



Parents' Association Newsletter

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

Fall 2015

An Open Letter to My Parents

Only Now Can I Begin to Appreciate the Greatness of Your Sacrifice

By Milagros O'Reilly ('16)

Dear Mom and Dad,

In the three years since I left home, I have learned so much about the amazing things I came here to study, but I have learned even more about the sacrifice you made so that I could be here.

In the U.S., parents are prepared to see their children leave for college. They left home themselves when they were 18, and they expect that their children will, too. For us it was different. In Argentina people go to universities in their own city. It never crossed your minds — or mine, for that matter — that I would go to school across the world at the age of 17.

I did not appreciate it at the time, but three years later, I see that my decision to go was the hardest thing I have ever put you through. I was the first child to leave home, and I was doing something different and unexpected. I know that it scared you, and that you could have said no — and even wanted to at times — but still did not, because you love me.

It seems like only yesterday that I was going to school for the first time, and you took a picture of me in my brand-new uniform and backpack. Dad would come into our room in the morning, saying the morning prayers out loud, and tickle us until we got up. When we came home from school, Mom would help us do our homework and serve us dinner in time to brush our teeth and listen to Dad playing his guitar and singing his lullabies.

Next thing I know, I am in college, and things will never be the same. I wish I had known the first time I walked out that door that those steps would have such consequences. But you did. You were aware of the big decision I was making, even when I was not. I just hope you know how dear is the memory of our home, and I want to thank you for supporting me every step of the way.

When I decided to come to Thomas Aquinas College, a priest told me to make sure I knew exactly the reason why I was going. He said when it gets really hard, and it will, I should remind myself of that reason, and that conviction would get me through the hard times.

Thank God I followed his advice! *I knew then that I was going to the College looking to understand and love my faith, and to make sure I would never lose it.* I held on to that purpose every time that I wanted to quit, and every time it made me stay.

Looking back, I realize that I owe this conviction to you. I may not have wanted to know and love God if you had not put that desire in our hearts. I love the faith that you taught us, and I want to live up to it more than anything in the world.

Now I am a senior, and every day I go to class and learn more about the things you taught me to love. I simply cannot imagine being happy doing anything but what I do, and there is no way I would be here today if it were not for you. There really are no words to express all that I am grateful to you for, and I can never repay you.

I have a lot of growing up to do still, and leaving for college will not be the last decision I make that changes things for our family. Some things will always be changing, but some others never will. I will always be your little girl.



“Every day I go to class and learn more about the things you taught me to love.”

Love,
Mili

Parenting from a Distance

In her beautiful open letter to her parents on this issue's front cover, **Mili O'Reilly ('16)** touches upon a sentiment that speaks to the hearts of all mothers and fathers — the deeply felt desire to do all we can for our children, even when it hurts.

Saying goodbye to our children and watching them leave our homes for college and beyond is a bitter-sweet experience. We are delighted to witness their growth into adulthood — though we miss them in their absence. For most of us, that pain is diminished if our children depart for Thomas Aquinas College — where we know they will immerse themselves in the good, the true, and the beautiful. But it remains nonetheless.

As does that deeply felt desire to do all we can for them.

In this issue, we examine a few of the ways that TAC parents are serving their children, and all of the College's students, even from hundreds or thousands of miles away. We begin with the story of **Cheryl** and **Christopher Schultz**, who provided for the needs of their cancer-surviving son, **Stuart ('18)**, and all his friends in Sts. Peter and Paul, by outfitting the residence hall with a new workout room (page 3).

Next, we take a look at an excellent on-campus career talk that took place in September, thanks to the efforts of sophomore **Siobhan Heekin-Canedy** (page 4). Siobhan's parents, **Anne** and **Scott**, are themselves models of parental care, having lovingly guided their daughter, first to the Olympics and now to the College. They tell their amazing story on this issue's back cover.

Finally, we have the example of **Madelyn** and **John LaFave**, who have helped their children — including **Peter ('13)**, **Andrew ('15)**, and **Mary ('18)** — discern their careers by enrolling them in professional aptitude testing. Like the O'Reillys, the Schultzes, and the Heekin-Canedys, the LaFaves are a reminder that the ways that we can assist our children on their journeys — to adulthood and to sanctity — are as numerous and varied as our children themselves.

