



An Open Letter to My Parents

“You Knew me Better than I Knew Myself”

By Coco Asjes ('20)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Four years ago, you proved your immense patience as I cast about for a “practical” education close to home in Iowa. I remember talking to you, Dad, about how I couldn't see a future for myself after school unless I specialized in a major like fashion design or hospitality. All the while, you nudged me toward a liberal education in California.

As always, you knew me better than I knew myself. You could see what a perfect fit TAC was for me, but instead of demanding that I go, forcing or guiltting me into it, you led me here gently. At your urging, I read TAC's promotional materials — a small move that has changed the course of my life — then applied and enrolled.

Still, coming here took some adjustment. The readings were long and difficult. I initially bristled under rules that I found harsh, such as curfew, dress code, and limited Internet access. Yet despite my resistance, this place began to change me almost immediately. Or, I should say, it brought to fruition seeds that you planted long ago.

Even though it was a bulky tome, I was fascinated by the rich tapestry of human action in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Socrates' account of the good and the pursuit of happiness in Plato's *Symposium* made me weep. Freshman Seminar dropped the “great conversation,” in which men and women have participated throughout the centuries, right in *my* lap — little freshman Coco, who was once concerned only about finding a job that would pay well after school. Nineteen hours of Socratic discussions each week became less difficult once I grasped the whole point of this education. The hours weren't making me into a more capable corporate cog; they were making me more human.

After this realization, even the rules began to make sense, as I could see how they fostered my good habits and discouraged my bad ones. Today I hardly recognize the social-media-addicted freshman I once was.

But it took me even longer to understand that this very realization happened because of your forethought.

You exposed me to great books from an extraordinarily young age. The time you spent over the course of 18 years — taking turns reading a few chapters with me each night — prepared me well for these four years filled with books.

You also taught me to surround myself with music, culture, and even people who supported me in progressing toward blessedness. Here I have found just such friends. Of course I struggle, but even in turbulent times my life centers around spiritual and moral progress because you set those goals before me — and then helped me to pursue them through the blessings of this education.

I can't help but smile as I work on applications to become a teacher at a classical Catholic school next year. This certainly isn't the lucrative path that I aimed at in my teen years. Yet if I can spark some interest in good reads, if I can inspire even a single youth to pursue a morally balanced life, I will be happy. My students will have no one to thank, though, but you.



“Today I hardly recognize the social-media-addicted freshman I once was.”

Love,
Coco

Diving In

Parents Angela and Jack Connelly Restore Aquatics Center on New England Campus

It was a “baptism by immersion” one Monday night last fall, when the students of Thomas Aquinas College, New England, celebrated the opening of the aquatics center in Meany Gymnasium — just in time for the oncoming winter.

The pool, which had fallen into disrepair since the campus’ previous occupant moved away in 2005, had been under renovation for several months. Thanks to the generosity of TAC parents Angela (Andersen ’87) and Jack Connelly, whose eldest daughter, Catherine O’Brien, is a member of the Class of 2011, it has now been fully restored.

As an alumna, parent, and member of the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors, Mrs. Connelly understands well the importance of exercise in the lives of the College’s students. “The whole curriculum of TAC is based on the whole person,” she says. “It’s absolutely intellectual, and it’s absolutely spiritual, but it’s also important to account for the physical dimension, which contributes to the dignity of the human person, creating an experience on every level of health and wellbeing.”

This “combination of mind, body, and spirit,” as Mr. Connelly describes it, played an important role during his own



A Statue of St. Joan of Arc that has been donated for the Connelly Family Aquatic Center

undergraduate years at Stanford, where he was a member of the varsity swim team. Now an attorney in Tacoma, Washington, he has coached swim and water polo at various levels over the years. “We love swimming, and we love the College,” he says. “This seemed like a meaningful way we could support the new campus.”

