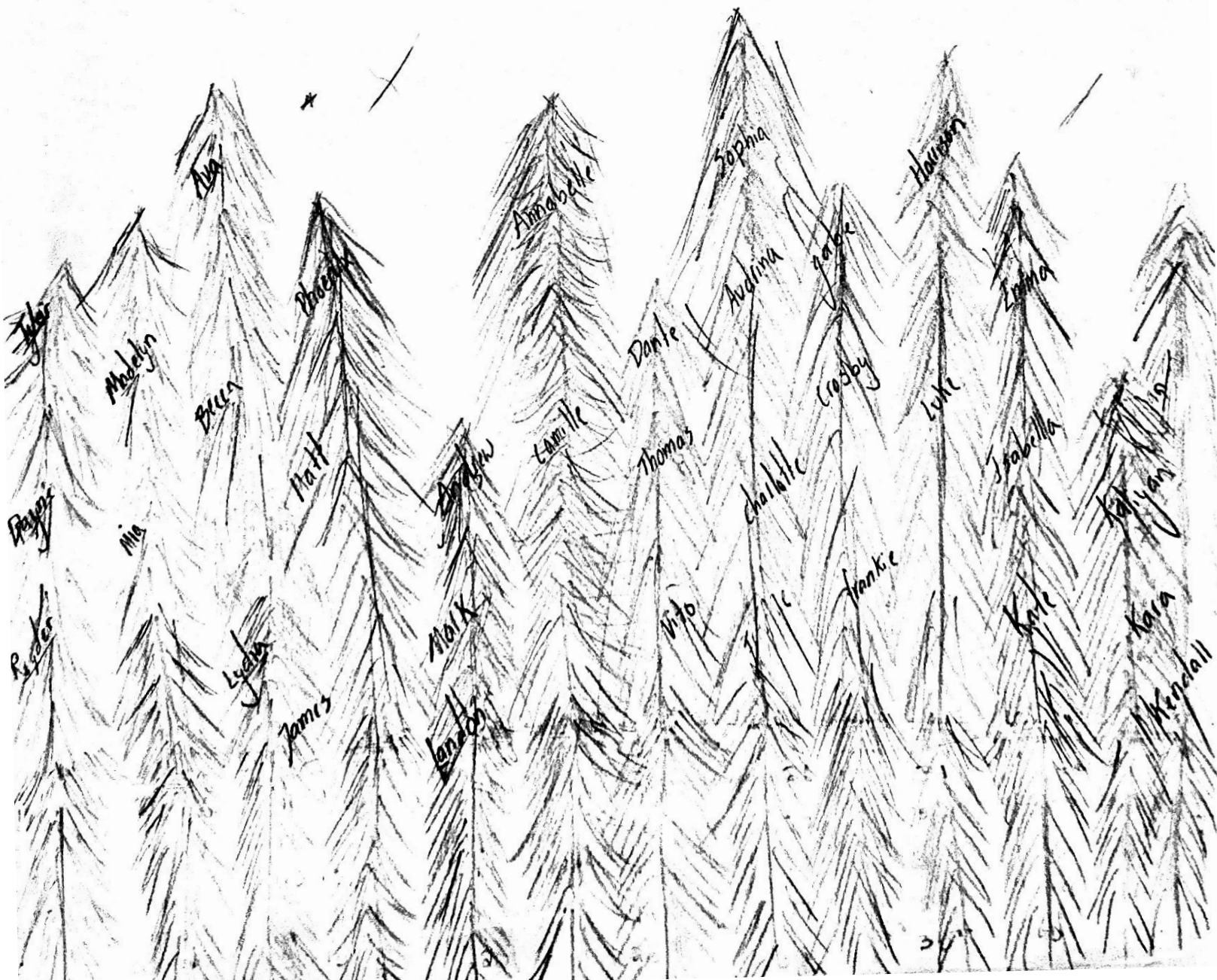


St Michael School
Pawcatuck, CT

Luminary

"because those who come before us, light the way for those who follow."



Front cover by Mia Giorno, eighth grade.

Luminary

Spring 2026

Acknowledgments

As coordinator of this oral history project, I would like to thank Reverend Dennis Perkins, pastor of St. Michael Church, and Mrs. Amy Babcock, principal of St. Michael School, for their leadership, sound judgment and enthusiastic support.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the alumni and former teachers for their willingness to sit down with our students and share their stories. I am grateful as well to our students for their curiosity and patience, and for the kindness they exhibited toward the interviewees.

Importantly, I wish to acknowledge the current middle school teachers at St. Michael School for their devotion to our students: Mrs. Rosie Novak, Mrs. Anna Grossomanides, Mrs. Larae Fowler and Mrs. Anna Brennauer. Their dedication in guiding and advising students, reviewing and editing manuscripts, and adjusting teaching schedules helped bring this publication to fruition.

Lastly, I wish to recognize Mrs. Beth Lawrence, St. Michael School secretary and alumna (Class of 1979), for her always-reliable assistance and steadfast support of St. Michael School and its staff.

I am truly grateful.

Jean M. Fiore
Director of Advancement
St. Michael School Class of 1975

Background and Dedication

The biographies in this anthology, known as *Luminary*, feature St. Michael School alumni and former teachers, and were written and illustrated in the 2025-26 academic year by current seventh and eighth graders of St. Michael School. The students drafted their biographies based on oral interviews conducted on December 3rd, 2025, in St. Michael Church Hall.

Fifteen years ago, during the 2008–09 academic year, Mr. Larry O’Keefe and Mrs. Deb Ventresca organized the first St. Michael School oral history project with then seventh graders and two eighth graders. Mr. O’Keefe, a St. Michael School alumnus (Class of 1955), had recently retired and returned to his hometown following a career teaching middle schoolers in Vermont. Mrs. Ventresca, a long-time educator in the Westerly public schools, was teaching English in her retirement to middle schoolers at St. Michael.

This anthology is dedicated to Mr. O’Keefe and Mrs. Ventresca, whose vision inspired the first and subsequent oral history projects.



*Mr. O’Keefe and Mrs. Ventresca at St. Michael Church Hall, April 24, 2026.
Photo courtesy of Gregg Gulino.*

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A Second-Grade Expert

The Academic Life of Carol Vacca Denslow

By Landon Robinson and Harrison McLaughlin

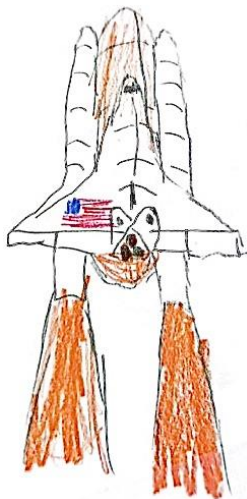
Imagine teaching at the same school and in the same second grade for decades. Well, that's what Mrs. Carol Vacca Denslow did. She taught second grade for 37 years at her alma mater, St. Michael School, then located on Liberty Street in Pawcatuck, prior to retiring in 2013.

Mrs. Denslow grew up in Pawcatuck and attended St. Michael School from first through eighth grade, graduating in 1963. Her sisters Rosemary and Sandra also went to St. Michael's as did her mother, Marie Lidestri Vacca, who graduated in June 1940. Mrs. Denslow was in a large class of 40 students throughout her years at St. Michael's. Almost all of the teachers were nuns who lived in the convent next door to the school and who belonged to the Sisters of Mercy, an order founded in Ireland and made up of Roman Catholic women dedicated to a life of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service. The sisters taught all of the subjects, including specials such as music, and were very strict.

