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A Rainbow Staff

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A Rainbow Staff

Gerald FitzGerald CSSp (Principal 1975 – 1980)



About a foot of snow had fallen during the night and only two people, both members of the staff, had struggled through the drifts to attend the 7:00 am Mass in the chapel of Neil McNeil High School. The celebrant began the service with the

greeting “The Lord be with you.” In reply he heard “Et cum spiritu tuo” from one bench, “ And with you too, Nicky” from the other.

Welcome to Neil McNeil of the mid-70s to the mid-80s, my term as Principal there. Vatican II was filtering down and the school staff fully reflected the bright spectrum of rainbow colours which illustrates the true richness of the Body of Christ.

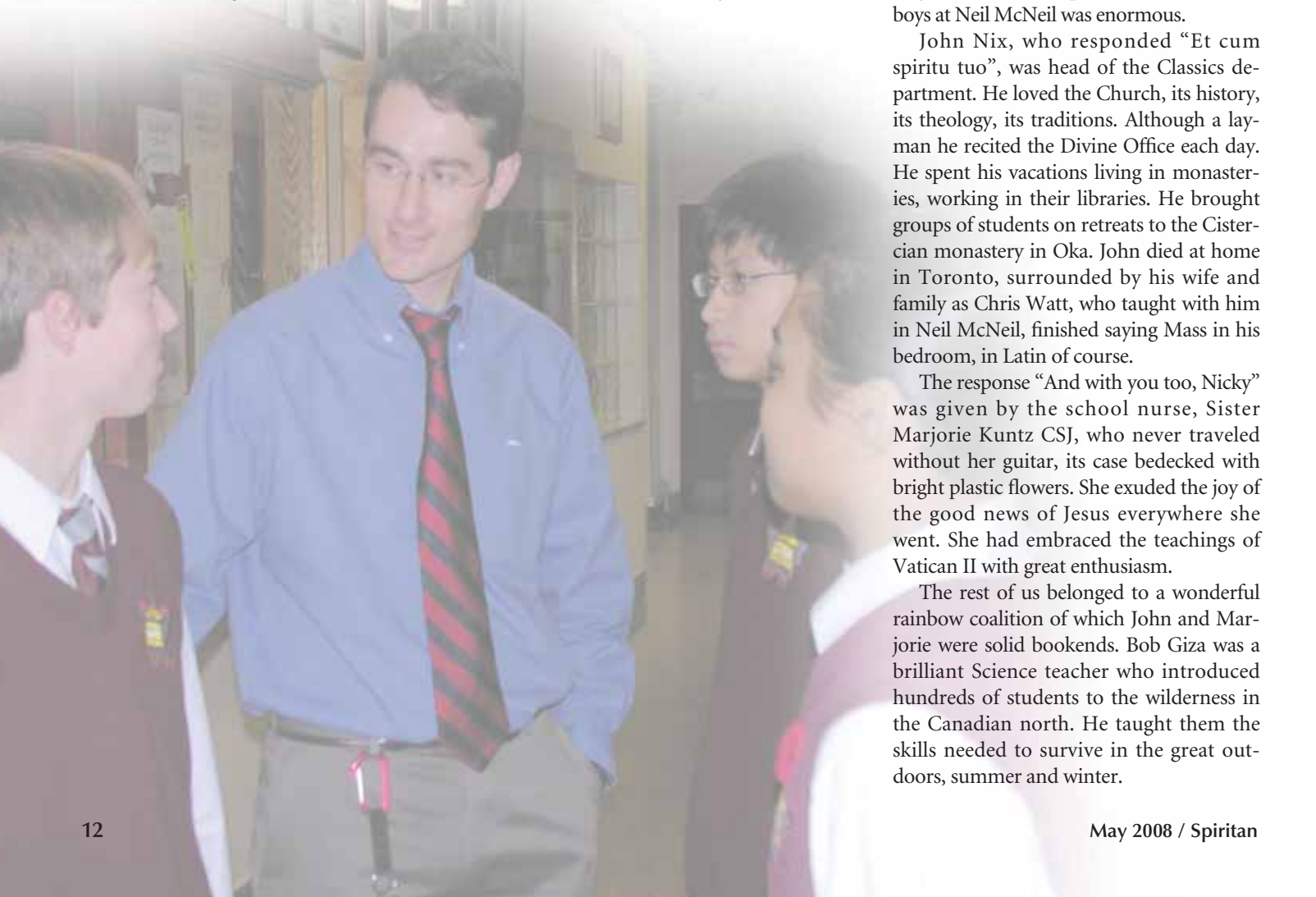
Quality and diversity of the staff

Among the many memories and impressions I treasure of my years as principal of Neil McNeil, the quality and diversity of the staff made possibly the greatest impact. My predecessors as principal had assembled a group of idiosyncratic, sometimes eccentric, people but all had a fervor and zeal to share their discipleship of Christ with the students they served. Their impact on me and on the boys at Neil McNeil was enormous.

John Nix, who responded “Et cum spiritu tuo”, was head of the Classics department. He loved the Church, its history, its theology, its traditions. Although a layman he recited the Divine Office each day. He spent his vacations living in monasteries, working in their libraries. He brought groups of students on retreats to the Cistercian monastery in Oka. John died at home in Toronto, surrounded by his wife and family as Chris Watt, who taught with him in Neil McNeil, finished saying Mass in his bedroom, in Latin of course.

