



An Open Letter to My Parents

Wanting What's Best for Us

By Stephanie Pipes ('19)

Dear Mom and Dad,

With Jessica having graduated in 2016, and Rachel, Sarah, Mary, and I here now, you are well on your way to sending all eight of your children to Thomas Aquinas College! I know that you are happy that we have made it this far — but I think you are also surprised.

For even though you have long loved TAC, you knew that it might not be the best for all of us. Jessica and Rachel considered multiple other schools before deciding to come here, and Sarah thought about accepting a swimming scholarship elsewhere before she attended the High School Summer Program. You were always open to whatever choice was right.

Personally, I am grateful that you urged me *not* to apply to Thomas Aquinas College.

Looking back at my high school self, I was not ready for a school like TAC. I had struggled to finish homework, read books, and write — three prerequisites for success here. Nor did I have a firm desire to search for truth, which is essential to motivate one through this rigorous program.

You recognized that I was not ready and encouraged me to attend community college instead. That experience completely changed my outlook on the purpose of education. I realized that something essential was missing there — the search for truth as something beautiful in itself, something to be sought for and wondered at.

We did not ponder, for example, why atoms were thought to exist, or why German uses only four cases instead of five. We were simply told so, and moved on. There was information to be memorized, and there were grades to be received. But I desired more. I wanted to have a purpose to my knowledge.

The moral life at the community college also contributed to my frustration. It roused in me a yearning to be with people who loved and practiced the Catholic faith and showed it through their choices and habits.

At some point during that year, I casually mentioned to you, Mom, that maybe I could apply to TAC for the following year. You said to go for it. You saw that I had matured — I was working hard to get good grades and to finish my homework — and saw that TAC was now an option.

Within a few weeks, I applied and a little later was accepted. And now, four years later, I am a senior.

During my time here I have pondered the existence of God and His truths in Theology. I have seen beauty through calculus in Mathematics. I have explored the founding of chemistry in Natural Science. I have come to understand human nature better through reading *The Iliad* in Seminar. I have wondered about the nature of the parts of speech in Language and seen the history of scales in Music. I have done all this among incredible classmates and tutors.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for giving us this opportunity and for bringing us up in the Catholic faith. Thank you also, Dad, for all the days you have spent working hard so that we might financially be able to come here.

Maybe one day you will be able to say that all eight of your children are TAC graduates. Yet even if that does not happen, we know you have always tried to do what is best for us — no matter where that takes us. We love you.



Love,
Stephanie

Giving Our Students the “Dual Package”

An Interview with Dennis McCarthy —VP for Finance and TAC Dad

Note: Joining the College’s administrative faculty this year is the new vice president for finance, Dennis McCarthy. A graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Business School, Mr. McCarthy spent four decades in the investment-banking industry, holding executive positions at such firms as EF Hutton, Drexel Burnham Lambert and, most recently, Boustead Securities. He is also a TAC parent: His eldest daughter, Kim, graduated from the College in 2011, and her husband, Paul Lazenby ('10), is the director of the College’s Annual Fund.



How did you first get into investment banking?

This is one of the stories I tell the students here — you don’t necessarily have to know exactly where you’re going! It was sometime in the second semester of my second year at Harvard Business School that I was doing my laundry and chatting with the guy sitting across from me. He started describing his summer internship in investment banking, and that was really the first time I had ever heard about the industry. It sounded interesting. So I researched it. I started applying for jobs and got one after I graduated. I then stayed in the industry, with different firms, for 40 years.

And how did you first learn about Thomas Aquinas College?

Well, that’s also one of those serendipitous stories. My oldest daughter, Kimmie, was in her junior year of high school, and my wife attended a prayer breakfast at the Los Angeles Cathedral, where she happened to be seated at the table with the College’s president at the time, Tom Dillon. As a result of that discussion, my wife and daughter later traveled up to visit the College, and when I learned about it, I fell in love with the school right away.

