



George C. Hines

January 27, 2024

George C. Hines, 96, beloved Philadelphia rowing coach and mentor to generations of young men, passed away peacefully on January 27, 2024, accompanied by his loving wife, Lois Trench-Hines.

Over the course of 50 years on Boathouse Row, George inspired hundreds of young men who became City Champions, Stotesbury Champions, National Champions and Olympians. His influence on his athletes was immediate, powerful and long-lasting. Known as “George’s Boys”, his athletes maintained a cult-like devotion to him; not only during their rowing career, but for decades afterwards as husbands, fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers. George’s Boys went on to become doctors, lawyers, journalists, TV producers, military officers, public servants and businessmen. They never missed a chance to reunite with George, celebrating the memory of their rowing experiences with him. Even as George’s health was declining, they organized celebrations for his 80th, 85th, 90th, 95th, and 96th birthdays. They remain eternally grateful for their experience with him, and find strength in the recollection of lessons learned with George.

George was a true gentleman of Boathouse Row. Looking more like a banker than a rowing coach, he was a very handsome, distinguished-looking figure on the bow of the coaching launch, barking commands to his crews. Always clean-shaven, wearing a Bowler hat and dressed formally in a suit and tie, he

projected a commanding and authoritative presence. He was disciplined, purposeful and resolute, but he never asked anything more of his athletes than he asked of himself. His language and tone were pure and clean; he never uttered a swear word, or anything remotely foul, in all his years on the river. He was the consummate gentleman and a shining example of the qualities that all his athletes revered.

Unlike most other sports, almost every freshman rower is a rank novice “walk-on” with no prior experience. A high school rowing coach molds both the body and mind of a young oarsman over the course of four years; teaching him the most basic elements of the rowing stroke and very gradually shaping him into a skilled competitor who can function effectively in unison with others. This requires a rowing coach to be highly skilled in communications and instruction, and George was a master in those arts. He would straddle the bow of his coaching launch, his waded feet dangling in the water, orchestrating his crew through a three foot megaphone like he was conducting a symphony. He had a vision of how he wanted every crew to perform, and he approached his job as a creative work beginning in February, building piece by piece, and ending in early June.

Despite his strict, formal appearance, George was charming, and his charm was disarming. He was a towering figure, but he was “approachable.” Everyone called him “George”, not Coach, not Mr. Hines, not Sir; but “George.” One of George’s Boys recalls his first encounter with him: “On a warm, sunny day in the summer of 1965 my parents dropped me off at Boathouse Row on East River Drive. I was going to enter La Salle High School as a freshman that Fall, and I wanted to become a sculler at Malta Boat Club, following in the footsteps of my older brothers, and hoping this would give me an advantage during the try-outs for the freshmen crew the next winter. I opened the Malta door, carefully stepped inside and made my way down to the floor of the boathouse, past rows of shiny wooden shells and

oars.....as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness inside, I noticed a handsome, distinguished-looking gentleman working at a bench along the inside wall. He was intent on repairing a broken rowing seat, while chomping on a cigar that appeared to have been extinguished long ago. I stepped towards him timidly, fearing he would be annoyed by my interruption, and inquired respectfully, "Mr. Hines?" He didn't acknowledge me at first, and kept chiseling the seat. Finally, he tilted his head in my direction and we made eye contact. Realizing he was being confronted by a frightened fourteen year old, he winked and said, "Mr. Hines is my father." He returned his attention back to the seat, and without looking up, he smiled calmly and said softly, "Just call me George." In that moment, my childhood fears dissolved, I grew up all at once, and I knew then that I was beginning a journey that would change the course of my life."

George knew that in order to motivate a young man to be a champion, he first had to establish a bond of trust. He did that by carrying himself like a champion, while being cleverly humorous and light-hearted. He assigned nicknames to many of his rowers; Franz, Beaner, Ace, Earthquake, Killer, Ski, to name a few. He didn't care what neighborhood you were from, how much money your parents had, how well you dressed, or your grades in school. When you were in George's boat, you were a band of brothers; everyone on the same page, no prejudgment. In the end, the only factor that distinguishes you is how hard you try. His practice sessions were deadly serious and he was "all business." He believed that rowing was a deeply worthy pursuit, requiring focus, self control and concentration. To behave otherwise would, in his eyes, be deeply disrespectful to the sport, to one's teammates, and to the competition.

During his twelve year tenure at La Salle High, he piloted the rowing team to preeminence, at a time when the sport had been dominated by schools from

Virginia and Canada. He coached both sculling and sweep rowing, and guided his team to victory in over twenty Catholic League and City Championships in every boat class from singles to eights. His first National Championship in the Varsity Eight came in May, 1965; upending an eight-year reign by Washington & Lee on their home course in Washington, DC. At the Stotesbury Cup in 1966 his crews made a breathtaking sweep of the Varsity Eight, JV Eight, Varsity Quad and Varsity Double. During his tenure, La Salle's rowers were highly competitive in every boat class, establishing the school's first dynasty in rowing.