It was an exciting time. Sputnik, the world's first satellite, was launched in 1957 by the Soviet Union while she was in third grade. Three years later when she was in sixth grade, John F. Kennedy was elected the first Catholic president of the United States and the "Space Race" to the Moon between Cold War rivals the United States and the Soviet Union began to heat up. Tragically, JFK was assassinated in 1963, five months after Mrs. Denslow graduated from St. Michael.

The school day at St. Michael's started at 9:00 a.m. and ended at 3:00 p.m. with a one-hour break for lunch so students who lived nearby could walk home and eat lunch there and students who lived far away ate lunch in the basement of St. Michael Church. She recollected field trips to some farms and fire stations, but her favorite memory was when she and her classmates decorated May baskets each spring filled with toiletries for the nuns. After school, she would sometimes walk to Higgins Pharmacy and buy a chocolate coke—a coke with chocolate syrup that she said was yummy—or she might go watch a movie at the United Theatre with her friends. Mrs. Denslow went onto Stonington High and Central Connecticut State College, where she studied elementary education, before returning to her alma mater in the fall of 1972 and assuming the second-grade teaching role from the retiring Mrs. Eleanor Arcangel.

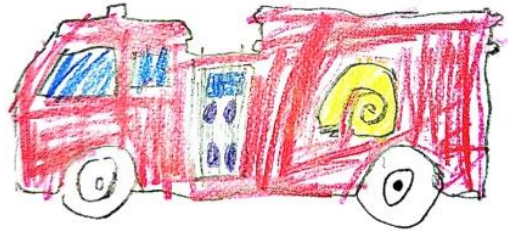
While she was a teacher, some major events happened such as the Space Shuttle Challenger exploding in January 1986



with Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher in space, aboard, and the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. She noted that she did not discuss these events with her students unless they asked about them. “They were so young, so we just prayed for everyone who was hurt,” she said.

During her nearly four decades of teaching second grade, Mrs. Denslow had the opportunity to teach her son Christopher, daughter Michelle and granddaughter Vanessa. She also had the added responsibility of preparing hundreds of students for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. She said she liked to teach Confession and First Communion classes.

One of her most fun memories was when she got to ride on a fire truck from the station back to the school. She and first-grade teacher Sister Margaret took their classes on a field trip to the Pawcatuck Fire Station. At the end of the outing, teachers and students all rode back up Liberty Street hill to the school on a fire engine. She shared: “Sister Margaret and I were standing on the back holding onto the grab bars!”



We learned so much from interviewing Mrs. Denslow, and we especially liked that students in the 1950s and 60s were able to go home for an hour for lunchtime. She said that St. Michael’s had a nurturing environment and she loved being there. “I would not trade my time as a student or teacher at St. Michael’s for anything,” she said. “I would gladly teach or be a student again!”

Sleeveless Dresses

The School Life of Catharine Lenihan Danie

By Becca Koswaski and Kaliyan Lamorge

(Becca is the great-granddaughter of Mrs. Danie)

We interviewed my great-grandmother, Mrs. Catharine Lenihan Danie. Our conversation started with small talk. She graduated from St. Michael School in 1952 in a class with 28 students. She enjoyed math and had to do penmanship sheets to work on her cursive very often.

Friends were a big part of Mrs. Danie's life. She was friends with everyone but became very close with Eleanor O'Brien and Joan McMahon. They would walk to school together, have lunch together, and call each other on their house phones. The three of them and a few other students would run all the way from the "old" school building on Liberty Street to someone's house on Courtland Street, where they would eat lunch together on school days. She would also be with them on the weekends either at Wilcox Park in downtown Westerly or having lunch at each other's houses. She was in Girl Scouts and The Children of Mary with them (the latter a school program for girls, dedicated to the Blessed Mother).

Even though St. Michael School did not require uniforms during the 1940s and 50s, the nuns devised dress codes that kept outfits pretty similar. One day



when Mrs. Danie and Mrs. O'Brien were in 8th grade, Mrs. Danie's aunt bought her a beautiful black plaid dress with sleeves that did not quite cover the shoulders. Eleanor got a similar dress and the two of them decided to wear them that Monday. When they got to school it only took a few minutes before Sister Sheila, who was not only their teacher but their principal said, "Eleanor O'Brien and Catharine Lenihan, please stand." Confused, the two of them stood. "Now look at these girls. They don't have enough money for sleeves for their dresses! Don't you feel bad for them?" The two girls sat down insanely shocked and embarrassed. Mrs. Danie later

told her mother and all she said was "You'll just have to wear a sweater next time."

Although there were some strict rules—such as boys and girls having separate entrances into the school—and strict nuns like Sister Sheila, there were also nice things about the school. Mrs. Danie elaborated: "It was fun at school. I liked getting the holy days off." Also, they did not have to worry about fundraisers, mainly because they had nothing to raise money for; however, they found other donations to collect. They went around the neighborhood with their classmates

collecting magazines, newspapers, and anything else people were willing to donate for the benefit of St. Michael School. During Christmas season, students sold religious stamps for use as decorations on presents and cards. They gave this money to the church.

Sister Marie, the seventh-grade teacher, was what made Mrs. Danie want to come to school most days. She was kind and always cared for the students. However, when they did not listen, she knew how to get their attention. She would slam her belt on students' desks. This may seem scary, but, while Mrs. Danie was telling us this she was laughing and remembering! She told us so much, making us laugh too and smile at her stories. It was also fascinating to hear about WWII drills, students hiding under their school desks and not making a sound. Every day at St. Michael School, even in the war years, was good to Mrs. Danie.

We enjoyed Mrs. Danie's stories from when she was a student at St. Michael's and appreciated learning about the differences between school then and school now. All of her memories showed us how much school has changed and put a smile on all three of our faces.



A Willingness to Serve

The School Life of Cathy Burdick Holdridge

By James O’Gara, Andrew Pellegrino and Gabe Kennedy

How much of a difference can a school make in just two years? Mrs. Catherine “Cathy” Burdick Holdridge, who grew up in Stonington, has many cherished memories from her early years at St. Michael School. One of her favorite memories was of the whole school walking to the United Theatre in downtown Westerly to see *The Song of Bernadette*, an American biographical film about Bernadette Soubirous, the French girl who saw apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in 1858. Another favorite memory of hers is when any emergency vehicles passed by, students would stop whatever they were doing and recite a Hail Mary. Yet another fond memory is of the annual crowning of Mary. Each May the students would pay tribute to the Blessed Mother by placing a crown of flowers on a statue of her located in the grotto near the convent. Students would process outside and the second graders wore their First Communion clothes.

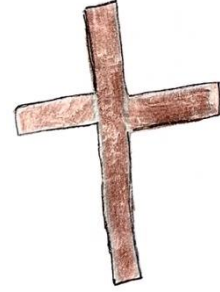


Mrs. Holdridge attended St. Michael’s from 1957 through 1959 for first and second grades only, while her older siblings John, Alice, Jane and Nonie stayed through eighth grade. She had thirty students in her class and they ate lunch in their classroom during a long lunch period where students could go home to eat if they lived close by. Mrs. Holdridge received a strong foundation, learned Catholic prayers and teachings, and had some good stories to share from her time at St. Michael’s. One of the stories we really enjoyed was when Mrs. Holdridge’s father forgot to pick her up from school. Sister Nathaniel was very kind to her and even got her a popsicle!

During the late 1950s when Mrs. Holdridge was a student, the girls wore a white blouse and navy-blue jumpers everyday as the uniform while the boys wore white shirts and a tie with the SMS emblem and navy pants. There were no Latin or foreign language or technology (computer) classes when she attended St. Michael’s, but they did have recess every day, like today. All of the teachers in the school, except for second grade, were nuns.

