

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

October 2003

DIARY OF A HEADMASTER *by Michael J. McKenna*

Dear Gentle Readers,

I've been asked to give you a break from the heavy fare typical of my lead article, so here's a light recounting of our first Senior Grand Tour to Europe from this past June. Enjoy!

June 9, 2003—

Met the group from Seattle at Dulles Airport prior to our departure and felt the instant camaraderie. Twenty-one of us total traveling to Greece. The energy among the group is palpable. *Lord, keep us in your care and protection.*

June 10—Arrived safely in Athens and smoothly transferred to the hotel, situated in the heart of the city, directly beneath the Acropolis. The view is awe-inspiring! After a decent meal in the hotel's rooftop restaurant (everyone knows I'm only here for the food!), Tim McCoy and I head off for a walk through the Plaka. We stop at a small taverna next to the ruins of a Roman marketplace and, as we stare up at the luminescent Parthenon, talk with our waiters about the ancient Greek civilization and what it means to them. "Nothing!" replies the younger of the two. "It's just rocks." The elder, however, had a deeper appreciation for his ancient forebears, for which I was grateful. *Lord, may our students develop a deep and abiding appreciation for the culture they have inherited.*



LORD, TEACH US TRUE HUMILITY.

June 11—Change of plans. We were supposed to tour Athens' city center this afternoon, but a large demonstration has been arranged to protest a new landfill ("Not in our backyard!"), so we have to do the tour this morning. Our guide complains vociferously about the inconvenience of it all. "Do they need permission?" I inquire. "Of course!" comes the reply. "Then why don't they just deny them permission?" I ask. "That would not be *democratic!*" comes the only Greek response I can imagine. Our guide, Christina, is a gem! Her knowledge of Greece and its culture is boundless. Spent the afternoon examining the Acropolis, Mars Hill, and the Agora. To walk where

Paul and Aristotle walked is a great gift! *Father in Heaven, thank you for your hand of protection thus far. May our students learn a great deal from Christina and their journey as a whole.*

June 12—A day trip to Delphi today. Traffic in Athens is miserable, so it takes us over an hour to get to the city limits. After three hours we arrive in Delphi, the center of the world in Ancient Greek cosmology. It was here that kings from the known world came to request (*pay for!*) prophecies from the Delphic Oracle. She would wash in a nearby spring, chew laurel leaves, take her seat on a tripod situated over a vaporous chasm breathing in the fumes, and then begin to utter her syllables, which were then interpreted by the priests. These obscure messages were then relayed to the patrons, whose responsibility it was to interpret the prophecy's true meaning. The larger the sum paid into the treasury, the better and more quickly forthcoming the prophecy. We wondered how such a civilized and advanced people could believe in such shams as this. Surely we know better. But then...don't the halls of governments operate in much the same manner today? *Lord, teach us true humility.*

Dinner at a Greek restaurant in the Plaka this evening, complete with traditional Greek bouzouki music and dancing. The guitar player was miserably out of tune and, worse yet, completely unaware of it (his toupee was nothing to write home

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about either!), and we could've passed on the belly dancer (that's another story), but, all in all, it was a pleasant evening.

June 13—A very busy day today as we leave Athens for good and travel on to Ancient Corinth. The Greek city of Corinth no longer exists, as the Romans razed it in the 1st century B.C., and rebuilt it in the 1st century AD. The ruins one visits today are, therefore, Roman ruins, not Greek. (It is for this reason that Corinth is Christina's least favorite place on our itinerary!) Corinth is situated at the crossroads between the Aegean and Ionian Seas, making it an important commercial center during Paul's day. Being here, it's easier to see why he would come to this place and stay. Corinth would bring him into contact with people from all over the known world, a more effective way to spread the gospel.

After Corinth, it's on to Mycenae, some of the oldest ruins of Ancient Greece. The stones in the wall leading into the city are so massive, it's unimaginable how such an ancient civilization could not only get them here from the surrounding mountains, but also fit them into place! (It's known as the Cyclopean wall, as myth has it that only the Cyclops was strong enough to move the stones.)