How can you aid your children and other TAC students, past and present? As all these parents show, the opportunities are everywhere. One important way, though, is with internship or job possibilities. So, if you have any leads, please send them our way! Above all else, of course, is prayer. Please continue to keep the College and our students in your prayers, as we will keep you in ours.



May God bless you and your children.

Robert Bagdazian

Robert Bagdazian

Father of Daniel ('13) and Gabriel ('14)

Coordinator, Thomas Aquinas College Parents' Association

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E-Mail Resources for TAC Parents!

- Get "Letter Home," the Parents' Association Electronic Newsletter
- Join the TAC Parents' Discussion Group
- Send us your prayer requests

Just send an e-mail to
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Fit for Life

Cheryl and Christopher Schultz Make Gift for Son — and the College

Five years ago, it looked like Stuart Schultz ('18) might never make it to Thomas Aquinas College.

At 15 years old, the 6-foot-7 high school sophomore from Noblesville, Indiana, had dropped from 200 lbs. to a mere 150 lbs. Months of chemotherapy treatments for his leukemia had given rise to an underlying genetic condition that prevented his body from metabolizing fat. He was wasting away, barely able to wiggle his toes, let alone walk or fulfill his dream of playing high school basketball.

But by God's grace, and over the course of several arduous years, Stuart overcame the maladies that had kept him away from school and the basketball court. He had to fight for his recovery, adopting a rigorous exercise regimen to rebuild muscle mass. "His oncologists tell other kids about Stuart and how hard he worked," says his mother, Cheryl. "He went from being bedridden and needing a walker to being a basketball player again."

So when their youngest son enrolled at the College, Mrs. Schultz and her husband, Christopher, wanted to make sure that Stuart continued to take care of himself. Yet in their generosity, they did much more than that.

Going to California

It wasn't Stuart's idea to come to Thomas Aquinas College. California seemed far away, and the notion of a Catholic liberal education seemed foreign. Stuart was skeptical, as was Mrs. Schultz.

Dr. Schultz, on the other hand, was hopeful. A dentist in Indianapolis, he had read about the College for some time and admired it from afar. He suggested that his wife and Stuart visit the campus during Stuart's junior year in high school, and the strategy succeeded. Stuart was so taken by what he saw that he decided to sign up for the High School Great Books program that summer.

There was just one problem: He was still receiving chemotherapy treatments. "The doctors said there was no way he could travel halfway across the country unless he had medical supervision," Mrs. Shultz recalls. So she volunteered for the job.

A registered nurse, Mrs. Schultz had put her career aside some 20 years earlier to raise the couple's three children. But



when she oversaw Stuart's medical care over the course of his three-and-a-half years of treatment, "It all came back to me," she says. During the Summer Program, she took up residence in one of the College's modular bungalows, and Stuart came by each evening for his treatments.

Even chemotherapy could not detract from Stuart's two-week foray into the great books. By the end of the program, both he and his mother agreed that Thomas Aquinas College was where he should spend the next four years. He enrolled as a freshman in 2014.

An Exercise in Generosity

Although the Schultzes were thrilled with Stuart's first year on campus, they found one part of the experience to be lacking. "The workout rooms were inadequate for his needs," Dr. Schultz says.

"Ordinarily we wouldn't have minded," Dr. Schultz continues. "We've visited lots of schools with our kids over the years. Almost all spend a lot of money on creature comforts. This school does it the other way around, emphasizing a beautiful chapel and excellent classrooms. That really needs to be commended." Still, it was important for Stuart's health that he work out regularly.

So, when they brought Stuart to campus for his Sophomore Year, Dr. and Mrs. Schultz purchased a new weight-lifting rack, bench, and rubber flooring for the workout room in Sts. Peter and Paul Hall. Dr. Schultz then spent the first three days of the year remaking the room — scraping up the old floor, preparing the surface, installing the rubber flooring, and assembling and bolting down the rack. Now Stuart and fellow residents of Sts. Peter and Paul can do squats, bench presses, and pull-ups on professional-grade equipment from the comfort of their own residence hall.

"The Schultzes could have simply bought Stu a membership at a local gym," says Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the College's Parents' Association. "Instead, they made a gift that will benefit his friends and the College for years to come. Their devotion to their son, and to the College, is inspiring."