When she was in second grade, Mrs. Holdridge served as a mascot for the eighth-grade graduation ceremony. Four second graders, two girls and two boys dressed in child-sized caps and gowns, would lead the procession of eighth graders into the church. At the end of the ceremony, the mascots led the graduates out of the church. She believes she was chosen for this honor because her sister Nonie was graduating.

Despite attending St. Michael's for a short time, Mrs. Holdridge says the school strengthened her early faith and that she so admired the Sisters of Mercy who staffed St. Michael School that she had wanted to become a nun in her youth. She currently volunteers in our parish's religious education program, teaching public school second graders about the sacraments and preparing them for First Holy Communion. Before teaching the sacraments, Mrs. Holdridge taught in Ledyard for 26 years: nine years at Ledyard Middle School and 17 years at Juliet W. Long School (elementary). She taught sixth grade, both regular education and special education mainstreamed students.



Mrs. Holdridge looks back on her time at St. Michael's with fondness and gratitude. She values the traditional Catholic curriculum which instilled in her a willingness to serve all these years later.

When School Was Fun

The School Life of Chris Gomes

By Matt Smith and Frankie Ritacco

What was St. Michael School like in the 1970s? Mr. Christopher Gomes graduated from St. Michael School in 1979, and he has many memories from his time as a student. He grew up on Stillman Avenue in Pawcatuck and would walk, skateboard, or bike with his friends and siblings to the school, then located on Liberty Street. The youngest of four boys, Mr. Gomes' older brothers John, Michael and Tony also attended. In fact, he and his siblings were third-generation St. Michael graduates, as their mother Rose Lidestri Gomes graduated in 1943 and their maternal grandmother Rose Sanquedolce attended in the late 1910s to early 1920s.

At St. Michael's, Mr. Gomes had fair grades and was a strong athlete. He would get to school early to play sports with his friends before the bell rang. They played football, kickball, baseball, wiffle ball and basketball depending on what they felt like playing that day. They sometimes played tackle football on the blacktop!



Mr. Gomes' favorite part of St. Michael School was the closeness of all its students and families. The most important things he learned from school were discipline and how to treat others properly. His favorite classes were history, religion and English. During his time at St. Michael's, students also had to complete science fair projects just like we do now. Most of his teachers were nuns who belonged to the Sisters of Mercy and lived in the convent next door to the school. The nuns would discipline students by hitting their desks with rulers or sometimes hitting their hands with rulers or, if a student or students were really disrespectful and disruptive, the nun might resort to throwing chalkboard erasers at their heads. He noted that the Sisters of Mercy did not show mercy!

While a student, Mr. Gomes belonged to Boy Scout Troop 9, which has been chartered continuously by St. Michael Church since 1920. (Incidentally,



Troop 9 celebrated its centennial in 2020.) Mr. Gomes played for the St. Michael School boys basketball team called the Saints, which was made up of fifth and sixth graders. They practiced at the Stonington Como and competed against other elementary schools in Stonington. He also served as an altar boy from fifth through eighth grade and wore a long red cassock with a white surplice when serving. In spring, he played centerfield for a

Pawcatuck Little League team that was sponsored by St. Michael School. Later, he would play for the Stonington Police Little League team.

In the 1970s the basement of the school, called St. Andrew's Hall, was designated as a bomb shelter. The school had to have a bomb shelter because of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. St. Andrew's Hall had a ping pong table, a dart board and a pool table for eighth graders to use. That was one of the reasons eighth grade was Mr. Gomes' favorite year.

When he was a teen, Mr. Gomes worked summers at the batting cages at the former Maple Breeze Park on upper Liberty Street in Pawcatuck. The park was owned and operated by the Main family whose children attended St. Michael School. The amusement park also offered miniature golf, a water slide, go-karts and ice cream. It was a popular place for youth in the latter part of the 20th century.

St. Michael School seemed like a really good school back in the 1970s. The school community was like a family and some of the teachers were really caring. Most kids were into sports that led to many games that they played at recess and out of school. We think we can learn from St. Michael's back in the seventies and make our school better today.

A Not-So-Good Shot

The School Life of Daniel Brannegan

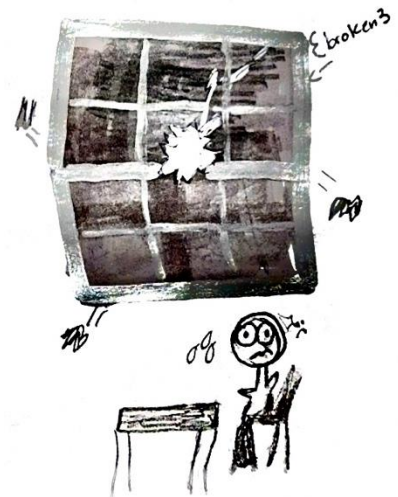
By Tyler Baltrukonis and Luke Phillips

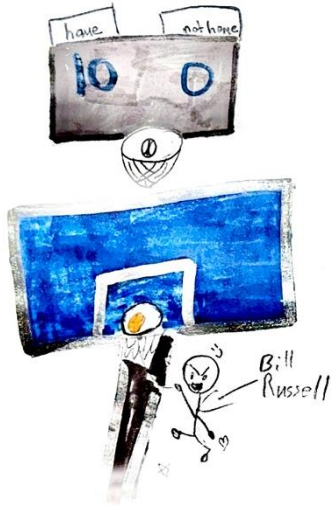
Have you ever wondered what St. Michael School was like sixty years ago? That is the question we answered with the help of the alumnus we interviewed named Dan Brannegan. Mr. Brannegan enrolled in St. Michael School in 1953 and graduated in 1962. His older sister Mary Ellen also attended, graduating in 1959; as did his mother Mary Mullaney Brannegan in the early 1920s.

Mr. Brannegan said that boys' uniforms were about the same as today's current uniforms (blue pants and white shirt) except that their blue ties were embossed with *SMS*. He told us that he had two twenty-minute recesses per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. He played dodge ball, kickball and tag. Sometimes he and his friends even played tackle tag called fanuary! They also had a one-hour lunch break, during which he left the school and walked back home to Stillman Avenue to eat. (We think our teachers today should consider this!)

Mr. Brannegan shared a classroom with close to fifty students and only one teacher. Regarding class size, he said "The high was 54, but the average was 47 to 48!" Most of his teachers were nuns, with the exception of third and fifth grades. His favorite classes were science and history, and his favorite teacher was Sister Regina Francis. "I liked her because she found time in her day to help me, specifically with math," he said. Mr. Brannegan relayed that they only had one teacher, all day, for all subjects. Regarding discipline, he noted that some nuns had a pointer stick to hit a disobedient student. Mr. Brannegan was an altar server, along with Jimmy Higgins, who received detention a few times, mostly for talking too much and once for coming back from a funeral service late. He and Jimmy were hanging around and were making large wax balls from the funeral candles!

Our favorite story from Mr. Brannegan is when he tried to throw (bank) a paper ball off a window into a trash can. He was in seventh grade at the time. He crumpled a paper ball, aligned his shot, and threw the ball onto a previously dislodged window which caused it to fall two floors to its death. His teacher and classmates were shocked by the sound of crashing glass. Meanwhile Mr. Brannegan was nervously laughing because he did not know what else to do. He tried explaining to his classmates, teachers, principal, and parents that it was just a paper ball, but no one was buying his story. Since no one believed him, his





parents had to pay for the window. Needless to say, they were not happy about it. He did, like his idol Boston Celtics superstar Bill Russell, make the shot. He said, "I always made THAT shot!"

