

Letter Home

THE THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Fall 2023

An Open Letter to My Parents

A Little Bit of Samoa in Santa Paula

By **Dillon Tuliau (CA'24)**

Dear Mom and Dad,

Coming here as a freshman four years ago took a huge leap of faith — on my part and yours.

After my high school permanently closed its doors at the end my junior year, our plans for the future changed dramatically. I could scramble, take some summer classes, and graduate early, but then what? Plenty of people from St. Michael's recommended Thomas Aquinas College, but we had some reservations.

For one thing, we had no family ties to the College, which was a bit daunting for us, considering how close-knit the TAC community is. Further, I had grown up surrounded by our Samoan culture, and there was no Samoan community here. I was still not quite 17 years old, and TAC just didn't seem like a good option.

Visiting the College, however, changed my mind. I remember sitting in on a Sophomore Philosophy class and being struck with wonder. The students were engaged in the conversation, interested in the text — and happy to be there. That same joyful presence was everywhere. The students and faculty were so genuinely kind and welcoming. The campus was gorgeous. I wanted to experience it for myself.

So, I took the risk of leaving the community I knew and loved to come here, and you took the risk of letting me go. I can never thank you enough for the trust you put in me from the very beginning.

Still, choosing TAC was a hard decision. We were unclear about what sort of career I could hope to achieve with a liberal arts degree. Paying for tuition wouldn't be easy. And being in a new cultural environment would have its challenges. Yet despite all this uncertainty, you helped me navigate career options, living apart from our family, and the maze known as FAFSA. Your trust, love, and sacrifice made my time at TAC possible.

Since then, all those fears and reservations have been far outweighed by the blessings I have received. Fostering the intellectual life and working through the curriculum has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I have discovered a love for studying language, which I now see as a beautiful medium for personal connection and a fascinating lens into people's hearts and minds. I would like to dedicate my life's work to studying it further.

Pursuing wisdom at the College has been especially transformative because I have been able to do it alongside some of my best friends. The friendship and community I have found here have been a real font of joy and love. In small ways, it reminds me of the Samoan culture I thought I would have to live without: Devotion to community life, meaningful conversation, and hearty laughter are integral both in our culture and at TAC.

I have grown immensely in my spiritual life, too. Through conversations with friends and hours in the Chapel, I have found a true appreciation of Catholic liturgy, art, music, and culture. I have a newfound awe for God's wisdom since encountering Him in Scripture and in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas. By experiencing true friendship aimed at growing in virtue, I have felt the love of God in a way I have never known before.

Thank you so much for the gift of a TAC education. All of the beautiful, life-changing experiences I have had here would have been impossible without your constant love and support. I can't wait to have you and the rest of the family on campus for my thesis defense and Commencement!



Dillon Tuliau (CA'24)

“Devotion to community life, meaningful conversation, and hearty laughter are integral both in our culture and at TAC.”

Ma le alofa,
Dillon

Bridging the Gap from Campus to Home

TAC's New Director of Alumni & Parent Relations, Nathanael Cassidy ('22)

The College is pleased to announce the hiring of its new director of alumni and parent relations, Nathanael Cassidy ('22)!

A native of the United Kingdom, Nathanael is a member of the first graduating class of Thomas Aquinas College, New England, with roots on both campuses. He spent his freshman year in California before becoming one of the pioneers who traveled east to establish the new campus in 2019. He then returned westward shortly after his graduation, where he wed classmate Simone (Kelly '22) — daughter of Karen (Stuart) and Brian (both '88), a tutor on the California campus — in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel.

“As a graduate, I’ve definitely got the ‘alumni’ part of the job title well-covered,” Nathanael jokes. “But the ‘parent’ part may take a bit longer!” The

Cassidys’ first child, Primrose — born in August — has yet to formalize her college plans.

“We still have plenty of time before having to make those decisions,” he laughs. “But as a new father, I can already see how wonderful it must be to have a place like this to which to send your children, a place where you know they can continue to grow in faith, intellect, and virtue after leaving the home.”