Stuart Schultz ('18)

Campus Life

Freshman-Senior Dance



On September 26 the seniors hosted a welcome dance for the freshmen, complete with a “Home of the Brave” theme and entertainment. Above are seniors April Shonnard, Annalisa Tombelli, Kaitlyn Carlson, Andrew Carey, Anna Maria Masteller, Olivia Cobb, Emily McAtee, and Margaret Smillie.

All-College Picnic

Top, left: Matthew Heffernan ('16), Jonathan Chavez ('16), Brian Schardt ('16), Michael Wye ('18), Charles Laubacher ('17), Benedict Schmitt ('17), and Peter Waterbury ('17); top, right: Rachel Bertotti ('16) and Samantha Wiebersch ('16); bottom, left: (left side of table, l-r) Moira O'Reilly ('19), Caroline Guinee ('19), Michael Smillie ('18), Thomas Loughman ('18), Dominic Ferri ('18), (right side of table l-r): Teresa Ford ('19), Anna Truss ('19), Ryan Truss ('16); bottom, right: Jack Murphy ('19) and Thomas Cain ('18)



Beach Day



On a hot September Sunday seniors took members of the freshman class to the Ventura beach. Top, right: Stephen Carey ('16); bottom: Mary Edson ('19), Abigail Herbst ('19), Caleb Skvaril ('19), Patrick Nazeck ('19), Dominic Amorose ('19), Ryan Lockhart ('19), Andreas Waldstein ('19), Stephanie Pipes ('19), Rachel Bertotti ('16), Rachel Rivera ('19), Rachel Williams ('19), Sophie Collins ('16), Brian Schardt ('16), Grace Brennan ('16), Mili O'Reilly ('16), and Philip Carrescia ('19)

Freshman Orientation

Top, right: freshmen Marietta Wye, Samantha Ureta, Mary Wichorek, Rachel Williams, Christiana Mellein, and Rachel Rivera; top, left: Samantha Wiebersch ('16) and Joseph Stack ('17); bottom, left: Anthony Evich ('19)





Rosary Procession



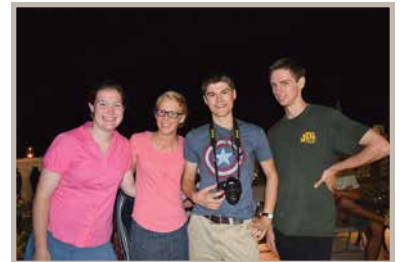
On September 8, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Head Chaplain Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., led students in a Rosary procession to the Lourdes Grotto on the lower campus. Left: Elaine Halbur ('16) and Emily Sanchez ('17)



Freshman-Sophomore Dance



Top, left: Moira O'Reilly ('19) and Isaac Cross ('19), Zachary Beckmann ('19) and Madeleine Birchenough ('19); top, right: Michael Dufresne ('19) and Anna Goodwin ('19); middle, right: Megan Schmidgall ('19), Christina Matthews ('19), Nicholas Pfeiffer ('19), and Michael Zepp ('17); bottom, right: Angelica Ayala ('19), Bella Ayala ('19), Kathleen Doran ('19), Lizbeth Guzman ('19), and Saxony Schmittle ('19)



Making Connections

Students Gain Insight at Business & Finance Talk

In the first of its year-long series of career events, the Office of Career Advisement sponsored a talk in September from two young professionals who shared their wisdom about finding work and fulfillment in the world of business and finance.

In an hour-long discussion with students in Albertus Magnus Hall, newlyweds Deirdre and Patrick O’Connell stressed that young, faithful Catholics can both make a living and contribute to the common good by pursuing careers in business. To begin with, advised Mr. O’Connell, a credit analyst on Alliance Bernstein’s Fixed Income Global Credit Research team, one should ask: “How can you use your unique talents to best help those around you in a really constructive way, helping as much as you can with the tools that you have that are unique to you?”

“They want employees who have an A+ attitude and the ability to solve problems and learn.”

The O’Connells urged students not to be concerned that, because they have pursued a liberal education, and not a business degree, they will be disadvantaged in the job market. “For a lot of these business jobs, you don’t need to already have business skills,” said Mrs. O’Connell, who has worked for USB Investment Bank and who, having recently earned an MBA from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, will soon join Monitor Deloitte as a management consultant. “Because a lot of the knowledge is so functional-specific to a job, they don’t care whether you have spent four years studying this — because you can’t,” she continued.