After 14 years of disuse, the pool was in need of extensive repairs. “This was a substantial upgrade,” says Vice President for Finance Dennis McCarthy. “The pool was completely cleaned and resurfaced where necessary, both on the outside (below the pool) as well as inside and on the deck. We also installed all new pumps and filter systems along with a new electrical system.”

For months the community waited patiently until the work was complete. Then, on the night of September 30, members finally got the opportunity for which they had been waiting.

At a poolside ceremony attended by students as well as tutors and their families, Chaplain Rev. Greg Markey blessed the facility, sprinkling holy water along its perimeter. Then Associate Dean Thomas Kaiser, joined by Facilities Manager Steve Wiggin, cut a red ribbon that had been strung from one diving board to another — before becoming the first to jump in. They were immediately followed by many students, including a good number who were fully dressed, who cheered, splashed, and executed some dramatic dives off the boards.



“We weren’t there for the opening, but we saw the video of the students diving in,” says Mr. Connelly. “It was wonderful to see that pool put to good use.” Adds Mrs. Connelly, “I was struck by how joyful the families of the tutors were, too. That pool will bring joy to everyone in that community.”

Although the pool is now operational, more work remains to be done on the facility, which will be renamed the Connelly Family Aquatic Center — and will honor St. Joan of Arc.

“Joan of Arc is an incredible person and a great model for the College’s students,” says Mr. Connelly. “All of her life work took place between the ages of 17 and 19, and despite never being trained in warfare, she led the armies of France. When you read the transcripts of her trials, her intelligence and faith really shine through the pages.” The couple has a longstanding devotion to St. Joan, a large painting of whom hangs in the entryway of Mr. Connelly’s law practice. “She was a person who said ‘yes.’ She gave her *fiat*,” says Mrs. Connelly. “She gave everything, and I think that’s what every student, every person is called to do.”

Although she admits that her “best swimming was down in the ponds” during her time on the California campus, Mrs. Connelly says that she and her husband plan to “jump in some day” to the pool with which they have blessed Thomas Aquinas College, New England. “It’s a beautiful pool,” says Mr. Connelly. “It was great to have the opportunity to restore it and put it back in operation for the College’s students.”



Coming Soon to California

As students at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, delight in the swimming pool that TAC parents Angela (Andersen '87) and Jack Connelly have restored for them, Mrs. Connelly can't help but notice a certain irony. “It’s kind of funny that the TAC campus in Southern California doesn’t already have a pool,” she laughs. California may have the sun and the more established campus, but it doesn’t have an aquatics center — yet.

That will soon change. The Fritz B. Burns Foundation of Los Angeles has awarded the College a generous grant to construct state-of-the-art athletic facilities on the California campus. The facilities will include weight and exercise rooms, ball courts, a running path, a climbing wall, and — of course — a swimming pool. Construction on the new facilities is expected to begin later this year, once all permitting is complete.

The California pool promises to be every bit as wonderful as its New England counterpart, with lanes for lap-swimming and complete locker-room facilities. Taking advantage of the more temperate climate, though, the Santa Paula pool will be outdoors, unlike the one in Northfield, Massachusetts. It will, however, be heated, so as to make night and wintertime use more palatable.

“We are deeply grateful to the Fritz B. Burns Foundation for enabling us to provide our students in California with the same sort of excellent athletic facilities enjoyed by our students in New England,” says President Michael F. McLean. “In New England we have seen already how these facilities enrich the lives of our students and better dispose them to make the most of our academic program. The new gymnasium and pool will likewise be a blessing for our California campus.”



Campus Life

Turkey Bowl



As they have for 21 of the last 30 years, the upperclassmen took the win in this year's Turkey Bowl on the California campus.



Walk for Life



... The next day some 300 of their California counterparts, all clad in red sweatshirts, made the case for life on the streets of San Francisco at the Walk for Life West Coast. TAC students have helped lead and provide security for every Walk since its founding in 2005.



Epiphany Dance



On their first Saturday after Christmas break, New England students and faculty families gathered in Olivia Music Hall for the first-ever Epiphany Dance, hosted by the Sophomore Class.

