

OLIVERIAN

A school as unique as its students.

Latest News from Oliverian

Serotinous Teens

By Will Laughlin, Head of School

Will addressed a recent gathering of parents at Oliverian's winter celebration and parent conferences:

My dad turned 90 this year and then my mother-in-law passed away. Meanwhile, my wife is pregnant with our first child; she is days away from giving birth to our first (and last) child, Colton. It's all a lot to process.

So, I've been thinking about trees.

I grew up in northern California on a big property with all kinds of trees—lemon, grapefruit, plum, eucalyptus, magnolia, jeffrey pine, bottlebrush, wisteria, and lots of others. My dad had gardens and an orchard and even, at one point, 100 acres of pistachio trees. So, I heard a lot about trees growing up.

I knew that the hallmark of a healthy tree planted in the right place—i.e. a tree that had found its place in the world—was how productive it was. Did it produce substantial quantities of fruits or nuts or other trees.

Our citrus trees were prolific. So many grapefruits and lemons and oranges fell that my dad had to pay to have them picked up and hauled away every week. Citrus are early high achievers as trees go. If they went to high school, most would have a 4.5 GPA and a few varsity letters. My dad gently fussed over his citrus trees—pruning,

grafting, and fertilizing-and they rewarded his subtle attentions with ridiculous fecundity.

Some of the other trees on and around our property were what arborists call serotinous trees. These trees, which include coast redwoods, ponderosas, and eucalyptus, take longer to become productive. Some take more than 100 years to produce. So be thankful your kid is not a tree.

But serotinous trees need more than just a lot of time to grow up; they also need a fire or a drought or a flood or some other trauma to bring them to full, productive maturity. They are sort of the bright underachievers of the tree world and, thus, have a long adolescence. If they went to high school they might tend to have high IQ's, low GPA's, and worried parents.

My dad did very little fussing over these trees. But he would occasionally take a chainsaw to one, lopping off a giant branch and painting the wound shut with black tree tar. Or he might turn up the heat with a controlled fire. But with time and just the right kind and amount of stress, these serotinous trees became some of the hardiest, most interesting, and most successful trees we had. Their roots went deep and wide. Fierce storms just made them dance slowly and sing (I remember staying awake at night to listen to them moan and creak when the coastal winds blew). They were beautifully twisted and scarred. They were nourished by ash from the same fires that scarred their trunks.

Like trees, different teenagers mature and become productive at different rates. Comparing one teen to another makes about as much sense as my dad hoping a eucalyptus tree will produce oranges. Some teens just need gentle pruning and sunshine and a sprinkle of fertilizer to produce a lot quickly. Others require fire, high winds, drought, radical pruning, and lots of time.

I don't know whether my son, Colton, will be a grapefruit tree or a ponderosa pine. I'm trying not to imagine or hope with any specificity. But I do hope that I will have the curiosity and patience to keep believing in him no matter how many years and how many fires are required for him to find his purpose and his place.

My inspiration to be that kind of parent-flexible, patient, and relentlessly loving-is right here in this room. All of you. I'm humbled and grateful to participate with you in the patient, hopeful work of growing these undeniably "serotinous" teenagers we so love. Thank you.

Land Ho!

By Kevin Watkins, Science Teacher

Science teacher, Kevin Watkins, shares his thoughts after 6 Oli students and 2 faculty members spent a week in the Florida Keys on a sailboat with Outward Bound for a challenging, yet deeply gratifying, week of adventure:



We had just finished standing on the deck of our 30-foot sailboat in rapt silence, listening to a pod of dolphins breaking the surface to expel puffs of breath in the shallow water. The light of the moon rising over the mangrove key did not allow us to see them, but the moment was all the more majestic for that bit of mystery. After five days of feeling the wind and sun, looking at scenery, and smelling the salt air (and each other), the purely aural experience was simultaneously exhilarating and calming.

It was our last night, and we gathered around a single candle lantern at the stern of the boat with knees pressed against each other. The cockpit offered scant room for nine novice sailors and their two instructors. Four nights of sleeping mere inches from one another, however, had made us accustomed to these tight quarters. All sailors sat with journal and pencil at the ready as our instructor, Peals, gave us our reflection assignment: what were six things you saw, five that you heard, four that you felt, three that you learned, two that you realized, and one that you know.

