

WE ARE ALL TRUE CARMELITES

By Judith Cannavo McKeever

“The goal of the Carmelite tradition of Catholic education is to instill in students the desire to become fully integrated spiritually, intellectually, physically and socially.”¹

“The men pictured on these pages have dedicated themselves to helping us find our goal in society... They are eager to establish within us the fundamentals of Christian living; eager to do their part in producing staunch Christian citizens... This is our faculty.”²

I’m not much of a gambler but I bet you might find it difficult to figure out the source of those very similar quotes without looking at the footnotes. And you know why? Because, although one statement was written more than 50 years before the other, they both describe the purpose and goal of a Carmelite education and as the title of this article suggests – we are all true Carmelites.

I am a very lucky lady. My late husband, Marlin McKeever, and his twin brother Mike graduated from Mt. Carmel High School in 1957. My late brother, Dean Cannavo, graduated from Crespi Carmelite High School in 1970. I was privileged to live in the company of these men of Carmel and witnessed first-hand the way their Carmelite education guided their lives and the value they placed on the four years they spent under the tutelage of the Carmelite priests, brothers and lay faculty.

The Carmelite Fathers founded Mt. Carmel and Crespi Carmelite High Schools with a single goal in mind, i.e., to establish all-male college preparatory schools where a “disciplined yet supportive setting [exists] in which boys can focus on academic and spiritual study and athletic achievement in a single sex environment.”³ You had classmates from different social, ethnic and economic backgrounds yet you all came together as men of Carmel. You were joined by parents, friends and family members who reveled in your academic achievements (“my son the nuclear physicist!”), cheered for you in your athletic pursuits (how many CIF, Catholic League and Mission League championships do these two schools hold?), prayed with you and for you, and expended effort, time and money to support you in your endeavor to become a Christian citizen, fully integrated spiritually, intellectually, physically and socially.

In his letter to the Mt. Carmel Class of 1957 graduates, Fr. Eugene McCallum, Principal, said, “The future, whatever it may mean for you, will be competitive...We hope that this [competitive] spirit will show itself in the lives you lead after Carmel – that they will be truly Catholic and truly holy.”⁴ I suspect that all prior and successive principals of Mt. Carmel and Crespi Carmelite expected all men of Carmel to be united in purpose and love of their education, to be loyal and supportive of each other and to present those qualities in all aspects of their personal and professional lives serving each other, their schools and the communities in which they live and work.

Following his graduation from Crespi Carmelite, my brother attended the University of Notre Dame. In his course of study there, he met people from all over the world. However, he chose to focus on our Italian heritage and opted for a year of study in Rome. After he graduated from Notre Dame, Dean chose the restaurant industry as his career of choice. Throughout his career, he maintained the friendships he developed at Crespi and Notre Dame and catered numerous events for charitable endeavors as varied as the friends who requested his talents. His last rites and memorial service were presided over by Fr. Peter Liuzzi, O.Carm, Mt. Carmel Class of 1957. Testimonials noted my brother’s generosity of spirit and equal treatment of everyone with whom he came in contact. That principle was taught in our home by our parents but built upon by the Carmelites, especially Br. Francis Otto.

My late husband always told me that the most influential people in his life were his father, Bill McKeever, Coach Vince Lombardi for whom he played and the Carmelite priests and brothers who educated him. Marlin also told me that the happiest years of his life were with Mike at Mt. Carmel and USC. After Mike's death, Marlin regarded fellow Mt. Carmel grad, Kermit Alexander, as his twin brother here on earth. Dick Mora, a friend with whom the McKeever twins attended St. Paul the Apostle and Mt. Carmel, served as best man at our wedding. Marlin and I were married in a Carmelite Monastery. And Kermit honored Marlin by asking him to be his best man at his wedding to Tami a few years ago. Marlin's last rites were administered by Fr. Tom Schrader, O. Carm. and his funeral Mass was con-celebrated by Fr. Gus Carter, O. Carm. and Fr. Schrader, O. Carm.

Besides the well-known antics on and off the football field, there was a quality of Marlin McKeever people knew and loved – if you could get past his menacing scowl. If I were to summarize it in one word, it would be loyalty. He was a man of Carmel and wore that moniker proudly. He was intensely loyal to the Carmelites. He attended Crespi Carmelite football games, donated funds to the Crespi Carmelite Scholarship Program, co-chaired the Fr. Nagle Padre Golf Tournament, convinced me to volunteer at the golf tournaments, and attended the annual St. Patrick's Day luncheon hosted by Crespi Carmelite in honor of Mt. Carmel alumni.

Do you see a pattern here? I do.

As a man of Carmel, you are a “lifelong learner, a productive and mature person, and a moral and spiritual person.”⁵ These are qualities that each of you learned and valued while at Mt. Carmel. They are the same qualities the Carmelite Fathers teach at Crespi Carmelite. They are the qualities that drive the spirit behind the Mt. Carmel Steering Committee, hosts of the Mt. Carmel Hall of Fame and supporters of the Crespi Carmelite Scholarship/Capital Campaign. They are the qualities that drive the spirit behind the Mt. Carmel Alumni Foundation and its support of the inner city schools' participation in the Catholic Schools Academic Junior High School Decathlon and the Padre Golf Tournament. These are universal qualities whether you graduated from Mt. Carmel or Crespi Carmelite. These are universal qualities that inspire us to support the dreams and goals of Mt. Carmel and Crespi Carmelite High School.

As I said at the start, I am a very lucky lady. The memories of my husband and brother are alive and close at hand. Those memories come to life in this publication when I read of academic accomplishments of St. Odilia School; when I cheered the Crespi Carmelite Celts in their quest for a football championship this past season; and when I prayed with Fr. Gus Carter, Fr. Albert Koppes, Fr. Tom Schrader, Fr. Peter Liuzzi, Fr. Paul Henson and other men of Carmel at the Mt. Carmel Hall of Fame Luncheon.

“May we, under the Mantle of Mary, always live up to the principles of life that the Carmelite Fathers and Brothers have attempted to foster in us. When wearing Mary's Scapular, no matter where we are or what we are doing, we will be assured of being true Carmelites.”⁶

¹Crespi Carmelite High School Mission Statement

²El Conquistador 1957

³Crespi Carmelite High School Capital/Scholarship Campaign Material

⁴El Conquistador 1957

⁵Crespi Carmelite High School Capital/Scholarship Campaign Material

⁶Thomas J. Arnerich, Mt. Carmel High School Student Body President, June 1957