

FEATURE

Jack Vaughn '74

Still special after all these years

More than a century after its founding, Christian Brothers remains more than a school – it's a family. Here's what students and faculty have to say about it:

"People are here because they want to be. I like the atmosphere, the sense of community. When I did a visitation day (before coming to CB), people would say, 'Hi! How're you doing? What school are you going to? Are you interested in going here?' It was a real sense of community."

– Shawn Brown, junior

"I like the environment here. The teachers are very family-oriented. I would send my kids here. As far as the academics are concerned, it's stressful."

– Quianna Johnson, junior

"I like how friendly everybody is. The teachers all seem so caring. They really care about things that are going on with you. If something's bothering you, they come up to you, ask you if they can do anything. I also like the fact that everyone here is very diverse – there are lot of different kinds of people, different cultures, people with different ideas."

– Erin Archer, junior

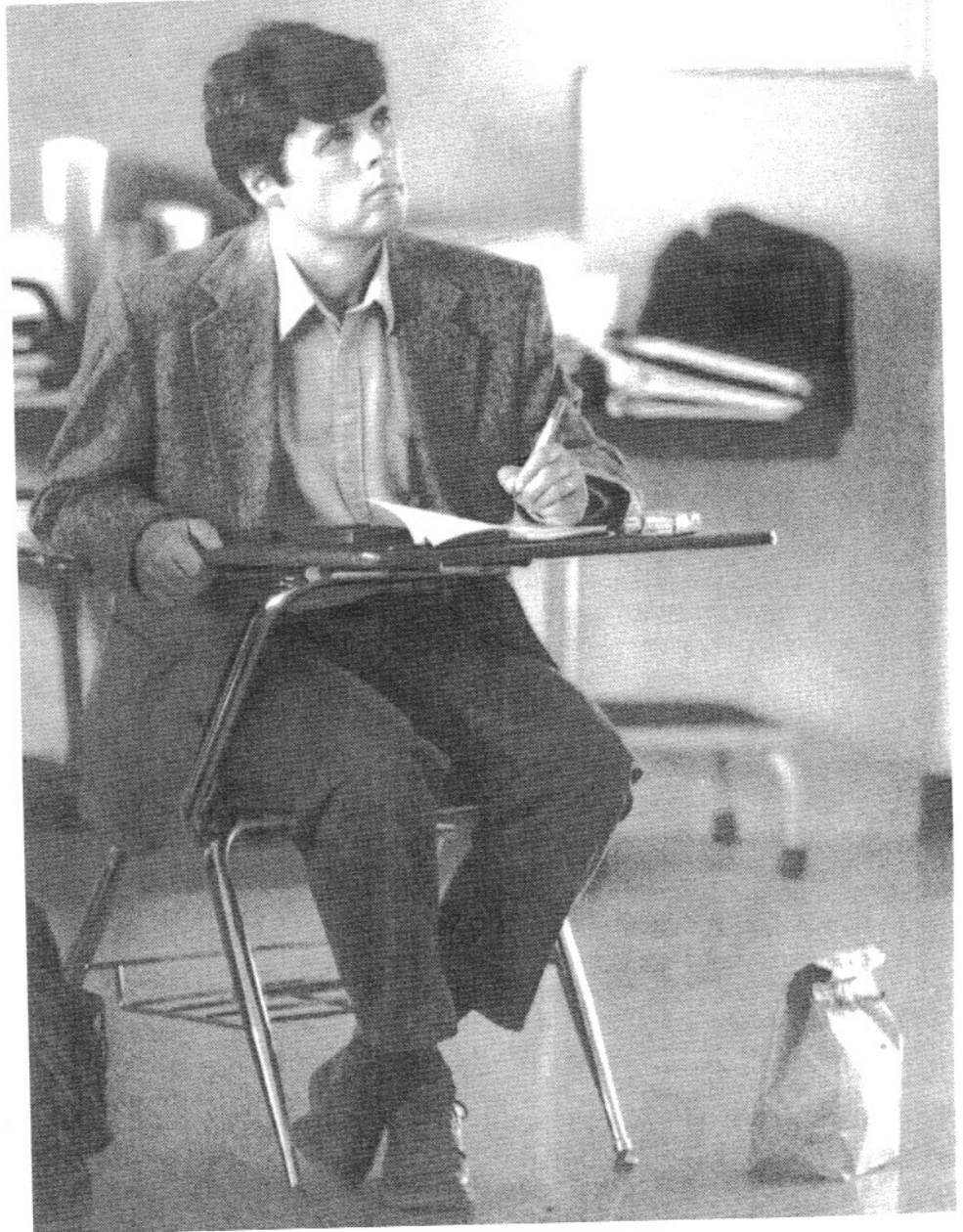
"I like that the teachers are there for you. I have a lot of friends who go to McClatchy and Kennedy and are on my soccer team. You almost have to laugh sometimes because they have all these problems with their teachers. Here you can go to the teachers after school, and they'll help you out. I like that."

