

The Dragon and The Class of 2004

John Webster, Head of School

The last time I saw Richard Holt, he stood 5'8" tall and he was saying good-bye to his seventh grade Academy classmates. Richard's family was moving to Indiana, and he would not return for his eighth grade year. A very quiet, polite and hard-working seventh grader, Richard would be missed. It was Commencement Day 1995.

The years passed and in April 2006 Richard sent me a graduation announcement from Notre Dame University, along with his photo in an Air Force ROTC uniform. The accompanying letter said, "Each morning I remember the Bible verses that started our day at chapel: 'Let love and honesty rule your life. Take those words, love and honesty, and write them down on the tablet of your heart and you will will a good name. A good name is worth more than all the money in the world.' Sir, I try to live those words every day. I'll be serving in the Air Force, but one day I'll stop by and visit my Academy Teachers."

Several years went by. Then, this April Richard sent me an email saying, "I'm coming to San Antonio during Fiesta Week. May I stop by the Academy? I'm bringing a friend." My response... "I want to see your face in the place. We look forward to your visit."

On the Wednesday of Fiesta Week, true to his email, Richard showed up for chapel, accompanied by his friend, Emily. Emily and Richard had met during their Notre Dame years. During chapel, much to Emily's delight, I called on Richard to tell us the date. Afterwards, Drew Kennedy showed our guests the campus and Richard was able to banter with many of his old (former) teachers.

Later, Richard, Emily and I talked for a while in my office, and Richard told me that his job in aviation carried him to all parts of the globe. As he handed me his unit's coin, stamped with the image of a fierce dragon, he advised me that if a member of his unit ever failed to produce the coin, he was required to buy the first round of Friday night drinks. I was now part of that proud tradition and would be expected to carry the coin at all times.

As we talked, it was clear that Richard cherished his memories of SAA and was eager to give Emily the opportunity to sense the spirit of the school. When he left, Richard made it clear that he is proud that San Antonio Academy has guarded the school's traditional values: love of God and country, honor, respect and pride in achievement. Then, Richard and Emily departed.

As they walked down the stairs of Taylor Hall and stood under the oak tree, Richard asked Emily to marry him... and she accepted his proposal. Richard had planned all along to make the most important speech of his life in a place that is rich with formative memories from his childhood.

Two days later, as I watched 55 Academy boys stand guard in front of the Alamo during the Battle of Flowers Parade, Richard and Emily stopped by. It was their final day in San Antonio and Richard wanted to know if I was carrying the coin. Thankfully, I was.

Postscript

On the Sunday of Fiesta Week, I attended the reunion for the Class of 2004. It was fun to see eighteen classmates enjoy each other's company. The boys had become men and were off to places like MIT, Columbia, and Yale, but here at a local restaurant, they were reliving their Academy days – telling stories, laughing, and eating food. After the first fifteen minutes, the only people who mattered were the boys. The adults were invisible. Life was good.