The response “And with you too, Nicky” was given by the school nurse, Sister Marjorie Kuntz CSJ, who never traveled without her guitar, its case bedecked with bright plastic flowers. She exuded the joy of the good news of Jesus everywhere she went. She had embraced the teachings of Vatican II with great enthusiasm.

The rest of us belonged to a wonderful rainbow coalition of which John and Marjorie were solid bookends. Bob Giza was a brilliant Science teacher who introduced hundreds of students to the wilderness in the Canadian north. He taught them the skills needed to survive in the great outdoors, summer and winter.





David Nazar SJ (1971)

At Neil McNeil we had the benefit of liberally educated men whose sights were turned to the mission of evangelization across a cultural divide. The priests and lay teachers admitted themselves to friendships with the students from quite an array of ethnic and economic backgrounds, despite the yin and yang of their own cultural adjustments, allowing for a very real education to take place — one of the heart and of the mind.

The Lake Timagami adventure

His enthusiasm was such that he persuaded the contingent of Neil teachers, who were born in Italy and raised in Toronto, to venture with him on a winter outing to Lake Timagami. After a nightmare journey on snow-packed roads between six-foot snow banks, they arrived at a log cabin where the temperature inside was the same as outside -23° F.

And it was all downhill from there. There was no espresso available, the vino had frozen, and the cuisine was basic camp-food. The next day was spent ice-fishing with little to show for it except frozen feet and hands. The Italian contingent returned from the trip traumatized.

Now thirty-five years later, they still gather with their wives on a Saturday in mid-winter to relive that famous ice-fishing outing of years gone by. And the stories of the expedition gain with the passage of every year.

Religion lived

The staff of that era made religion something to be lived as well as believed.

The same students who marched in the Rosary Rally also held a candlelight vigil outside the gates of Litton Industries which were involved in the manufacture of cruise missiles. The same students, who gave all of the proceeds of their chocolate campaign, over \$45,000, to famine relief in Africa, prayed kneeling at their desks as a school-mate struggled for life in hospital. The same students, who cleaned up the debris in the local ravine, filled Ted Reeve Arena on Friday nights in support of Neil's hockey teams.

I will never forget the school liturgies. They were prepared with such great care and with so much input from so many talented people that they produced an involvement of the pupils in worship that calls to mind the Masses Pope John Paul II celebrated at World Youth Days.

Thanks to the diversity of the calls which the different staff members had received

Spiritans on Staff

- Fr. Leo Brolly
- Fr. Thomas Clarkin
- Mr. Colum Corrigan
- Fr. Thomas Cromien
- Fr. Michael Doyle
- Fr. Gerald FitzGerald
- Fr. Patrick Fitzpatrick
- Fr. Loughlin Flanagan
- Fr. Peter Fleming
- Fr. Thomas Garvey
- Fr. John Geary
- Fr. Edward Graham
- Fr. Obinna Ifeanyi
- Fr. Bernard Kelly
- Fr. Joseph Kelly
- Fr. Kieran Kenna
- Fr. Conor Kennedy
- Mr. Fintan Kilbride
- Fr. Ian Knox
- Mr. Noel Martin
- Fr. Garry McCarthy
- Fr. William McGough
- Br. George McLoughlin
- Fr. Lennox McPhillip
- Mr. Nicholas Nolan
- Fr. James O'Brien
- Fr. David Okenyi
- Mr. Francis O'Neill
- Fr. Richard Quinn
- Fr. Gerald Scott
- Fr. John Sheppard
- Fr. Michael Smyth
- Fr. Michael Troy

from the Holy Spirit, they were able to create at Neil McNeil a vibrant, living, worshipping, thinking and serving church. It was a church I was fortunate to belong to. It is a church I will always remember. ■

★★★★★ **MICHAEL HERON**

How could any alumnus forget the man who for them was always "Mister Heron"? No nickname, no abbreviation. Even the final farewell handshake at the Grade 13 graduation breakfast was with "Mister Heron".

Mike joined the staff in the second year of its existence and immediately became totally involved with the staff, the pupils, the parents and the school activities. Nothing happened without him being a part of it. His varied gifts were called upon at all times. He had outstanding management skills, boundless energy, wonderful vision, and great leadership qualities. It was no surprise when he was appointed the first lay Vice Principal of Neil, a position he held until retirement.

Mike's idea of a school, like that of Fr. Troy and Dan Dooley, was based on the schools in Ireland, their native land. School life could be fun, but strict discipline, high academic and behavioural standards, service of the community came first.

To come into Grade 9 after the fairly casual atmosphere in elementary school was traumatic. Anyone who had ever had the bony finger pointed at him with the command "Come here, boy" remembers the sensation to this day. The beady eye, the Adam's apple, the grey three-piece suit kept swarms of teenagers focused, on task, and disciplined during the hormonal terrors of Grades 10 and 11.

When the storm was over and the sun began to shine again, it was wonderful to discover how "Mister Heron" had improved and changed over the past two years. He wasn't a lion at all; he was more like a pussy cat.

However, nobody dared to get too familiar. He would always be "Mister Heron".