Shortly after exchanging vows, the Cassidys settled down on the New England campus, where Simone serves as the admissions manager and visit coordinator. The couple spent much of the next few months lovingly caring for Dr. Nancy Anne Faller, the campus nurse, who died of cancer last fall.

Meanwhile, Nathanael began his career by working for AmPhil, a consulting firm that assists nonprofit organizations across the U.S. “Mostly,” he says, “I handled client communications, project management, and a variety of writing and research projects”—skills that will suit him well as the College’s parent liaison.

Thankfully, his new job does not require a move. “We are happy to keep living here on the New England campus,” Nathanael says. “And with Simone’s family in Santa Paula, we will be making regular trips to the California campus, which will make it easy to stay in touch with students and parents on both coasts.”

Staying in touch, he believes, is a crucial part of his new position. “It’s important for parents to have someone at the College who can be a point of contact and answer questions,” he reflects. “I hope to play that role for TAC parents, serving as the bridge between our children’s original homes and this

next one, which, although temporary, is so very formative.”

As director of alumni and parent relations, Nathanael hopes to build on the ways that the College’s parents can aid students through professional networking and mentoring. He also hopes to create new opportunities for veteran TAC parents to welcome newcomers.

Supporting him in these efforts will be members of the Parents’ Council, a dedicated group of TAC moms and dads of current and past students across the country. “I’ve already had the honor of

“Parents are the unsung heroes of Thomas Aquinas College.”

meeting with the Parents’ Council and its president, Paula Cummings, who was very generous in her support,” says

Nathanael. Adds Paula, “I think that Nathanael will be a great director of alumni and parent relations. We look forward to working with him!”

Nathanael can also draw upon the expertise of his predecessor, Robert Bagdazian, who returns to his work in planned giving for the Development Office. “I’m excited for Nathanael, who gets to work with the amazing community of TAC parents, as well as for the parents, who are getting someone so hard working and dynamic as their voice,” says Rob. Adds Nathanael, “I’m very grateful for all that Rob has done to lay the foundation for our Parents’ Association — and to know that he will be around whenever I need his advice!”

Above all, Nathanael knows that the broad community of TAC parents will be his best resource. “Parents are the unsung heroes of Thomas Aquinas College,” he says. “They raise the extraordinary children who seek out this rigorous and faith-filled education in defiance of everything the world tells them. They are our first and best advocates, people who have sacrificed for the College and who are always willing to help our students.”



Simone (Kelly) and Nathanael Cassidy (both '22) with their daughter, Primrose

“So Much Beauty, So Many Places of Prayer”

A TAC Mom Recounts Her
Alumni-Parent Day Adventure

By Colleen Roy

Note: The following is excerpted from an article originally published in The B.C. Catholic.

In September I stretched outside of my comfort zone and spent more than 40 hours driving to and from our home in British Columbia to TAC’s California campus, where my son Andrew is a junior, for Alumni-Parent Day. There would be Mass, campus tours, meals, wine and cheese, and a chance to take part in a seminar-style class on a passage from Aquinas’s *Summa*.

This sounded lovely, but perhaps not enough of an enticement to go. I had been feeling like I could use a break, but to spend all of that time driving for one day with my son wasn’t quite what I was looking for.

Then Andrew told me I would be there to see his play, *A Man for All Seasons*, on the life of St. Thomas More. He also would be singing at both the Saturday and Sunday early-morning Latin Masses. These were enough to convince me, and so I asked my notoriously spontaneous mother to join me on the trip.

Our time at the College was filled with so much beauty, so many places of prayer. We discovered an

outdoor Stations of the Cross and grottos to Our Lady, St. Joseph, and other saints, all surrounded by flowers.

Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel is a truly Catholic place of worship and a tribute to the reality of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. It gave me a sense of relief that such efforts are made to glorify God.

