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We Look Back, We Also Look Ahead

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We Look Back, We Also Look

Peter Fleming CSSp (Principal 1980 – 1991)

Died May 5, 2006, RIP

Extracts from his Principal's messages



Every now and then I take a few minutes and delve into one of the early yearbooks. Usually what was meant to be a “few minutes glance” turns into a rather long and thorough look: “How he has changed.” “I wonder where they are now,” “Did we do that then?” “Didn’t he look young then!”

The boys of then are now “generous sized” mature men who have long since shed the maroon and grey for three-piece suits, designer jeans or whatever is current for men in their thirties, forties and fifties.

Over the years the school has been in existence, many great young men have graced our halls and classrooms. The maroon and grey, albeit at times worn and torn, has not disguised the quality and caliber of the people wearing it. At Neil, we are proud of our Neilers.

We are proud too of our teachers, who combine to have a great impact on those they teach. Their personal example, their Christian witness embody a value system to which we are publicly committed.

Our secretaries bridge the gap between the outside world and ourselves while attending to the myriad administrations which are part of any school.

Granted, our buildings, our plant and our facilities — often battle-worn and scarred — provoke, at times, comments both humorous and cynical. But our maintenance staff makes them as presentable as possible.

“A healthy mind in a healthy body” is a matter of much concern. The healthy body is well catered for by our cafeteria staff who tries to satisfy their customers young and not so young.

Together we touch the lives of our students. Truly we can borrow the McLuhan maxim, “the medium is the message” and

★★★★★ **FR. JOSEPH KELLY CSSp**

Fr. Joe Kelly will be remembered by more alumni of Neil McNeil than any other former staff member. And without exception, these memories will be ones of affection and gratitude.

Joe came to Neil as a teacher in the Business Department in 1968. In his thirty-two years on the staff he taught Religion and Commerce before becoming a full-time Guidance Counsellor and later head of that Department. He was closely associated with the Parents’ Hockey Association which raised funds and provided support in the areas of management and coaching for the school’s extensive hockey program.

But it is not for any of these activities that the alumni will remember Joe. They will remember him for being a compassionate adult to whom any teenager in the throes of adolescent anguish could turn for sympathy and support. Joe’s shoulder was the one they leaned on when parents “didn’t understand”, teachers were “picking on me,” girlfriends were “breaking my heart” and all rules and regulations were “oppressive” or “plain stupid.”

Joe held their hands until in Grade 12 and 13 they found that life was good again, even Mr. Heron the Vice-Principal was nice, their new girlfriend was wonderful, and Neil was a good place to be. And, above all, their parents had finally changed for the better.

Ahead

Andrew Cash (1981)

As a school community we asked ourselves questions about the world's inequalities and injustices. There was nothing dispassionate about our discussions, whether about the bomb or the Church's work in Central and South America. As young people we were being challenged to insert ourselves into the world in a way that would serve the creation of the kingdom of God on earth. This had a considerable effect on me.

John Popiel (1985)

During high school I learned about what was happening in far off lands and the conflicts that were going on in the third world and always wondered why there was injustice in the world. I remember Fintan Kilbride telling us the story of his involvement in the Biafra war in the 1960s and specifically his plane crash.

acknowledge that we are all mediums for the gospel message.

We learn from the past, but we cannot live in it. We build on the strength generated by our predecessors and continue with the same determination and commitment which has guided our school this far. We look back.

We also look ahead. Where will we stand on the value of human life? Will there be a part for us to play in that debate? The environmental issue will become more acute and even critical for the well-being of future generations. Where will we stand?

Will we have compassion and care for the victims of AIDS, for the sick and infirm, the handicapped? Where will we be as part of the global village which is becoming more and more a global economy? What part will we play in breaking down racial prejudices?

Let us hope and pray that all of us will continue to meet the changing challenges of the times. ■

