



OLW Alumni Newsletter

May 2016

Three Generations of OLW Graduates

In honor of the Feast of Our Lady of the Wayside on May 24 and the ground breaking for the school in 1953, we want to highlight one family that includes three generations of OLW graduates.

Mike Saelens - 1957
John Saelens - 1963
Frank Saelens - 1966
Jean Saelens Orecchio - 1981
Tricia Saelens Dieck - 1983
Chris Saelens O'Keefe - 1985
Joe Orecchio - 2011
Kate Orecchio - 2014
Dave Orecchio - 2018.



OLW in the late 70's and early 80's

Jean (class of 1981), Tricia (class of 1983), and Chris (class of 1985) - all daughters of Mike Saelens - reminisce about OLW when they attended.

Talk about the uniform:

Jean and Tricia: We may have started off with just a blue jumper in grade school, but then they switched to the same uniform plaid as they have now.

All: For the girls' middle school uniforms, we had to wear a "wesket". It was a blue pullover vest made of polyester. We always had to wear a white blouse (no golf shirts). And we

OLW in the late 50's and mid 60's

We asked Mike, John and Frank Saelens - all students in the first years at OLW - what they remember at OLW.

Mike Saelens is a 1957 graduate. He started at OLW when he was in sixth grade and the school first opened in August 1954. Mike's recollection of the brand new school building is that it was "large, clean and modern, especially coming from an old school house at St James." Classrooms were on the first floor and the temporary church was on the lower level. Classes were taught by very strict Dominican Sisters who dressed in full habits. Father O'Hara, the pastor and founder, was a taskmaster and also quite stern. There was no gym class or playground. Our current parking lot used to be a field where the students played baseball at recess.

In the late 50's and early 60's, students did not switch classrooms, even in middle school grades. They stayed in their homerooms and the homeroom teacher taught religion, reading, math, and writing; there was no music, art, library, technology or gym class. When Mike was in school, there were no sports teams. He served as a Patrol Boy (crossing guard) which was considered a position of honor because your classmates voted you to this. Clapping out erasers and taking out the garbage were great service jobs for students because you could leave the classroom.

Mike feels that today OLW is "organized, focused and developed." Mike and his wife, Greta, a retired OLW teacher, live close to OLW and are active in the parish.

John Saelens, class of 1963, started at OLW as a first grader- there was no kindergarten at OLW yet. The Dominican Sisters were still teaching and living in the old convent, but more lay teachers were part of the faculty. There were no non-core classes yet, such as art, gym or music classes, but the field had become a parking lot.

weren't allowed to wear pants or gym shoes.

Chris: What I remember about the pleated skirt is it was very time consuming to iron. It had about 50 narrow pleats in it and by the time we hit junior high, my mom made us iron our own skirts!

Jean: The worst was the gym uniform. It was a one piece uniform that zipped up the front.

Tricia: So unflattering!

What were art, library, gym and music classes like?

Jean: We had Mrs. Ziliak for music. We had to practice music for mass and we weren't allowed to leave until we had it right. We also had to practice quietly lowering and raising the kneelers. I don't remember having Art.

Tricia: I vividly recall having art class in 5th grade. They also occasionally brought someone in to teach a creative writing class.

Chris: We met for music once a week with Mrs. Ziliak. She could get the students singing their hardest at Friday afternoon masses. "Though the Mountains Will Fall" was always a favorite song that the students wanted to sing. She was an amazing music teacher and I have fond memories of the program. I still remember some of her voice exercises. "Tee Tee Tee Tee Ta Ta Do Do Do..."

Chris: There were some very competitive games of dodgeball, kickball and softball during PE. I also remember using the dollies a lot across the gym floor and racing back and forth.

What traditions do you remember that OLW still carries on?

Jean: The traditions have remained a constant. The Christmas show, Cotillion, Spring Fling, and May Crowning all have remained the same. But we used to have hot dog day instead of pizza day.

Tricia: Hot dog day was awesome. The Christmas Show was amazing; every year, they picked an 8th grader to narrate it. It was really beautiful.

Chris: The Christmas Show was run by Mrs. Ziliak. Students definitely looked forward to the two night performances. Each grade would sing one religious song and one popular song. It was a big deal to be chosen for small parts in the show like the narrator, a Santa, xylophone players, bells, triangle, drums, etc. Cotillion was a chance for kids to learn their fox trot and square dancing. Mrs. Frasier taught us in the rectory. There was a big dance at the end of the year where you showed off your skills. Hard to imagine that the music was played on a record player!

What's your favorite memory?

Jean: I can't say I have one favorite memory as it is more about the environment and community of OLW. During the month of May, the smell of flowers would be everywhere as each classroom had a shrine to Mary with

Father O'Hara was still strict and the boys were happy to get the jobs that let them leave the classroom and the school building, such as clapping out erasers and taking out the garbage.

The school uniform was a light blue shirt with dark pants, with khaki pants allowed in the spring and fall. No shorts were permitted. When John reached junior high, there were boys' basketball teams. He participated in Cotillion which was the same format as it is today - monthly dance lessons with a Spring Fling big bash at the end of the Cotillion term. Boys wore sport coats and ties and the girls wore gloves with their dresses.

