

JACK CRANFILL

A Character with Character



Most people who know Jack Cranfill would describe him as a “character”. In the MacMillan Dictionary, a “Character” is someone with qualities that make them different from most people and interesting to know. That description fits Jack to a tee. If you ask Jack, being a character comes from being part of his family. “You cannot separate me from that fact. While I am known in the industry and have been involved for many decades, it all still comes back to family with me.”

John C. “Jack” Cranfill Jr. was born in Lexington, Kentucky on November 24, 1947, the first born child of John C. Cranfill and Dorothy “Dotty” Laverne Rothan Cranfill. In 1955, the family moved to Somerset, Kentucky where his dad started a small auto parts store called Auto Electric. It was a true Mom and Pop operation as his mom kept the books for the store. Jack’s dad was not mean-natured, but he was stern. He taught Jack that the most important thing you have in life is your word so you should always keep it and that you should give a man an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. The later lesson may have been particularly important to his dad since Jack started working at

the auto parts store at the age of 11. His mom Dotty taught Jack how to laugh, to love, and to give. Jack credits her for the fact that he is one of the happier people you will meet. She was also very wise. Jack’s wife Jan once asked her, “How do you be a great mother-in-law?” Her answer: “Keep your mouth shut.” His mom never had a driver’s license until she was in her 60’s. The State police that gave the driver’s test hung out at the auto parts store (which also happened to be the starting point for the driver’s test) or she would not have passed the test!

While Jack was the oldest, he was joined in time by two brothers, Bob and Larry, and two sisters, Linda and Michelle. In spite of the fact that there is an 18 year age difference between the youngest and the oldest, the siblings remain very close. His sister Linda hosted a mere 70 family members just this past Thanksgiving. The family has been gathering prior to Christmas for as long as Jack can remember. The most recent gathering was December 15th at his brother Bob’s house where the family shared food and sang Christmas carols using the same music sheets they’ve used since Jack was a small child. Instead of exchanging gifts, they bring gifts for the homeless and

many in the family serve dinner to the homeless and give out the gifts during Christmas week. The gang also loves to party together. Once in the 1980’s when they were all in their 30’s, the three Cranfill brothers were on the dance floor at the Country Club, and created “the Cranfill Shuffle”. To this day all the kids and grandkids learn the dance so watch out when the Cranfill clan takes over a dance floor!

Jack’s never knew his maternal grandmother Anna Waldhause Rothan and only knew his maternal grandfather Martin Rothan for a short while. Jack recalls that Martin loved spicy food and that it was often on the menu when the family went for a visit. Martin wrote a book on umpiring titled the New Baseball Rules and Decisions Book. It’s out of print today, but you can still pick up a copy on eBay if you’re lucky. On his father’s side, there were some real characters. Jack’s grandfather was Mitty Beatrice Cranfill and his brother, Jack’s great uncle, was Otha Dora. Jack is not quite sure how their parents came up with those names, but it may have had something to do with the fact that his great grandfather married a full blooded Cherokee. His grandfather Mitt was very different. He did not believe in banks



Jack and Jan



Jack Sr. and Jack Jr.
on New Year’s Eve



Jack’s Mom Dotty



so he buried his money. He was the poster child for the phrase “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” as he collected discarded items from the alleys in Lexington that later became antiques. He had a monkey for a pet and kept a fire going year around in his bed room. Jack’s grandmother was Mamie, a good woman but tough.

Nuns Will Teach you Character

As a child, Jack attended the small three room St. Mildred’s Catholic School in Somerset - 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade in the one room, 4th, 5th and 6th grade in another room and 7th and 8th in the last room. There is nothing like a Catholic school for teaching children that not following rules carries consequences. The experience proved significant to Jack’s life, teaching him respect and discipline. It was significant in other ways as well. When he finished up at St. Mildred’s, there were 8 people in his 8th grade class. He then attended Somerset High School where there were 160 freshmen, most of whom he did not know. The Catholic students were not automatically put into the accelerated classes as some of the higher achieving public students were, so Jack figured out that if you can do math people will think you are smart. He also learned that if you can make people laugh or smile, you will start being included.