Mr. Brannegan said that the teachers were the same to everyone and did not favor the girls (unlike today!). He said that he had a lot of homework in middle school (like today!). He also said that when he was in eighth grade his class visited Enders Island in Mystic. Today's eighth graders have a retreat at Enders as part of graduation festivities.

After graduating from St. Michael's, Mr. Brannegan went onto St. Bernard High School in Uncasville and thereafter to Fairfield University for college. He then received a master's degree in organic chemistry from the University of Rhode Island and went to work at Pfizer Corporation for about 25 years as a scientist. He married one of his St. Michael classmates, Jane Kenyon Brannegan, and raised two children. Now he's a happy grandparent with five grandchildren, some of whom also attended Saint Bernard's.

School Before the Electronics

The School Life of David Kmetz

By Ryder Campbell and Dante Algier
(*Ryder is the grandnephew of Mr. Kmetz*)

Have you ever thought about how school was back then, when there were no electronic devices, such as phones or computers? My seventh-grade partner Dante Algier and I had the chance to interview an alumnus of St. Michael School. His name is David Kmetz and he is my great uncle. Uncle David went to St. Michael School from first through eighth grade, graduating in 1976. He grew up on Morgan Street in Pawcatuck, so he lived very close to school, which was then located at 63 Liberty Street across from St. Michael Church. Actually, he walked to and from school every day.

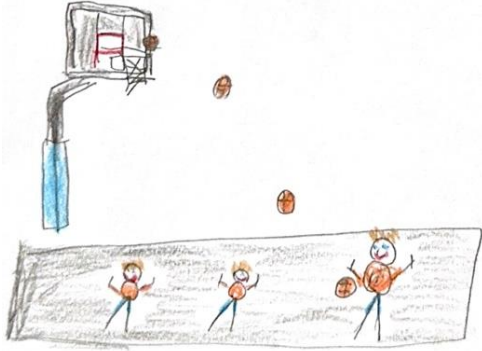
Uncle David grew up in a very large family with eight siblings, all of whom also attended St. Michael School. After graduating from St Michael's, he went onto Saint Bernard High School in Uncasville, Connecticut, and then to the University of Connecticut where he studied finance. Upon graduating from college, he went to work for the Washington Trust Company in downtown Westerly, Rhode Island, where he now serves as vice president of commercial banking.

When Uncle David was at St. Michael's in the 1960s and 70s, there were about thirty students per class, more than what we have on average in the classroom today. There were no cell phones or personal computers, and students did not talk about global news like students do now. Nowadays that's all kids do!

He noted that he had to wear the same uniform every day: blue pants and a white collared shirt with a plaid tie. His favorite subject was math. He loved it because one could always know if an answer was right or wrong right away since there was only one answer instead of multiple different answers.

Uncle David packed his own lunch every day because his parents expected him to be responsible and to take care of himself. He also said he had to bring the brown paper bag that he used that day back home for use the next day! He claimed that he did not get in trouble too often, but Dante and I suspect that is not exactly true. Punishments from the nuns who staffed the school could either be a slap from the ruler on your hands or the offender would have to write all the time tables on the board. (We suspect Uncle David knew his times tables well!)





Dante and I learned that the most important memory my uncle had was of the friendships he fostered while a student at St. Michael's. Most of the friends that he made in school, he still has to this day. Because St. Michael's is a small school (one class at each grade level), students become very close with each other. Uncle David would hang out with his classmates 24/7, both in school AND outside of school! They would either play football, basketball, baseball, or another team sport.

Uncle David would recommend going to St. Michael School for the friendships. Since St. Michael's is not as big as nearby public schools, he said that after a while you basically know everyone. He has so many friendships today because of St. Michael School. "You can become very good friends when you have such a small school like that!" He also said he felt well prepared for his current job which requires a high level of skill in math.

Overall, we learned a great deal about how school used to be, and we really enjoyed our time with Uncle David.

School Spirit

The School Life of Donald Fiore

By Lydia Scariati and Emma Ritacco

Imagine having recess while one of your teachers sold candy, such as Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, to the students. That is what happened during Mr.



Donald Fiore's school years. The nun assigned to recess duty would don an usherette tray filled with candy bars and sweet treats and sell them to interested students. Mr. Fiore believes proceeds benefitted the school.

Mr. Fiore attended St. Michael School for eight years, starting in September 1964 and graduating in June 1972. He said he "felt at home at school" because his family (younger siblings Jean and Tom), relatives (Crowley, McGowan and Howard cousins), and friends went to St. Michael School with him. Students were genuinely proud to study at St. Michael's and there was a lively spirit at school that made it fun.

Mr. Fiore's favorite subjects were English, math and history. He liked that there was always an emphasis on grammar. He particularly liked the spelling bees as he performed well in them. When Mr. Fiore went to St. Michael's, there was not much of a playground, just blacktop, but the students had twenty minutes of recess, twice a day. Sometimes, they would even play pool in the basement since there was a pool table for eighth graders to use.

Snowstorms were common in the winter months when he was growing up. Some memorable events that happened during his school years were the Great Northeastern Blackout in early November 1965 when 30 million people lost power in New England, New York, Ontario, and the Mid-Atlantic for close to 13 hours; the 1966 death of 19-year-old St. Michael School alumnus, U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Bill LaBrecque in Vietnam; and the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970. Mr. Fiore also recalled the November 1970 funeral of Monsignor John F. X. Quinn, who had served as pastor of St. Michael Parish for 41 years, as well as the 1971 appointment of Sister Anthony Mary (known as "Sam" by students) as new principal and eighth grade teacher when he was in eighth grade. U.S. Senator Thomas Dodd was laid to rest at St. Michael Cemetery in May 1971. Senator Dodd's wife, Grace Murphy Dodd, was a Westerly native and his mother-in-law Helena Higgins Murphy had been born in Pawcatuck.

Some differences between St. Michael School then and now are that the school used to be located on Liberty Street and is now in the former West Broad

Street School; students brought their own food and ate at their desks in their classrooms (they ate tuna or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with Twinkies or Hostess Cupcakes for dessert), whereas today local restaurants provide lunches for a minimal cost; there were blackboards with chalk instead of white boards with markers; grades and comments on report cards were handwritten while today's report cards are computer-generated; boys' basketball was the only sport offered whereas today there are many extracurricular activities, and cross country and basketball are offered for both boys and girls. Additionally, the Sisters of Mercy taught at the school while today there are only lay teachers. Mr. Fiore said the nuns were "strict but good and taught the students responsibility."

Some similarities between St. Michael School then and now are that the same subjects are still taught, with the exception of Latin (which was not taught when Mr. Fiore attended) and P.E. (students had two recesses a day but no gym class); students learned the tenets of the Catholic faith; and uniforms were required. Boys wore a white shirt with navy-blue pants and matching tie that had a shield on it with the letters *SMS*. Later, the school switched the tie to a plaid one. Bus transportation was also available to Stonington residents then, like today.

When Mr. Fiore graduated on June 19, 1972, at St. Michael Church, he was one of 21 students: seven girls and 14 boys. He was also vice-president of his class. He felt academically ready for Stonington High because St. Michael School taught him well. Connecticut State Senator Joseph Fauliso delivered the graduation address. Fauliso, who would eventually serve as Lt. Governor of Connecticut, grew up in Pawcatuck and attended St. Michael's in his early years. Mr. Fauliso's niece Tina Woodall was a classmate of Mr. Fiore.