– Brendan McVeigh, junior

"The teachers are more pro-student than they were at public school. I have a math teacher who knows that there are activities and something horrible might happen so you aren't able to do your homework. So she gives cards for each semester. If you don't have your homework, you give her a card, but you must have the homework in by the end of the year. That's pretty forgiving."

– Stephen Walrath, freshman

Scenes Sentimental



Editor's note: Jack Vaughn, a 1974 Christian Brothers graduate, is an editor on the features desk at The Sacramento Bee. In October, he returned to campus for a day's worth of classes with juniors and freshmen.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

from a Journey

By Jack Vaughn

■ Her backpack bulging with books, Quianna Johnson rushes toward Room 215 and first period. On the way, she runs a gauntlet of greetings, heads down a hallway of hugs – back-slaps, high-fives, even the occasional, “You go, girl!” You suspect that she’s just particularly popular. But look around – the smiling, the touching is going on all over, warming a fall morning.

■ In Algebra II, teacher Lee Wurschmidt helps a dim-witted pupil – the only other adult in the room – try to grasp the complexities of a Texas Instruments graphing calculator, which the students are teaching to do mathematical cartwheels. The visitor aced Algebra II in 1973, but the language of today’s class – identity matrixes, inverses, determinants, Cramer’s rule – is as Greek to him as pi. “When you see E to the negative something, that’s a mighty tiny number,” Wurschmidt says. In a 45-minute class, that’s the only phrase he understands.

■ Over in American Literature, Demi Moore’s somewhat, ahem, revealing version of “The Scarlet Letter” is playing on video. During the racier scenes, the juniors – boys and girls – watch calmly and intently, noting differences between the movie and the novel. The visitor can’t help but notice what’s missing: the snickering, catcalls and even coyote howls that would have greeted such a film at CB in the early ’70s.

■ In a music building that didn’t exist a generation ago – part of a program that now includes concert, jazz and pep bands, choirs and madrigals – a dozen instruments are making a joyful noise, all at once. It’s a cacophony of sound that teacher Tom Herb, with a

wry smile, calls Beginning Guitar. Herb tells the students, just now starting to read music and pick out notes, that they’ll soon sound like the CD he’s popped into a player. “You laugh every time I say that. But every time, you get it done.”

■ Nearly every class begins by evoking the “Christian” in Christian Brothers through a prayer or inspirational story, and the students’ offering of intentions – special prayers for their mother, their brother, their grades, their soccer team. The participation is a far cry from the ’70s when many classes were as secular as a public school’s.

No, this isn’t the Christian Brothers that I remember. It’s more familial, more nurturing. More diverse. More scholarly. More cultured. More spiritual. Better.

To praise the present is not to put down the past. In the ’70s, which Brother V. Kenneth, FSC, calls “a whole different time” of social upheaval and spiritual uncertainty, Christian Brothers kept me on solid ground. I was and am proud to be one of the guys. But to those alums who fear, as junior Kendra Galenti puts it, that CB “has gone down ever since they changed it to coed,” I can say: It just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



We got next, CB girls say

Christian Brothers girls have strong views on where they fit in at a school that was traditionally all male. Here are a few of their comments:

“Girls have added a lot more spirit, a lot more color, a lot more creativity. Girls have made this school a lot different from the other Catholic high schools in the area. I think everything the guys add is doubled because we’re here. In the real world, it’s guys and girls, and you have to learn to work with both men and women. If you go to Christian Brothers, you learn how to do that. It makes Christian Brothers special.”

– Amanda Yeager, senior

“It’s definitely equal here. A couple of years ago, people thought differently because the girls were just getting used to being here. They weren’t really noticed. But now the girls and boys are totally equal. The girls always complain about sports because football is a big issue. But I feel equal – I don’t feel like I’m lower than a guy. ... And there’s also the maturity level. If you compare people who go to our school and people who go to the same sex schools, I think we’re more mature because we have to deal with situations at school rather than not be exposed to them until later on. Being at an all-girls school would make a difference – I’d get kinda bored.”