“I tell people we weren’t poor, we just didn’t have anything. I learned it’s not things that are important, but your imagination and friends. We brewed sassafras tea from tree roots. We built “forts” in the field across from our house. We played “Kick the Can” because everyone can afford a can. We caught lightening bugs. We roasted marshmallows. We played whiffle ball and badminton. When your friends are in the same boat you are, you really don’t notice what you don’t have.”

Jack attended the University of Kentucky, the first person in his family to go to college despite knowing nothing about the entrance process, acquiring student loans (a blessing in disguise), or otherwise securing financial assistance. Initially he lived with his grandparents in Lexington. Mamie moved her clothes out of the closet and put a cot in there for him. Mitt would wake him at 6 am to chop wood. Figuring that wasn’t what college was meant to be, he went out for fraternity rush the next semester and found a fraternity that would let him run the kitchen in exchange for his board. He was so happy that he was able to experience true college life and finally “come out of the closet!”

Jack worked his way thru college doing any job he could find. One year he had 14 W-2 forms when it was time to do his taxes. This pay-as-you-go route was a long one and it took seven years for

A Huge Cast of Characters – The Cranfill/Rothan Clan.

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Jack to complete his Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering. Jack claims that “I chose Chemical Engineering because I would not have to take a foreign language - in my mind Spanish would be tougher than Physical Chemistry!” Three years into his program, he began questioning his choice of Chemical Engineering as he felt he was surrounded by people wired very differently than he was. He went to the Placement Center and took a personality test. The results indicated that he was least qualified to be was a minister (that told Jack the test was probably pretty good) and the next least thing was an engineer. In spite of this, he decided to stay the course, but planned to eventually get into technical sales.

A Character Meets his Match

By his junior year in high school, Jack was no longer at the bottom of the social food chain but by no stretch close to the top. He saw this freshman girl walking towards him in the hallway and he asked someone who she was. She was Janet DeBord. He says it was just like he knew she was the “one”. A few weeks later, Jack was at a Sock Hop

and Jan was dancing with the guy she was going steady with. “I tapped him on the shoulder and said I wanted to dance with her - he said no, but I did so anyway - I brought her in close and said I don’t want to scare you, my name is Jack, I know you are Jan and I want you to break up with him and go out with me - I then let go so she could go back to her date - two weeks later they were broken up and we had our first date.”

Jack and Jan were married in Somerset, Kentucky in 1970. The fact that Jack was a Catholic and Jan was a Baptist presented a few challenges. Jan’s parents would not come to the Catholic Church and Jack’s parents had issues if the priest was not part to the ceremony. Jack met with the Baptist Minister, the local Catholic Priest and the Catholic Bishop and somehow got them all to agree. It was one of the first hints that he may be good at sales. At that point you could have sold tickets to the event and the joint wedding went off without lightening hitting the Baptist church! The newlyweds were both still in college and they moved into a 10 x 30 trailer. They both worked and



Jack and Jan at the prom



Jack with Eric Linn at a NCTA golf outing

carried full class loads. Date night was going to the grocery together. "I could add up in my head how much we had in the cart and would look and say what do we need more than what's in the cart - those days were as happy as any we had until we had kids!"

Work Will Test Your Character

After graduating in 1971, Jack's took a job as an engineer for Consol in Beckley, West Virginia. He was shocked to get the offer as he was in Chemical Engineering and had never even seen a mine. The HR person from Consol was very social and they just seemed to hit it off. Jack did well at Consol, which was a double edged sword. They wanted him to get his foreman's license and work underground to get that experience. That was not something he wanted to do and once he told them no, he knew he needed to move on. The next job he got was with Nalco. It wouldn't be his last job at Nalco, but we'll get back to that. He and Jan were able to move back to Kentucky and settled in Louisville. Jan taught at Jefferson Town High School, allowing Jack and Jan to buy their first home. Jack thrived and was the Top New Account Producer at Nalco in 1976. Not everything was rosy though as he was not good at the corporate game. He turned down a promotion to district manager so his family would not have to move. He would eventually get a district manager job at ARCO. They contacted him when they were starting up a new water treatment company in 1979 and he was promoted to district manager in 1981. He stayed with the company through many

Jack loves this industry because, for the most part, people are real.

ownership changes. In 1994, he joined AKJ Industries. He knew the owners from his days with ARCO and Jack was tasked with starting up a chemical division from scratch. The group was