Trivial and Quadrivial Pursuits



On Monday, January 28, students and faculty on both coasts celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany with a community Mass, lecture, and festive dinner, students on both campuses participated in a Trivial Pursuits competition. The Rhetoricians fittingly choose a saintly theme. In New England (right), judges



March for Life



On January 24 every available student on the New England campus was in the nation's capital for the National March for Life. They could be seen singing and praying all along the Mall, easily identified by their crimson TAC ski hats. ...



... of St. Thomas with a fitting combination of prayer, scholarship, and fun. After participating in the annual game of Trivial & Quadrivial Pursuits. In California (left), ... approve an answer.

Mt. Lafayette Hike



When the first snow of the season fell on the New England campus in November, students made the 150-mile trek to New Hampshire's White Mountains to scale Mount Lafayette (elev. 5,249 ft.), where they saw plenty more of the fluffy white stuff.

New Telescope



Thanks to a recently installed telescope on the balcony of St. Thomas Hall — the gift of a local astronomy buff — students on the California campus were able to watch Mercury pass between the earth and the sun on November 11.



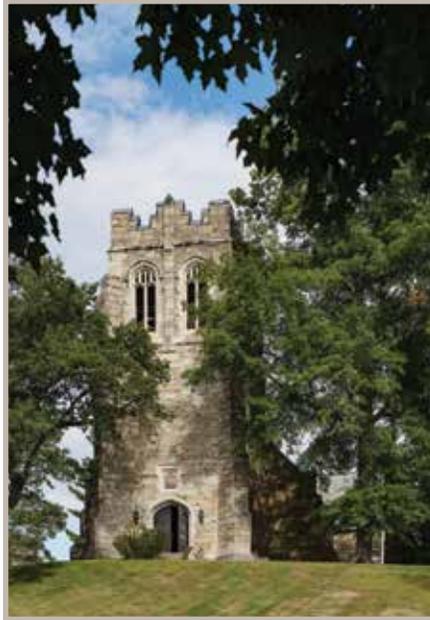
Outpouring of Generosity

Parents Join Effort to Furnish New England Chapel

“It has been heartening to see how many people have sacrificed for the good of Thomas Aquinas College, for our students, and for the spiritual life of our new campus,” says Rev. Greg Markey. “And it is remarkable how many of those people are the parents of our students and graduates.”

Last November, Fr. Markey sent out an email asking friends to help make the century-old chapel on the New England campus a fitting home for Catholic worship. Although an anonymous benefactor had paid for the major renovations of the building — including installation of an altar and confessionals — Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel was still lacking many basic liturgical items.

Within minutes, gifts started coming in from across the United States — gifts of communion patens, Stations of the Cross, ciboria, and more. The total value of the items purchased is just shy of \$85,000.



“Nearly half of all the gifts — 15 out of 34 made so far — have come from parents,” says Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the TAC Parents’ Association. “Measured in dollars, parent giving accounts for 69 percent of all funds given to help furnish Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel.”

What is extraordinary, Mr. Bagdazian points out, is that so few TAC parents have any firsthand experience of the New England campus. “These are not people making a gift that will directly benefit their children, most of whom graduated from the California campus long ago,” he explains. “Rather, they are passing along to others the same blessings that their children received at

Thomas Aquinas College.”

Despite the outpouring of generosity, a few items on Fr. Markey’s wish list still remain. They can be purchased at thomasaquinas.edu/omph-registry.

Giving Made Easy

Parents Support College — for Free! — via Amazon Smile

“We’ve used the Smile program for a year or two because it’s a convenient, if quite modest, addendum to our support for Thomas Aquinas College,” says John Dunlap, father of Dave (’03), Ben (’05), Nathan (’12), and Anna (O’Reilly ’12).

Mr. Dunlap and his wife, Vicki, have been faithful benefactors of the College for more than 25 years. So, when the couple learned that they could augment their support every time they made a purchase from Amazon, they readily seized the opportunity.