– Gina Carrasco, junior

“When they brought the girls here, they didn’t think about how it was going to be – they didn’t build another gym, they didn’t change the name or anything – so the girls are still kind of second-best. I don’t want to say the girls are (treated as) inferior, but the guys have the upper hand. But it’s getting better.”

– Diana Castro, junior

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

"When parents look at our school, they see that generally speaking, it's a safe place to send their kids. They know the kids are going to have discipline. Academic excellence has also been an issue, especially in the last 10 years. ... The other thing that really sets us apart is that we're ethnically diverse. We're a private school, but we're coed and we're ethnically diverse. And you just don't see that at other private schools."

– Kevin McGovern, art teacher

"The teachers are really nice. I never had a brother teaching me before, and I thought they would be really mean and strict, but they're not. They're a lot nicer than everyone made them out to be."

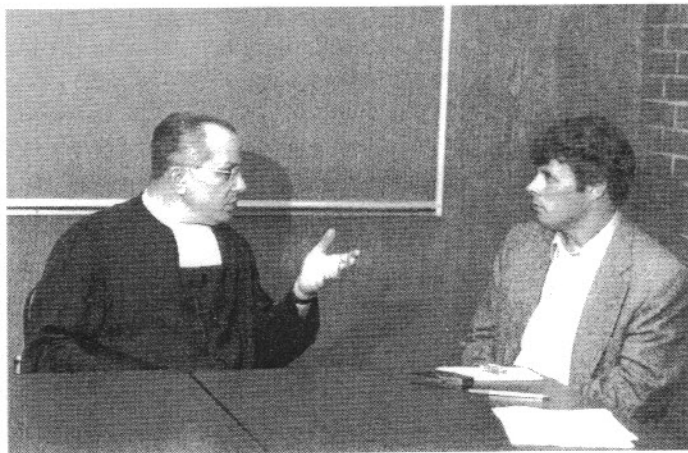
– Lisa Taylor, freshman

"What sets Christian Brothers apart is the level of concern and care that exists here, the students opening doors, saying 'please' and 'thank you.' Those may seem like little things, but they matter. The teachers are genuinely dedicated to what they're doing, and that shows. The students are genuinely invested in their future. I'm not saying some nonsense doesn't exist. But there is a genuine caring and concern, a love, and certainly God's presence. When we talk about a Catholic school, what makes it distinctive? It's the ability to pray, to call forth God's blessings and the Holy Spirit for the kids and the protection of the Blessed Mother, as evidenced by the statue in the Quad. These are the everyday glimpses that make a big difference."

– Brother Kenneth, FSC, freshman instructor

"I like how there are so many activities. If you don't like one thing, there's going to be something else you can do – in classes, in after school activities. And I like how you can talk to the seniors, how they're not, 'Oh, stupid freshman.' It's really surprising how they'll talk to you. But what really surprised me was that I expected school to be boring. It's not. It's so fun."

– Holly Valine, freshman



ain't so. Some great stuff is going on. And after all, isn't a better school what we all hoped for when we were 16 and what we now want for our children?



When you return to Christian Brothers after a quarter-century, so much is familiar: the backup on Martin Luther King Boulevard during the morning drop-off; the deliberate pace of a brother – sadly, one of only six left on campus – padding through Bertram Hall; the CB seal embedded in the entryway (though the tradition of not stepping on it seems to have lapsed). Then you see the backpacks. They're huge – and heavy. And often matched, on the other shoulder, by an even bigger gym bag sprouting with equipment. I remember feeling burdened by one world history text and a binder. Today's packs are a metaphor for these teens' lives, which seem so much more complex and pressure-filled than mine was. "Christian Brothers is known for the size of its backpacks," says Quianna Johnson, one of my two student guides for the day. She and my other guide, Shawn Brown, agree that this year, their junior year, is the most academically stressful.

Between honors and advanced-placement classes, sports and college-test competition, things get very serious very quickly for a junior. "Because of the college issue, I think to myself, 'This

applies more now,'" says Gina Carrasco. "So I get scared, like, 'Oh, no, what do I do? What will happen if I don't do well?'"

