FROM THE HEADMASTER’S DESK

I am writing as I settle back into the bustle of New York life after a sabbatical term in Morocco and France, where I served as priest at two Anglican parishes. Having read so much about the refugee crisis in North Africa, I found it sobering to witness and to work in that context. For a resident of one of the most vibrant centers of culture and commerce, where the basics of life – electricity, running water, heat and light – are a given, it was humbling to live alongside those who have never known such luxuries.

My abiding memories will be of children living, and literally sleeping, in the streets who are the same age or younger than our own boys, and of the children I encountered at a Catholic Mission, orphaned infants and toddlers whose only relationship with adults came from the convent sisters and a few volunteers. All of this reminded me how fortunate our boys are, to be part of the Choir School community, which provides life’s necessities as well as adult care.

I am indebted to my colleagues at the Choir School, who picked up extra duties while I was away. I am especially grateful to Amy Francisco, our very able and dedicated English teacher, for her exemplary work as Acting Head of School. Going forward, in addition to her teaching responsibilities, Amy will assume the newly created post of Director of Studies. I look forward to catching up with you all in the weeks ahead.

—Charles F. Wallace, Headmaster
Music this fall continued apace. The choir’s first event was a recruitment tour to Connecticut the second week in October, visiting Trinity Church, Hartford; Saint Peter’s Church, Cheshire; and Trinity Church, New Haven. These recruitment events not only help spread the word to future choristers, but they also forge collegial relationships with others who are serving God through the choral tradition.

The concert series opened in October with an evening of Vaughan Williams, Rutter, and Pärt. First up was Arvo Pärt’s Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten, followed by John Rutter’s Visions, Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, and concluding with his poignant Dona Nobis Pacem. In December, the choir gave two sold-out performances of Messiah, which Paul Pelkonen of Superconductor called “forceful and convincing.” On December 14, at the Ceremony of Carols concert, Mr. Hyde conducted the boys and harpist Bridget Kibbey in what the New York Times called “a tender, cleanly executed account of Britten’s beguilingly modest piece.”

December also saw two Facebook Live events featuring the choir, one via the New York Times and the other via the classical radio station WQXR. Facebook Live events have become an alternate source of video coverage for media outlets and even for individuals. Initially broadcast live in a Facebook feed, the videos stay available for viewing some time afterwards – and you don’t need a Facebook account to view them. The Times event covered a rehearsal of Messiah and got over 300,000 views. WQXR’s event broadcast a rehearsal for Ceremony of Carols. Both videos feature interviews with the boys and with Mr. Hyde, who puts the school in context as he discusses the tradition of the concerts and the choir itself. These videos are wonderful evangelism – please enjoy them while they’re still available and share them with friends.

In January the boys had the honor to sing for a ceremony celebrating the topping off of the Hines Building at 53 West 53rd Street. The American flag was raised and all the construction workers were honored as part of this wonderful tradition that celebrates the pouring of the last floor at a construction site.
On September 30, Mr. Appleton (math) tied the knot with Elena Tardanico, now Elena Appleton. The ceremony was conducted by their mothers, both of whom are ordained. The couple honeymooned in Grenada after their original destination, Saint Barts, was devastated by Hurricane Irma.

Mr. Appleton reports that the newly relocated math room (called the Math Lounge by some envious faculty) has settled into its rhythm this term.

This fall we welcomed three new gap students, Alistair, Alister, and Arthur – all A’s!

In November, Mr. Carpenter (history) completed the New York City Marathon. He tells us that one of the most surprising and awe-inspiring things about the race was the way masses of people lined the streets to support the runners. Coming off the silence of the 59th Street Bridge, where there were no cars and no spectators, and then turning into the street in Manhattan, the runners were overwhelmed by the cheering of supporters! Mr. Carpenter plans to run a half-marathon early this spring.

In December, Ms. Francisco organized the annual gingerbread house bonanza, and in January, the boys paid a visit to the Brooklyn Cat Cafe, where they conducted some serious interviews with both cats and rats.

Each year, a friend of the Choir School makes a gift of Armed Forces baseball caps for the boys. Thank you!

FOCUS ON HISTORY

In the Winter/Spring 2017 issue, we took a closer look at the Choir School’s English curriculum, so this time we asked Mr. Carpenter to tell us more about the grade 5-8 history course. His description of the program made us want to sharpen our pencils and go back to school – you might too!

The boys begin fifth grade with the study of prehistory – history before writing. They examine what it means even to study history, and then they learn about hominids and the neolithic agricultural revolution, when humans began to settle in one place. The next trimester looks at ancient Mesopotamia and includes reading a version of the epic Gilgamesh. Of course, the crowning unit of fifth grade is ancient Egypt. Mummies! Pharaohs! Pyramids! Mr. Carpenter begins with a study of the Nile, its features and geography, and a mini-unit about modern-day resource management along the world’s longest river.

Sixth grade focuses on two classical civilizations, ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Between these two studies, Mr. Carpenter sometimes inserts a month-long unit on Islam, in part to address boys’ questions about current events and also to correct misinformation and stereotypes.

Islam’s impact on civilization folds into the seventh grade curriculum, which focuses on pre-modern Europe from the fall of Rome to the French Revolution. While the year is Eurocentric, it does integrate other cultures in its study of the Crusades, in a comparative unit between European and Japanese feudalism, and in the study of the many global influences on the scientific revolution.
Eighth grade begins with a trimester-long research paper. Boys learn how to conduct research and how to write a paper of that scope. Topics are chosen at the end of seventh grade and focus on aspects of American history. This year’s subjects include Why did the colonies win the Revolutionary War? What were the causes of the Great Depression? How did women contribute to WWII on the home front? Once their papers are behind them, the class addresses early American history for the rest of the year, from exploration-contact history through the Constitution, including a short research paper on a chosen amendment of the Bill of Rights. This year, instead of a final exam, the eighth graders will be designing board games around American history, building the game elements and design from scratch.

Mr. Carpenter explained that the curriculum is set up to be “thin and deep” rather than “wide and shallow,” meaning that boys cover fewer topics but in greater detail. “At Saint Thomas we use the facts as a base to address larger questions,” Mr. Carpenter told us. “What does it mean to be a human, and to live a good life? How are the institutions around us structured? How does our environment shape our society?” He takes a multifaceted approach to history, looking at geography, myths, religious systems, social classes, systems of law and government, stories and literature. Middle school boys respond well to project-based learning in addition to textual studies, so Mr. Carpenter has the boys create “feudalism pyramids,” mold cuneiform tablets, write on papyrus in hieroglyphics, and draw concept maps, among other projects. He also tries to offer variety in the ways boys can be assessed. For instance, for a certain exam, boys might be allowed to write an essay instead of taking a test, or to answer document-based questions, or to write a story to show their competence in the material.

Because the classes are so small and the schedule so potentially variable, there can be opportunities for improvisation within the curriculum. Last year, for example, the seventh grade wound up with two extra weeks. They voted to do a short unit on Machiavelli’s The Prince (an abbreviated version), which led to a study of political tact and how it’s different from other political virtues studied before. They looked at maxims such as “never outshine the master” and searched for historical examples of people who followed the maxim and people who transgressed it. There was even a cross-curricular unit with mathematics, studying matrices, war-games, and prisoners’ dilemmas.