We met a few of the tutors and picked (snuck?) oranges from a discovered grove on our way to one of Andrew’s favorite places to read: a climbing tree beside some seemingly neglected ponds. I felt a sense



Mrs. Roy, her mother, and her son, visit with new friends at the Alumni-Parent Day Barbeque

of longing to stay there, to refill the empty chicken coops, and, of course, to fill the grove with beehives.

Because my mom ended up chatting with everyone we met, we missed the campus tour. The blessing in this was that we got to wander the grounds with my son and somehow ended up being admitted into the library’s Rare Books Room.

Andrew, my mom, and I were allowed to pray a Rosary together with beads that had belonged to Padre Pio. I wondered at how the beads were not locked away somewhere, but realized that he would

everyone. He knows that his ambitions could lead him astray but is unwilling to take the humble work More kindly offers him.

In the end, he is offered and chooses corruption for the sake of earthly glory. He is manipulated because evil men see that he isn’t strong enough or willing to do what he knows is right, even when it means betraying the man he most respects. He is lost to ambition and vanity, Thomas is killed, and the devil takes his due.

“Why Richard, it profit a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world ... but for Wales!”

Richard’s weakness spoke to me, because it is symbolic of the weakness of our day. People seek “virtue” of all kinds but aren’t willing to grasp it. Instead, they justify their vice and accuse those who try to live in truth.

I came away grateful for the time with my mom, for the not one but two full days and a breakfast with my son, and for places like TAC.

These schools are treasures of Catholic truth, goodness, and beauty. They can instill courage, veracity, opportunities for adventure, and a willingness to suffer for what is right. These will make the vicious offerings of the world pathetically boring and unappealing.

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certainly want his Rosary prayed with and not gawked at from behind glass. Meanwhile, Andrew’s choir was superb, and the show was wonderfully played and directed by fellow students.

Andrew had the regrettable role of Richard Rich. We watch the movie on an annual basis, so I’m used to a very greasy Richard. Andrew played it differently, and I found myself sad rather than disgusted. Richard Rich wants to be employed by Thomas More. He wants to be good and reaches out desperately to him. He is mostly overlooked and rejected by

Campus Life



Yosemite Camping Trip



USMC Recruitment Visit



Fall Schubertiade



Our Lady of Fatima Rosary Procession



Alumni-Parent Day Mass



Freshman Bug Collection



Rev. Dougherty
Lecture



Oktoberfest



Scarves & Cider Social



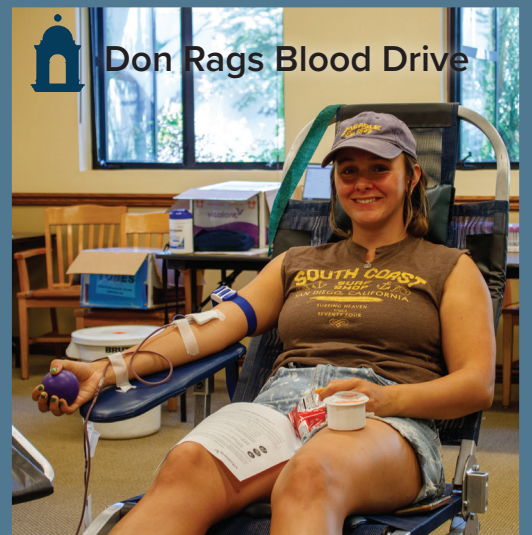
TAC vs. TMC Soccer Match



Sophomore Ice Cream Social



Halloween Dance



Don Rags Blood Drive

Career Center Updates

Helping Students Face the Future with Confidence

When students consider pursuing a liberal arts degree at Thomas Aquinas College, they must contend with the conventional wisdom that says doing so will set them back in the job market. The mission of the College's Career Center is to demonstrate that, in this case, conventional wisdom is anything but wise. Through various initiatives on both coasts over the last semester, the Center and its captain — College and Career Counselor Dan Selmeczy ('08) — have shown how a Catholic liberal education prepares students for whatever professional path Providence may have in mind.



College and Career Counselor Dan Selmeczy ('08) visits with students in New England.