We had lots of fun interviewing Mr. Fiore, who is now retired after a career supervising the enforcement of child support orders for the State of Connecticut's Windham Judicial District. We enjoyed learning about his school days at St. Michael's. He is proud of his alma mater and still true to his school!



A Classical Decisionmaker at the Helm

The Academic Life of Doris Sullivan Messina

By Phoenix Marco-Schappa and Vito Gynther

Have you ever wondered how classical education started at St. Michael School? Back in 2017, then-principal Doris Messina made the monumental decision to introduce a classical curriculum to the traditional Catholic instruction offered at St. Michael School. Prior to instituting this new curriculum, Mrs. Messina made a trip to a school in Hyattsville, Maryland, called Saint Jerome Academy to observe classical education in action. Saint Jerome's had experienced declining enrollment until it set itself apart from public schools by implementing classical education. Mrs. Messina wanted to do the same; she wanted to make St. Michael School not only different from local public schools but better.

The curriculum she introduced at St. Michael's included an expansion of the



study of Latin to grades 3 through 8, rather than just grades 7 and 8; a renewed focus on grammar using Shurley English; a continued emphasis on cursive writing; and a focus on classical literature, ancient civilizations, American history and associated geography. Today, Latin language instruction at St. Michael's has expanded even further to include all grade levels from K4 through 8th grade.

Another major decision Mrs. Messina made—in concert with Reverend Dennis Perkins, pastor of St. Michael Parish—was to relocate St. Michael School to the former West Broad Street School building at 131 West Broad Street. This move took place in 2020 in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic. This was a very important decision because the old building on Liberty Street was in disrepair and needed to be replaced. The West Broad Street School building, with its classical architecture, offered the perfect home for St. Michael School with its new emphasis on Catholic classical education for the modern world. It also offered more space for future growth.

Yet another significant decision made by Mrs. Messina was to keep the school open during the coronavirus outbreak. She decided against online school and wanted students to continue with in-person education using proper safety protocols. The larger school building at West Broad allowed for easier social distancing. Students and teachers alike wore masks all year.

Mrs. Messina started working at St. Michael School in the mid-1990s as a substitute teacher. Her sons Jed and Tommy were young and enrolled at the school. In 1999, she accepted a position as the fifth-grade teacher and taught that grade for five years, during which time she had a class of 29 students. She then

taught middle school English and language arts for three years. In 2005, Mrs. Kathleen Clancy, the long-time kindergarten teacher, and Mrs. Messina were named interim principal and vice principal, respectively, succeeding Mr. Richard Woodworth, the first lay principal of St. Michael School.

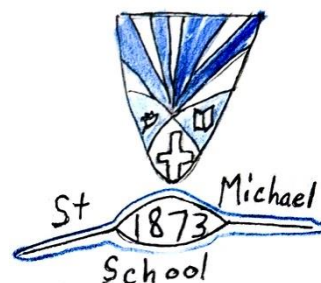
In 2006, Mrs. Messina and Mrs. Clancy reversed roles. Mrs. Messina led the school for the next 16 years with the help of vice principal Mrs. Clancy for the majority of those years. She also taught religion and Latin while serving as principal. In 2022, former fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Amy Babcock succeeded Mrs. Messina as principal. Today, Mrs. Messina still teaches Latin part time with the help of Ms. Fiore, the former 1st grade teacher, along with Father Perkins, and she serves on the St. Michael School Advisory Board.

During her time at the helm of St. Michael School, Mrs. Messina hired many of our current teachers including Mrs. Grossomanides (affectionately known as Mrs. G), Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Brissette, Mrs. Gynther, Mrs. Brennauer, Mrs. Macaione, Ms. Fiore, Ms. Donnini and our current principal Mrs. Babcock who initially taught music. When Mrs. Messina started teaching at St. Michael's, Father Perkins was the newly appointed pastor, uniforms incorporated blue shirts instead of white ones, soccer and cheerleading were offered in addition to basketball and cross country, and French was the language taught.

Doris Sullivan Messina was born in East Providence, Rhode Island, and went to St. Brendan School in Riverside, RI, through eighth grade. She stated she did well academically but got in trouble a lot because she was chatty. However, she said that she believes in “consequences for actions.” For high school, she attended St. Mary Academy – Bayview, an all-girls Catholic college preparatory school, also in Riverside. Following high school, Mrs. Messina received her bachelor's degree in Theatre/English from Plymouth State College in New Hampshire. She then completed an M.A.T. (Master of Arts in Teaching) at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, where she also attained her administration certification.

Mrs. Messina told us she really enjoyed serving as principal of St. Michael School. “It was my favorite job,” she said. She is proud of St. Michael School's longevity (it was founded in 1873) and pleased that so many former students now have their own children in the school. “Students I had in class or I knew as students are now enrolling their children. It just shows the commitment to the school. It shows the continuity that comes from a school over 150 years old.”

St. Michael School has been fortunate to have such a dedicated educator and leader during the past quarter century. We are grateful for her guidance.



A Simpler Time

The Academic Life of Fran Cawley

By Dayne Belanger and Crosby Mathews

Want to know what St. Michael School was like 70 years ago? Meet alumna Frances “Fran” Cawley, who in her retirement returned to St. Michael School as a teacher’s aide from 2001 to 2007. When she was a student in the 1940s and 50s, there were only nuns who taught and they showed up for work even when they were sick. The Sisters of Mercy—the order of nuns assigned to teach at the school—lived in the convent on Liberty Street next door to the school. Miss Cawley had 38 students in her class and they did not wear uniforms back then. After she graduated in 1956, Miss Cawley attended Stonington High School. Then, in college, she studied education and taught high school in Norwich and Norwalk for 35 years.



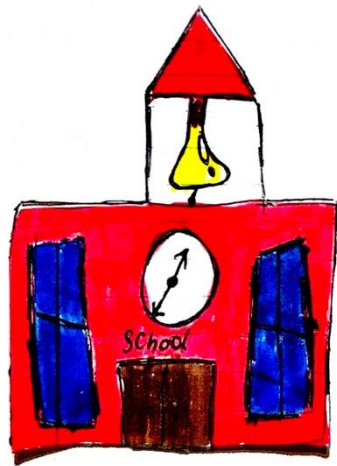
When Miss Cawley was a child, parents did not have to pay much to send their children to St. Michael School. She was an only child and her mother was a homemaker. Her father, Bill Cawley, was a well-known reporter for *The Westerly Sun* during the devastating hurricane before Miss Cawley's birth known as The Hurricane of 1938. The hurricane was one of the worst to hit New England and resulted in many deaths.

Each week day, Miss Cawley walked to and from school and went home to eat lunch, while the students who lived further away brought their lunches and ate in the church basement. The students did not change classrooms for their different subjects; instead, the teachers came to them. She had no television in her home until she was in the sixth grade. When she had free time, she played outside which youngsters nowadays do less often because they are glued to phone and computer and television screens 24/7. She was also a brownie and girl scout for many years.

According to Miss Cawley, most of the academic subjects that were taught at St. Michael’s have remained the same, with the exception of foreign language. At that time, most public and private schools did not offer a foreign language she said, whereas in Westerly students were taught Italian. Today, all St. Michael students study Latin. Miss Cawley also noted that they did not have yearbooks at St. Michael’s when she was a student, but they did have their photos taken by a school photographer, and they exchanged photos with their classmates and friends. They were issued a photo holder that folded open like an accordion to reveal all the

pictures, and Miss Cawley even brought a photo holder with photos of former school mates to share with us.