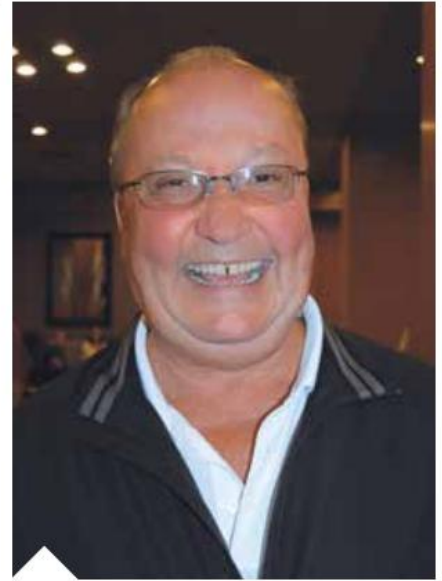
very successful, to the point that Nalco bought the chemical division of AKJ Industries in 2014. Jack worked for Nalco until he retired in November of 2016 but started doing consulting work for them again in mid-2017.

Jack loves this industry because, for the most part, people are real. He was reluctant to start down the path of mentioning those that have had an impact on him for fear he would leave someone out or tell embarrassing stories. Besides, I told him that he couldn't go over 3,000 words so that pretty much killed that. Jack's first NCTA meeting was at one of the Spring Conference's held at the Silverado in Napa, California. He did not know a soul when he got on the Wine Train for the annual conference dinner. He ended up sitting with Kevin Deschler, who was still with Ameren at the time, and a couple from FreightCar America. Jack told them two things - the wine was on him and on the way back when they served dessert, "people would be pulling chairs up to join our table because we would be having so much fun." Both things came true. The next morning, Jack got an invitation from FreightCar America to join their wine tours.


Since then, Jack and others from AKJ and Nalco have been very active in the NCTA not only through regular conference attendance but also with the work of the various committees, particularly the Western Logistics and Planning Committee. Jack has also been active with other industry groups including the ACC, Eastern Fuel Buyers, Michigan Coal and Rail, and Lexington Coal Exchange.

Children Help Develop Character

Jack and Jan have two children. Their daughter Shelley and her husband David and their four children live 15 minutes away. Jack describes his daughter as one of the nicest, most caring people you would ever meet. Son Trey and his wife Cara live in Lexington with their two children. Trey works with Nalco which means Jack gets to work with him, an experience he cherishes. Jack says he's never met anyone who did not like Trey.




Jack is one of the happiest people you'll ever meet.



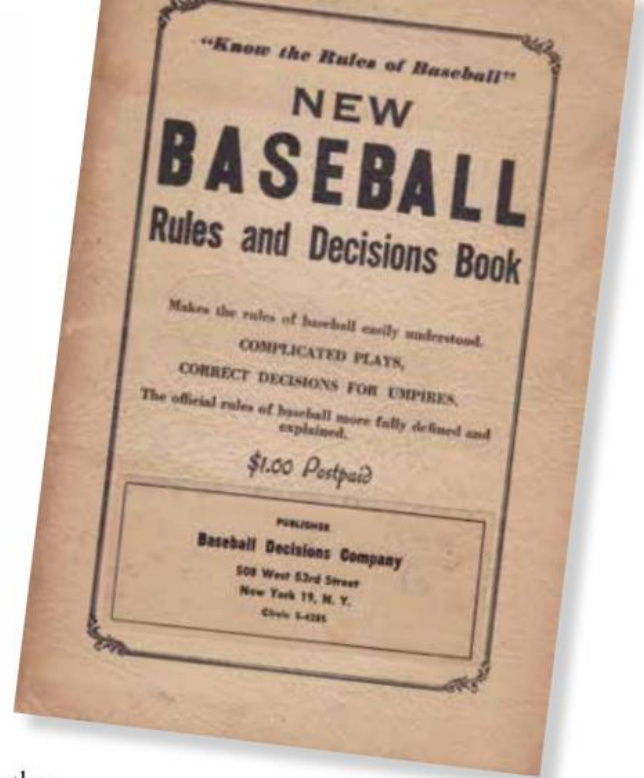
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When his kids were young, Jack served as a Sunday School Teacher and Youth Leader. One exercise queried the kids on what they wanted to be when they grew up and also asked what their parents wanted them to be. He knew he and Jan were doing something right when daughter Shelley's response to the second question was "happy". It made him proud.

