

Memories of Brockville

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Sub-Socius, Socius, Professor 1953-1963

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Pleasant Memories

Cooperation & Helpful Spirit: While most of the students were keenly competitive especially in sports, there was a wonderful readiness to help each other and encourage the efforts of any who were struggling.

This was especially evident in all the coaching and study help given by students who could spare the time and had the ability to help. I doubt if there was an evening when some students didn't come to ask if they could go to a classroom for coaching on an assignment before them. I recall vividly coming home from Kingston around eleven thirty one night. I noticed a light on behind the stage in the auditorium and went upstairs to check on it. I found two students huddled in their bathrobes preparing for an exam. One of them was the tutor and the other the very willing recipient of help. I sent them off to bed but was impressed by this last minute emergency response.

Many good students did not need the study hall periods each afternoon and evening and they were saved from boredom by these coaching sessions they willingly gave to those who had more difficulties in studies.

Student Initiative: I found that students often needed a little priming to get their creative juices flowing. I tried to be a little ahead of them with ideas and suggestions but once started they could take an idea and really run with it. So many of our initiatives were sustained by the enthusiasm of the students. Some times this enthusiasm exceeded the talent and skill required such as the time a city boy insisted that he could drive the tractor for a float in the St. Patrick's Day parade. He stripped the gears and I had to answer to an irate Brother Malachy! Or the time that students soliciting advertisements for the year book in Brockville. they had little a little bonus of a dollar or so they could use to buy themselves a treat before returning home. They shrewdly decided that they could get their best luck at a small bakery and pastry shop. While studying the choices before them or rather under them they leaned too heavily on the glass top of the display case and brought the shelves tumbling down on each other. The owners telephoned me to tell me I would have to pay for the damage to the case and the ruined cakes. If I recall correctly Bill Donnelly was one of those students and you will recall he could bring considerable weight to bear down on that glass counter.

I really appreciated students who could be given a task and it was done without further reference or a myriad of questions. So many of the improvements we made to the common rooms and the library were done by student carpenters and engineers.

Worthy Achievements: Doing well in debating, in speech and in drama brought us a lot of confidence that we had gifts and talents to share. Bringing home the first place trophy from St. Michael' s college Speech Festival was especially gratifying and having the school band at the railway station to greet us with "When the Saints come Marching In" was truly exciting. In fact the band was a really small miracle due to Father Santopinto' s never say die. There were days when the more prudent Fathers suggested that we should retire the effort and save the school much embarrassment

I will always remember two debates we had. The first was with nurses from Hotel Dieu hospital in Kingston. They were neophytes and it was their first outside debate. It was our first with women and we had stressed that our fellows had to be on their best behaviors. Darrell McGinn and Dick Clark spoke for us. They were very gentle and polite but their arguments were devastating. The nurses were so overcome by the chivalry of their opponents that they were blinded to the force of their arguments. The decision of the judges against them was unanimous but I doubt if those nurses ever had such gracious opponents.

Another time we went to Montreal to debate against St. Joseph' s Training College for Teachers established by Canon Emmett Carter who became Cardinal Carter of Toronto. Their debaters were clever and humorous and really sarcastic. They had their audience enjoying their wicked humor but they failed to respond to the logic of our arguments. We won decisively and Canon Carter spoke at the end to all his debaters. He reminded them that debates were based on logic and reason rather than sarcastic humor. I recall that the Canon never came over to welcome me and thank us for coming, a sign of imperiousness to come perhaps.

Student Responsibility: At the time I took it for granted but since then I have often realized how much responsibility was shared with the students especially the capos and sub capos. I always took the choice of those leaders very seriously and I can say that while we have some may have occasionally been too strict or too lax, these students carried their responsibilities magnificently. Father Bedard told me that as a Socius or Sub Socius I was to sleep in the room off the dormitory on alternate weeks, I declined to do so and in my first year as Socius made that room into the Press Room for the newly launched Scholacta. The Capos seldom had to call on me to settle a dormitory disturbance. The students respected their authority and it was exercised fairly and responsibly.

Scholacta, too, was itself an exercise in imitative and responsibility and while I began it and gave it strong support, it appeared issue by issue because students saw it as an opportunity to use their many gifts in making something that was their own. In regard to Scholacta I remember going to Kirkland Lake to interview Frank Hrbolich. We had been sending him Scholacta regularly.

I discovered he had been following the monthly academic honour roll. He said to me: "I guess Bob Plamondon is the guy for me to beat!" It was a healthy competition and they both had talents to burn. In grade 9 Bob Plamondon would umpire a senior' s baseball game and his decisions were accepted, at least as well as any umpire receives consistent acceptance!

Blue & Greys, Shirts & Ties: This was the rule for Saturday evening and Sunday. We began this tradition my first year at St. Mary' s. It was not because the students were sloppy or poorly dressed but it established a goal that everyone could reach and helped, I think, the corps d' esprit. Dress up began on Saturday evening at dinner and continued

during Sunday. It was required also for many special occasions such as lectures in the Gym, debates, speech contests and participation in special events outside the College.

I remember going in one evening to the auditorium at the Brockville Collegiate. There were about 20 seniors as I recall. A man stopped me to say: "You have a fine group of young men, Congratulations." I think those blues & greys helped to convey that impression.

Less Pleasant Memories

The Food: I think the food was my most abiding horrible memory. I am sure it was not as hard on the hungry students but I never had a great appetite and some nights it just disappeared. I ate many meals in the student dining room to demonstrate my solidarity with them but I never got used to supper especially that white margarine was the worst of my trials. One summer I collected enough money to purchase smaller tables for six in arborite and stainless steel. But I could not do anything about the food served on those tables. However when I think that board, room and tuition was only about \$30 a month all during my years at the College, I can appreciate how limited the food budget had to be.

Road Trips: Once we had wheels we could contemplate getting away for special events. I still recall the trips to the Stratford Festival, to the Canisius Debate Tournament in Buffalo, the visits to Ste. Anne de Beaupre, to the novitiate and the Seminary in Aylmer and the Parliament in Ottawa, the Toronto Speech Festival and the Queens Drama Festival in Kingston. A simple reminder to each group: "Let' s behave and not hurt the chances of those who will follow" was always sufficient to ensure a trip without disaster.

In Conclusion: I hope these memories are helpful for your reunion. I would really like to be with you but I had already made my reservations for my holidays and a separate trip for the reunion seemed a little much. Jim Mason asked me to send along both good and less happy memories. I still remember those very sparse evening meals but I really haven' t many other miserable memories. Memory I find is merciful and I am grateful for that. Though I tried to be fair and equitable dealing with all the students in all their variety, I know I often failed. If any of you are still hurting I ask your forgiveness and assure you I have no ill feelings towards any of you but only much gratitude for ten wonderful years of sharing life, faith, friendship with you. Some of you may gather for another reunion some years hence. I can hardly expect to be still alive or able to participate but we will all meet again in the Father' s house and that is what the end of this journey is all about! Happy Reunion!

Edward F. Kennedy, CSSR

NB: Father Kennedy, among other Redemptorists, was one of the principal initiators toward the construction of Macdonnell Hall and Murray Hall at St. Mary' s in the 1960s besides many other physical improvements to the College during his years there.