“They want employees who have an A+ attitude and the ability to solve problems and learn.”

The key, Mr. and Mrs. O’Connell agreed, is being vigilant about networking and making phone calls, and being willing to hear the occasional “no” from a prospective employer. The couple stressed that they would be personally available to the students to help them in any way with their career searches.

Married earlier this summer, Mr. and Mrs. O’Connell live in New York City and have been active in numerous Catholic apostolates, including St. John’s Basilica, where they helped to start a youth group with Thomas Aquinas College sophomore Siobhan Heekin-Canedy. (See page 8.)

“We’re very grateful to the O’Connells for being so generous with their time and their insight, and we’re grateful to Siobhan for helping to arrange their visit,” says Director of Career Advisement Mark Kretschmer. “It’s a blessing for our students to know that there are good people out there who can and want to help them.”

The Perfect Gift ... *A Christmas Novena of Masses*

Beginning on December 16, the chaplains of Thomas Aquinas College will offer a novena of Masses in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. Each person enrolled in the Novena will receive a beautiful, personalized card from the College. (Cost: \$5 each, including shipping and handling)



thomasaquinas.edu/christmas-novena

After TAC: Discerning the Right Path

Parents Madelyn and John LaFave Prepare Children with Aptitude Testing

“For some students, one of the great advantages of a liberal education — that it prepares you to do anything — can, at first, feel like a burden,” observes Director of Career Advisement Mark Kretschmer.

“When students don’t have a strong sense of what they want to do for a living, the sheer number of career choices available to them may seem overwhelming,” he explains. “They approach graduation thinking that maybe they want to study philosophy, or practice law, or get a master’s in engineering, or sell real estate. Sometimes, they are so bewildered by all the options that they have a hard time choosing just one.”

Mindful of the danger of “professional paralysis,” Madelyn and John LaFave of Butte, Montana — parents of Peter (’13), Andrew (’15), and Mary (’18) — have embraced a strategy for helping their children discern a career: aptitude testing. Over the last several years, each of the adult LaFave children has undergone a series of tests and assessments designed to identify not only their talents and dispositions, but also the professions that best suit them.

There is a wide range of aptitude testing available, varying greatly in terms of quality and price. The LaFaves chose the services of Johnson O’Connor, a nonprofit research organization with offices throughout the United States.

“They conduct an inventory of your aptitudes,” says Mrs. LaFave. “They look at all kinds of things — your visual perceptions, your divergent thinking, or ability to multitask, your foresight, your inductive reasoning, your analytic reasoning, even the strength of your grip, which can indicate whether you would be happy in a desk job.” The assessments include a wide variety of tasks, such as assembling blocks, solving puzzles, and reciting numbers. “The program identified potential career tracks for our children, giving them confidence to pursue the fields that they are most passionate about.”

For the LaFaves’ eldest daughter, Helena, who attended Montana State University, the testing pointed to a career in counseling, which she is now studying while earning a master’s degree in social work. For their eldest son, Peter, a TAC graduate with strong interpersonal skills, it suggested marketing. Today he is a senior business process consultant at Anthem,



The LaFave children at the 2014 wedding of Peter (’13) to Adrienne (Grimm ’14) in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel; from left to right: Margaret, Mary (’18), Helena, the bride and the groom, Andrew (’15), and James

Inc., where he handles marketing relationships from a purchasing perspective. Andrew, who just graduated from the College this spring, is following Johnson O’Connor’s suggestions of “small specialty business,” “editing,” and “music” by pursuing a career in music production. Finally there is Mary, a sophomore, who has done volunteer archival work for various local organizations since high school. It came more as a confirmation than a revelation when her assessment suggested she would thrive as a teacher, a consultant, or ... an archivist.

“Aptitude testing can be a useful part of the discernment process for students who are looking for some direction, and we have an introductory discernment guide and other tools available in the Career Advisement Office,” says Mr. Kretschmer. “Testing is not an infallible guide, but it can be a rich source of information.” He cautions, however, that families not confuse aptitude testing with personality testing, which, because it depends on respondents’ subjective opinions and moods, is a less accurate measure of one’s abilities.

“Of course, the most important question is, ‘What is God’s will for me?’” adds Mr. Kretschmer. “Discerning God’s will is not always

easy, but often we can find clues by looking at the people He made us to be, each with our own unique gifts. That is where aptitude testing can be particularly helpful.”