For subjects, Miss Cawley studied math, science, and reading, and had religion class every morning. There was no library at St. Michael School so students had to walk to the one in Westerly on their own time. A few times a year, librarians visited the school and presented books. On Mondays, St. Michael students got out early so students from the public school could come for catechism classes.



During Miss Cawley's youth, there were two grammar schools in Pawcatuck: St. Michael School and West Broad Street School. They were both kindergarten through eighth grade. The high school was on Field Street where the Stonington Middle School is located today. She attended that school for one year before the new high school opened on South Broad Street in 1957. There was a movie theater near Mel's Downtown Creamery called the Central Theatre. Other than that, most of the downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck area has remained the same.

It was a pleasure talking to Miss Cawley and learning about this great school and life in the 1940s and 50s. We hope you enjoyed learning about it too!

Overcoming Obstacles

The School Life of Gerry Shea Spillane

By Ava Gomes and Charlotte Gulan

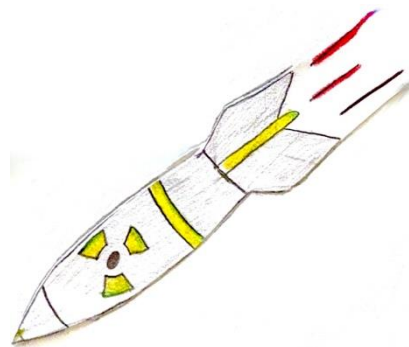
Imagine being a school girl and having to do bomb drills and having both your brothers in the military and not knowing if they will come home alive. Imagine having to fear contracting an incurable disease. Or imagine enduring the destructive winds and torrential rains of one of the deadliest storms to hit New England. This was the childhood of Mrs. Geraldine “Gerry” Shea Spillane who started first grade at St. Michael School in 1941.

Mrs. Spillane was just shy of four years old on September 21, 1938, when a Category 5 hurricane swept through Pawcatuck and Westerly. Her father feared the roof would blow off their home at the corner of Garden and Robinson Streets in Pawcatuck so he and Mrs. Spillane’s brother Bobby, who was 12 years old at the time, went up to the attic. The roof was starting to lift and one could see outside. So Mrs. Spillane’s father broke two windows on opposite sides of the house to let the air pass through. They had no power for days afterwards. She said, “We were fine but lost the garage. It blew down the hill!”

Mrs. Spillane recalled that a highly contagious disease named polio afflicted thousands of children worldwide, causing paralysis of limbs and breathing muscles. Her friend told her about a boy who had to live in an iron lung day in and day out and could never leave. That child had contracted polio, which restricted his breathing. The iron lung allowed the child to breathe. Even Franklin Roosevelt, prior to becoming president of the United States, contracted polio while swimming in freshwater at a boy scout camp in New York. Mrs. Spillane herself had contracted measles but fortunately it was not fatal.

During Mrs. Spillane’s school days, corporal punishment was an accepted form of discipline. When she was a fifth grader, a classmate stole a ruler. The teacher was very enraged at the thought of a student hiding it so she said “If no one admits it, you’re all going to get the yardstick!” Mrs. Spillane was terrified since she sat in front so she thought she would be first! Thankfully, the child gave back the ruler and no one got hit.

In the 1940s during World War II, Mrs. Spillane experienced classroom bomb drills and rations—fixed, limited allowances—on meat, butter, gas. Also, at night the whole town had to turn lights out so they would not be detected by enemy bombers.





Another recollection that Mrs. Spillane shared with us pertained to the annual tradition of giving May baskets. On or near the first of May, known as May Day, students, typically with the help of their mothers, would decorate a basket containing a variety of food treats and other small gifts to present to their teacher. They would walk to the convent where the Sisters of Mercy, who taught at the school, lived. They would place the basket on the doorstep, ring the doorbell, and then run and hide. When one of the nuns came out, they would gleefully shout “Surprise!”

After graduating from St. Michael’s in 1949, Mrs. Spillane went onto Stonington High and then to Willimantic State Teachers College, known today as Eastern Connecticut State University, where she studied elementary education and became a teacher at the Broadway School in Mystic. While at Willimantic, she met Robert “Bud” Spillane. They married, raised a family and lived in many different cities due to her husband’s career as a public-school superintendent for several large school districts. In 2011, the Spillane’s retired and returned to Pawcatuck and St. Michael Parish. They moved into and renovated Mrs. Spillane’s childhood home (built in 1870) on Robinson Street, the one that decades earlier had successfully weathered, due to her father’s wisdom, that ferocious storm known as the Great New England Hurricane.

Faith and A Strong Foundation

The School Life of Jane Burdick Martley

By Mark Phillips and Thomas Carpenter

Have you ever wondered what it was like to attend school in the 1940s and 50s? We had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Jane Burdick Martley and learn about her experience as a student at St. Michael School, which was then located on Liberty Street across from St. Michael Church. Mrs. Martley was born in 1939 and attended St. Michael School from first through eighth grade, graduating in 1954. During her time at St. Michael's, her parents paid a minimal tuition for school, and students did not wear uniforms. After she graduated, her faith stayed with her through life.

Mrs. Martley was particularly fond of the Sisters of Mercy who staffed St. Michael School. At that time, there was only one lay teacher and the rest were nuns. She said some nuns were strict disciplinarians but most were not. Her favorite teacher was Sister Marie George, who taught seventh grade. Mrs. Martley came to St. Michael's because her parents thought the discipline and structure would benefit her brother Johnny who got into a lot of trouble, both in and out of school. One of the main reasons he got in trouble was because he would sneak out the fire escape stairs at school.

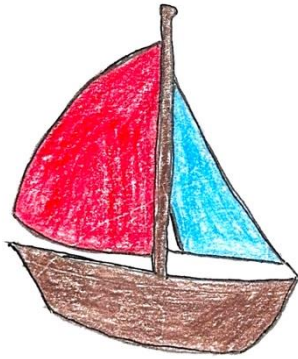
Mrs. Martley started first grade in September 1944 during World War II and specifically recalled having to practice air raid drills. She said everyone was very tense because they thought that the Axis Powers were going to bomb them. In March 1945, while Mrs. Martley was still in first grade, Harry Truman became president of the United States and his decision to drop atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in August 1945 led to Japan's surrender. Mrs. Martley was six years old when World War II ended.

When Mrs. Martley was in eighth grade, there were 18 students in the class and today there are 16 students in eighth grade. The total number of students was about 125 students which is much less than today's enrollment of 167. There was no specific disciplinary code so the nuns meted out punishments as they saw fit. Mrs. Martley did not like studying since she struggled academically but she loved her teachers and classmates. There were no physical education or Latin classes back then. She also had to walk to a bus stop every day where she would get picked up to go to school. She grew up in Stonington, first on Taugwonk Road and then Cove Road.

She liked art and her favorite activity in school was to draw. In middle school Mrs. Martley did not have to



switch classes as the teachers rotated instead, and when she wanted to write something she had to hand-write it or use a typewriter. She enjoyed playing baseball at recess, which lasted 15 minutes like today. As an eighth-grade field



trip, she went to Crescent Park in Riverside, Rhode Island, which was popular at the time but no longer operates today. Mrs. Martley loved swimming and clamming as a child and being on the water as her dad had a boat. He also kept a garden where he grew vegetables and flowers, and she enjoyed helping him tend the garden. She also loved to travel and camp. Later in life, she even went to Ireland with her mother and siblings.

Mrs. Martley feels that St. Michael's provided a strong foundation and taught her many valuable lessons.