Boys leave Saint Thomas as strong historical writers since the curriculum involves writing at every turn: free writing, reading comprehension exercises, reflective writing, creative writing. In one assignment, for instance, Mr. Carpenter asks boys to take on the persona of a historical character and write from their point of view – write about the sack of Rome from the perspective of a distressed mother, a soldier, a wealthy landowner, and so forth. Above all, Mr. Carpenter aims to teach the boys methods by which they can analyze and write about any culture, place, or people they may need, or want, to learn about.

MEDICINE FOR A NEEDY WORLD

Dr. Alan Van Poznak recorded music at Saint Thomas Church for more than twenty years. I am lucky to have recently hosted him at a dinner at the Choir School and to have heard from him directly about his work.

Dr. Van Poznak was a neurosurgical anesthesiologist at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center for fifty-two years. He originally heard about Saint Thomas from one of his medical students, Prior Parker ’70. After noticing a photograph of a Klais organ in Dr. Van Poznak’s office, Mr. Parker said, “If you like good church music, you should go to Saint Thomas Church. I know. I was a chorister there.” That was how it started - Dr. Van Poznak’s twenty-year quest and his conviction that choral music and its message should be a welcome medicine for a needy world.

When Dr. Van Poznak first visited Saint Thomas, he was astonished: “It was as if the very walls cried out to me, Welcome home! The music was so excellent that is seemed wrong to let it vanish into the air. I wanted to save it.” In 1982 Dr. Van Poznak began to make cassette tape recordings to do just that. In doing so, he discovered that parents too far away to come to church were grateful for the chance to hear their sons’ beautiful voices. Dr. Van Poznak would sit in the front row and place his Sony cassette recorder and stereo microphone on the shelf of the front panel. There was a lot

OUR MISSION

The Saint Thomas Choir School houses, nurtures, and educates the boy choristers of the world-renowned choir of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. Through rigorous musical training and highly individualized classroom instruction in a familial, Christian environment, the school instills in its students the intellectual skills and ethical values that will enable them to embrace life with confidence, responsibility, and joy.
of outside noise, so he asked Father Andrew, the rector at the time, if it he could use a high stand for a microphone. Father Andrew said, “Do it, man, do it!” Dr. Van Poznak later placed another microphone stand at the rear of the center aisle so that he could catch the wonderful sound of the choir recessing to that glorious setting of Psalm 150 by Talbot. Because he did not want anyone to trip over the stand or the cable, he put up a yellow caution tape, causing the verger to cry, “Stop! You’re making my church look like a crime scene in a studio!” As time went on and new advances in technology took place, Dr. Van Poznak used the eight microphones suspended from the ceiling to record the choir.

Joyce Streetman, mother of chorister Curtis Streetman ’84, introduced Dr. Van Poznak to Gerre Hancock, then Director of Music, and they became very good friends. “Beyond the joy of providing cassettes and CDs for the choristers and their parents, the recordings have also provided an opportunity to preserve and disseminate evidence of the musical genius of Dr. Hancock,” said Dr. Van Poznak. “Each of his improvised processions from the ambulatory to the chancel is a fitting introduction to the service of worship in itself.”

Dr. Van Poznak’s recordings are now housed with Paul Murray in the Church of Our Saviour on 38th Street under Judith Hancock’s supervision. –Elyot Segger, class of 2019

AN EIGHTH GRADER REFLECTS

Thinking back as an eighth grader over my favorite projects, I always gravitate to the memory of the stained-glass windows project. Visitors often remarked at how good the dining room and library looked with the light shining through the multi-colored pieces of paper and casting bright colors all around the rooms. When I talked to our art teacher, Mr. Eppley, he said that he got the inspiration for the project from the third and fourth grade class. Their teacher, Mr. McDowell, had thought of the idea while teaching them about the different pieces of music traditionally performed in the church. Mr. Eppley took the idea and added his own spin to it.

The process began with printing the rough outlines of our figures onto a large sheet of paper. After our photos were taken, they were digitally uploaded to the server and displayed by the classroom projector onto the paper. Once our figures were traced, we sketched out our own backgrounds. Some boys displayed themselves with traditional designs while others had more abstract ideas. One of these abstract backgrounds came from our own patriotic Dylan Cranston ’17, who displayed himself with the American colors flying proudly behind him. (Unfortunately, he displayed the colors as three wide horizontal stripes, making the background look like the Luxembourg flag.) Next, we transcribed the traced outlines onto a piece of acetate and assigned a color to each shape so that our art projects could have the effect of a stained-glass window. Then came the fun part of the process, the tissue paper and glue sticks. With multicolored tissue paper, we slowly filled our pieces of acetate with the paper cutouts, using a broad range of colors. Our windows took two months to complete, and then they were hung in the windows of the library and dining hall. Mr. McDowell noticed that the boys never lost interest in the project even though it was so elaborate. Elyot, a current seventh grader, told me, “As I worked, the window became more and more like a reflection of myself.” Mr. Eppley impressed us all with this project, and I hope that he continues to do so with many new projects for years to come. I always look back at the stained-glass windows and remember not only the process itself but all the stories and the way we enjoyed ourselves.

–John “Bobby” Zahorsky, class of 2018
PARENT PERSPECTIVE

Having spoken with the youngest students at the Choir School on several occasions, we learned that adjusting to life at the Choir School is fairly straightforward…for them. Parents, however, can be another story, and in pursuit of that story, we spoke with current and former parents about what it was like to let their sons board at the Choir School. What pressures do parents of boarding school students face? How does boarding affect family life? How does it affect their relationships with all their children? What do they give up, and what do they gain by jumping into the unusual but seaworthy craft that is the Choir School?

Before Karen Wentling became one of the school’s Housemothers, she was a choir school parent herself. She told us about sending her youngest son, Calvin ’10, to the school. “We knew about the school already because we were Saint Thomas parishioners. Calvin had only had a couple of voice lessons, and we were shocked when he was admitted.” Mrs. Wentling stressed that boys don’t have to be singers; they will become singers if they have the potential and a willingness to learn. “Calvin’s father and I took him out alone to talk about the school. We were surprised when he told us, You know, I realize I can do something I didn’t think I could do!”

Once their son started at the school, the Wentlings, who have five other children all older than Calvin, had to make adjustments to family life. “You have to follow the school’s calendar,” Mrs. Wentling explained. “It will affect the rest of your family, depending on how far or close you are and how many other kids you have, how many other soccer games you have to go to. It affects the holidays especially. The first two years at Christmas, we shifted our whole schedule to accommodate the fact that boys don’t go home until Christmas afternoon. We waited to open presents until Calvin got home, and he promptly lay down on my bed and fell asleep.” On the other hand, Mrs. Wentling emphasized, “Your child is getting a really good academic education. They’re having close relationships with boys from different environments and backgrounds. The boys get to know each other differently than they do in day school; it’s organic and natural. And the classroom size is so small that no child is ever overlooked. Everyone gets individual attention. We always know what they’re doing.”

Having watched her own son go through the Choir School, high school (The Hill School) and now college (Princeton University), Mrs. Wentling is keenly aware of how the Choir School influenced him, and she sees the same thing happening to the boys she now cares for as Housemother. “The discipline here is a great gift. It gives them the power to learn. They leave here confident children, knowing they have something to contribute wherever they go. They also feel more confident that they’ll be able to learn whatever the ‘thing’ is. In general they’re less afraid of challenges, and they’re willing to take more risks in a good way. Being able to focus affects every possible area of your life.”