"An adult would be surprised by how much stuff we handle every day," says junior Gena DeLeon. "We're almost adults, and it's really hard to

imagine how many things we're learning about each other and ourselves – just how hard it is. There's school, friends, your family, other people's families that we're worried about. We all try to be supportive."

Another junior, Jennifer Morris, puts it starkly: "I thought I was going to get an ulcer just trying to get A's." I believe it. In Greg Meegan's Advanced-Placement U.S. History course, for instance, I feel as if I'm back again ... in my 19th Century survey course at Stanford University. Meegan prods his students through a surprisingly sophisticated analysis of the War of 1812, sectionalism and westward expansion – and lets these teens know that much is expected.

"If you're looking in your books, you're already lost!" he says after asking for the war's causes. "This stuff should be in your notes."

"Yours was probably the most improved essay I read," he tells one girl after pointing out a writing problem on her timed test. "You did a wonderful job of going from there (pointing down) to here (pointing up). Which really puts you between a rock and a hard place because you can't fall back now – you've just doomed yourself to excellence!"

Over in Beginning Guitar, Mr. Herb is asking no less. After listening carefully to a boy successfully strum a short tune, he presses for more. "You could be three tunes ahead if you want to be. Every time you play, you play well. You could move faster."

And in German III, teacher Gabriele

Truhitte mixes a smiling, easygoing conversation with students – in her lilting mixture of German and English – with constant reminders that they are there to perform. “Auf Deutsch!” she admonishes students when they revert to their native tongue. “Deutsch, Deutsch, Deutsch, Deutsch, Deutsch!” “But you know what I mean!” one girl protests.

Under those loads, students seem to be staying on their feet – and even showing a ‘90s self-confidence. Seeing photographer Tom Bass and me on a lawn near the cafeteria, a dozen or more students stride over to greet the intruders. A few even flash salesman’s smiles, thrust out hands and introduce themselves: “Hi, I’m So-and-So. What are you doing here?” Twenty-five years ago, I would never have had the guts to accost a strange adult on campus. “These kids take ownership of the place,” says Brother V. Kenneth.



With all its emphasis on achievement, Christian Brothers still offers nourishment for the soul – more, in some ways, than a generation ago. In a full day of classes, I didn’t hear a single harsh word spoken between students – a far cry from the tension-filled, confrontation-happy ‘70s. Affection, on the other hand, was on open display. The students’ language – in the classroom, at least – is far cleaner than the locker-room talk I remember. And student after student uses words like “caring,” “friendly,” “supportive” and “understanding” to describe teachers and classmates.

Says Amanda Yeager, a senior: “I like the feeling of community here. I feel I know all the teachers, and they’re all my friends. When there are classroom discussions and students disagree with each other, they can be respectful and say their point without hurting the other person.”

At the other end of the CB years,

freshman John Chavez agrees: “Everyone’s nice here. It’s a nice campus. I like my teachers – I hope they keep going that way for another four years.” “You know basically everybody,” says Shawn Brown. “It’s a bunch of friends.”

In part, that atmosphere reflects the presence of the Holy Spirit. Prayers are offered with far more student participation than I remember from the mumbled “Hail Marys” of the early ‘70s. And in part, that atmosphere reflects the presence of ... girls. I’m not about to take sides over whether CB should have gone coed; personally, I enjoyed the specialness of single-sex schooling, and I’m sure some male camaraderie and sense of tradition have been lost. But from what I saw, the new system works.

“I think the presence of girls smoothes out the rough edges in the guys,” says Brother V. Kenneth. “The guys comb their hair and are a little more civil. And the girls aren’t quite as gossipy. The dynamic is much different than for all-girls or all-boys. It’s a very healthy, very natural thing. I think it’s given a lot of fuel to the place.”

Kevin McGovern, a classmate of mine who teaches art as part of a Fine and Performing Arts Department that has expanded dramatically from the meager offerings of 25 years ago, watches and offers advice as his freshmen work on colored-pencil portraits of one another. He likes the fact that some of those faces are girls’:

“When I was a teacher here and it was all boys, 10 minutes after the final bell rang, if you went outside to get someone to help you with something, the place was deserted. Now you can go out 45 minutes after the bell has rung, and there are people on the Quad, hanging around the cafeteria. That all

“The girls seem more stressed than the boys. The boys seem to be handling their sports and their classes – and they seem so relaxed. I don’t know how they do that. The girls go home, study four to six hours a night. Most of us cry, most of us have to work. Then we wake up in the morning in a bad mood and the guys say, ‘Why?’”

