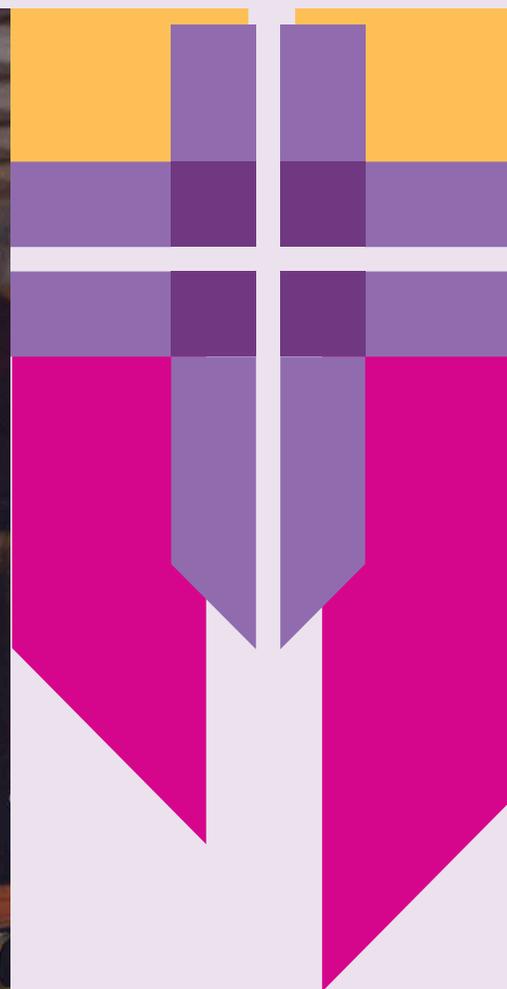


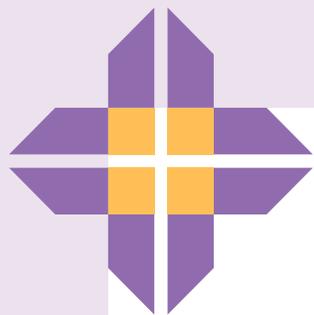


Billy Collins '63



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The “Amazing” Class of '63

BY MICHELLE M. MURPHY



It was one of those odd coincidences that struck people only after the plans were made: This spring, two different New York Leadership Council events featured speakers from the very same class at Holy Cross — Billy Collins, the U.S. Poet Laureate from 2001-03, and Paul LeClerc, the president and chief executive officer of The New York Public Library.

“No other alum has ever held either of these unique positions in our society, and it’s ironic that both men are not only from Holy Cross, but are also from the class of ‘63,” says Pat McCarthy, director of alumni relations, general secretary of the General Alumni Association (GAA), and a member of the Class of ‘63 himself. “This says a lot about the nature of the entire class.”

Indeed, although every Holy Cross class produces some celebrities, captains of industry, or both, the Class of ‘63 includes a striking number who have made their mark in business, academia, medicine, law, the arts, or, in service to others. In addition to Collins and LeClerc, for example, the class includes College Trustee and Cornerstone member Jeremiah O’Connor, founder, CEO, and chairman of the global real estate company, The O’Connor Group. It includes *The New Yorker* cartoonist Leo Cullum; the television journalist Tony Guida; and the businessman John Peterman, known not only for his J. Peterman catalogue company, but also for the character on the television show, *Seinfeld*.

What’s more, this class has remained unusually close since graduation — maybe even closer, some say, than they were at graduation. Consistent, newsy letters from class scribes Charlie Buchta and Mike Toner have nurtured this bond, well-attended reunions help cement it, and an understanding borne just from living life, similarly but separately, may have kindled friendships that never existed before.

Take LeClerc and Collins. “We weren’t close at Holy Cross,” LeClerc says of Collins. “I was totally intimidated by him. He cut a very dramatic figure as an undergraduate: intense, highly individualistic, like a romantic artist in the flesh. ... Now, I know he’s a very, very sweet and wonderful man.”

“I was part of a clique or cabal of malcontents, pretentious and sardonic malcontents,” recalls Collins, who is retiring this year after teaching at New York’s Lehman College for 30 years. “We were a tightly knit

but not very well-liked group of literary snobs and jazz lovers. ... I’m still friends with many of them: John Whalen, Peter Cox, Dan Cosgrove, Tony Libby, Chris Zacher.” The late Tom Wallace was also part of that crew, he adds.

“Time has a way of unifying or separating further whatever issues there might have been in the class,” observes McCarthy. “By the 25th reunion, issues that affect all of us have probably hit home for most people: Divorce. Illness. Success with kids. Trouble with kids. They all come to a head by the 25th. The brightest or the best may not have been the most successful, and the lowest (from the class) may be at the top of the heap. And it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter. You just wish you knew that sooner.”