My experience at college was sort of the reverse of Thomas Aquinas College: Georgetown was a relatively large school; it had around 5,000 undergraduate students and lots of lecture classes. I was good at lecture classes, good at taking notes and responding, so I did well in that, but I realized afterward that never once after graduating from college did I use any of the skills of note-taking and regurgitation. I used other skills that, fortunately, I had developed through my work experience. So I was attuned to the weaknesses, or the flaws, of a traditional lecture format, and when I heard about TAC,

I became a very strong advocate of the Discussion Method as a much better way of conducting education.

Your own education was focused toward a specific line of work. Were you concerned that a liberal arts education would not sufficiently prepare your daughter for a career?

No. I was a business major in college, and when I went to Harvard Business School, there was a young fellow in my study group who had been an English major at Williams College. I observed that, within a few weeks of starting Harvard Business School, he was on par with all of us who had had four years of business training. I observed up close that our majors made no difference. He was a bright guy; he absorbed the material very quickly and was at no disadvantage within just weeks. And Harvard Business School is not a weak program!

So I learned that the vocational aspect of college is not really that important, and was able to then counsel Kimmie that I didn’t find that to be an issue whatsoever.

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Does the TAC education lend itself well to the business world?

Oh, sure. I see proof positive of that in my son-in-law, Paul (Lazenby '10). While still a student at TAC, Paul was fortunate to interview for a management-training program at a big global company. One of the interview assignments was, “Stand up and deliver a PowerPoint about yourself.” His fellow applicants — young people from various other schools which were more technically oriented — were stumbling around and uncomfortable standing up in front of people to deliver *any* kind of message, let alone something as easy as, “Who am I.” But for a TAC grad, that was a piece of cake. How many times during the course of four years do students get called on to stand in front of their peers and describe something much

more technical than who they are? And so, right off the bat, Paul started to shine.

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I've seen story after story of how young people from TAC prove that they have the kind of knowledge, intellect, and ability to achieve in any industry. They are not afraid of working with an Excel spreadsheet. That's just not something that's off-putting to them. Just like they wouldn't hesitate to dive into Senior Math — or, frankly, Freshman Math. I sat in on Dr. Augros' Senior Math class. That is not an easy program. For anyone who can get through that program, most of this other work that they are going to experience in grad school or on the job is manageable.

How did you come to work for the College?

Well, I have been an advocate of the school since before Kimmie started her freshman year, and in the course of time I had gotten to know President McLean and much of the team here. Around the time that they were formulating a succession plan for Peter DeLuca, Dr. McLean reached out to me. As it happened, after 40 years of investment banking, I was considering a change. I had been praying, "Lord, give me some guidance as to what you would like me to do with my talents." And so when Dr. McLean called, I thought, "OK, I get it. I get it. I hear the message, and I am interested. It's a school I love, and this is the opportunity for me to apply my talents in these *next* 40 years."

Tell us about the video you made for your LinkedIn page.

We're a small school, and we don't have the football team that Notre Dame has, or the alumni base in Southern California that a USC or a UCLA has. So I am trying to create some awareness among employers of TAC as a place where students are well-trained, social, and hard-working. So if they see a TAC résumé, it will catch their attention, and they will give the applicant the benefit of the doubt. Or, better yet, I want them to reach out to us if they are looking to fill an opening someplace: "Hey, I saw your video about TAC students. Any-

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Vice President for Finance Dennis McCarthy speaks to members of the TAC Business Club in November. “The skills that are useful for work are being able to understand complex material, communicate it in an efficient fashion, and be ready to discuss it,” he said. “You do that Freshman Year, when you stand up and demonstrate a Euclidean prop. Do you know how far ahead that puts you in front of other applicants?”

body want to go to the Midwest? I'm looking for somebody in Chicago.”

So I made this video, which answers the question, “Why, after 40 years of investment banking, did I make this change?” And the answer is, because the students here are a very good group of students — this is the kind of young adult we need to have more of for the workplace today.