From Mycenae we travel on to Epidaurus, where there is a Greek theatre in almost perfectly preserved condition. The amazing thing is the acoustics of the theater. From the 55th row back, one can hear, as though he were right up close, a whisper, a dime drop, and a piece of paper tear! The ancients were miraculous engineers! David and Justin's rendition of *Me and My Shadow* was inspired as well! From here we take a short trip to our hotel. Fortunately, after such a hot, tiring day, this hotel has a pool, which our group makes immediate use of! *Lord, thank you for your good and perfect gifts, both large and small. Give us eyes to see them all.*

June 14—Our last day in Greece! From our hotel in Nauplion we travel across the Peloponnesus to Olympia. Contrary to popular belief, the Greek Olympic Games were not a celebration of athletic ability alone. As the Greeks considered the "whole

man" to be the ideal, the games were for those who exhibited both physical and intellectual prowess. Time during the games was given to mental pursuits as well as to physical challenges. *Father, help us to learn, even from this pagan culture, to worship you with our whole minds and bodies!* After Olympia, we head to Patras to board our ferry for the overnight trip to Italy. Before we got here, some of us were thinking, oh, Staten Island Ferry? But once we saw it, it was more like a cruise ship: comfortable yet snug compartments, some



of the best food on the trip yet (remember why I'm here!), a pool, a casino and a disco lounge (our boys only *heard* about those!). Quite comfortable!

June 15—We have a lecture this morning by Dr. Atwood, our tour's accompanying guest lecturer. After the lecture, the remaining time on the ship is free until we land in Italy in the afternoon. Our driver is waiting for us, to take us across the peninsula, through the Apennines, to the eternal city. His driving is so poor, we fear that we're headed for something else eternal, but we arrive at our hotel safe and sound. (One phone call to our tour arranger and the aforementioned driver is never to be seen again!) After dinner, several of us take a short walk down the street to the Coliseum. Now I remember what I love most about taking students to Europe...seeing them see these wonders for the first time! As the Coliseum looms up before us out of the dark city sky, they

are literally awe-struck. *Lord, as we gaze at the raw power of the Ancient Romans, help us to remember that this vast empire was conquered by the simple truth of the gospel.*

June 16—Met our guide Antonio this morning. He obviously loves his city. His enthusiasm is contagious! Another change of plan, this time due to the Papal audience occurring on Wednesday, when we're scheduled to visit Vatican City. We tour the city with Antonio all day, visiting Vatican City in the late morning. I don't have enough space to convey the marvels that our group beheld. The Sistine Chapel, Raphael's works in the Papal apartments, the Forum, Palatine Hill, the Circus Maximus, and on and on. One needs days, weeks to do it all justice! It is here, in the Forum, that the students learn that many of the ruins they see are the handiwork of early Christians. They saw these temples, not as beautiful works of art and architecture, but for what they were—pagan places of worship whose existence was a stench in God's nostrils. Amazingly, if the temples couldn't be pulled down, churches were constructed right inside of them. Again, the gospel is victorious! *Jesus, help us to remember that your victory, your rule and reign, are a present reality.*

June 17—An early tour of the Catacombs of San Calista. These catacombs cover nearly 24 kilometers underground, yet our tour covers about 500 meters! Again, contrary to our preconceptions, these were not secret hiding places where Christians escaped persecution. The Romans knew where they were. These were simply burial grounds outside the city walls, as it was not allowed for them to bury their dead within. Occasionally, during the worst persecutions, soldiers would hunt Christians down in the passageways, but largely they were left to themselves. The simple devotion, and difficult life of these early Christians is evident in every nook and cranny. In the midst of death (and the small nooks for dead children were particularly poignant) the evidence of their celebration of life is all around in the artwork. They were incredibly victorious people, even in the midst

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of unimaginable hardship. *Lord, help us to celebrate our lives, in the midst of our comforts, as robustly as these early believers did theirs.*

After the catacombs, we have a free afternoon in Rome. My group heads off to the “Pedestrian District” for a walking tour of the Pantheon, Piazza Navona, the Fountain of Trevi, and the Spanish Steps. I find a cheese shop, a meat market, and a wine shop, all next to each other, and make my favorite impromptu meal with a quick stop in each. (Remember...why am I here?)