In fact, it was right after their 25th reunion that the Class of ‘63 began something that has since been mimicked by other classes: It set up its own class foundation, a formal 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity, to receive donations and to distribute money to classmates in need. The inspiration for this fund was Kevin Lawler, a classmate who’d been a basketball standout at Xavier High School in New York, but who now struggles with multiple sclerosis. Several of his friends, including Buchta and Peter O’Connor, got the fund off the ground and used the initial contributions to buy and equip a handicapped van for the Lawler family. The cover of the spare tire is emblazoned with the Holy Cross seal. “The van made an extraordinary change in Kevin’s life,” says Buchta.

Since then, ongoing donations have replenished the fund, and help has been given to other classmates

with emergency needs. “When we ask for contributions, no one has ever said ‘no,’” says O’Connor, who remains on the class fund board.

So how to explain this unique group? Could it have been something in the water in the early 1960s? Or was it something more, and more complicated?

Classmates agree that it’s impossible to pinpoint just one secret ingredient; rather, they say, it was probably a combination of things, an unusual alchemy of influences both on The Hill — and off.

For one thing, these men entered the “old” Holy Cross — it was still a somewhat insular, single-sex, predominantly Irish Catholic institution that prohibited cars on campus (except for fourth-year students) and required students to attend Mass every day at 7 a.m.

“You knew to ‘sit wider’ (at Mass) than you were, to let another guy sleep in,” recalls Dan Cronin with a chuckle. “A big part of it was the all-male thing ... we went to basketball games together, rallies, the NIT. And because a lot of us had grown up in New York, we knew each other even before we went to Holy Cross.”

“One of the things that Holy Cross did was to kind of wrap this whole class up together in Saran Wrap,” says LeClerc. “You always lived basically together with your class. Ate with your classmates. Only took classes with your classmates. So it was inevitable that you would know everyone at least by face, if not by name. There was a built-in cohesion ... but that was true for all the classes. We were no different.”

Veteran New York radio and television journalist Tony Guida says his friendships with classmates were the greatest gifts of his Holy Cross education. “We have attended the triumphs and failures of each other’s lives. Our bond feels more like family than friendship.”

“These common things cut across class status,” adds O’Connor. “We were sort of like a family; people were concerned about each other. Those memories, those experiences, have had good value throughout our entire life.”

Another unifying factor was sports. Lots of sports. And the Class of ’63 excelled in sports. “Those were the days in which Holy Cross, as small as it was, played major

sports — we played Syracuse in football, for instance,” recalls Buchta. “We had some really, really good guys ... who made their mark when they were only sophomores. That was one of the places where the Class of ’63 began to have an impact, when you began to notice we were there — on the playing fields.” Several members of the class — including Al Snyder, Dennis Golden, Tom Hennessey and Peterman — were drafted by professional football or baseball teams after graduation.

Plus, these men came to college at a unique moment in history.

“We entered Holy Cross in the fall of 1959 at the end of a passing era and graduated in 1963 at the beginning of a new one,” says Golden. “In many ways, we were a transition class, spanning the threshold between the traditional, classical Holy Cross education and the period of campus-based and worldwide changes that soon followed — i.e., curricular enhancements, revisions in campus rules and regulations, election of President John F. Kennedy, Vatican II and Vietnam. So in that way there was something different about our class and the timing of our college years.”

“That class was an amazingly tight class for that time, a very proud class,” adds Bob Morrison. “There were a lot of really fine people in the group, and (the class) always seemed much more together. I’m not sure exactly why. But the result was such that we called ourselves the ‘amazing class of ’63.’”

“*Time* HAS A WAY OF UNIFYING OR SEPARATING FURTHER WHATEVER ISSUES THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN THE CLASS, ... BY THE *25th* REUNION, *issues* THAT AFFECT ALL OF US HAVE PROBABLY HIT HOME FOR MOST PEOPLE: DIVORCE. ILLNESS. SUCCESS WITH KIDS. TROUBLE WITH KIDS. THEY ALL COME TO A HEAD BY THE 25TH.

PAT MCCARTHY '63
DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI RELATIONS AND GENERAL
SECRETARY OF THE GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



Here are some glimpses into the lives of the many accomplished men from that “amazing” class. ...

Billy Collins was an only child who came to Holy Cross from Archbishop Stepinac High School in White Plains, N.Y. “You were pretty much channeled in those days into Catholic colleges,” he says. “And there was a pretty well-beaten path between that high school and Holy Cross.”