Mrs. Wentling pointed out a few ways that parents can help their sons grow by encouraging the independence they have at school. “The boys here become good self advocates because their parents aren’t here to do it for them. That’s actually a big thing, and it’s something we have to teach new boys and new parents. If something happens, of course we want them to share it with their parents, but we also want them to understand that they need to tell us, because we are here, and we can fix it now, rather than in a few days from now.” Parents can take their sons out on Saturdays and come to lunch on Sundays. Many periodically attend Evensong during the week and visit with their sons while walking back to the school.

“When you walk and talk, you can learn a lot about your son, sometimes more in that twenty minutes than you could in several evenings at home,” Mrs. Wentling said. “And it’s really helpful when parents can come to Sunday lunch because they can see what’s happening and meet other parents. It’s a real family feeling, a warm time. Because the school is driven by the church calendar, you feel that Sunday is special. They wear Sunday uniform. The whole feeling of the day is different, and when they’re done helping everyone else worship, we have a fun night, we play, it’s a sabbath. It’s not what we usually have in our frantic lives.”

Many parents want their children to have the experience of contributing meaningfully to something and being of service to others. Mrs. Wentling noted, “The truth is there aren’t that many things children can actually do beyond symbolic helping, but here, when the boys sing in worship services, they are contributing a massively meaningful, valuable, and rare thing to countless people who come in the church or listen online. It’s powerful.”

Mrs. Wentling told us that many parents say they enjoy being the “good guy” because a lot of the time they’re spending with their child is the fun time. True, they are missing out on things at home, but some of those things are the conflicts over homework and bedtimes. Mrs. Wentling found as a parent that it was important to create new routines and habits around boarding school. “Whether it’s We always come in and get hamburgers on Saturdays or something else, those routines create meaningful experiences with your children – those boarding and those not.”

Susan Hill is another parent of alumni (Wick ’97 and Rowland ’98), and she spoke to us about the peer-pressures parents face in sending their children to boarding school. “Your friends don’t understand. Your own parents often don’t understand. I think you have to know your child, and you have to be willing to let him go. The boys know when the school is right for them. They see this community, and they see the fact that they can do music at this level, and they want to do it. When can you make a ten-year-old do something he doesn’t want to do?”

Like most parents, Mrs. Hill was hesitant to send her sons to board, but, she says, she and her husband both realized what the
Choir School was offering. “To be part of a community, to perform this music at a very high level, and to have experiences you can only gain by being here, by the curriculum, by the access to things they only have in New York, and by the amazingly gifted faculty and staff, the incredible Headmaster! If I could have done for them what they got here, I wouldn’t have been able to let them go. But as it is, I would do it again, and so would my boys.”

School counselor Robyn Rosenthal was also a Choir School parent, sending three of her four children through the school (Gerry ’94, Mitch ’00, Hank ’05). Home life certainly changed for the Rosenthal family while the boys were here, but Mrs. Rosenthal pointed to an unexpected benefit – it allowed her daughters to come out and shine. As far as her boys were concerned, she cited the single-sex environment and the church tradition as special benefits. “Once they start finding out that girls are interesting, they don’t have to compete for them or show off for them, so they can pay more attention to what they’re doing. They’re like a band of brothers here; of course they have arguments, but they have deep friendships.”

She feels strongly that it benefits children to grow up in a religious tradition. “Being in church all the time solidified what we began at home.” Even boys who aren’t Episcopalian reap the benefits. “It’s experience rather than proselytizing; faith is just lived. We don’t have to talk about respect all the time, for example, because it’s built into everything they do. Once boys start at the school, parents get it; they understand what the place is and how happy their child is.”

As a school counselor, Mrs. Rosenthal also understands the developmental psychology angle. “Let’s face it: it’s good for children not to be with their parents all the time. That’s their job, to grow up and leave us. What I see that’s incredibly healthy is that Choir School parents are letting go more, and study after study shows that’s what we need to be doing. Choir School students today have more of the independence that kids used to have in previous generations. Today, even those parents who want to give their children a healthy independence find it extraordinarily difficult because of societal pressures or dangers. At the Choir School, though, there isn’t any trouble for them to get into. They’re chaperoned all over town, they aren’t allowed to have phones with wifi, and there is no unsupervised internet.”

The surprisingly unplugged childhood that the Choir School offers is something Mrs. Rosenthal particularly values for parents. “You can’t buy it! They don’t have phones with them, they don’t keep them at night. The amount of time we’re spending on electronics is changing the brain and creating shorter and shorter attention spans. Here they build their attention spans, build their offline activities, build human-to-human activities.”

Parent Scott Cranston spoke to us while his son Dylan ’17 was in his eighth grade year. The Cranstons are a musical family, a church family (Scott was a Vestryman and former Warden at his church), and an education family (both parents are public school teachers), so they knew quite a bit about what they were getting into with the Choir School. “The whole process is a marathon, not a sprint.” Mr. Cranston emphasized, meaning it’s crucial for parents to take the long view and not get stuck on the tough moments. “You find out the tests of your family. Your son has to learn he has a second home here. It takes time.” Phone calls home are difficult for the parents, he admitted. The boys are busy, running around, but the parents wait for that call. “Each year gets easier,” he said. “You see the success, and every time you see them go off with their flock more easily.”

Because of his church, school, and music background, Mr. Cranston recognized that “things are done differently here than other places. It’s a good thing, but as a parent you have to back off and let the process take care of itself. You will get to enjoy watching your son succeed – and the other boys too – but in the meantime, you need to trust that the faculty and staff are all invested to make this a life-changing experience.” As a public school teacher in a strong public school district, Mr. Cranston was nevertheless happy to see his son go to the Choir School. “Even though Dylan’s public school was ranked one of the top in the state, it couldn’t offer what Saint Thomas did, private music lessons, studying French, learning music at the highest level.”

Dylan had a somewhat unusual Choir School career because his voice changed “on a dime” in the middle of sixth grade. When we asked why he returned, Mr. Cranston cited the education. “The academics, especially. Middle school in even great public schools is an abyss, one-size-fits-all.” When Dylan returned, he continued his private voice lessons and began to study the organ. In his eighth grade year, he played some preludes before the 11am Sunday service, he was employed at his home church as a substitute organist, and he even returned to the choir singing in the Gentlemen’s row.

Mr. Cranston knows that the school isn’t for everyone, but if it’s right for your son and your family, he counsels pushing through when there are difficulties (the marathon, not the sprint). “When they’re on the phone with you and want your attention, you don’t see the high points, or the running around having fun. The ‘bumps’ are what build character and experience. Even though my own son was so successful musically, for us the experience has really been about the other stuff – the classroom, the resilience and self-reliance, the confidence. You can’t make excuses and hide like you can in public school. I’m glad one of my children got a chance to escape the nonsense.”

Mrs. Hill summed it up when she described receiving a phone call (before cell phones) at six o’clock one morning. It was her son. “Mommy!” he cried. “We’re singing Zadok the Priest!” Mrs. Hill found it hard to describe what that phone call meant to her, but it’s an awe-inspiring experience other Choir School parents can understand.
CONTEST

Never let it be said that it’s all work and no play at the Choir School News. This issue we are excited to announce a contest. (Yes, prizes.) Please be seated as you read on. Last year Ms. Francisco asked faculty and staff to describe their favorite books from middle school. Below you’ll find book blurbs alongside a photograph of the writer when he or she was in middle school. Match the book titles with the name of the staff member (found on the following page) who wrote it. You can send your list (titles and names) by post to Sophia Bryant-Scott (Saint Thomas Choir School, 202 West 58th Street, New York, NY 10019) or by email to editor@choirschool.org. Please include your name, address, phone, and email. The deadline is Pentecost (May 20, 2018), and prizes will be given to the three earliest and most accurate entries. After Graduation, we will post the correct answers on the school webpage. Good luck!