I'm reaching out to my contact base, and my contact base on LinkedIn is pretty big, in the 3,000 zone. The video has gone well beyond that. It's received more than 7,000 views, including 1,000 CEOs and 2,000 CFOs of American corporations. I have received a lot of feedback from my Harvard Business School classmates and colleagues and clients that I have had over the years, who are impressed by the students. It's all very positive because, unfortunately, a lot of young people don't have the greatest reputation. Especially among people of my generation, young people are perceived as entitled, or whiny, or self-absorbed. The whole message of my video was, “That's not this group. This group has got a great, hard-working work ethic which you see both inside the classroom and in their Service Scholarship jobs.”

What advice do you give to the College's students?

A lot of students come to me — I think because I've come from the business world — asking for career advice. I try to encourage them so that they will graduate not only with all the skills we develop here, but also with an awareness of those skills and the ability to market them in the business world. I think our students are going to be extremely successful with that dual package: the skills that they learn here combined with the marketing tools to show them off.

Campus Life



The California campus begins to resemble ... the New England campus, as leaves take on their autumn colors and blanket the grass outside St. Joseph Commons, with the Blessed Mother gazing from her perch atop Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel.

Handel's *Messiah*



On November 17 the Thomas Aquinas College Choir performed a complete, unabridged production of Handel's *Messiah* at its fall concert in St. Cecilia Hall.

Pizza-Making Party

On the afternoon of this fall's All-College Seminar, students met up in St. Cecilia Hall's Ken and Joyce Skinner Coffee Shop to prepare pizzas for that evening's All-College Seminar. Among this year's creative chefs, a freshman designed his pies to honor one of the judges, senior Joe Daly (below). ...



All-College Seminar



... That evening came the seminar itself. Groups of about 20 students from all classes — joined by two members of the teaching faculty — gathered in classrooms across the campus to analyze and discuss Flannery O'Connor's "Parker's Back." Afterward they retired to St. Joseph Commons for the pizza party.



Women's Campout



Retired tutor Dr. Carol Day and the College's resident assistant, Jeannette Richard ('17), lead a late-September women's campout at the Sage Hill campground in Santa Barbara.

Rosary Coast to Coast



Students pray on the Ventura beach on October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, for "Rosary Coast to Coast," a nationwide prayer for the spiritual and moral healing of the United States.

Turkey Bowl

On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, the upperclassmen bested the underclassmen, 19-8, in Thomas Aquinas College's annual Turkey Bowl flag-football game. In the 29-year recorded history of this illustrious competition, the upperclassmen have now won 20 times.



Soccer



Students participate in a spirited soccer game on the campus athletic field, with St. Cecilia Hall and Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel in the background.



Young disciples of St. Thomas Aquinas, seated before their patron's statue, study and visit on the Chapel steps.

Joining the Family

A Mom and Dad Travel 3,000 Miles for Alumni & Parent Day

When asked why she and her husband, Alexander, made the 3,000-mile trip from their home in suburban New York for this year's Alumni & Parent Day, Paula Cummings answered in a way that any mom (or dad) could understand:

"We couldn't wait until Thanksgiving to see our son!" the mother of Ian ('22) admitted. "He's the first one to leave the nest, and it's really hard."

There were also other benefits of coming to the third annual event, besides easing the pains of child-sickness. "We had been told that when your child goes to the College, you join a family," adds Mrs. Cummings. "At Alumni & Parent Day, we felt that instantly."

For the better part of three decades, the event was known simply as "Alumni Day," with graduates bringing their families to relive all that they had loved most about their time on campus — the spiritual life, the intellectual life, the friendships. In 2016 the College began inviting parents to join the festivities as well, and the result is the now well-established joint event, held each year on the Saturday of Columbus Day Weekend.

"We are always looking for ways to bring parents more fully into the life of the College, and Alumni & Parent Day does that beautifully," says Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the Thomas Aquinas College Parents' Association and father of Daniel ('13), Gabriel ('14), and Samuel ('20). "For parents, it's not only a great excuse to come see your children, it's also an opportunity to experience, firsthand, life on campus."

With each passing year, attendance has increased, and parents — like the Cummings — continue to come from ever-farther away. "It's very well timed because it takes place about 6-7 weeks after the start of the year and 6-7 weeks before Thanksgiving," says Mr. Cummings. "It was also an exciting time for TAC: The College had just acquired 700 acres surrounding the California campus, and President McLean mentioned that the New England campus may soon be approved, which it was just weeks later."

