May 31, 2010

Dear Classmates,

Happy Memorial Day Weekend! Actually, by the time you read this, the weekend will have past. But, since I am writing this on Memorial Day, I could not resist the opportunity to thank all who have served or are serving in our military for the sacrifices they endure to keep our nation safe.

This weekend has also given me the chance to reflect back 25 years to this very weekend when we simultaneously celebrated successfully completing 4 years of undergraduate study at “The Cross”, bid farewell to our Holy Cross family and turned our sights toward new challenges that stood before us. Personally, I cannot believe it has been 25 years (that is, of course, until I look at all those pictures that L.J. Mitchell has posted on Facebook!). There have been several days that I have woken up in a cold sweat because I find myself taking a final exam in a class I have not set foot in all semester only to realize that it is just a bad dream set upon by my Catholic guilt for skipping so many classes when I was at Holy Cross!

But, besides this recurring dream, there are certain other reflections of my time on campus that continue to stay with me – a few of which I would like to share with you now.

**Change is inevitable**

“So, this is what you learned, Stenny, after 25 years?” Not earth shattering, I know, but what never ceases to amaze me is the pace of change that has occurred since we graduated: computers, internet, cell phones… the list goes on. Instead of recounting on all the changes I can come up with, I have one telling example that I think illustrates this point well and even deals with class letters.

For about 10 years (1986-1996), all of you had to endure my periodic class letters as your class co-chairperson. Back then, I would get a phone call from the Holy Cross Development Office informing me that it would be a good idea to send out another class letter. They would send me a pile of “green slips” that classmates had sent in via the US Postal Service. I would then sit down with a legal pad and hand write the letter, utilizing the reams of information contained in those green slips. Once the letter was complete, I would mail it to the Development Office who would have to decipher and transcribe my chicken scratch on their “word processor” before mailing it out to the class.
This time around, I received an email (read on my phone, no less) from Tom Flynn asking if I would be willing to write a class letter. The green slips now are mainly virtual (ok, I don’t have any green slips in front of me, but that is not the point). Gone is my legal pad, replaced by my laptop (which is really lucky for the Development Office since I can’t even read my own handwriting anymore!). Instead of mailing this draft to Holy Cross, I will simply send an electronic copy to Tom who will be able to digitally format it and then distribute – all within a few days (I think!).

Wow, have times changed!

**A Man/Woman for Others**

As evidenced by my recurring dream described earlier in this letter, I never was a strong academic student while at Holy Cross. I enjoyed the classes in my major and the professors, as well, but I have to be honest and say that the strong academic foundation of Holy Cross did not have a real lasting impact on me. The major imprint from our college experience that has remained with me is that the education we received could be used for things greater than personal success or rewards. This ideal was first forged through all the extracurricular activities centered on helping others that were available on campus – the SPUD program, Oxfam and the Mustard Seed, to name just a few. Participating in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius my senior year cemented this philosophy and ideal in my brain. Every day I wake up and try to live that day as a “Man for Others”. Some days I am successful, others I am not. But, I continue to try, and it is worth the fight.

I think that is one of the reasons I stayed in the Navy for 23 years. I had the opportunity to serve in a position whose mission was always greater than one person. Okay, flying in airplanes and seeing the world wasn’t bad either, but you get the picture!

More recently, my wife and I co-founded a charity running team to raise money for melanoma research and awareness. We started our team in Washington, DC in 2008, and are now in our third season while expanding teams in to the cities of Denver, CO and Hartford, CT. To date, we have raised over $200,000 to fight this deadly disease.

I don’t just see this ideal in myself. It seems every time I turn around, there is another classmate is personifying this philosophy. Katie Curran’s recent class letter is just the latest example and once again demonstrated to me that my Holy Cross education was so much larger than the academic classroom.

**A Lasting Bond**

By the time we graduated, my parents swore I bled purple. Unfortunately, unlike many of you who were able to stay around in the Boston area and even room with former classmates, I had to sever ties pretty quickly from the Cross and even Massachusetts. Two days after graduation, I headed down to flight school for the Navy. A few of our classmates were down there, as well, but we were pretty well spread among different classes and training squadrons.

Couple this with the fact that I am not what you would call your best correspondent, my interaction with Holy Cross friends dwindled from weekly to monthly to the annual Christmas card (at best) over the next several years. The bond I feel for these same people, however, has not changed. My wife is always amazed how I can run into former classmates in the strangest places (like a rest stop on the Pennsylvania
turnpike or in the Dallas-Ft Worth airport). What amazes her even more is that we can pick up a conversation like we just left Holy Cross weeks ago.

On Memorial Day weekend 25 years ago, my dad told me that I may not be able to understand it now, but that I should feel grateful that I was feeling so bummed about leaving Holy Cross. That statement has stuck with me all these years because I truly am grateful. I spent four years in an environment that really helped me grow, surrounded by classmates and friends who helped shape the person I have become today. To me, there is no greater and lasting bond.

I look forward to seeing all of you at reunion,

Stenny