1. Alanna, the First Adventure, by Tamora Pierce
   I loved the adventure and characters, especially Alanna’s courage and spunk. I used to spend hours with my friends drawing maps of our own imaginary worlds and making up our own adventures. I read some of Pierce’s books so much that the bindings fell apart.

2. Anne of Green Gables, by Lucy Maud Montgomery
   I read this book over and over and used to pretend that I was on Prince Edward Island with the characters. I remember thinking that Anne was so smart and brave and wanting to be like her! It is still one of my favorites today.

3. Charlotte’s Web, by E.B. White
   I love the story of friendship, and Templeton is so funny!

4. The Day of the Triffids, by John Wyndham
   This book was my introduction to sci-fi. I really started to enjoy reading in sixth and seventh grades, and this book helped me discover the kinds of books I liked.

5. East, by Edith Pattou
   I loved how the magic and the historical setting melded so seamlessly, and how the different perspectives — each chapter is narrated by a different character — all had their own voice and focus. Also, trolls!

6. Ender’s Game, by Orson Scott Card
   When I was a kid, I loved Ender’s action-packed triumphs over impossible odds with his ragtag group of friends. He was the kind of kid I wanted to be with the kind of friends I wanted to have. I still dream about the Battle Room!

7. Fahrenheit 451, by Ray Bradbury
   I loved this book because the world seemed upside down, backwards, and wrong, but no one noticed for a long time. When I first read it, I was beginning to feel the same way, but I didn’t know what to think or how to choose a different path. I needed clues, and I was afraid of what I might discover, or what I might have to give up.

8. Fantastic Mr. Fox, by Roald Dahl
   In this book, Dahl brings to life a whole underground animal world and humanizes the characters he creates. Dahl’s books are full of amusing names, and his use of alliteration is just the right hook to capture the imagination of a young reader.

9. Grimm’s Fairy Tales
   I loved the lessons the fairy tales taught us, especially the scary ones.

    These were my favorite books in elementary and middle school because the magical world that J.K. Rowling creates is amazingly creative and detailed. Even now, when I return to those books, I notice references, symbols, and allusions that I had never noticed. The books also successfully combine fantasy, comedy, romance, and drama into a coming-of-age story. I consider myself very lucky to have grown up with those books and characters!

11. The Hobbit, by J. R. R. Tolkien
    This is a brilliant precursor to the best, most expansive fantasy series of all time. While The Lord of the Rings is dense, like Mirkwood Forest, The Hobbit is a more easy-going and lighter story, and so was my favorite book in my youth.

12. Johnny Tremain, by Esther Forbes
    I loved reading Johnny Tremain because it made lots of facts I had learned in school seem real to me.
**Lord of the Flies, by William Golding**
I liked it because I was able to draw parallels between the characters and my own life, especially being part of a community of people trying to find solutions. Teamwork is important to me, so I was able to identify with the book despite the non-storybook ending.

**My Side of the Mountain, by Jean Craighead George**
I loved it because it was a book about a kid like me living in the city and yearning to live in the country. I imagined I was the main character doing all the things he did: building tree-caves, making tools, gathering and hunkering down through the seasons. I think it was my favorite because it gave me a detailed, imaginary way to escape the city doldrums.

**The Phantom Tollbooth, by Norton Juster**
This was my favorite book as a kid and is still one of my favorites. I loved how it celebrated curiosity, learning, and thinking about things beneath the surface. Milo discovers how much the world has to offer if we are willing to make the effort to look.

**Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe**
Robinson Crusoe was the proto-survivor and admirable in many ways. I was a voracious reader, and books represented an adventurous escape from the everyday.

**A Tale of Two Cities, by Charles Dickens**
I know I was supposed to like Lucie and Charles best, but Sydney Carton was and remains my favorite character. He has the most interesting and complex development, and I’ve always had the most sympathy for him.

**The Twits, by Roald Dahl**
I will always remember this book, with its wonderfully hideous illustrations by Quentin Blake, not least because Mr. Twit bore something of a resemblance to my middle school Headmaster.

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INTERVIEW WITH FATHER WALLACE

A FEW WEEKS AFTER HIS RETURN to New York and the Choir School, we sat down with Father Wallace to hear about his sabbatical, which he took between July and December 2017. He spent the first part in Tangier, Morocco serving as Priest-in-charge at the Church of Saint Andrew, and the second half in Marseille, France as Priest-in-charge at All Saints’ Anglican Church. In both cities, Father Wallace worked closely with migrant and immigrant communities. We asked the boys to help us think of interview questions, and we were delighted to find Father Wallace full of stories to tell.

What was it like in Morocco? Hard or easy?

In Morocco, the work could be challenging because some of the parishioners were facing overwhelming obstacles like poverty, living on the streets, and extreme loneliness. These were people who had given up everything – homeland, family and friends – for the promise of a better life elsewhere.

Who were you working with?

At Saint Andrew’s most parishioners were part of the migrant community, people trying to reach Europe from other parts of Africa. I worked primarily with West Africans, who attend Saint Andrew’s because it’s an English speaking parish. The vast majority were Nigerian and Liberian. They were very young, in their early to mid-20’s. These men (most of the migrants were male) were hardy survivors; they simply had to be to make such a long journey from their homelands. On Fridays they’d be outside the mosque begging; on Saturdays they would go to the synagogue; on Saturday nights they would go to the Roman Catholic church; and on Sunday morning, they’d be at Saint Andrew’s.

Tangier is located at the northernmost point of the African continent, where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic, and it’s the final destination in Africa for those who have travelled great distances to get to Europe. On a clear day in Tangier, you can see the coast of southern Spain, only fourteen kilometers away. Some think they can swim that distance; others are loaded into boats and attempt to cross the rough waters. Approximately one third of those who attempt a crossing don’t succeed - they either drown or are caught by the Spanish or Moroccan coastal patrols, who are working together to prevent people from making the dangerous journey.

There was a lot of pastoral work – listening, offering a different perspective, baptizing and burying when called upon to do so, and establishing some semblance of law and order within the life of the church community.

Why are they migrating?

Some of them are fleeing the political situation or extreme poverty of their homelands. Some individuals who identify with the migrant community are in fact involved in drug-and-alcohol smuggling and in human trafficking.

Tell us a bit more about Saint Andrew’s and your work there.

Historically, Saint Andrew’s served the English-speaking community living in northern Morocco, southern Spain, and Gibraltar, a British territory across the strait. In recent years, with the influx of migrants, the composition of the parish has changed. Today, it is a parish of extremes. Most of the African members turn to begging for their livelihood. This is a serious issue within the parish community, and as a result of the excessive begging, many of the expats, whose offerings pay the bills, have refused to attend Sunday worship.

There was a lot of pastoral work - listening, offering a different perspective, baptizing and burying when called upon to do so, and establishing some semblance of law and order within the life of the church community.

