

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mr. Nick Noble

*Interview conducted by Kaela Dunne
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Q) How have senior privileges and traditions changed since you were at St. Mark's?

A) Well, it's been more than forty years since I've been at St. Mark's. Some of the senior privileges have remained the same, but many of them have not. Many still exist but have been made more available to everyone. Perfect example is when I was a sixth former, there was a sixth form room and it was exclusive to the sixth form. Actually, it was two rooms. One room had our mailboxes and there was a fireplace in there. In the big room, there were couches and a TV, sometimes we had a ping pong table. That was ours exclusively, no underclassman could cross the threshold. Still when I was here, we had our room, our own TV, it was our exclusive area. The sign of belonging was when you got your responses back from colleges, you posted not your acceptances, but your rejections on the wall of the sixth form room. I had a couple of classmates that were mortally ashamed of the fact that they had no rejections. The sixth form quad obviously. Although then it was truly [enforced], now no one goes crazy if someone runs onto the quad to get a cloister ball. Then, you took your life in your hands. It was exclusive. Sixth formers, alumni, and faculty were the only ones allowed to cross that quad and the sixth formers had the right. Other sixth form privileges were leadership positions and things like that. Those still exist. But again, in some ways they've been made less elite and more inclusive.

Q) Why do you think senior privileges and traditions are important to St. Mark's?

A) That assumes I do think they're so important to St. Mark's. I do think that rewarding seniors for leadership is important. I think if you are going to put responsibility on a student then that student must feel like they are getting something out of it. I don't mean quid pro quo, I just mean that one of the reasons sixth form senior privileges were put in place, back in the 19th century, is because the school began to realize that, unlike a lot of other schools at that time, we really wanted to have student leadership and student responsibility. Prefects in dorms, which a number of boarding schools didn't do. We had monitors. Although there was always student leadership at other schools, St. Mark's was going to give kids the responsibility of taking attendance and the responsibility of overseeing younger students. We used to have a formal study hall and seniors were put in charge of the study hall when necessary or in charge of dining room tables. They deserved to be recognized, otherwise it was felt that the younger students wouldn't see them as authority figures appropriately. So I think there is something necessary there to recognize that. The only people that could take that privilege away from them, and it happened on occasion, was the head of school. The headmaster would say "you're not living up to your responsibilities, therefore you don't get your privileges. I do think it is important to recognize somehow in some way that you've climbed a ladder in some way and have certain responsibilities and I think there's something to be said for rewarding that. Especially collectively, these days when there are

90-100 kids in a class, there aren't enough leadership positions for everybody but by saying that everybody is taking a leadership role by setting a good example by being quiet in chapel or whatever else and therefore it is important to recognize and reward the group.

Q) What is one tradition St. Mark's had when you were here that you wish we still did?

A) It would be easy to say the sixth form room because that would be nice but no. What I wish we had, and it gets harder because there are more games, we used to call it the "Victory Wagon". In the fall, we played Groton in football and soccer. In the spring, we played them in baseball primarily, we also rowed against them in crew and lacrosse came along a little later. What would happen is if we beat Groton, there would be a big victory celebration. There was a big wagon that would be kept in one of the storage closets and the job of the underclassmen would be to decorate it in blue and white and with signs. The winning team got in the wagon and was dragged around campus to different sites and were recognized. People would make speeches and it was a lot of fun. One thing we changed, which I find a little bothersome myself, is that it used to be you only got a bonfire if you beat Groton. So, it was after the fact and it was often at the end of the wagon. When soccer was added to the list, then both teams had to beat Groton. So my sixth form year, the soccer team only tied Groton so we didn't get a bonfire. We did get a victory wagon but only for the football team not the soccer team. I always loved that. It was fun, it brought everyone together and it was a little more interactive than just getting the bowl or just getting the coat, which are wonderful things but they both came along much later. Those are like you're receiving it, not participating in it in terms of the celebration. That's probably the one I miss the most.

Q) What was the best senior prank you've ever witnessed?

A) There's a long list. These are the three best senior pranks and for different reasons. The first, and I don't recommend this but this was back in a different time, students went out and "borrowed" faculty cars, drove them onto the quad in the shape of an "SM" and the periods in the S.M. were little kiddie cars from faculty children which they "borrowed." I would not recommend that at all but it was really cool to look out your dorm room window and see the SM made up of faculty cars. Another one which I don't recommend, but was really cool, is all the tables in the main dining room were stacked in a pyramid and at the very top- I don't know how they did it—they put the headmaster's desk on top. The one I liked the most because it kind of conveyed how we felt at the time was that the center, then the schoolroom, used to be full of desks. When we were third and fourth formers that was how we spent most of our time and by the end of the my fifth form year they got rid of all the desks. All the old desks were stored in the basement and we were feeling nostalgic for the old desks. So, one night, as a prank, we—a number of students—went downstairs, found all the old desks, brought them back up and set up the old schoolroom exactly the way it was. In the morning, all the sixth formers decided we would have our usual morning meeting in the old school room instead of in the new meeting place Benson.

Mr. Benson Noble comes to St. Mark's after a twenty eight year career as an educator. He currently oversees the news content of the School website, serves as Editor of the twice-yearly St. Mark's Magazine, and takes on special projects regarding St. Mark's history and its alumni. Mr. Noble is also a member of the St. Mark's graduating class of 1976.