For the LaFaves, aptitude testing proved to be the perfect complement to a Catholic liberal education. “The College’s academic program gives our children the foundation to do anything that they want to do,” says Mrs. LaFave. “And the generosity of its benefactors and financial aid program gives them the *means* to do what they want to do, because they don’t leave the College saddled with debt. If they need more schooling, or training, or graduate school, they will be able to afford it.”

“That’s what’s so wonderful,” she adds. “They have so many possibilities.”

“Discerning God’s will is not always easy, but often we can find clues by looking at the people He made us to be.”

Parents' Corner

From Sochi to Santa Paula

by Anne and Scott Heekin-Canedy

Ever since she was a little girl, we encouraged our daughter, Siobhan, to pursue excellence with grace, courage, and sacrifice. That pursuit led her, first, to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and now to Thomas Aquinas College.

Siobhan began taking figure-skating lessons when she was 5 years old, and very soon she started to dream of one day competing at the Olympic level. By the time she turned 14, she had decided to devote herself exclusively to ice dance. Her coach arranged for a Ukrainian boy, Dimitri Dun, to become Siobhan's partner, and the two began competing at the world level. Thanks to their laser-like focus and hard work — and a great deal of prayer and support — Siobhan's dream slowly became a reality.

For us, guiding our daughter through this journey required a delicate balance of encouragement without pressure. For Siobhan, it required both endurance and sacrifice, foregoing parties, vacations, or even just time with her friends. For the whole family, there were numerous trips to Ukraine and competitions throughout the world.

Early on it became clear that homeschooling would be necessary to facilitate the level of travel and training that Siobhan's skating required, and that sparked our initial interest in classical education. Not long thereafter, we received an appeal for a donation from Thomas Aquinas College — which we now regard as heaven-sent! That solicitation, and a few subsequent gifts, soon led to a visit from the College's then-president, Dr. Thomas E. Dillon, who made a deep impression. Though college was still a long way off for Siobhan, TAC was now on the consideration list.

In 2009, just as she was beginning to hit her stride as an ice dancer, Siobhan began to apply to colleges. We visited many schools, and though we were impressed by most, TAC stood out.

From the moment we stepped onto the campus, we knew



Scott and Anne Heekin-Canedy with their daughter, Siobhan, at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia

we were somewhere special. There was a feeling of rightness there, owing perhaps to the lovely lines of the Spanish-style architecture and the way it settled so harmoniously into the rugged landscape, or perhaps to the darkly burnished spire of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel and the way it soared up into the sheltering hills, or perhaps, most of all, to the overarching sense of dedicated purpose, with its aspirational calling to combine intellectual endeavor with devotional faith.

Much to her delight, in December of 2009 Siobhan received an acceptance letter from Thomas Aquinas College. She was also admitted to an Ivy League university and one of the top secular liberal arts schools, but by then she had already made her decision. There was, admittedly, some tradeoff in choosing TAC over these better-known institutions, and Siobhan recognized that the College's

classical curriculum would be demanding. But by this point in her life, she was well accustomed to taking on sacrifice and hard work in the pursuit of something greater.

Nonetheless, she still had a big decision to make — should she start college on schedule, or continue to train in the hope of qualifying for the 2014 Olympics? The College generously agreed to a one-year deferral, and then three more in the subsequent years, as we annually considered the matriculate-or-defer question, and decided to continue the skating journey.

That journey brought Siobhan an abundance of achievements, including becoming a four-time Ukrainian Ice Dance Champion and placing in the top 15 in the European and World Championships in 2011, 2012, and 2013. In the end, she achieved her dream by competing in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

In his October 2000 homily to the Jubilee of Sports People, Pope St. John Paul II said that “the logic of sport, especially Olympic sports ... is also the logic of life: without sacrifices, important results are not obtained, or even genuine satisfaction.” We bear witness to this statement.

At the age of 22, Siobhan retired from competitive figure skating. She has now turned her pursuit of excellence and journey of faith to the halls of Thomas Aquinas College. A sophomore, she is finding all the challenges she hoped for and the “logic of life” which will lead, in turn, to even more important results and genuine satisfaction.

“Should she start college on schedule or continue to train in the hope of qualifying for the 2014 Olympics?”