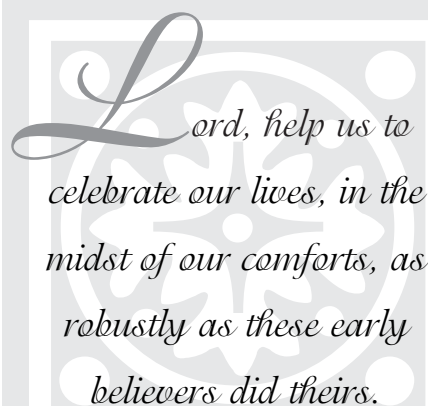
June 18—Our final morning in Roma. We break up into groups, most of us heading toward the Forum area to see such things as the interior of the Coliseum, Michelangelo’s *Moses* in the nearby church of St. Peter in Chains, and Palatine Hill. Afterwards, we continue our trip to the medieval city of Assisi, home of Italy’s patron saint, St. Francis. This evening, however, we stop in the nearby town of Santa Maria Degli Angeli, where St. Francis actually lived and died. *Lord, thank you for the opportunity to see the progress of Christianity over this land in such vivid ways.* (Incidentally, our meal in the Hotel Dal Moro is the best so far—risotto with asparagus, bruschetta, veal, a delicious dessert...remember?)

June 19—This morning we head off to Assisi, just a few miles up the road. The basilica is actually two. As soon as the lower one was finished in the Romanesque style, the second one was built on top of it in the early Gothic style. Our guide, a Nigerian Franciscan named John, led us around, informing us of not only the incredible frescoes by Giotto et al, but also about much of the Franciscan “mythology” built up over the years. When our intrepid Mr. Finkbeiner attempted to engage John in a conversation about some of the stories surrounding St. Francis, all John could say was, “Faith is such a deep mystery; who can understand it?” *Father, thank you that our faith is in the comprehensible, finished work of Christ.*

After Assisi, we head to Siena, probably one of our favorite places we’ve visited yet. This medieval city was an archrival of Florence. As we only have

a short time here, my plan is to see one thing only, Lorenzetti’s frescoes, the *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* in the city hall. These medievals knew how to spend the public’s money! To them, art was something to adorn their homes and churches and workplaces. A delicious cheese tray for lunch (!), and then on to Montecatini Terme, near Florence.

June 20—This morning we meet our guide, Tonya, an Italian-American, who takes us to the Academia where Michelangelo’s *David* is being prepared for cleaning. Thankfully, our view is unobstructed. *Magnificent!* After that, it’s on to Santa Maria del Fiore, which is the home of Brunelleschi’s famous cupola. (*How could they do these things?*) We finish our time with Tonya at the Uffizi Gallery, one of the most revered art museums in the world.



Lord, help us to celebrate our lives, in the midst of our comforts, as robustly as these early believers did theirs.

Near the end of our tour, as some of us begin to fade, Tonya confesses, correctly, that “too much art can kill you.” *Lord, thank you that You are the Great Creator, and that You have placed it within the hearts of men to create after You.* For our free time in Florence, I take a group to the church of Santa Croce, Italy’s Westminster Abby. Here is buried Galileo, Michelangelo, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Machiavelli, et al. A gelato at Vivoli’s concludes the day.

June 21—We leave Montecatini, heading to our final destination, Venice. On the way, we make an unplanned stop in a medieval town known as Ferrara. Completely off the tourist trail, we feel for the first time that we’re really experiencing

Italy as the Italians do. Time for lunch and a brief tour of the town and then on to Venice. We arrive in our hotel in the resort town of Jesolo in the early evening. Just enough time for a dip in the Adriatic before dinner. Our boys, in their baggy American swimming trunks, look out of place on this oh-so-European beach. (*“Mr. McKenna, why do they wear things like that?”* You’re not in Kansas anymore, fellas.) *Father, cause us to see how small we are in this vast world You’ve created, yet never forget how much we are loved.*