John Saelens is a classmate of Miss Martha Cavers, who taught at OLW for 37 years and is retiring this June. He is retired and living "the good life" in Virginia.

Frank Saelens graduated from OLW in 1966. By now, the curriculum included music and art. Music was taught in your homeroom and focused mostly on hymns. On Tuesdays, Father O'Hara made the students sing hymns until they were "exactly right." Mrs. Drolet accompanied them on the organ in Church. Art was a short class once a week. Frank played basketball and now there were cheerleaders at the games. Frank participated in the Christmas program, which included all grades. He also participated in Cotillion lessons. Frank is grateful that he learned to dance while at OLW because it helped him "get a lot of dates in high school."

He remembers the sisters fondly and recalls that all the teachers, especially the nuns, were very caring. They really tried to understand each child. Frank sees a similarity between the care and attention that teachers give to each child now as when he was in school. Catholic school teachers want to be in a Catholic school environment and it shows in how they work individually with each student. He notices that today's teachers don't think about the students as a 'good kid or a bad kid,' but as an individual student that needs help.

All three Saelens brothers agree that May Crowning was an important ceremony from the school's earliest days, just as it is now. They also all remember going to church weekly (or more often) and say that it had a lasting impact on developing their faith. Frank wishes that students went to Mass weekly now. "I hated it at the time, but it made me who I am today," he said.

Frank is "not quite retired" and lives in Arlington Heights.

Modern Day OLW

OLW today has changed a lot academically, but still maintains many traditions that OLW alumni remember so

fresh cut flowers from the yard (lilacs, cherry blossoms, etc.).

Tricia: I loved the Christmas program. My mom always made us a cute outfit for it. I remember one year, my grade played Little Drummer Boy on Glockenspiels and I was asked by Mrs. Ziliak to play the finger symbols. I felt so excited and proud.

Chris: I will always remember the songs from May Crowning: "Bring flowers of the rarest" and "Gentle Woman". The students voted who they thought should be in court and who should be the wreath bearer and crowner. It was a very honest and sincere vote and not a popularity contest.

What do you think OLW taught you?

Jean: It is important to be part of a community that you actively engage in by volunteering, sharing and praying.

Tricia: I really value being surrounded by people with similar values and sharing our faith. It was a wonderful community. I taught at public schools for two years and then returned to Catholic schools. Catholic schools provide such a strong sense of community.

Chris: OLW provided me with a sense of community and family. It also instilled the importance of volunteering, reverence and service.

Jean is VP and Corporate Controller at True Value, She and her three children live near OLW and they enjoy Notre Dame football and the Blackhawks.

Tricia lives in Tampa with her husband and three children. She followed in her mothers footsteps and became a teacher. Currently, she is the elementary curriculum specialist at a preK-12 Catholic school.

Chris and her husband live in Mill Valley, CA with their four childre. They enjoy spending time on the mountain and exploring Northern California.

fondly. Cotillion, Spring Fling and May Crowning are very special events for the 8th graders. The entire school participates in May Crowning and the second graders lead the procession in their communion dresses and suits. Crowning of Mary is done by an eighth grader who is chosen by their peers.

The school still performs a Christmas program, but over the years it transitioned from all grades participating to only the even grades. This year, with the introduction of a new choir program, second grade and fourth through eighth graders performed Christmas favourites. 2016 also brought the inaugural OLW Musical, which we hope will become a long-time tradition.

There are several sports teams now - boys' and girls' cross country, track, basketball and volleyball, plus girls' cheerleading and softball. There are other activities for students, such as student council, robotics, Scholastic Bowl, Band, and the Literary Paper, the Wildcat Roar.

Academics have changed as well. Some classrooms use iPads and laptop computers. All students go into the tech lab throughout the year for keyboarding and some testing. The tech lab and the library share the space on the first floor that used to be the temporary church and then became the lunch room. OLW has many longtime teachers who share their love of learning with our students. On yearly school surveys, parents routinely call out the caring teachers and school community as one of their reasons for choosing OLW for their children.

Joe, Kate, and Dave Orecchio are the third generation of Saelens' to attend OLW.

Some memories that three Orecchio children share are: the preschool Mother's Day Tea, the 1st grade and 5th grade service jobs like milk delivery, patrol, and lunch monitor. They also remember friends, teachers and community - these are similar recollection of many OLW alumni.

Dave, class of 2018, is in sixth grade and enjoys switching classes and eating lunch in the gym. His favorite memories so far include Spirit Days during Catholic Schools Week and playing basketball in 5th and 6th grade so far.

Kate, class of 2014, is a sophomore at St. Viator, and remembers going to the University of Illinois in seventh grade for the State Science fair with a large group of classmates.

Joe, class of 2011, is a freshman at University of Notre Dame and 2015 graduate of St. Viator. He says, "OLW forced me to find good study habits to prepare me for more intense homework later on. This is a community that feels

like home."

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