The parish had been without a priest for some time, and one of my responsibilities was to help the church council initiate a search for a new, permanent appointment. In November, the parish announced that it had appointed a priest from Ghana. This is the first time in its 123-year history that Saint Andrew’s will have an African chaplain. In the past, their chaplains came from the UK, Australia or Canada. He will begin his work there this Easter.

Alas, there were the usual parish squabbles. For example, the choice of music during the services was a bone of contention. The ‘African Choir,’ as it was called, offered a few songs after communion. No Tallis or Howells here, but the music was inspiring in its own way, with drums, clapping, dancing (I refrained from that!). While it was heartfelt and sincere, some of the old guard did not approve. One of the more animated battles was with the members of the choir who told me that they wished...
to be reimbursed their taxi fare to church each week, and given a catered lunch! They were not terribly amused when my response was, “I thought you sang in the choir because you loved the Lord!”

I spent many afternoons sitting in the churchyard talking to people - migrants, locals, and tourists. Of course, the beggars knew I was there, so they were frequent visitors. Instead of giving handouts, I would find work for them around the churchyard - painting the fence, repairing gravestones, cleaning up the grounds.

**How many people did you help? How did you help people?**

The community in Tangier is transient, people on the move, in the pews one week and gone the next, so it’s difficult to answer that question. Some days, I’d be talking to someone who was missing his or her family; other days I’d be dealing with matters of life and death. For example, the local morgue might call for help identifying the bodies of migrants that had washed up on the shoreline if it could not find any identification papers.

During the week, I volunteered with the Sisters of Charity, a religious community comprised of six nuns, who lived in the old medina – the walled part of the city. The old Spanish cathedral had been converted into a convent where the sisters operated a food-and-clothing distribution center and housed twenty-six orphaned girls. It was a shock to the system when I was instructed by the Reverend Mother that I would be working with the eighteen-month to two-year-old girls! The girls liked it when I played songs on the piano or read books. They loved to get up and dance about the room to Moroccan music, and – since I know you’re wondering – yes, even I participated, much to their amusement! The greatest challenge was feeding the girls at the table for lunch. I was responsible for a table of six, rushing around the table, going from one girl to the next feeding each one. It was a real workout!

I also volunteered at a second convent which housed older girls and young women who were visually and hearing impaired. Here they were educated and taught skills, primarily rug-making.

**How did your work in France compare with your work in Morocco?**

I was in France for the second half of my sabbatical, and there I volunteered at a refugee center that helps new immigrants assimilate into European culture, learn a new language, and find work and support for their families. Specifically, I assisted in teaching English and French and with an after-school program. Most of the students were from the Middle East or from other former French colonies of North Africa such as Tunisia or Algeria. It was a less intense experience than my work in Tangier, but I enjoyed it and met some lovely people there.

**How did you find serving as a Priest-in-charge?**

I really enjoyed parish life in France. While it was called the parish of Marseille, it was actually made up of three tiny congregations: Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, and Oppède. The church in Marseille was tucked away on a quiet street in the city center and was rarely open during the week, so the first thing I attempted to do was to make the parish more accessible. We started a Wednesday morning service followed by coffee and conversation. I attended the service, but it was designed to be lay-led: no priest required. It was a chance for the parishioners to take greater responsibility for their church and worship.

Serving in a small parish can be exhausting. The priest is responsible for everything from planning the liturgy and writing a sermon, to selecting hymns, and printing orders of service. When the organist was away, I had to play the hymns, too! Still, it was good fun, and in true Mediterranean fashion, very relaxed.

**What would we be most surprised by?**

The fact that I was standing in the pulpit!

**Were there any language barriers?**

Even though I was living in France and Morocco, I was working in Anglican parishes which are part of the Church of England, so English was the common language. French and Arabic are official languages in Morocco. In Morocco, I picked up a bit of the local Arabic dialect for the basics; people are very appreciative if you make an effort. My French, though rusty after years of neglect, is much improved after six months of living and working in francophone countries.

**Was the food weird?**

If I cooked it, then yes, most definitely! Of course, I have been completely ruined by years of Heidi’s cuisine!

In France, I enjoyed the abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables available at the local markets. In Tangier, there was an outstanding boulangerie (bakery) across the street from my flat. A loaf of fresh bread cost approximately 17 cents! The main fruit and vegetable market in Tangier was outside the grounds of the church, so I got to know many of the farmers who made the three-or-four-hour journey three days each week from the mountain villages.

The most terrifying part of cooking at home in Tangier was turning on the stove. It ran on a propane...
canister, so before you could cook, you had to turn on the gas, light a match, and then close your eyes and hope for the best! For the first week it felt safer eating at a local restaurant. There were some good restaurants, lots of tagines, couscous, and plenty of invitations to parishioners’ homes for a meal.

Did you have a comfortable living space? What about internet connection?

I had both. I’ve made a few moves in my working life, so I’m pretty adaptable. I did have an issue with my housing in Marseille: someone tried to break into my flat at two o’clock in the morning. I woke up to the sound of someone trying to jimmy the lock of the door. But that’s another article for another day! In Tangier, the flat was basic and rather dated, but comfortable.

In addition to having internet access in both flats, the parishes provided me with a flip phone, just like the ones the boys at the Choir School use to call home on Monday and Wednesday evenings.

What was it like in the winter time?

Winters in southern France can get rather chilly. Marseille benefits from its location by the sea; however, a northwesterly wind, the Mistral, makes it feel much colder than it is. According to French lore, the Mistral is “le vent qui rend fou,” the wind that drives people mad. I don’t know if I am any madder after ten weeks living there; I’ll let others be the judge of that.

What did you do for fun? What was the most interesting thing you did?

I explored many new places on my days off. In Morocco, I drove through Atlas and Rif mountain villages. I toured the royal cities of Meknes, Marrakech, Fez and Rabat.

Since Marseille is a hub city, it is very convenient to get around Europe from there. I took the train to Paris, flew to Nuremberg and Munich for their Christmas markets, met up with Saint Thomas parishioners in Florence, and visited Granada and Seville in southern Spain.

My most memorable travel adventure was my three day stay in the Sahara desert. Though I initially was on my own, I joined up with four women travelling together. We hired a Berber guide, a young fellow named Ali, who was twenty years old and married with children! From our meeting point, it was a three hour journey by camel to our desert camp. You’ve really not suffered until you’ve sat on a camel for three hours. The recovery period is longer! When it was time to make the trip back, the girls said, ‘We’ll just walk our camels!’ Easier said than done! The late nights of stargazing and the early mornings to catch the rising sun were simply incredible.

Did it feel strange coming back?

The short answer is no, but it was reassuring to discover that my key still worked and that my nameplate was still on my apartment door. Ms. Francisco had also composed a thorough and lengthy list of jobs awaiting my return!

Before boys graduate, I usually say a word or two about the importance of gracious entries and exits. I was mindful of the fact that while I had been away for five months having a grand old time, people were here working. So while I certainly didn’t feel out of place, I’ve tried to make sure I’m not meddling in a school year already half-over. I am grateful to have such accommodating colleagues!

Would you do it again?

In a heartbeat.

Any new perspectives?

We are living at a time when people take so much for granted, and in a culture more interested in asserting “rights” rather than “responsibilities.” In my prayers, I certainly am more intentional about giving thanks to God for “our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life.”

