I found myself very surprised then on an occasion, very shortly after I arrived at Shalom as Principal, that Brother came to my office with a copy of the religious magazine, 'The Tablet' in hand – a practice that he continued every month.

He had earmarked several articles for me to read and he had underlined several paragraphs to which he thought I should pay particular attention. Now, 'The Tablet' is a very progressive and inclusive magazine. Some would even describe it as being pretty 'left of centre'. It is not a magazine that would ever have found a place in Rocky's reading list in the earlier days that I knew him.

I remember thinking to myself at the time, "Who are you and what have you done with Br Rochford?"

But he changed. There was an 'evolution of grace' in him. He loved the Church and there was no one more faithful to it and he particularly loved Pope Francis and the direction the current Pope is trying to take the Church. He grew to love an inclusive Church rather than an exclusive one. He grew to relish the 'shades of gray' and recognized the need for the Church to respond and celebrate and welcome – differently.

His spirit blossomed at Shalom and in Bundaberg in a way it never had before. He was an infinitely happier and more rounded personality.

The theologian Diarmuid O'Murchu has given a new slant on the philosopher Descartes famous line, "I think, therefore I am". O'Murchu, in talking about the power of community as a transforming force says that Descartes line might be better said as, "I belong, therefore I am". Rocky belonged at Shalom and he welcomed and wanted others to embrace our community.

He belonged to this Church community and he wanted our Church to be welcoming and inclusive. The experience of community changed Rocky and he invited others in.

With a birthday card, or a good wish or his presence at a game or event or competition or wherever young people gathered.

A story was shared with me from Deb Bolam, long time Shalom staff member and friend of Rocky. On an earlier occasion when Brother had returned to Bundaberg after a serious battle with Cancer, Deb asked him if he was afraid of dying. He responded, 'No because I've seen what heaven is like. It's like being at Shalom.'

On Monday morning last, at about 11.30am, he would have heard those words from his best friend, 'Well done good and faithful servant. Come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.'

Shalom Brother.