

Damien, La Verne, in the Rare Old Time and Now

Flying into LAX always reminds me of the first time I flew there on a TWA flight for the first time in 1961, all of 47 years ago. I remember it was TWA because we had joked that those initials stood for "Two Weeks Aboard"; it had taken us more than twelve hours to make the journey from New York. Our plane landed in Chicago and couldn't take off again because of "engine trouble". After several hours delay four of our group – there were eight of us in total – boarded another plane but were taken off again when it was discovered that they were part of a larger group. It was to be all or nothing and it was nearly nothing. The plane they had been on took off shortly afterwards and crashed killing all on board. The party waiting for us at the airport in Los Angeles had returned home by the time we arrived several hours later.

Of the eight of us, four were assigned to Bishop Amat and four to Damien High School. The basis for our assignments was simplicity itself. We were told to present ourselves from Jaffrey to Fairhaven Novitiate where



Brendan Comiskey, SS.CC.

Fr. Eugene seated us in eight seats in no particular order. The Provincial, Fr Bill Condon, came in, gave us a pep talk, and told us that those sitting on the seats on the left were to go to Amat and those on the right to Damien. There was no such thing as what subjects needed to be covered or what expertise, if any, we possessed.

The old Pomona Catholic High School, as Damien was called in those days, is hardly recognizable today. In the 60's it was a tired old school, abandoned by the local school district in favour of a new school. New buildings now appear all over the place. There are no less than three gyms: the old gym, the new gym, and the newer gym, a truly magnificent creation rightly named the Travers Cronin Athletic Center. The student body presently numbers in excess of one thousand, twice as many as were there in my time. A large number of SS.CC's have served there over the years, some now dead and others gone their separate ways. The deceased are thought-

fully remembered on a display in the oratory. Pat Travers is the sole survivor at the school from those days, but what a survivor he is and what a magnificent record of service is his.

While visiting I met and had lunch or dinner with some of my former students, all of whom were in their mid teens back then. They are now all grandparents but their love for Damien and for the SS.CC.'s has grown over the years. Although I met with all of them separately and on different days and places, their verdict on their old school was unanimous: there was and is something special about the priests who served Damien and them: "Those priests gave their whole lives to the students. They loved them!"

The six men at Damien residence are older now and there are no new faces, but the pace hasn't slackened. The Sunday morning I left for LAX, when I came down to the kitchen for a very early morning flight – it was 5:30 am - all but one of the community were already there getting a bite before heading out for Masses all over the area. The only absentee hadn't gone to bed yet! Laud Sacris Cordibus!



Above: Manchester, New Hampshire (1960). SS.CC. brothers from left: Michael Brooks, Martin O'Loughlen, Brendan Comiskey, Fergus Donnelly, Jerry Shanley, and Eamonn Keeney.

Left photo: June 24, 1962, Ordination at Cootehill, Co. Cavan. Back row (left to right): Pat Travers, Dominic Crewe, Most Reverend Eugene Callaghan, bishop of Clogher, Novice Master Patrick Heran, and Chris Grannell. Front row (L—R): Patrick Argue, Malachi Cullen, William Lean, and Peter Dennis.