They do so via Amazon Smile, a philanthropic program through which the online-retail giant donates .5 percent of the price of all eligible purchases to the charitable organization of its customers’ choice. A good number of alumni and friends have designated TAC as their non-profit — raising more than \$6,000 for the College to date.

“Shopping through Amazon Smile is such an easy way of supporting the wonderful institution that is Thomas Aquinas

College, and it costs you nothing,” says Eloisa Silva, mother of Juliana and Cris-tiana, a sophomore and freshman, respectively, on the California campus. “It is no different from any other shopping through Amazon, as products, prices, and features are the same.”



To support the College via your online shopping, please visit smile.amazon.com and identify Thomas Aquinas College as your charitable recipient. Then, bookmark the Smile page, and use it every time you shop at Amazon. Mobile shoppers can participate in the Smile program by making a quick change to the settings on the Amazon Shopping app for Android or, for iOS users, shopping via Amazon’s mobile site at smile.amazon.com.

“Charities have received over \$150 million from the Amazon Smile Foundation, and we can ensure TAC is one of them,” says Mrs. Silva. “Support faithful Catholic education by simply making sure you designate TAC as the charity of your choice!”

“We Need You”

Alumni Professionals Offer Advice, Encouragement to Students

Attorney Andrew Emrich ('93)

Alumnus attorney Andrew Emrich ('93) returned to the California campus last fall to offer advice to students who hope to pursue careers in law or public policy.

In a presentation that covered topics ranging from choosing the right law school to law-school admissions, Mr. Emrich shared how, despite his early plans to enter criminal law, he



made a career, first, in public service and, later, in representing corporate clients. “You can have a perfect idea of what your trajectory is going to be, and it may not turn out that way — and that’s fine,” he advised. “Sometimes those experiences you don’t

expect and don’t chart out turn out to be the most valuable.”

A partner at Holland & Hart LLP in Denver, Mr. Emrich earned his *juris doctor* from the University of Wyoming College of Law in 1996. He then went on to serve for four years as legislative counsel for Sen. Michael Enzi, followed by four more as counsel to the assistant attorney general at the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. In 2005 he left public policy for private practice.

In the course of his discussion, Mr. Emrich outlined six “traits of good lawyers,” — all of which, he observed, are the fruits of liberal education. “You are getting one of the finest educations in all of academia,” he said. “And from it I acquired six traits essential for the practice of law: integrity, good listening, problem-solving, good judgment, effective advocacy, and resilience.”

As students discern their professional paths, Mr. Emrich urged, they should above all else seek to do God’s will in their lives. “Realize that you are here because the God of the universe intended you to be here from all eternity,” he said. “All these other things will work out. Make good choices and be prudent, but always keep that in mind.”

Therapist Marietta Grumbine ('14)

“We need ethical therapists, and this is why I have come to talk to you today,” Marietta Grumbine ('14) told a group of Thomas

Aquinas College, California, students at a fall talk about psychology and counseling, sponsored by the Office of Career Services. “I have been where you are, and I know the formation that you have had. We need you.”



In the last year of a three-year Marriage and Family Therapy master’s program at Fuller Theological Seminary, Miss Grumbine is a counseling intern at the Phoenix Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter and addiction-recovery center where, she reports, she is blessed to perform daily three Spiritual Works of Mercy — “counseling the doubtful, comforting the afflicted or the sorrowful, and instructing the ignorant.”

The work of a therapist, however, “is not pretty, it’s not glamorous, and it’s heartbreaking sometimes,” Miss Grumbine cautioned. “Being a therapist is looking at all those things no one wants to look at — trauma, abuse, neglect, addiction — no one wants to look at those things. ... But we were told to do that. We were told to wash one another’s feet. We were told to look at the ugly things and serve. Being a therapist is that. It’s being a foot-washer.”