Our answers ranged from the practical to the insightful to the scatological, having learned more than just how to sail while at sea. What follows are a handful of my own responses to this assignment:

I saw Shelby's leadership while in the role as Captain, delicately balancing polite delegation of duties with individual preference and talent. I saw Riley's courage as he bounded about the ship's deck, tackling any new challenge given. I saw Addie's love of cooking, skillfully and magically transforming bland food using the contents of our "spice bucket." I heard Misha's humor, for even running a ship aground can be hilarious with a properly timed "Land ho!" I heard Eli's lighthearted silliness, helping us pass the time by listening to variations on Alexander Hamilton (e.g. "Alexander FightMeSon!"). I realized that Bennett has a depth and maturity behind those long locks. I realized that Jonathan has an immense capacity for caring for others.

And one thing I know: each and every student/sailor pushed him- or herself beyond the boundaries of comfort and came away with a unique and unforgettable experience.

Oli Represents at Harvard Model Congress

By Micah Weiss, Humanities Teacher

Recently, Oliverian School sent its 3rd delegation to the 32nd annual Harvard Model Congress. In these times of political upheaval, the appropriate theme from many organizers and even the keynote speaker at the conference, former Indiana senator Evan Bayh, was civility and compromise. Fifteen hundred students from over 80 schools attended, and from everything I witnessed, the students embraced that message, as the tone was one of cooperation and



respect in every committee. Oliverian's delegation really made us proud in that, and many other, respects.

Our group was small this year, with six students in attendance. Most of our delegation took part in the special committees separate from the Congress itself. However, Will L. represented us marvelously in the mock Senate as Ben Cardin, Junior Senator from Maryland. In his committee, he debated many issues of environmental import, the most current of which was a Flint, Michigan related clean water bill. As a signatory on the bill, Will became an architect of the law, and a voice for its defense. He exemplified bi-partisan cooperation as well, as it was a bill favored heavily by the Republican Senators, and Will crossed party lines with several other Democrats to defend and pass the bill. The bill made its way through both houses, and was eventually signed into law by one of the co-presidents.

Both Shelby M. and Noah R. were in advisory special committees. Shelby played the role of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx as part of the Presidential Cabinet. She was very active in informal caucuses as the Cabinet members discussed how to advise the co-presidents on bills moving through the Congress. Noah took the role of Ben Bernanke in the National Economic Council. He was extremely vocal in defense of preserving Social Security, raising the wage cap on the Social Security tax, and took an active role in pushing back against the Francis Fukiyama-led attempt to privatize Social Security. At one point, Mr. Bernanke (Noah) turned to Fukiyama and the following exchange took place:

Bernanke: Do you read the Bible, sir?

Fukiyama: Why, yes. Why?

Bernanke: Are we not our brothers' keepers?

Eli L. took the role of William Samuel Johnson in the historical Constitutional Convention committee. A delegate from the state of Connecticut, Eli pushed back on several measures relating to slavery, and though the needle of present knowledge and historical accuracy was difficult to thread, Eli was deeply energized by the debates and the draft of the constitution their committee constructed. Though the details of that constitution are a little elaborate to here relate, it was clear that no one enjoyed themselves more at HMC than Eli.

Finally, the two members of our delegation that worked the hardest were Peter M. and Jonathan P. As a team they took on the challenge of the Supreme Court. In that role, Jon and Peter together had to prepare briefs for both sides of four different cases without knowing which side of the four cases they were to be assigned to argue, as the three roles of Petitioner, Respondent, and Justice were on a random rotation. I was lucky enough to watch two cases, beginning to end, where Jon and Peter acted as lawyers rather than justices, and I was in awe of their preparation, teamwork, and attention to detail.

Peter and Jon were inspiring to see work. They typified the cooperation, compromise, and complex thinking that is required of an individual to be a member of our democratic republic. The overall positive mood of the experience, and the educational value all our students gained from it, was obvious. And it was remarked that perhaps our country would be better off if these students from all over our country were given the real roles in Washington that they merely played over that weekend. The sincerity and honest efforts of so many of the participants, especially our Oliverian delegation, was a model for our government in both senses of the word, and gave us, the teachers and lucky enough to witness our students' efforts, hope for the future.

A special thank you to Aaron Rumsey and Betsy Kane for being excellent chaperones. And most of all, a thank you to, and appreciation for, our delegation of excellent students for their earnest efforts, hard work, and positive representation of the Oliverian community.

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