June 22—Our last day in Italia. We head off a bit early, via waterbus, or *vaporetto*, to attempt to catch the service at St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice. They won’t allow us in as tourists, but I assure the guard that we’re worshippers, and he permits us to pass. After the service, we meet our final guide, Louisa, who takes us around the main tourist center near St. Mark’s, and into the Doge’s Palace. For our final bit of free time, I take a group away from the tourist center, off into the winding, unpredictable streets of Venice and make our way to a church known as *Frari*, where there are some remarkable paintings by the Venetian Tintoretto. Afterwards, we make our way to the first Jewish ghetto in Europe, the area known as Cannaregio. There is still a thriving Jewish community in Venice even after all these years. How unusual to see signs in the windows of pizzerias guaranteeing that the food sold there is completely kosher! We take the *vaporetto* down the Grand Canal, back to the landing where we regroup and return to our hotel. Tomorrow we depart for America.

I realize that our trip has been a bit of a whirlwind for our students. Hopefully, their memories of these things will be like fine wine or cheese, growing better with age. Even before we depart, some of them are already talking about what they want to focus on the next time they come. *Success!*

I’m already thinking how to make the trip better for our next group of seniors this coming June; Let’s see...there was that little pastry shop in Montecatini we missed, and I didn’t get to sample the mocha almond gelato at *Vivoli’s* in Florence...

DID YOU KNOW?

Rockbridge Academy has been one of the national teacher training centers for the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS). In August, teachers around the country as far away as Minnesota and Florida attended our four full days of training. Mike McKenna, Leslie Collins, Laura Tucker, as well as several veteran teachers, shared the vision of classical and Christian education and the practical applications of this methodology. Our school has had the privilege of assisting many of these schools, as well as home schooling parents, during our regular school year by answering their questions and phone calls, welcoming them as visitors who observe our classes, and sharing our curriculum and materials.

Learning to Love Learning was the theme of the second week of training for the returning Rockbridge teachers. This year our desire is for all students to not only acquire the tools of learning, master their subjects, and work hard to the glory of God, but to ENJOY learning. In *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, a book our teachers read regularly, John Milton Gregory states, "Use the pupil's own mind, exciting his self activities. Keep his thoughts as much as possible ahead of your expression, making him a discoverer of truth." Please pray for us as we pursue this goal in our classrooms.

Accreditation Visit

Now that our school program encompasses grades K-12, Rockbridge Academy has become eligible to pursue accreditation. The administration and teachers of Rockbridge worked many months during the past year to prepare materials and documentation of our program to send to the accreditation team for the Association of Classical and Christian Schools in Moscow, Idaho. This team will be visiting our school during the last week in October and will be reviewing our work and meeting with staff, faculty, students, and board members. Please contact us if you desire more information about the accreditation process or would like to assist Kim Kerr with organizational details.

MORE HONORS

The Maryland Distinguished Scholar Program named **Justin Horst** as a semi-finalist in the category for the arts based on his musical talent.

Congratulations, Justin!

SCHOOL BOARD NEWS

As you may know, last year's board election resulted in a tie between Mr. Tom Ramsey and Mr. Chris Boswell. The tie was broken at the September board meeting, and Mr. Chris Boswell was voted to take his seat on the school board as of the regular October meeting.

A New Parent's Perspective

This fall marks one of the most challenging and exciting seasons that our family has experienced. Alyssa, our younger daughter, would be in fifth grade this year. We felt that Alyssa's educational experience could be deepened and broadened. Alyssa was excited about the prospect of change and communicated to us that she was okay with us finding a new school for her. We knew several families that had students at Rockbridge, and I was compelled by the unique blend of a Classical and a Christian education. God opened the door for Alyssa to attend Rockbridge and all of our schooling needs seemed to be falling into place.

Still, I have to admit that though I felt God's leading, this change still required faith and courage. Driving into the parking lot at Rockbridge that first day, I felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness for Alyssa. Who would welcome her? Would she be able to adapt? Who would her friends be?