The day began with morning Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. "Just like at freshman drop-off, it was so great to start with a Mass," says Mrs. Cummings.



Ian Cummings ('22) with his mother, Paula, at Alumni & Parent Day

"And it was beautiful to see so many other families there." Afterward was brunch in St. Joseph Commons. "We love that it's so open, that people just come to the table and sit down with you," Mrs. Cummings continues. "The air is really positive and friendly."

In the afternoon, the College hosted a seminar, led by members of the teaching faculty, on St. Thomas' treatment of the Crucifixion and Burial of Christ from the *Compendium Theologiae*. "I think that, for a lot of parents, it was edifying to do what their

children do here every day," says Mr. Bagdazian. "We were participating in the academic program for ourselves, working our way through a great book by way of the Discussion Method."

Tending to the mundane but important task of getting their son a flu shot, the Cummings missed the seminar as well as the highly popular children's Cardboard Yacht Race. They did, however, return in time for the President's Reception in St. Gladys Plaza and the barbeque dinner that followed. "What was nice was that the dinner wasn't just for parents and alumni, but for the students, too," says Mr. Cummings. "At the freshman drop-off barbeque, it was largely just freshmen who were there, so this was our first time seeing the entire student body."

For both parents, the dinner was not only the culmination but also the highlight of the day, bringing together so many parts of the Thomas Aquinas College community — fellow parents,

tutors, students, and alumni. "It was wonderful to see TAC at work," says Mrs. Cummings, "just seeing it in action." Adds her husband, "We appreciated meeting such a wide cross-section of people, connecting with so many different parts of the community, and joining the family. We felt very welcomed."

Plans are already under way for Alumni & Parent Day 2019 in California, as well as for a possible second gathering in Massachusetts. "On the California campus, the event was originally for alumni, but we eventually expanded it to include parents," says Mr. Bagdazian. "In New England, where we will have parents right away, but no alumni for a few years, it will need to be just the opposite. So look for our TAC parents to be the trailblazers!"

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Launched & Established

TAC Business Club Thrives in Second Year

Over the last two years, a group of enterprising Thomas Aquinas College students has worked to establish an organization which will benefit others like themselves for years to come — the TAC Business Club.

“We had been thinking about a business club for some time,” says Martin Haggard ('18), the group's first president. “Then in the fall of last year we were finally able to launch it. College Vice President Paul O'Reilly was very supportive. He thought it would be a great resource for the students and for friends of the College, who could benefit from coming to know our students and maybe even hiring them.” The group boasted more than 40 members by year's end.

Taking Off

In its first year, the club hosted events for students seeking careers in business, including interview-preparation sessions in which the club's officers played the role of employer. “We wanted them to have these ideas already in their minds,” says Mr. Haggard. “That way, when someone asks them a hard question, it will not be the first time they have heard it.”

The Business Club also worked with the College's Development Office to establish a mentorship program so that alumni, Regents, and other friends of the College can offer advice and networking assistance to students looking for work in their fields. As part of that program, the group hosted business leaders for talks on campus, including Chuck Hass — co-founder of Covad Communications and MetroFi, Inc. — who last spring spoke to members about his career, beginning with 15 years at Intel and leading up to his most recent venture, an effort to bring clean and inexpensive solar cooking to the people of Uganda.

By year's end, the club's efforts were already bearing fruit, with three members of the Class of 2018 taking jobs with alumni businessmen, and two current students using the mentorship program to land summer internships. The club even garnered attention from the local media: In May it was the subject of a story in the *Pacific Coast Business Times*, “Business Club takes off at Thomas Aquinas College.”

“Real Experience for Work”

After graduating last spring, Mr. Haggard moved to Jackson, Wyoming, where he now works as a project manager at



the Grupp Law Firm. Yet the club he helped to found continues to thrive in this, its second year. Sophomore Ayla Rice ('21) has succeeded Mr. Haggard as president, ensuring stability in leadership for the next several years.