Jack coached his son Trey in baseball from T-ball thru Babe Ruth leagues. Jack shared the coaching duties with Head Coach Jack Lashley ("Bad" Jack) and served as assistant coach ("Good" Jack). The Jacks knew baseball well and

kept the nucleus of the kids they started with in T-ball together thru Little League and Babe Ruth. Their teams dominated and in 1992, the year most of the boys were 15, they won the State Championship and went on to the nationals. The kids and their families were like family to Jack. "Then life happens - some of the kids that you love and you know have the capacity to be good take a wrong turn - you hear about drugs and arrests - it breaks your heart, but it also teaches you that you always need to be attentive and involved with your kids and grandkids no matter what their age is."

Jack and Jan are enjoying life as grandparents to Jack, Grayson, Tanner, Callie Jane, Emma Finley and Cambell. "I can remember when my first grandchild Jack was born. I thought, 'Where has all this love I wasn't using been?' It's been that way for each grandchild." All the kids are very different but special in their own way.

Grandson's Jack and Grayson were invited to Barcelona by FC Barcelona to play soccer. It was a great trip and learning experience for both. Jack was also part of a Quick Recall team, an academic quiz bowl competition. Jack's team won the Louisville Catholic league championship recently. Apparently, the youngest Jack takes after his grandmother. If you're in the mood to feel really stupid, "Old" Jack encourages you to attend one of these events and compete with these middle school kids.

Kids, even those that love you dearly, can be brutally honest at times. Tanner was a little tyke when his Grandfather had to get on his brother Grayson for some infraction. Tanner looked up at Jack and said "Bad Pappy", sticking up for his brother. Callie Jane drew a picture of Jack with very little hair. When he asked her about it, she said "Pappy, that's all you've got." Emma Finley tells all her friends that "Pappy is a trickster." The youngest, Cambell, is a loving child, with a smile that lights up a room. All of the grandkids are athletic and active. It keeps Jack and Jan busy going to games, shows, and mass. Jack claims he doesn't know where they got it, but his none of his grandkids have ever met a stranger!

Character and Vices can go Together

One of the unique pastimes Jack enjoys as a Kentucky native is going to Churchill Downs. Horse racing is a passion for Jack and going to Churchill Downs is like Norm going to "Cheers". Everyone knows his name. As usual, Jack has gotten the entire family involved, starting a family wagering pool prior to the 2012 Kentucky Derby. The pool hit a superfecta that paid \$42,000 dollars. The word spread, and next year the pool had even more money to work with. "We had over 200 people from all over



Jack and Jan at daughter Shelley's wedding

the country (my family is social!) in our pool, so no one made a lot of money, but we cashed in for over \$300K before we went bust." Fortunately, they'd taken some distributions along the way.

Jack still enjoys seeing his friends in the coal industry so semi-retirement is good for him. He hopes the combination of part-time consulting with Nalco, family involvement, and spending time doing things that "my wonderful wife" wants to do will continue for the foreseeable future. Throw in a few trips to the race track trips, and who could ask for more?

Finally, there are two things that you might not know about Jack.

First, God gave him the ability to write poetry. He can do it on the fly on a bar room napkin, entertaining the crowd regardless if it's good or still needs work (notice I didn't use the word bad). Or his poetry can be meaningful. He was invited to the wedding of a customer's daughter on two different occasions to write a poem and read it at the rehearsal dinner. While he typically didn't write poetry for Jan, he did so on

"In a garish way, it's like attending your own funeral while still alive."

her 60th birthday. Titled "Though My Eyes", he wanted her to know he still saw her as that girl walking down the high school hallway, as his newlywed wife, as the mother of their children going above and beyond, as his lover and friend, as the best grandmother God ever made, and as the person he wanted to spend retirement with.

The family has gotten into the act as well. For Jack's 70th birthday, Shelley & Trey reached out to family and friends and asked them to share a story or a note for his birthday. They were presented to Jack in a box and he opens one each day. Some days start off with a smile, some with a cry and sometimes both. Jack says there are no negatives yet, but it is early in the process! "In a garish way, it's like attending your own funeral while still alive."



Jack in his Derby finest

The second thing you might not know about Jack is that he has a 0 and 1 record mud wrestling women. This story is probably better told by the "character" himself over a refreshing drink at an NCTA reception. We do have editorial standards you know. ▲