We met Alyssa's teacher and she was immediately warm and vibrant. As Alyssa walked to her desk, three girls from her class came to her, smiling and said, "Welcome Alyssa, we are so glad to have you." They then offered to show her around and to walk with her to the opening assembly. I could not have hoped for a sweeter, more authentic reception. I had to bite my lip and turn my head so that I did not commit the cardinal sin of embarrassing Alyssa on the first day with some unexpected tears of happiness and gratitude from a mom's heart.

I had already known that Rockbridge would be an incredible place to learn. Now, in addition, we have experienced Rockbridge as a place that is tender and hospitable to "strangers." I am so thankful and appreciative to the faculty, staff, parents, and students who have made this time of transition easier for our family. As I drove out of the parking lot that first day, I was grateful for three very special, Christ-like young ladies in the fifth grade that opened up their hearts, went the extra mile, and welcomed my daughter.

Terry Bouma

EUROPE TRIP PRESENTATION

You're invited to join us for an evening to share our Senior Europe Trip adventures. This presentation will be held in the Fellowship Hall at Rockbridge Academy on Friday, October 10, 2003 at 7:30 p.m. Our headmaster, Michael McKenna, will host the event, give an overview of the trips' goals and successes, and present pictures and tales from the recent Europe trip taken by our senior boys. Information regarding next year's trip will be available as well.

Please join us!



Safeway & Giant Support for Rockbridge

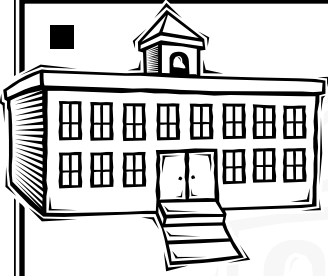
We could use your help! It's time to renew our shopping cards for both the Safeway and Giant programs. Both of these programs pay Rockbridge Academy CASH! In order to receive the cash benefits, each family must renew their bonus cards each year.

If you do not have a Safeway or Giant shopping card, please sign up for one when you shop. If you already have a card, all you need to do is provide the appropriate card numbers to Rockbridge Academy and we'll make sure to reregister your family for the 2003/2004 school year, or you may register on-line by visiting the following websites: Safeway at www.escrip.com and Giant at www.giantfood.com.

Don't forget grandparents, neighbors, and church friends can designate Rockbridge Academy on their cards too. Thanks for your support!

HEARD AROUND THE HALLS

A mom stopped Mrs. Hinz in the hall and said that her daughter was complaining about having a tummy ache just before leaving for school. Having been through school anxiety tummy aches with her older child, Mom was a bit concerned that her kindergarten was experiencing the same thing. So Mom asked, "Well honey, what do you think is the problem?" The daughter replied, "We'd better hurry up and get to school so my tummy will feel better." :)



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- OCT 3.....Back to School Night—7–12 gr. @ 7:00 p.m.
- OCT 10Lecture & Dessert—Europe Trip Presentation @ 7:30 p.m.
All are welcome!
- OCT 17Picture Day—*Individual Pictures Taken*
- OCT 24Daytime Open House—8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.
- OCT 31History Parade—Grades 1–6 —begins @ 1:30 p.m.
End of the 1st Quarter
- NOV 4SCHOOL CLOSED—Teacher Planning Day
- NOV 7College Night @ 7:30 p.m.—All are welcome!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*I*F I HAVE GAINED ANY DISTINCTION, IT HAS BEEN OWING TO THE TWO DAYS' LABOR IN THAT ABOMINABLE DITCH.

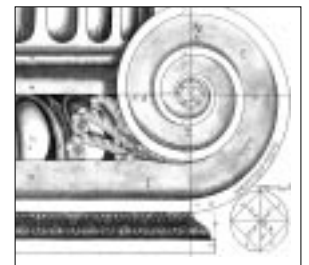
—*John Adams*

When he was a lad, John Adams told his father that he refused to go back to school and continue his Latin studies. Adams' father didn't argue. He simply set the boy about digging a ditch on the family farm. After two days, Adams decided to go back to school.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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