Dan kicked off the fall in California with a round of workshops focusing on practical job-seeking advice. First was a résumé workshop, in which he walked students through the process of assembling résumés that showcase the communication and analytical skills formed through the Discussion Method. At another workshop, he focused on the interview process. “You and the interviewer want the same thing: to figure out if you can do this job well,” he insisted, dismissing the widespread impression that a job interview is more like an interrogation than an invitation to collaborate.

In mid-September, in collaboration with Emily (Barry '11) Sullivan, student support coordinator at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, Dan ventured across the country to offer similar counsel to students interested in exploring their possible career paths. “I wanted to hear what their interests were and what their vision was for life after TAC,” he says. “I then shared mentors, internships, and jobs that might be a fit for them.”

Dan also met with Emily and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Dr. Stephen Shivone to discuss ways to bolster the Career Center's resources on the Eastern campus. “One project on our radar is to expand career day to New England,” says Dan. “They have an education fair that is often bigger than what we have here in California. We're exploring whether to piggyback on that event or to create a smaller, separate career day.”

Such career days have been a principal focus of Dan's efforts in California. As soon as he returned from Massachusetts, he set about organizing an event for the fall semester. Companies

represented included, Veritas Managed Solutions, AdjusterPro, and Investortools, among others. The representatives were struck by both the size and quality of the student turnout. “I've never been to a fair like this,” one remarked. “I could see myself hiring almost any of the students here! At larger fairs I've attended in the past, it's been fewer and farther between.”

Delivering the keynote was Maximilian Summe ('07), who works for DFINITY, a Swiss-based company specializing in blockchain technology. He encouraged students to rethink the meaning of “career.” Learning to work well both educates and forms the worker, and certain habits especially conduce to

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the learning process — habits which, Mr. Summe emphasized, students form in the classroom: attentiveness and a willingness to act. “If you're not paying attention, you miss what the author says,” he observed. “And if you don't speak in class, you don't test your own understanding.”

In their sophomore and junior years, students at the College learn how Galileo and Newton overturned the popular notion that the sun orbits the earth. In its own way, the Career Center has a similar goal: from big picture reflections that place work in a spiritual context to more focused considerations on leveraging their Catholic liberal education on job applications, it is overturning conventional wisdom, reminding students that their professional futures are bright not in spite, but because, of the time they spend seeking the truth for its own sake.



Career Day Panel in California

Answered Prayers

Memories of a TAC Dad

By Jonathan Peters ('00)

My father, Rick Peters, passed away on October 1, 2023, after a 10-month battle with a rare genetic form of lung cancer.

In the months before he died, he told me a story that he had never mentioned before. It is so beautiful that I wanted to share it.

When I was growing up, my father was not Catholic. His job required a lot of driving, and whenever he passed a Catholic church, he would feel compelled to stop and go inside. He said he felt there was someone there inside the tabernacle. This blew my mind. As a non-Catholic, he was making visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament even before he knew Jesus!

You see, it was right around this time that my siblings and I, along with our mother, were praying a nine-month novena for Dad's conversion. He had absolutely no idea we were doing this because we would wait until he had left for work to pray.

At the end of nine months, he suddenly asked a priest friend, Rev. Vincent Young, OVM (the then-chaplain at Thomas Aquinas College), what he needed to do to become Catholic. My dad came into the Church in 1987 and made his first Holy Communion with my 7-year-old brother, Elliot, in the chapel at TAC. Good family friend Leo Raab — husband of TAC alumna Debra (Urick '77) — was his sponsor. From that moment on, he grew in extraordinary holiness and truly began to "put on Christ."

My father was an easygoing, simple man with a very great faith. He was a man of prayer, always speaking to God and about God. He had a great devotion to Our Lady, the Rosary, and Ven. Fulton Sheen. He was a member of the Third Order of St. Norbert. He taught us what it meant to be a good father and husband. He taught us what it meant to love God



Rick Peters, father of Jonathan ('00), with TAC Chaplain Rev. Vincent Young, OVM, after receiving his First Holy Communion in 1987.

with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. He was always very generous and taught through his example what it was to sacrifice for others.