Billy Collins

He didn’t exactly cover himself with academic glory once he got there, though: “At the end of freshman year I had a D in Greek and an F in French — the first D and F I ever had in my life. ... It was the typical adjustment from high school to college, when you’re not quite ready to take on these responsibilities, and you were acting pretty much like the high school bonehead you were.”

Before long, though, Collins found his niche with other literary types on campus, and ultimately became editor of *The Purple* — the first place that printed his poetry. Since then, of course, he’s published a bit more — seven books’ worth, in fact, all written during his three decades as a professor at Lehman College, part of the City University of New York. (He earned his Ph.D. at the University of California.)

It’s a career that he secretly aspired to but never really imagined he’d have. “Writers to us were gods. They were gods,” he says. “There were a lot of romantic figures at the time ... who gave you some kind of dream that you could do something with this late-adolescent confusion and take this tortured soul of yours and turn it into something noble and maybe profitable.”

Several of his Holy Cross professors remain vivid to him: “Ed Callahan, who was one of the few laypeople at the time — he taught modern literature. He was a good role model. Fr. Eugene McCarthy was a vigorous teacher of literature. And Fr. Thomas Grace — he was an Oxford-educated medievalist. He was rather remote and removed. To us, that was very attractive. We held him in hushed reverence.”



Dan Cronin

Although he’d be embarrassed by the term, classmates consider **Dan Cronin** their very own profile in courage. A track star at New York’s Xavier High School as well as at Holy Cross, Cronin was hit by sniper fire in Vietnam in 1967 — and has been a paraplegic ever since.

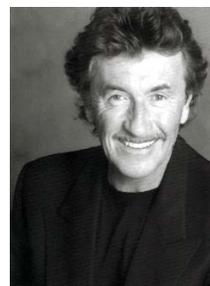
“After I got shot, I was in a coma for three days,” he recalls. “When I woke up, I knew I was in bad shape. There was a priest there. I think my education gave me the intelligence, the insight, to accept what had happened. My faith, too — but I’d had that since I was a little kid.”

After decades in New York, Cronin now lives in California, where he excels at a wide range of wheelchair sports and volunteers at the Veterans Administration hospital. “I never really felt that the chair was that big of an obstacle,” he says. “I go everywhere. ... I try to talk with (other disabled veterans), let them know it’s not the end of the world.”

His one word for the Holy Cross experience? “I would say ‘education,’” he says. “Seeing guys from different parts of the country, how they handled different situations, how they applied themselves to different problems. You learned from the people around you. I think that was more important to me than the academics.”

Like many Holy Cross students before him (and since), **Leo Cullum** was a graduate of St. Peter’s Prep in Jersey City, N.J. His father had also been a Crusader.

“Living with a group of fun, aggressive guys gave me the confidence to enter the Marine Corps,” recalls Cullum, who now lives in Malibu, Calif. “Although I wasn’t in touch with any of my classmates while I was in Vietnam, I was in an F4 squadron with three other Holy Cross graduates — and this was out of a group of 40 officers!”



Leo Cullum

Later, Cullum worked for 34 years as a pilot for TWA (he retired in 2002), while simultaneously churning out more than 1,000 cartoons for *The New Yorker* magazine. In fact, *Newsweek* credits him with being the person who brought a smile back to America’s face after 9/11, with

a cartoon depicting a well-dressed woman sitting at a bar next to a man in a loud plaid blazer. The caption: “I thought I’d never laugh again. Then I saw your jacket.” Some of Cullum’s cartoons have been collected in three books: *Scotch and Toilet Water*, *Tequila Mockingbird*, and the forthcoming *Cockatiels for Two*.

A handful of men drew Bayside, N.Y., native **Dennis Golden**, to Holy Cross: Thomas Lennon ’27 (who also became his father-in-law), Robert Daughters ’37, and Bill Stetter ’50.



Dennis Golden

Golden, a scholarship athlete at Holy Cross, was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys but served in the Marine Corps from 1963-66. After earning his Ph.D. at Boston College, he began a career in higher education — he has been the president of Fontbonne University in St. Louis since 1995.

“For me, Holy Cross was transformative,” he says. “As a student-athlete, I am especially grateful because Holy Cross offered me the opportunity to get my college education, and it was made crystal clear that I was a STUDENT-athlete. ... I think of my Holy Cross classmates and the Jesuits every day of my life. The environment was educationally strong, values-based, faith-filled, Christ-centered, and other-directed. We learned our life lessons well on The Hill.”

Paul LeClerc, the Sorbonne- and Columbia-educated leader of one of the most important libraries in the world, came to Holy Cross on an academic scholarship — and promptly lost it.