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Christmas in Marseille; The cemetery of Saint Andrew’s contains graves of young soldiers killed whilst serving on military missions near Tangier during the Second World War; The Chancel of Saint Andrew’s, Tangier. The church was built on land given to Queen Victoria by the Sultan Moulay Hassan I in 1883. It is constructed in authentic Moorish style, a mark of respect to its host country. Workers, skilled in marble, wood and stucco, came from Fez to adorn the church’s interior. They carved the capitals of the columns and the inscription of the Lord’s Prayer in Arabic round the chancel arch.
Recruitment is an ongoing, year-round effort, one given a boost recently by the newly redesigned school website (same URL www.choirschool.org). The new site is full of fresh content and still growing. Among other things, you can learn about a day in the life of a typical chorister, what the boys do on weekends, the full academic curriculum, what kinds of trips the boys take – there’s even a section about Heidi’s famous food. If you’ve ever wondered what life is really like today behind the Choir School doors, the new website draws back the veil. Please spread the word!

PAYING IT FORWARD

Last summer, when we were chatting with Joshua Ross ‘10 about his career as a tenor (see Summer/Fall 2017 issue), we stumbled upon the story of how Joshua came to attend the Choir School in the first place. Boys have learned about Saint Thomas in myriad ways, and sometimes, as in Joshua’s case, it’s possible to glean the Holy Spirit’s work drawing boys into the ministry of the school. “It’s a good story,” Joshua told us. “A long one…”

LET ME SET THE SCENE FOR YOU: I came from a family that didn’t have a lot of anything. My dad was a drug addict and alcoholic. That’s better now, thankfully, but some of my earliest memories are of my mom putting me in the carseat to go and find my dad and chase him out of bars.

When I was in elementary school, we were living in Kill Devil Hills, NC, and I loved to walk around school singing the hits from the radio, like Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake. One day in third grade, my teacher Miss Lively heard me singing. Now, she knew a guy in town who was a retired opera singer. He’d gone to Juilliard, travelled all over the world singing, and finally retired to Kill Devil Hills, where he ran a little ensemble called the Concert Chorale of the Outer Banks. His name was Forest Warren. Miss Lively wanted to put me in touch with him because he wanted to put on a production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a small opera by Gian Carlo Menotti, and he needed a boy soprano to play the lead role. Miss Lively talked to my mom about it, and my mom said, *Joshua is not really into opera. He likes the radio stuff. Why would we do that?* I said, *Let’s try it. It might be fun!*

When my mom took me to the audition, I was the first person of the day. Mr. Forest had me vocalize a little bit, and I sang for him. Keep in mind, I had no training, none, not a lick; I did everything by ear. To my mother’s surprise, Mr. Forest told me on the spot that he wanted to work with me. He cancelled the other auditions of the day and said, *You’re the kid.*

I worked with him very closely, and eventually Mr. Forest became a huge influence in my life, really a father figure. He taught me for free because we had no money. He gave me voice lessons and taught me the whole role of Amahl. I really enjoyed it, loved the stage, and learned the part quickly by ear. Eventually the production happened, and on the last night, Mr. Forest told my mom, *You know, there’s a school in New York City, for boys, called Saint Thomas Choir School…*

We talked about it, Mom and Grandma and I. My grandma is a huge influence in my life, and she said, *Absolutely not. There is no way we are sending our seven-year-old to New York City to do that! But me being me, I said, Mom…? [insert angel voice, ed.] I’ve never been to New York before. Let’s just take a trip. Let’s just see if I’m good enough to get in. They eventually agreed, thinking, Okay, we’ll take him up there, he’ll end up hating it, we’ll come home, and that will be the end of that.*

I auditioned for John Scott and sang the little aria from *Amahl*, which for my age was impressive though at the time it was just what I knew. During the audition, Mr. Scott asked if I knew any piano. I didn’t, but I sat down at the piano and made up a little piece. After the audition, I stayed the night as part of the whole interview process. I loved it and made friends with everyone. It felt like a community. That first night, the older boys felt like older brothers. When my mom and grandma came to pick me up the next day, I didn’t want to leave. That’s when they knew they had a problem.

We went home to North Carolina, some time passed, and one night as I was in the bathtub, my mom came in. I *just got a phone call*, she said. *Do you remember Father Wallace from Saint Thomas?* I said, *Well, yeah! She told me I’d been accepted to the school, and on a full scholarship. I said, Great, I can’t wait to go next year!*

During my time at the school, Mr. Scott and the two organists trained me and gave me the foundation of all my musical education. I also kept in touch with Mr. Forest. I would visit him, and when I did, we would do concerts at the little Methodist church there.
Other times, he would come to New York, where he and his wife had an apartment, and take me out.

About sixth grade, I had a low point, puberty, and one vacation, I didn’t want to go back to school. I forget what it was that caused that; I’ve always been a bit of an overdramatic type of person. Anyway, I told Mr. Forest I wasn’t going back, and he said, Do you want to bet on that? He bought a plane ticket for himself and his wife, and they took me back to school. He said, You need to stick with this. You have too much invested, and you’re too talented not to. Soon after that, there was a change in my voice. I started getting all the big solos, and from then on, I was Mr. Scott’s go-to soloist. I did every solo I can really remember.

When I was in seventh grade, Mr. Forest was diagnosed with ALS, and it progressed very quickly. One of the pieces we would always sing together at concerts was Panis Angelicus. It was a big thing for us, and it was one of the first things I learned after Amahl. I planned for my eighth grade graduation that he and I would sing it together, but about two weeks before graduation, Mr. Forest passed away. I sang the piece anyway, but with Sam Sargunum ’10, and Julian Turner ’10 at the piano.

There’s one last chapter in this story, though. Right before Mr. Forest passed away, we had a talk, and I said to him, I want to continue your work. You got me into Saint Thomas, and I want to pay it forward.

Fast forward to this past year. I was a junior at Manhattan School of Music on a bus ride home to Virginia for Christmas. This little boy and his mother got on the bus. I saw the kid coming down the aisle, and I was thinking, Oh no, don’t sit next to me, don’t sit next to me… Of course, he sat next to me, and his mom sat right behind him. He was about six years old, and he was singing Adele. He sounded pretty good, so I got chatting with his mother. It turned out she was a single mom from the Bronx, and I quickly realized all the similarities between this boy and me: he had a single mom, just like I did; he’d been singing from the radio, just like me. I couldn’t really ignore it – the feeling that I needed to do something – so I said to his mother, I think your son has potential. He’s at the right age. I’d really like to work with him when I get back to New York, free lessons. I just want to see what his abilities are. We exchanged numbers, and I went home for Christmas.

Once vacation was over, I got a text from her, and, long story short: they came to see me, he had a lesson, he had great potential, I could hear it from the first, he could match the pitch, he was musically inclined, his temperament was perfect for Saint Thomas. After a few lessons, I broke Saint Thomas to his mother: There’s this school, ok?, that I went to, and I think he would be a good fit, and since you’re local, I think you’d really benefit from having him there. He’d have a great education, not only in music but in life. They were interested, so I worked with him to prepare him for the audition and then went with them to the audition itself. The first piece I taught him? Panis Angelicus.

Joshua’s student was admitted to the Choir School and began third grade in September of 2017. Joshua is serving as his mentor family. ■

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TWO BROTHERS REMEMBER THE 1930s

Recently, we were contacted by Peter Schepper, the son of Allen Schepper ’38 and nephew of Donald Schepper ’36, both of whom attended the Choir School during Dr. Noble’s time. Peter told us that his father and uncle, both in their 90s, were aware of the school’s upcoming centenary and eager to share their stories. With some technical assistance from Peter and his cousin Jeanette Doyle, both Donald and Allen sent us memories of the school as it was more than eighty years ago. Ready to travel back in time? Let’s go.

