



FRANK BALDWIN

*1931-2013*

## Frank's Working and Sporting Life

*"His abilities as an organiser are much beyond the average,  
and they are helped by his unusual capacity for sustained effort"*

*– Alan Paterson on Frank, 1955.*

### *His early years (1931 – 1949)*

Frank was the fourth of five children, born in the early stages of the Great Depression. His father – Percy – was one of the pioneers of the heavy transport industry in Nelson, which he forged after returning from the First World War.



Frank's mother – Dorothy - lived in the Rai Valley where she worked as a nurse in Blenheim. A vignette that has become folklore in the Baldwin family recounts how Percy carried Dorothy as a pillion passenger on his motor cycle for a romantic outing one day, only to find when he arrived in Blenheim that she had bounced off shortly after leaving Rai.

A few years after Frank was born (in 1931), Percy merged his haulage business with seven other heavy transport operators to form Transport Nelson Limited. Percy established their administrative and accounting systems, at which he showed a special aptitude.

Some of Frank's happiest times as a young boy were working with his father. They both loved to build things with concrete. It turned out that Frank also had a special aptitude for numbers and organisational efficiency.



Helping Percy, Frank built a matrix of concrete and brick gardens around their family home at 176 Nile Street, which is still lovely today.



The Maitai river on Nile Street East was Frank's heartland and 10 years of his childhood were spent playing on and in the river. The same location drew him back for 10 years in the 1970s.

At Nelson College, his House Master observed that "Frank's general up-righteousness, pleasant personality, zeal, and ability in the various sports made him very popular with his fellow-students. He represented his House in practically every activity. Frank's character and athletic ability and genuine popularity made it easy for him to exercise authority over his fellows".

Frank was 17 when his father died and he took responsibility for managing the family's affairs.

### *His 20s (1949 – 63)*

For the first 14 years of his working life, Frank organised administrative systems for other people – in law, accounting, construction, and insurance.



In the mid-1950s, he prepared and managed Bill Gibbon's contract to build the Nelson hospital. At Knapps law firm, he was "extremely quick in his work, energetic, capable and systematic, showing a marked organising ability. He was capable of running an office with great efficiency".

Mr Connery of Knapps also observed that "Frank had a flair for figures and we found his ability to analyse financial statements of considerable value" – skills that were the foundation of Frank's later career.

In his 20s, Frank was immersed in sport. He was a powerful lock on the rugby field and an equally vigorous centre on the basketball court. He also represented Nelson at cricket, rugby (Seddon Shield champions), basketball (NZ champions), athletics (high jump, long jump, sprints and shot put – Hester and Mahar Cups).

Attracted to Wellington by an offer to play for the top team in the Capital, he lived at the Wellington fire station in exchange for fighting the odd fire. This is when Frank met Erica, who played for the Wellington representative team. They married in 1956.



Back in Nelson, Frank and Erica started their life-long journey of buying, renovating and selling numerous houses.

Frank's passion for sport – basketball, in particular – continued to surge. In 1957, he was awarded the NZ Guards Trophy (for best forward in NZ basketball). He played for the NZ Basketball Team from 1957 to 1963, culminating in a six week tour of South East Asia. He would train by running up and down the sand dunes at Tahuna until he almost passed out.

Frank's civic activities in the mid-60s were extensive – as Secretary and President of Corso, Trustee-Treasurer of St John Methodist Church, Treasurer of the Nelson Athletics Association, and Secretary of Nelson District Cricket Association.

### *His 30s and 40s (1964 – 1978)*

By 1964, Frank had (in his own words) “a burning desire to use my energy, drive, initiative, personality and knowledge in my own business for my family's benefit”.

He had no particular field in mind. It just so happened that Bob Wadsworth offered to sell his real estate business.



Two years later, Frank partnered with Barry Brown. Between 1966 and 1978, they created the most successful real estate agency in the Nelson-Tasman region.

Their approach was based on solid old fashioned values of honour and integrity. Nothing between them needed to be written down as “your word was your honour”.