George could be brutally honest. Not in a condescending or hurtful way, but in a deeply empathetic and nurturing way. He believed there was no more important issue a young man must confront, than the truth. He demanded discipline, self control and respect for others. One of his rowers said, "In one afternoon on the river with George, you could grow up ten years."

George could turn self-pity into fire. At the Stotesbury Cup Varsity Eight race in 1965 (in which his team came in second; one length behind perennial champion Washington & Lee) the crew was bitterly disappointed, having been undefeated up to that point. After the race, they quietly gathered around George, who was working at the bench, anxiously waiting for him to address them. After an awkward pause, he asked them, "What did you learn today?" They were speechless. Finally, he bellowed, "You learned that you CAN WIN!" Which they did at the National Championships the following week.

Childless throughout his life, he inspired a generation of young men. Many of his athletes said, "He was the most important adult influence in my young life. I would not be the person I am today, if not for George." Another said, "Being a part of George's team was a privilege and an honor. That experience informed every important decision of my life; my marriage, my children, my career. George is a gift that keeps on giving."

George was born on December 8, 1927, the only child of George, Sr. and Margaret Hines. He attended St. Francis Xavier elementary school in Fairmount, in the shadow of Boathouse Row. As a child, George vacationed on a lake in the Poconos and became enamored with rowing boats. He was an ardent hobbyist and constructed model boats and airplanes. Each month, he devoured the latest issues of Popular Science and Popular Mechanics, and eventually constructed small gas engines for model airplanes. He attended La Salle College High School at 1240 N. Broad St. On the advice of his Guidance Counselor, Brother David Albert, he attended summer school at West Catholic, preparing him for early graduation in January, 1946. He enlisted in the Navy aviation branch and became a flight line mechanic.

While a senior at La Salle High, he tried out for the rowing team, which had been resurrected at Vesper Boat Club by none other than John B. Kelly, Sr. He was cut from the squad. Most other short, 130 pound students would have abandoned the sport at that point. Not George. He went next door to Malta Boat Club and learned how to scull. He competed in sculling events that spring and summer, proudly sporting the Maltese Cross on his racing uniform.

George attended La Salle College and earned a degree in Business Administration in 1952. He was on the crew for four years there, and won a gold medal at the Dad Vail Regatta in Boston during his senior year. He also attended Temple Law School, but instead of practicing law, he decided to enter the family real estate brokerage business. George maintained his brokerage license well into his 80's, and managed several rental properties.

In 1956, George was asked to join the coaching staff at La Salle High. He initially coached a four-oared crew that won the Stotesbury Cup that year. Brother Joseph Regan appointed George Head Coach in the summer of 1956. In 1963, George designed and constructed a training barge with seats for twelve rowers, six to a side, with a walkway down the middle for the coach. He

used this vessel to coach hundreds of novice La Salle High rowers. An iconic photo of George instructing students in the barge was featured in Philadelphia Magazine in the Fall of 1963.

In 1961, George moved the La Salle High rowing program to Malta Boat Club, where he served as Captain. Malta remained the beginning and center of George's rowing life. While captaining Malta, George was presented with the prestigious Ilman Award for Public Service to the Philadelphia rowing community.

In 1969, George was appointed Head Coach of La Salle College. He was commissioned as a Judge/Referee by the National Association of Amateur Oarsmen, and served as Vice Chairman of the Dad Vail Regatta Committee until 1984.

George remained a bachelor for many years, but at the age of 52, he married Lois Trench, who was a sculler at the Philadelphia Girls Rowing Club and a member of the first USRA Women's National Team. In 2005, Lois and George purchased a large tract of land on the east bank of the Schuylkill River in Conshohocken, where they established the Hines Rowing Center (HRC), and the Whitemarsh Boat Club. George and Lois poured all their energy in building the HRC, which today houses over a dozen high school and collegiate rowing programs. Since its founding, the Hines Rowing Center has afforded thousands of young men and women the opportunity to row and compete. The value of collegiate sports scholarships and grants earned by Hines Rowing Center student-athletes has grown to millions of dollars per year.

George was revered by the alumni, administration and Christian Brothers at La Salle College High School. He was considered the living archetype of the La Sallian educational philosophy. He was inducted into the La Salle Alumni Hall of Fame in 2009, and the Athletic Hall of Fame in 2015.

George is survived by his wife, Lois and “George’s Boys”

Relatives and friends are invited to his funeral mass at 1:00pm on Saturday, February 3rd, 2024 at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul, 18th & the Ben Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia PA. A viewing will be held in church from 12:00-1:00pm. Interment at SS. Peter and Paul Cemetery, Springfield, PA.

Funeral LiveStream: <https://vimeo.com/event/4052357>

Tribute Wall



“ *My condolences to Lois and George's Boys. I was sorry to hear of his passing but was not in the area to attend the funeral service.*

I worked for Lois Trench-Hines in the late 1990's at Meniscus and had the privilege to get to know George. He was a kind man and enjoyed the company get togethers at the Brig, their place in Brigantine. He was supportive and knowledgeable.

I know that everyone who knew him will miss him, especially Lois.

Belinda Rose - February 12, 2024 at 01:53 PM

MF

“ ¡Viva George!



Michael Fitzgibbons - January 30, 2024 at 09:08 AM