In the course of her hour-long presentation, Miss Grumbine answered students’ questions about graduate-school options, various kinds of therapeutic practice, and the ethical challenges that a Catholic therapist may encounter. Counseling, she continued, serves an essential human need. “Everyone needs mental-health care, because we are human beings, just as everyone needs to be taken care of physically sometimes,” she explained. Because clients are often vulnerable, and the information they disclose can expose them to exploitation and manipulation, therapists must possess the highest ethical standards.

“There is a lot of beautiful work that can be done in therapy,” Miss Grumbine said. “But in order to do that work, you need to be trustworthy with people’s lives in your hands. That’s why I’m talking to you, because I’m hoping that you are those people, and I want to convince you to go be therapists.”

Parent's Corner

Students on Two Coasts

By Pip (Puccetti'78) Donahoe

I am a proud member of the last class to graduate from Thomas Aquinas College's original campus in Calabasas, California — the Class of 1978 — with fond memories of Malibu Beach and Mulholland Drive. Now two of my children are at the two “new” TAC campuses: Theresa ('20) in Santa Paula and Peter ('22) in Northfield, Massachusetts. Our family tracks the TAC saga.

When I think back on my own decision to attend the College, this new start-up that was so singular in its curriculum, I didn't have a clue. But my parents did, and for that I am so very grateful. They could see how much I would benefit from this program — intellectually, morally, and spiritually — and I have.

My husband, Tom, didn't have the blessing of a TAC education — he went to Georgetown — but he, too, would come to fall in love with the place. Tom learned about TAC not just from my stories but through the many friendships we have with tutors, graduates, and their children. He knows well the value of this formation.

Naturally, we hoped that some of our children would want to go to Thomas Aquinas College, but as Tom likes to say, marrying late gave us perspective, especially as to teenagers and helping them understand the goal and purposes of a college education. And as our children approached college age, we gained wonderful insights from close friends who had already

helped some of their own children make the college decision. Most of all, we benefited from the wisdom of a man we consider ourselves privileged to have called a friend: the College's late founding president, Dr. Ronald P. McArthur.

Sometime in the 1990s Ron gave a powerful talk to alumni and friends in Washington, D.C., “Choosing



Thomas Aquinas College for the Right Reasons.” At the time I was a bit surprised by the topic — what *wrong* reasons could there be for choosing TAC? But Ron was concerned that some students were applying to the school for *good* reasons — its wholesome, faithful environment — but not the *right* reason: its unique program of Catholic liberal education. His concern was that these students may not succeed as part of this intellectual community if they did not have an understanding of the focus of the curriculum and a desire to embrace it.



Peter ('22), Theresa ('20), John, Andrew, Pip and Tom Donahoe

Well, that gave us something to think about.

When it came time to help our children choose a college, we knew, our desires notwithstanding, not to push TAC too aggressively. Because every child has his own path, we tried to listen and be supportive. Our advice was: If you choose to attend TAC, make sure it is for the right reason. Be informed. Get acquainted with Catholic liberal education, its value, and TAC's unique approach and curriculum.

So we were pleased that two of our children made the effort to learn about the program, completed the arduous application, and were accepted. They were much better prepared and understood far more than I did when I was graduating high school — and they are doing well.

As parents, it has been greatly satisfying to note the development and progression of their analytical capabilities and how the program has informed their approach to learning. I enjoy discussing with them the same concepts that I wrestled with as a student four decades ago. Tom and I like learning about the wonderful speakers who visit the campuses, and when our children come home, we are pleased by the level of conversation at the dinner table.

Our family has a unique perspective on the opening of the new campus. Peter, a sophomore in Massachusetts, spent his freshman year at TAC, California. Despite being a California senior, Theresa worked on the New England campus last summer. And even though they are 3,000 miles apart, Theresa can still provide guidance to her little brother, as he studies the same classical curriculum.

Moreover, Tom and I have been delighted to meet some of their friends when we have visited the two campuses. We have been deeply impressed with how supportive the students are of each other — on both coasts.