Even as he suffered through the cancer, he did not complain but continued to be his jovial self, always happy and smiling. It would have been very easy for him to complain, but he united his sufferings to those of Jesus on the Cross and offered them all up to God. Even near the end, as he lay unable to speak, he made signs with his hands to convey that he was praying for all of his family.

Please pray for the repose of his soul. He leaves behind 7 children and 14 grandchildren. He will be greatly missed.



The Peters family after the First Communion Mass

“It was right around this time that my siblings and I, along with our mother, were praying a nine-month novena for Dad's conversion.”



Parent's Corner

By Patrick Egan

Although we live in New York City, where we experienced much of the worst of Covid-19 and the lockdowns, the pandemic ended up bringing unexpected blessings to the Egan family. Even amidst tragedy, God still works His wonders — as He did for us in the spring of 2020.

Our eldest child, Georgiana, had enjoyed the Thomas Aquinas College High School Summer Program, but this 17-year-old, soon-to-be high-school graduate had her heart set on a larger school in an urban setting. My wife and I were unsure about Georgie starting college so young, and we did not want to throw our lamb to the wolves at a secular school. So we decided to defer matriculation for a year. Our plan was for her to learn a new language while traveling in Europe. Our prayer was that we could convince her to go to TAC.

Then Covid arrived. Georgie had a virtual high-school graduation via Zoom, and travel was now impossible. We were left with a sulking teenager trapped at home.

In August, though, my wife had an inspired idea: Might TAC have room for Georgiana in the incoming class?

A side effect of the pandemic's travel restrictions was that they prevented a few members of that year's freshman class from entering the country. Their loss was our gain. Georgiana started at TAC-New England three weeks later. She was eager to escape the lockdowns and our apartment, but TAC, for her, was temporary. She looked at the next year as a fifth year of high school — a welcome detour en route to her big-city, secular education.

“I will never forget how my wife, after receiving a phone call from Georgiana in late October, hung up the phone and smiled. Georgie had asked if we would agree to let her stay at TAC for all four years!”

Within a month, Georgiana had settled into life at TAC. She had made friends and was enjoying her classes, her classmates, and her tutors. She had always loved reading, and she was a good writer, so she thrived in an environment where she could join “The Great Conversation.” We could see the graces at work.

I will never forget how my wife, after receiving a phone call from Georgiana in late October, hung up the phone and smiled. Georgie had asked if we would agree to let her stay at TAC for all four years! We laughed and then thanked Our



The Egan family: Georgiana ('27), Maddalena, Patrick, Agnese, Ottavia, and Sebastiano

Lady, who had brought this all to fruition. Our daughter would now attend a college steeped in the Catholic faith, while also receiving an incredible education. We were ecstatic.

Yet the blessings were even greater than we realized. Georgiana flowered as she was able to excel in a small-class environment with intense discussions. I was amazed at her confidence and knowledge when we would discuss her classes or current topics during her visits home, and her spiritual life advanced.

All of this crystallized for me during a tutor's welcoming talk at our son Sebastiano's Summer Program in 2022. The tutor told us how, after visiting TAC for a week, a faculty member from St. John's College had identified the major difference between the two schools. Both colleges teach the Great Books in a discussion format, this tutor explained, but TAC orients all of its teaching toward truth — the Truth, Jesus Christ.

There it is. How can that be surpassed? My wife and I have spent our married lives trying our best to educate our children and instill in them the Catholic faith. The College continues this mission and then returns them to us as educated, faithful adults who know how to think critically.

So, here we are, a few years from Covid. Georgiana has flourished during her time at TAC and will be graduating in 2024. Sebastiano followed in her footsteps and is now a freshman. Maddalena, who attended the Summer Program this past summer, has decided to apply early. We hope that Agnese, our eighth grader, will follow the same path.

For us and, I pray, for many others, Covid came with a silver lining. It began our family's affiliation with Thomas Aquinas College. May that relationship continue for many years to come.