

Our Night with Harry Potter

A NARRATIVE BY: TOM JOHNSON

Tom Johnson is the Christian Brothers head men's varsity tennis coach. He and his wife, Maria, are the proud parents of Clara '13 and Sean '22. As a result of the Christian Brothers "One Night in Casablanca" 2019 Auction and Dinner, his family attended a Broadway production of "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child" in New York featuring CB's own James Snyder '99 in the lead role of Harry Potter.



We attended the Christian Brothers auction and dinner in spring 2019 without much knowledge about Harry Potter. In short, we didn't know "the Sorcerer's Stone" from "the Order of Phoenix." But we have Potter fans in the family; our children, Clara '13 and Sean '22, are both devotees. We knew that when the auction item for a weekend in Manhattan, seeing the play, "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child," and meeting James Snyder '99 came up, we had to win it and make it a great end of the summer trip. So, we held up our paddle long enough and after what felt like a long few minutes, we had secured the trip. Little did we know that Snyder would treat us to an incredible performance and a magical evening.

When we arrived, there were hundreds of people in line for the play already. There was a certain unmistakable energy building even outside the theater. There were serious Potter fans there and the reviews had been outstanding; everyone was anticipating something great. As the stage lights dimmed and the curtain raised, we saw Snyder as Harry Potter take to the stage. In the production, he plays Potter as a father and husband, looking exactly like what Potter would look like as a young father. We were immediately drawn in by the play, actors and the sheer

wonder of the special effects. At one moment you could hear a pin drop and the next, uproarious laughter.

While the play was spectacular, meeting Snyder after it was quite the VIP experience. With throngs of people roped off from the actors, we stepped through the stage door leading to a small waiting area with walls decorated with old playbills and photographs. "You must be the Johnsons?" Snyder asked as he welcomed us with a warm smile. He thanked us for being there and remarked how nice it was to see people from home. He was down to earth and very much interested in Clara, Sean and their lives.

After meeting, we joined Snyder for dinner at a famous Broadway theater district restaurant named Sardi's, which is full of images of famous actors, directors and playwrights. For a night, it felt like we were part of that history. He introduced our family to the other actors, and we even got to meet the actor who plays Ron Weasley!

As the evening went on, Snyder told us about his time at Christian Brothers. He cherished his years at CB, which is where he first discovered his love for acting. He got his start by practicing for his first play on the green linoleum tile of the old library. After high school, a bigger stage

and city were calling his name. He then went on to attend University of Southern California where he studied theater. After graduation he began his climb into professional acting. Snyder has seen the breadth of the world of acting, having been in movies, on TV shows and in theatre. He now performs on one of the biggest stages with a lead role in what is arguably the most phenomenal theater venue in the world.

In addition to playing a father and husband on stage, Snyder is both of those roles in real life. He, his wife, Jacqueline, and their children moved to New York a few years ago. We asked him how he had time to do these kinds of meetings and dinners with visitors from Sacramento with such a busy schedule. He humbly responded, saying "I know the motto 'enter to learn, leave to serve.'"

Snyder embodies what it means to be from Christian Brothers and from Sacramento. He is not only talented and funny, but also genuine. He gives of his time and effort for CB despite the demands of leading in a play of this magnitude and the enormity of his success. He continues to serve our Christian Brothers community and we couldn't be prouder.