One of the most helpful lessons she learned was the importance of being on time. She was married to the late Bill Martley and together they raised three children, two daughters and a son. She continues to work as a secretary of several businesses and she enjoys quilting. Without St. Michael's she feels she would not be as successful as she is today.

What Was School Like in the 1950s and 60s?

The School Life of Jane Kenyon Brannegan

By Camille Thomas and Kate Niedbala

According to alumna Mrs. Jane Kenyon Brannegan, St. Michael School provided a safe, nurturing environment in which to learn. Mrs. Brannegan attended St. Michael from kindergarten through eighth grade, starting in 1953 and graduating in 1962. She lived about one mile away from the school, then located on Liberty Street, so every day she would walk four miles in total: once to school in the morning, then back home for lunch, then back to school, then finally back home at the end of the day. She had one hour for lunch.



Mrs. Brannegan grew up on Washington Street near the former West Broad Street School, which is now home to St. Michael School. She was like an only child since she and her younger sister Heidi were ten years apart, and for many years Mrs. Brannegan was the only girl on her street. Since the number of boys on her street was uneven, they always asked Mrs. Brannegan to play baseball with them to make the teams even. She would be sitting on the front steps of her house but before she said yes to playing with the boys, she gave them math problems to do!

At school, Mrs. Brannegan was a good student and never got in trouble. She did not mind wearing a uniform to school, and the nuns who taught at the school strictly enforced the uniform regulations. As a matter of fact, all the girls had to kneel on the floor to make sure their skirts were the right length!

Mrs. Brannegan's favorite school subjects were music and art. She also enjoyed learning to square dance and ballroom dance during P.E. classes. She said, "It was fun, and everyone was excited to go." After school, Mrs. Brannegan took piano lessons with the nuns and feels that all students should learn to play an instrument. She also started an afterschool art club with her friends and said her interest in art today stemmed from her school days at St. Michael's. In her later years at St. Michael's, she tutored younger students and helped them with their studies.

Mrs. Brannegan shared many memories from her school days. She recollected the excitement in 1959 when the Barbie doll was released, though she never got one because her grandpa did not like the way the dolls looked. That same

year, she recalled the sense of national pride when Alaska and Hawaii became part of the United States. She also remembered major storms and local buildings flooding when Hurricane Donna hit in 1960, followed just two years later by the lingering five-day nor'easter known as the Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962.

Lastly, she recalled that when she was in seventh grade, her class got a new student, a friendly boy from Canada named Herbie Sirois. The new student did not speak any English, which made it impossible for him to have a conversation with anyone. The whole class helped to teach him English. He became a kind of “class project” for everyone to work on.

Mrs. Brannegan thought that she was well prepared for high school because St. Michael's provided a strong foundation and lasting values and taught her how to be a good citizen. She also made some very good friends while she was a student at St. Michael's and still gets together with several of her former classmates today. She even married one of her St. Michael School classmates, Daniel Brannegan.

We truly enjoyed the experience of getting to meet Mrs. Brannegan. It was fun to talk to her and interesting to see how St. Michael School changed over the years. Mrs. Brannegan was very nice, and we appreciated learning from her.



The Outstanding Player and Role Model

The School Life of Joe Donohue

By Mia Giorno, Kara Lemay and Sophia Antoch

Mr. Joseph “Joe” Donohue is a third-generation St. Michael School graduate. His grandfather John “Jackie” Joseph Donohue who was born on Liberty Street, his father John, and his siblings Jack, Michael, Cathy, and Chris all went to St. Michael’s. Sadly, Mr. Donohue’s father passed away at age 38 when Joe was just three years old. His mother Catherine (known as Kay), his Aunt Mary (his father’s sister) and his Grandma Donohue raised him and his four siblings. These women and his school teachers (the Sisters of Mercy) were his role models.

Mr. Donohue’s ancestors—great-grandparents John and Hannah (Murphy) Donohue and great-great-grandparents James and Catherine (Sullivan) Murphy—were originally from Ireland. They immigrated to America in the 1860s and settled on Liberty Street in Pawcatuck, not far from where St. Michael Parish would open St. Michael School in 1873. In fact, they were some of the earliest parishioners and founders of St. Michael Parish.

Mr. Donohue said he was an average student as he focused more on sports than school work. He recalled that he did not pass his first Latin test because he did not study. His mother, a long-time business teacher at Stonington High, set up Latin tutoring sessions for Joe with then-seminarian Paul Loverde, a St. Michael School graduate from Pawcatuck, who went on to be ordained a priest and eventually served as Bishop of Arlington, Virginia.



Mr. Donohue played football, basketball and baseball. When he was 11 years old, someone kicked him in the face during one of his Little League games. He broke his jaw and had to have surgery. Thankfully, he broke his jaw in June, so he did not miss any school. He spent the night at Lawrence and Memorial Hospital in New London. When football season started at the end of summer, he wanted to play but he had to wait a year because of his jaw injury. After it healed, he played Peewee football for Stonington under Coach Gomes, whose children also attended St. Michael’s, and

he even won the Outstanding Player of the Year Award. Eventually, he would play football for Stonington High.

When he was at St. Michael School, Mr. Donohue was taught mostly by nuns who were strict disciplinarians. During his middle school years, he had responsibilities. At the end of the day, the chalk board erasers had to be clapped and cleaned. He had flag duty too, raising the flag in the morning and lowering it in the afternoon, like our eighth graders do today. His mom also encouraged him to become an altar boy and assist at church services. After school, he worked as a paper boy.

One day, he was delivering newspapers with his friend Tom Italiano. They were walking on lower Liberty Street near the Dairy Queen. It was snowing, and there was snow everywhere. All of a sudden as they passed Lawton's gas station, they heard a big explosion. A window blew out, flying over their heads like a frisbee and landed in the street. Mr. Italiano and Mr. Donohue quickly turned and ran toward the Pawcatuck firehouse to pull the alarm. A huge fire developed and spread everywhere, even to the two next-door neighbors to the left of the gas station. They later learned that the fire and explosion were caused when a kerosene heater ignited. Sadly, some people died.

When Mr. Donohue graduated from St. Michael's in 1963, there were 47 students in his class. He went onto Stonington High in the fall and, that November, President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas. He recalled that he was in the boys' locker room getting ready for football practice at 2:30 when the coaches told him and his teammates the news.

He advised us to work hard. "It's so much better to study when you're younger. Take the time to do what you have to do now." Mr. Donohue studied accounting at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts. He first worked at Electric Boat in Groton in the 1970s and then went to work for Harris Corporation in Pawcatuck. He and his wife Deborah Burlingame have a daughter and a son and five grandchildren.

We really enjoyed Mr. Donohue's company. We had such a great time interviewing him, and he was so kind to us. He was not only an outstanding football player but also an outstanding role model for us.



Mantillas at Mass

The School Life of Julie Turano Gulino

By Madelyn Mathews, Audrina Chapman and Kendall Swanberry

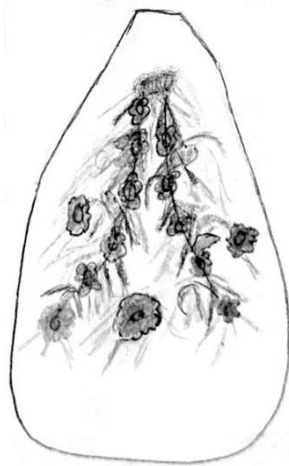
Imagine having to wear a uniform that you considered ugly, only to have it change every few years to something even more unattractive. That's what Mrs. Julie Turano Gulino had to do every day during her years at St. Michael School: wear something that she truly disliked! Up through fifth grade, girls wore little jumpers as their uniforms. However, in sixth grade the uniforms changed to full button-down jumpers over white blouses. Two years later, the uniforms subtly changed from plain blue jumpers to plaid grey and blue. None of these uniforms were particularly appealing in Mrs. Gulino's estimation.