– Danielle Wong, junior

“The girls feel they have to prove more because they have gotten a bad rap. Some say the school has gone down ever since they changed it to coed. We have really good girls sports teams, such as the softball team and the volleyball team, and they aren’t really mentioned. But it’s getting better, and it’s definitely equal. Compared with St. Francis and Jesuit, we’re lucky. At this school, students are united. It kind of balances things out having girls and guys at the same school.”

– Kendra Galenti, junior

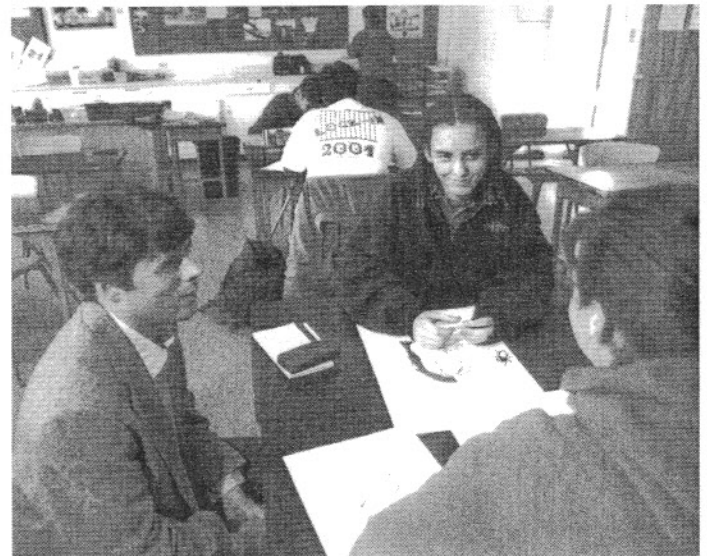
“She’s got you there!”

– a junior in an American literature class cheers as Demi Moore, in “The Scarlet Letter,” defends women’s right to education

changed with going coed.”

McGovern, who favored the switch to coed, says the boys will profit: “In

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



0.30.97

ASSIGNMENT

CBHS / EDITORIAL

FILE NO. C

1 KODAK 5053 TMY 2 KODAK 5053 TMY 3 KODAK 5053 TMY 4 KODAK 5053 TMY 5 KODAK 5053 TMY



1 0A



2 1A



3 2



4 2A



5 3

6 KODAK 5053 TMY 7 KODAK 5053 TMY 8 KODAK 5053 TMY 9 KODAK 5053 TMY 10 KODAK 5053 TMY



6 5A



7 6A



8 7A



9 8



10 8A

11 KODAK 5053 TMY 12 KODAK 5053 TMY 13 KODAK 5053 TMY 14 KODAK 5053 TMY 15 KODAK 5053 TMY



11 10A



12 11A



13 12



14 12A



15 13

16 KODAK 5053 TMY 17 KODAK 5053 TMY 18 KODAK 5053 TMY 19 KODAK 5053 TMY 20 KODAK 5053 TMY



16 15A



17 16A



18 17A



19 18



20 18A

21 KODAK 5053 TMY 22 KODAK 5053 TMY 23 KODAK 5053 TMY 24 KODAK 5053 TMY 25 KODAK 5053 TMY



21 20A



22 21A



23 22A



24 23



25 23A

26 KODAK 5053 TMY 27 KODAK 5053 TMY 28 KODAK 5053 TMY 29 KODAK 5053 TMY 30 KODAK 5053 TMY 31 KODAK 5053 TMY



26 26A



27 27A



28 28A



29 29A



30 30A

32 KODAK 5053 TMY 33 KODAK 5053 TMY 34 KODAK 5053 TMY 35 KODAK 5053 TMY 36 KODAK 5053 TMY



32 32A



33 33A



34 34A



35 35A



36 36A

JAK 5053 TMY 26 KODAK 5053 TMY 27 KODAK 5053 TMY 28 KODAK 5053 TMY 29 KODAK 5053 TMY 30 KODAK 5053 TMY



26A 26 26A 27 27A 28 28A 29 29A 30 30A

DAK 5053 TMY 32 KODAK 5053 TMY 33 KODAK 5053 TMY 34 KODAK 5053 TMY 35 KODAK 5053 TMY 36 KODAK 5053 TMY



31A 32 32A 33 33A 34 34A 35 35A 36 36A