Donald Schepper ’36:

My family’s history with the school dates back to the beginning. Before the Choir School was established, my older brother Fred sang in the Saint Thomas Church choir, and when the school was opened in 1919, Fred was among its first students, graduating in 1922. Given my brother’s good experience, my parents enrolled me as soon as I was old enough. My younger brother Allen joined me two years later.

Allen Schepper ’38:

We also have another brother, Norman, who could not attend because he had a hearing deficiency. It was hard for my parents to be without their three sons for so long, but because of it, we had an education that was far better than our peers. Our father worked very hard delivering milk for Sheffield Farms in the Bronx. We were all enrolled on scholarship.

Donald:

That’s why I am a donor to the Self Society. When I attended the Choir School, there were thirty-two students; now there are fewer. I wish that more young boys could benefit from all the Choir School has to offer.

Being a part of the Choir School family was one of the greatest and most influential experiences of my life. I received a wonderful education, developed self-discipline and self-confidence, trained my voice, and was exposed to the greatest of religious music. I enjoyed and attended the Met and Carnegie Hall many times. The experience enriched my life in so many ways – too numerous to mention.

Although I don’t remember any teachers from high school, I remember well the staff and students at Saint Thomas. We all greatly admired and did our best to live up to the expectations of our choirmaster, Dr. Noble.

Allen:

Dr. Noble was a man small in stature, and I remember seeing him in front of the organ on that large seat scooting back and forth playing furiously. The Rector at the time was Dr. Brooks, and the Headmaster was Charles Benham.

Donald:

Mr. Benham was a warm and understanding man. I remember English teacher Fred Borg, math teacher Rolston Coles, and my favorite coach, Luke Ward. I also remember Mrs. Atwater at the entrance to the dining hall, checking the younger boys for clean hands and shined shoes. She was a very caring housemother, looking after our cuts, bruises, and colds.

Allen:

She was like a mom to all of the boys, nurturing yet firm, always reminding us of our manners. If our elbows were on the table, she would remind us that this was verboten. She would decide our meals. Sometime for breakfast we would have eggs, bacon and toast, or oatmeal or cereal. Juice and milk were always included. Lunch was a sumptuous meal, and all four food groups were represented. We would have roasted chicken, beef, or fish with vegetables or potatoes. Before meals, we said prayers. We realized how lucky we were and that not everybody was eating as well as we did.

Donald:

The school at 121-123 West 55th Street consisted of two adjoining brownstones. On the first floor were our large rehearsal room, the dining room, and the kitchen. Dr. Noble’s apartment was a floor above, right below the younger boys’ dorm, where we slept in one large room the length of the building. (The older boys slept in a room on the floor above us.) We stored our suitcases under the bed, had a night table and a metal locker. As you entered the dorm, on the right there were five or six washbasins; it was amazing that 18-20 boys were able to brush their teeth, wash their faces, comb their hair, and get down to breakfast on time. No one was ever late for breakfast! In the
back of the dorm there was a separate room containing two or three shower stalls and a few toilets. When I was prefect of that dorm, my main responsibility was to hold down the noise, running and jumping so as not to disturb Dr. Noble below us.

Allen:
My brother and I were both prefects. Another one of our duties was closing the transoms every night and opening them in the morning. These were the large windows in the boys’ forms. One night, Donald and I saw the Hindenburg floating over the school. We were aghast at the size and the shape of this wonderful flying craft. It was as long as a city block. How excited we were to have seen this marvel of man, and how devastated we were to hear that it exploded less than a month later.

Donald:
Although our years at Saint Thomas were during the Depression, I don’t remember any hardship. We certainly ate well and had everything we needed. Our football uniforms may have looked a bit tattered, but at the time we didn’t notice.

Allen:
A typical day started with lessons and choir. We would have a big breakfast and then go to classes. The uniform was a white shirt with blue knickers. We all wore a black tie, and the uniform was finished by a neat blue blazer. Our choir uniform was a black cassock with a white frock similar to what an altar boy would wear.

Donald:
We had classes and rehearsed Tuesday through Saturday. Friday evening there was a rehearsal with the men and boys at the church. On Sunday, we began with Sunday School, then sang with the men in both the 11am and 4pm services. Following the afternoon service, those of us who were fortunate to live within commuting distance went home to our families, returning Monday evening for study hall. Only a few boys remained at the school for the weekend.

In the afternoons we enjoyed playing football, softball, and soccer in the Central Park Sheep Meadow. Basketball was played in the gym in the Saint Thomas Chapel near Third Avenue, a 15-20 minute walk from the school. At five o’clock, we returned to school, showered and dressed for dinner.

I don’t remember any disciplinary problems, although there were occasional good-natured pranks. Even then, after a stern warning, all was forgiven.

Allen:
There is one story, actually an incident, that pertains to discipline. Our coach, Coach Holter, was very popular and had a great sense of humor. He was always playing jokes on us, and we had a great time with him. Once I decided to play a prank on him, a shenanigan of epic proportions. I went to the corner store and purchased Limburger cheese, which I then put in his sheets. When he went into his quarters, it stunk to high heaven. He knew exactly who the culprit was, so as a form of payback, he took my sheets off my bed, remade it with his sheets, and made me sleep in the “odorific” bed. I learned that night about making your bed and lying in it! Unfortunately, when the other staff learned of the incident, they didn’t take it as humorously as the coach had. I was brought to the staff and reprimanded vehemently. The higher-ups were contemplating expelling me. Coach Holter stood up for me and told them that I was in great standing with the school and that if I were expelled, my whole future would be jeopardized. He even went as far as to say that if I were expelled, he would quit. In the end, I was put on probation, but he really saved me from having to leave the school. He was a true friend and ally.

After the Choir School, I attended Trinity Prep School and was allowed to skip my freshman year because I was so far ahead in my studies after the Choir School. I later attended Hamilton College, where I received a full scholarship, played football, and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 1946. In college, I also acted in theater, much of it musical theater. I was on stage with the likes of Paul Newman, Alice Ghostley and Peter Falk. I had quite the singing voice and was given leads in a lot of the productions. Eventually, I made a great life for my wife and my four children by working in radio and, later in my career, at American Express. For many, many years I sang in the church choir and enjoyed it immensely.

Donald:
For me as well, church and music were always a big part of my life, both as a child and as an adult. While serving in Guam and Tinian in the Pacific during World War II, some friends and I formed a quartet and sang in church services and variety shows at various camps on the island and also aboard ships in the harbor. Following the war, my musical training at Saint Thomas enabled me to use my voice as a soloist at each of the churches to which my wife and I belonged over the years and in several choral groups, most notably the Haworth Choral Society in Bergen County, New Jersey. Whenever I sang Messiah, I would proudly tell the other choristers that as a young boy I sang under T. Tertius Noble. In my mind, I can still sing the soprano runs in Messiah.

Being a part of the Choir School family was one of the greatest and most influential experiences of my life.
I loved Saint Thomas Choir School while I was there and love it still. I will be forever grateful for the many ways in which the experience enriched my life.

**Allen:**
I hold Saint Thomas Choir School in high esteem. I don't know where I would be in life without the kickstart it gave me at such a young age. It brought a wealth of education, camaraderie, and class to my life, like a tsunami of positive reinforcement.