Mrs. Gulino attended from first grade through eighth grade and graduated in 1968. Her grandmother, mother, and brother all went to St. Michael School. Her younger brother John Turano graduated in 1974, her mother Anne McCormick Davis graduated in 1942 and her grandmother Marion Purtill McCormick was a 1916 graduate.

Like many of the students in the 1960s, Mrs. Gulino walked to school, even in the middle of winter. She grew up on Lester Avenue, which was not that far from Liberty Street where St. Michael School was then located. On particularly cold days, when she and her friends arrived at school, they were like icicles, she said, so they would sit on the radiators before their first class! Mrs. Gulino said that it was one of her funniest memories of St. Michael School.

However, we feel that the funniest memory she shared was of the nuns selling candy to their students. The Sisters of Mercy staffed the school and during recess they would entice students to buy candy. Mrs. Gulino specifically recalled one of her teachers, Sister Mary, donning an usherette tray at recess from which

the students could purchase chocolate bars and the like. It would be the only time that students were allowed to eat candy. Mrs. Gulino loved this part of the day!



One of our favorite anecdotes from Mrs. Gulino was about going to Mass. In church, the girls had to wear mantillas, which are lace head veils. If a student forgot her mantilla, she would have to wear a kleenex secured by a bobby pin. Imagine how embarrassing it must have been to wear a kleenex atop one's head in front of the whole school! Things have definitely changed because girls today have never had to wear any type of head veil to church.

During Mrs. Gulino's time at St. Michael School, lunch was an hour long so students could walk home to eat if they wished, and there were no middle school dances or field trips and no yearbooks. However, she has fond memories of the pageants she and her classmates would present at Christmastime. Students would prepare for weeks in advance for these pageants, which reenacted the biblical story of Jesus's birth.

Mrs. Gulino's graduating class had 33 students in it, 12 boys and 21 girls. Most students went to Pawcatuck Junior High for ninth grade and then onto Stonington High School. A few students went to Saint Bernard's in Uncasville following graduation from St. Michael's.

It was a great experience getting to interview Mrs. Gulino. We had lots of fun as she was really sweet and shared many interesting stories. Her school life was very different compared to ours today.



St. Michael School 70 Years Ago

The School Life of Michael Nowak

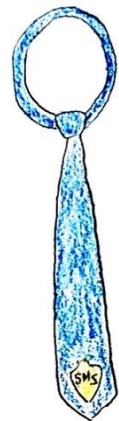
By Annabelle Thavenet and Isabella Rodriguez

Have you ever heard a sonic boom? We know someone who has! We had the privilege to interview Mr. Michael Nowak, a graduate of St. Michael School, class of 1960. Mr. Nowak insinuated that he did not enjoy going to school, as he felt that he did not have any freedom; all the nuns were strict. He attended St. Michael's from second grade through eighth grade, and his classes went from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon. Each class had forty students and each lesson was an hour long. Mr. Nowak enjoyed math and science and said that he uses the math and science that he learned at St. Michael's in his everyday life.

During his favorite time of day, recess time, while nobody was watching since the nuns spent their break in the convent next door to the school, the class played a plethora of games called taper-ice (similar to sharks and minnows), fanuary (a running game similar to tag), and dodgeball. Though Mr. Nowak is now retired, he feels his education at St. Michael School contributed to his job success. He lived in ten states (including Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, and New York) and had eleven different jobs. His last and longest job (twenty years) was at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, first located in New London, Connecticut, and then in Newport, Rhode Island, from 1989 to 2009. Mr. Nowak also learned self-discipline during his four-year enlistment in the military (1966 to 1970). He is a Vietnam veteran and served as a marine radar technician on a mountaintop overlooking Da Nang, a coastal city in central Vietnam that operated as a military hub for U.S and South Vietnamese Forces during the Vietnam War.

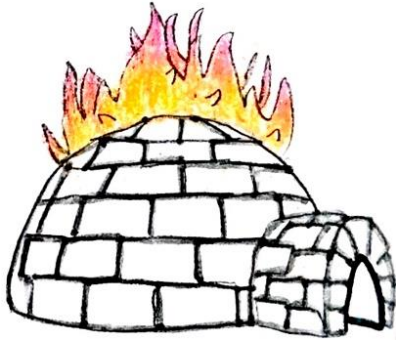
According to Mr. Nowak, it was a quiet time geopolitically when he attended St. Michael's. Eisenhower was president, the Beatles and Elvis were popular, and the one historical event that he was really excited about was the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, the first satellite in outer space. As for student attire, Mr. Nowak noted that during the 1950s the uniform that students wore was similar to today's elementary uniform, with girls wearing a white blouse with blue jumper and boys wearing blue trousers with a white shirt and blue tie with the SMS logo.

Our favorite story was when Mr. Nowak and his fellow classmates hummed along during class time to the sound of propeller planes passing by the school. The nun, puzzled as to who exactly was humming, would freak out, and he and his classmates found this very funny. On occasion, supersonic aircraft also flew overhead. (It was the Cold War-era and air defense training was common.)



When planes exceed about 740 miles per hour in the air, it creates a very loud noise that sounds like a boom. This thunder-like noise—the breaking of the sound barrier—also disrupted class time.

Mr. Nowak said that he caused a lot of trouble both in and out of school. Some of the antics that he told us about we would not have thought of or even imagined doing and it made us laugh. For instance, he would make snow furnaces. Those were igloos that were stuffed with newspapers and then lit on fire. The snow around the newspapers would eventually put out the fire. Another less dangerous activity he enjoyed doing was drawing. The students occasionally had a one-hour art class, and one time the nun said that they could draw anything Christmas-themed. Mr. Nowak did not hear that last part. When done, forty students stood up around the classroom displaying their drawings. Half were nativity scenes and half showed Santa Claus. Mr. Nowak drew a rocket ship! The nun asked why, and Mr. Nowak tried to argue, unsuccessfully, that he drew the right thing. In the end, the nun won.



During the 1950s, St. Michael School had no gym class, no organized sports, and the nurse had no assigned office space so she went around to the classrooms administering to students. When the polio vaccine came out in 1957, the whole student body walked to the former West Broad Street School (where St. Michael School is now located) to receive their polio shots.

We are very thankful to have had the opportunity to interview Mr. Nowak. He is intelligent and kind, and he made us laugh. Though he did not like going to school at the time, he made some lifelong friends and had a memorable time. He strongly agrees with sending children to a private Catholic school like St. Michael's, as he believes that the education is worthwhile and that it strengthened his relationship with God.



The interviewees on April 24th, 2026, in St. Michael Church Hall.

Front row (l to r): Fran Cawley, Julie Gulino, Jane Martley, Catharine Danie, Gerry Spillane, Jane Brannegan and Doris Messina. Back row (l to r): Cathy Holdridge, Carol Denslow, Michael Nowak, Dan Brannegan, Joe Donohue, Chris Gomes and Don Fiore. Missing: David Kmetz.

Photo courtesy of Gregg Gulino.



The seventh and eighth graders with the interviewees, St. Michael Church Hall, April 24, 2026.

Photo courtesy of Gregg Gulino.

Back cover by Charlotte Gulan, seventh grade.

"Light our way oh God of the living."

St. Michael School
Pawcatuck, Ct.