“I got creamed freshman year,” he says. “I was a premed bio major, and there were certain things for which I now realize I never had much talent: physics, inorganic chemistry, biology.”

Although he really wanted to study French, it was “unthinkable” at the time to change majors — so it wasn’t until he graduated that he began pursuing his true interest. “I was lucky that Fr. Desautels gave me perfect advice: spend the summer in Paris, study at the Sorbonne for a year, and then enroll in the Ph.D. program at Columbia University.” By the time he was 25, he was teaching full time at Union College. “I have to say I’ve been sort of a prodigal son,” he continues.



Paul LeClerc

“The 40th reunion was the first I attended. And it was important to me to see Fr. Desautels again, to thank him for what he did for me. Everything I’ve done has evolved as a consequence of the inspiration he gave to me.”



Bob Morrison

The first time **Bob Morrison** ever set foot on the Holy Cross campus was the first day of freshman year. “And I only lived 26 miles away!” says Morrison, who came from Wellesley. A public school graduate, he’d decided to use his Naval ROTC scholarship at Holy Cross.

“I took the random walk through the early part of life,” he recalls. “I liked to read. I thought I could write pretty well. I didn’t really like math. And I had zero idea of what I wanted to do. So I majored in English.”

After a four-year stint in the Marines, he went to Wharton for an M.B.A., and began a career that started in a training program at Procter & Gamble and ended, eventually, in the top jobs of three different companies: PepsiCo (vice chair, from which he retired in 2003); The Quaker Oats Company (chairman, president and chief executive officer until it merged with PepsiCo in 2001); and Kraft, Inc. (chairman and chief executive officer).

“I didn’t do really well at Holy Cross — it was very demanding,” he says. “I was not a great student. I graduated with an average that now would never get me a job. But I started to grow up there.

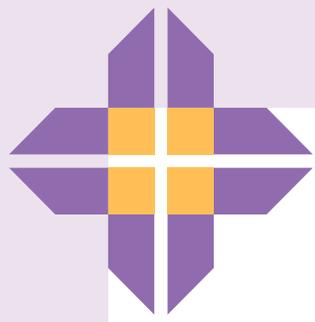
“I’m a big believer in liberal arts,” he continues, “even though I cannot tell you what studying Descartes, or Kant, or reading more Shakespeare than I wanted to, or wading through Ulysses ... did for me, other than that I’ve found that in the rest of my life I’m probably a little more broad in terms of my interests. It formed a terrific foundation for everything else.”

Peter O’Connor so treasures his Holy Cross education that he makes it a point to keep his classmates in his life, all the time — and they seem happy to be there. For example, about two dozen traveled to South Jersey in April to see him receive the first annual “Peter J. O’Connor Social Justice Award” from the Diocese of Camden, given in honor of his lifelong



Peter O’Connor

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Campaign I *The Scene*

LIFT HIGH THE CROSS



Ann Marie and Bill Teuber '73, P'02 and Rose and John Mahoney '73, P'00, hosted distinguished, regent and benefactor members of President's Council for the 5th consecutive year, at the Ritz Carlton in Boston. Among the guests were, from top, left to right: Kevin Moran '77, Brian Leary '77, and Sean Teague '78; Joe '64 and Judie Levis; Michael Shanahan '78 and Frank Vellaccio P'07, P'97; Inez and Tom Moore '65, P'95; Sharon and Dennis Hanson '76; Ann Marie, Bill '73, and Christine Teuber '02, Patrick O'Donnell '02, Fr. McFarland, S.J., Michael Mahoney '00, Crista Carrick '02, John '73 and Rose Mahoney; Karen and John Andreoli '82.

MAY 13, RITZ CARLTON HOTEL, BOSTON



photos by John Gillooly



The Leadership Council honored Billy Collins '63, the U.S. Poet Laureate from 2001-03, at its annual dinner fund-raiser, held at the New York Palace Hotel. The evening's event helped fund 20 student internships in leading businesses and not-for-profits in the New York area. Among the attendees were, from top, left to right: Judy Ainlay P'05, Jim Grogan '76, Stephen Ainlay P'05, and Heidi Brake Smith '82; Gene '51 and Gretchen Grisanti, and Dick Ahern '51; Joan Hogan Gillman '85, Billy Collins, Bill Phelan '73, and Ken Padgett '66; Tom Carey '83 and Patricia Haylon '83; Megan Barclay '97 and Tony Barclay '70; Ruth Ann and Greg Fleming '80, Elizabeth Sprague '80, and Rick and Regina Patterson, both Class of 1980.



MAY 25, NEW YORK PALACE HOTEL