In my mind, I can still sing the soprano runs in Messiah.

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**MEMORIES OF MR. CASTILE**

On May 23, 2017 the New York Times ran an obituary for Rand Castile, who taught history at the Choir School in the early 1960s. He was remembered in the Times for “opening the doors for Asian art” as a collector and curator of Japanese art and artifacts. One of his students, John Koster ’63, reached out to us with a tribute:

Mr. Castile's knack for relating such diverse subjects as etymology, the arts, and the solar system to history were remarkable at the time. For us boys coming out of the 1950s, when “Made in Japan” was a joke referring to low-quality merchandise, Mr. Castile's introduction of Japanese culture, of Zen and koans, haiku and brush drawing, was revelatory. The family’s tiny apartment in the old Choir School building on West 55th Street was dominated by a large abstract-expressionist painting over the couch and a wall of bookshelves. In the minds of us students, the Castiles presented an aura of well-groomed bohemianism. We wore blazers and school ties all day over broadcloth button-down shirts (blue in the morning, changing after sports into white for the later afternoon and evening, or maybe the other way around?), so we were shocked when the Castiles once brought into the school dining room a dinner guest wearing (heaven forbid!) blue jeans.

As young students, we naturally tended to accept the aesthetic judgement of our elders, but our, or at least my own, critical sense found a model in Mr. Castile’s frank discernment. After lights-out in the twenty-bed dorms, faculty members would read a chapter of a book such as Dorothy Sayers’s *The Nine Tailors* or Ian Fleming’s *Moonraker*. The James Bond thrillers were fashionable, even before their film adaptations, as favorites of President Kennedy, but Mr. Castile would intersperse his reading with scathing comments about the quality of Fleming's prose. More significantly, he once remarked that he would like to throw all the Russian anthems out of the choir's repertoire. We did sing an awful lot of Alexander Gretchaninov, an old exile from the Soviet Union whom our Choirmaster, Mr. Self, had known since his student days in Paris.

Those were exciting years in the New York art world, and it was thrilling to know that our Mr. Castile wrote reviews of art shows for *ARTnews*, then one of the leading journals. Of course, I wanted to be an avant-garde painter. He also taught us calligraphy. I never wrote beautifully, but the experience gave me an appreciation for fine old scripts and typefaces. My appreciation extended to Asian calligraphy when, the summer after my graduation, Mr. Castile wrote from his summer house in Maine to ask whether I could go to a calligraphy exhibition at the Japan Society and send him a copy of the catalogue.

I owe so much to the Choir School in general and to Mr. Castile in particular, and this little essay is no compensation for the fact that I never thanked him adequately for what he meant to me. I can, however, thank the Choir School for its remarkably good sense in hiring Mr. Castile straight out of college. Requiescat in pace.

Mr. Koster spent twenty-four years at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion as Professor, Conservator, and Curator of keyboard Instruments at the National Music Museum. He and his wife, who is an artist herself, have recently retired and moved back to New England.

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If you wish to support the Choir School or any of its designated funds – such as the Girl Chorister Fund, the Camp Fund, the Learning Assistance Fund – please visit our website (www.choirschool.org) and click the Giving tab.
During the term, we had the chance to say hello to several alumni who came by to visit, including Bill Chambers ’76 and Curt Himy ’80. Many young alumni came for Thanksgiving dinner. In December, Patrick Heijmen ’92 and his wife came up from Virginia for Messiah, and we saw Daniel Barbiero ’58 at Ceremony of Carols.

In other alumni news, Angela and Rowland Hill ’98 welcomed Jude William Hill on October 31, 2017, and this January, a twenty-minute opera by Nathan Fletcher ’07 entitled “A Bridge for Three” premiered at the Kennedy Center. The piece was commissioned by the Washington National Opera for its annual American Opera Initiative Festival. Nathan was cheered on by brother Zachary ’07, Atticus Sawatski ’07, and former Choir School science teacher Jason Platt.

KEEPING IN TOUCH
To submit your own class notes, please send an email to alumni@choirschool.org. Follow us on Instagram (ChoirSchoolNYC), Twitter (@ChoirSchoolNYC), or Facebook (Saint Thomas Choir School page). Finally, please be sure to visit the Alumni section of the new website www.choirschool.org.
IN MEMORIAM

We are sorry to report the sad loss of three alumni this fall:

Pierce Foster ’46 passed away the weekend of October 21, 2017. Pierce had written us only in April to share a few memories: “Hard to realize it has been more than 70 years since I had my initial tryout with Dr. Candlyn in the rehearsal room at the Church. Back in 2016, I was happy to be able to get to Saint Thomas for our 60th Alumni Reunion service. I was equally happy to have classmate Andre Pierre ’47 beside me in the stalls! Great memories linger, and I do hope they hang around a few more years.”

Melli Shofner, the wife of Steven Michael Shofner ’54, called us in October to let us know Steven had died.

Henry C. (Hank) Rosenthal ’05 died suddenly at his home on September 30, 2017. He had endured a long struggle against alcohol and drug addiction, and his death was due to heroin overdose. Hank was a gifted and accomplished pianist and keyboard player who performed both as a solo artist and as a member of many jazz and rock groups. He also accompanied theatrical groups and solo artists. He sang as a tenor for a time with the choir of Immaculate Conception Church, Somerville, and studied organ with its Director, Gary Gavula.

The family have been deeply touched by the outpouring of support from the Choir School community, including the many alumni who attended the funeral and sang with the choir. On February 17, a memorial concert was held in Bound Brook, NJ featuring many of the acts with which Hank played over the past few years. Proceeds from the concert went to Recovery House at Rutgers, a special alcohol-and-drug-free dorm. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested donations to the Choir School in Hank’s name.

GIVING

Many of you have made gifts to the Choir School since the publication of the 2017 Summer/Fall Newsletter. Thank you very much – we are deeply appreciative of each contribution received throughout the year from generous alumni, alumni parents, parishioners and friends. These donations are critical to the school’s ability to advance its mission. All contributions made since June 30, 2017 will be listed in the 2018 Summer/Fall Newsletter as gifts are not recorded in this issue. If you have any questions, please contact Ann Hall Kaplan akaplan@SaintThomasChurch.org.

CENTENARY

Next year will mark the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Choir School. There are many exciting events and offerings in the works, but here is a preview of some dates to save:

Sunday, March 3, 2019
Come back to honor our three Founders as well as the March 3, 1919 opening of the Choir School. This celebration will mark our first official Founders’ Day!

Wednesday, April 17, 2019
Please join us for our traditional Alumni Dinner following the Tenebrae service during Holy Week.

Saturday, June 8, 2019
Prize Day and Reception. On this day we will welcome our newest alumni and celebrate their achievements.

November 9-10, 2019
Join us for Alumni Reunion Weekend and Remembrance Day as we close our Centennial Celebrations.

For more information please contact Susan Hill at shill@choirschool.org or call the Alumni Office at 646.569.6464
Upcoming Dates 2018

March 22
Concert: *A German Requiem* by Johannes Brahms

March 28
Tenebrae followed by Alumni Dinner
*please RSVP to Susan Hill shill@choirschool.org*

May 8
Concert: *Music for the Eve of Ascension*

June 9
Prize Day and Graduation

November 10-11
Alumni Reunion Weekend

December 13
Alumni Dinner following *A Ceremony of Carols* Concert