“This year we are planning to host a dynamic lineup of guest speakers for a series of student career talks that introduce our members to accomplished business leaders throughout the greater Los Angeles area,” says Miss Rice. “We will also continue our mentorship program for juniors and seniors, as well as offer skill-enrichment workshops, such as Excel training and intensive interview prep.”

For its first speaker of the year, the group invited the College's new vice president for finance, Dennis McCarthy, who has previously held executive positions at such firms as

EF Hutton, Drexel Burnham Lambert, and Boustead Securities. “Your experience is so different from so many of the other students,” said Mr. McCarthy. “You come to class prepared. You express yourself. You agree, you disagree — that experience is so valuable. That's the real experience for work.”

Looking ahead, the club seeks to partner with employers through the College's Service Scholarship Program. More than 70 percent of Thomas Aquinas College students work part-time, on-campus jobs as part of their financial aid packages, and club members envision converting some of those jobs into paid internships. “The employer would pay the students the equivalent amount of a Service Scholarship,” says Mr. O'Reilly. “That way, students could gain valuable experience while contributing to the cost of their education, and employers would be training potential employees at a pretty low cost.”

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Parent's Corner

The Last Homely House

By Geoff Zwemke

I remember when Thomas Aquinas College first came onto our family's radar. It seemed like a mythical, faraway land where giants still walked the earth. From its first days in trailers to today's beautiful California campus, nestled in the hills, with its masterfully crafted curriculum built on great books and Socratic dialogue, its impressive alumni and supporters — it loomed large in our imaginations and hearts.

My wife and I were especially impressed with the “clans” sending their kids there: families solid in their faith, “epic” in their proportions of love, vibrancy, and number of children. Not perfect, but the kind of families you hope your own will befriend.

Soon after our own kids went off to the College, we began to see real growth and change in them, flowing from the sacramental life, from the joy of friendships with truly exceptional peers, and from living and breathing a truly Catholic and liberal (freeing) education. As parents, it has been a blessing to know that they are not only earning a college degree, but experiencing a four-year formation of their hearts, minds, and souls. We see in them and in the College's alumni that TAC prepares its students to launch successful careers and vocations, to live fulfilling and rich lives.

Those of us back at home — my wife, our four remaining children, and I — enjoy periodically “climbing the mountain” and visiting campus to spend time with our students and their wonderful friends, experiencing firsthand the blessings of this unique place. The high point of all our visits has been experiencing the Triduum and Easter weekend. Wow! In the liturgies, rites, and music, I felt like someone re-learning the vocabulary of a lost language. Majesty. Splendor. Reverence. Beauty. Glory!

After the three-hour Easter Vigil (yes, some of us did nod off), the Easter party started at 2:00 a.m. The food, friendship, and dancing lasted all night. And thanks to that party, Thomas Aquinas College is forever fixed in the mind of our six-year old son, Anthony. It's the place where he discovered the Fountain

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of Endless Soda, much to his delight. Truly a taste of the heavenly banquet for everyone!

But each time we visit TAC, we feel a drag on our minds and hearts when it's time to leave and return to the lowlands — for parents and kids alike. We don't ever want to leave.

The desire to stay makes me think of the Last Homely House, or Rivendell, in Tolkien's Middle-Earth books (not the movies). There's a certain quality, some intangible but powerful air that rests heavily on *both* places:

[Rivendell] preserved through many lives of Men the memory of all that had been fair; and was a refuge for the weary and the oppressed, and a treasury of good counsel and wise lore. (*The Silmarillion*)

The future, good or ill, was not forgotten, but ceased to have any power over the present. Health and hope grew strong in them, and they were content with each good day as it came, taking pleasure in every meal, and in every word and song. (*The Fellowship of the Ring*)

Maybe what we sense at both the College and Rivendell, even in their imperfections, is the truest and deepest reality that they point to: “For here we do not have a lasting city; we wait for a home that is yet to come” (Hebrews 13:14). Thomas Aquinas College is a place where none of us can linger overlong. We are all sojourners, and there's a ring of power that needs destroying. It's time we set out on the journey.