In addition to the Baldwin & Brown Group, Frank and Barry formed three other firms: Town & Country, Nelson Property Sales, and Williams Real Estate (in Rotorua). They also acquired Lumsden Real Estate.

Frank was instrumental in many substantial real estate transactions, including the sale of Mrs 'Queenie' Richardson's 6,600 acres (comprising most of the Maitai Valley) very close to the heart of the city, a significant part of which was transferred to the City Council for public recreation.

In the mid-1960s, Frank was still playing basketball, but he had also become a talented referee, serving as the New Zealand referee on the 1967 tour of Australia by the New Zealand Mens' team.

In the late 1960s, Frank and a group of passionate Nelson basketball players set out to build their own dedicated basketball stadium – a first in NZ. It was a remarkable achievement, with \$500 in the bank and 6,600 hours of voluntary labour. The stadium at Stoke is still a hot-house for youth and club teams in the Nelson area.



In the years following its opening, Frank and the stadium committee organised and hosted the NZ Mens' and Womens' Basketball Championships, and the first mini-ball tournament in NZ.

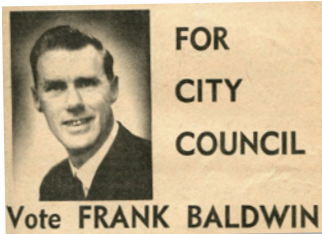


In the early 1970s, Frank also served as Manager of the New Zealand Men's Basketball team. He is the only person other than Sir Lance Cross to have represented New Zealand basketball as a player, referee and manager.

Even at the age of 41, Frank played in the Nelson basketball trials (in his words) "for a bit of fun, to give the young guys a run for their money". The gang that built the stadium continued playing socially in the Nelson Club Champs with three rules: "no practices, no team talks, no coach"

Throughout his 40s, Frank played squash, six days a week. Well-known and long serving Nelson lawyer, C J (John) Harley, recalls how their games were often like a wrestling match – neither would give an inch.

In the 1970s, Frank also energised a myriad of civic organisations. As a city councillor, he introduced new planning processes. An editorial comment in the Nelson Evening Mail in March 1971 remarked that "Frank Baldwin has, by common consent of Nelsonians, given dynamic leadership in his time on the Council. His stewardship has extended well beyond the normal requirements of a councillor, to the extent that even his own colleagues from time to time had to remind him not to neglect his own interests".



As chairman of the Nelson Colleges Council of Governors, Frank sold Fairfield House to the Crown for a substantial sum, which funded a new sanatorium. He also arranged funding for a new free-standing library. During Frank's watch, the school's grounds were also upgraded, the boarders' dining room was revamped, and a new science complex was built.

While on the board of the Nelson School of Music, and the Nelson School of Music Foundation, funding arrangements were improved.

Frank was also always the first to help in his neighbourhood. When the 1970 flood took out the Nile Street foot bridge, Frank and his neighbour, Brian Cotton, immediately built a temporary 'plank bridge', which was used for quite some time

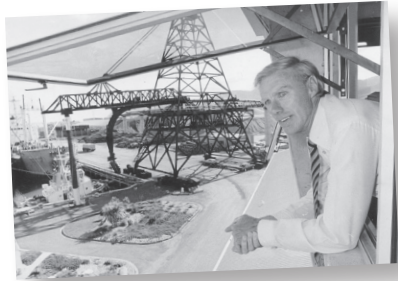
by kids walking to school from Nile St East (until the previous foot bridge was replaced by the present road bridge).

As chairman of the Trafalgar Centre Sports Night Committee, Frank arranged to bring the Japanese Olympic gold medal gymnastic team of 1972 to Nelson at no cost to the Trafalgar Centre or the people of Nelson. He also organised an international weight lifting competition.

### *His 50s and 60s (1978 – 1997)*

In 1978, Frank was asked to overhaul the Nelson Harbour Board. In Dave Holor’s words: “Management had been a benign autocracy and somewhat inward looking. So we wanted someone from the outside. Frank’s appointment was an outstanding success”.

In his five years at the Nelson Harbour Board, Frank developed a 25 year plan to handle increasing forestry, fruit and cement exports, and introduced a proper financial management system with forward financial planning. Frank also built a reputation as an aggressive marketer of the port’s services, moulded a new management team, and led a range of new capital projects to support the Board’s new strategic objectives.



In 1983, Frank was asked to overhaul the Wellington Harbour Board, which he did with the same whirlwind vigour. It was another transformation from sleepy local authority to commercial enterprise focused on providing customers with (in Frank’s words) “better facilities and services, and better prices while delivering an appropriate return on funds employed”.



Frank also set out to compete very strongly against other ports. When Frank completed his job at the Wellington Harbour Board, Richard Prebble, as Minister of Transport at the time, noted in Parliament that the “Wellington container terminal is regarded by many ship operators as being more efficient than the other

terminals at Port Chalmers, Lyttleton and Auckland”

Perhaps Frank’s most visible legacy from this period is the Wellington Waterfront Development.

After examining waterfront developments in Baltimore, San Francisco, London and Sydney, Frank made it happen in Wellington. As the newspapers put it, Frank was the driving force. They described the development plan at the time as a “world beater”.

In 1987, he became Chief Executive of the new Airways Corporation, which he rebuilt from the ground up. From an off-shoot of the Ministry of Transport, Frank established Airways as a stand-alone business focused on driving costs and prices down, while improving services for customers and delivering an appropriate return to shareholders.

With his team, Frank also introduced a new nationwide air traffic control system, under-budget and on time – a first in the world of civil aviation. Richard Prebble, who was Minister of State Owned Enterprises at the

time, observed that “Baldwin saved the New Zealand taxpayer at least \$150m in one move after taking over at Airways”.



In 1991, Dick Smith invited Frank to Canberra to be Managing Director of the Australian Civil Aviation Authority. Under Frank’s leadership, the whole CAA organisation was restructured. His efficiency drive reduced charges to customers by A\$100m per year.

Henry Bosch, Deputy Chairman of the CAA at the time, remarked that “the board asked Frank to commercialise a large sluggish bureaucratic organisation, which had been part of the public service establishment, and agreed that major and rapid change was necessary. He carried through this task with exceptional energy, vision and dynamism”.

However, the reform process became embroiled in politics and Frank returned to New Zealand to become Chief Executive of Landcorp New Zealand to assist with another restructuring.

The Australian CAA implemented Frank’s proposed new air traffic control system and his recommended separation of the CAA’s regulatory and commercial arms.

Frank then became Executive Chairman of Government Property Services Limited. In the late 1990s, Frank was a director of Timberlands West Coast Limited, Crown Forestry Management Limited, Nelson Marlborough Health Services Limited, and the Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve Board.

In 2000, he was diagnosed with Alzheimers.

### *His essence*

In the 1950s, Frank adopted a saying from John Wooden (the greatest US basketball coach, who gave coaching clinics to Frank's New Zealand team): "There was a man. The more he gave, the more he had".

By nature, Frank was impelled to serve, and to apply his maximum effort and talent to whatever he did.



As Lew Hunter of H Baigents & Sons in the 1970s noted at an early stage in Frank's career: "Mr Baldwin is not a 'yes' man, but has an incisive mind which is prepared to conciliate and mediate... In my opinion, the greatest attribute Mr Baldwin brings is his tremendous drive and tenacious application to work. I know of no-one who would supply more drive and tenacity than Mr Baldwin".

He was also shaped by a powerful sense of what was just and fair.

In everything Frank took on, he brought about major change – new facilities, new systems, new people. As Richard Prebble said, "Frank was a leader – quite fearless". He was driven to try to make things better.

Frank believed and lived the truth that "far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing".

Frank has been a wonderful father and husband, grandfather, brother and son.

