

Stories from the Heart

The grace of Grace



A single whammy is one thing. A double whammy, quite another. But a triple whammy...well that's just unfair. And yet, it is Grace McCrea's life.

Grace, who graduated from Sacred Heart in 2017, is studying Fine Arts at Mount Allison University. But the path she has been on was dramatically and suddenly diverted earlier this year. First the pandemic hit and she uprooted herself from Sackville, New Brunswick and moved back to Halifax to continue her courses at home. While that was the story for many university students across the region, to have it followed by open-heart surgery is not.

The surgery took place in May to repair a congenital heart defect. A defect she only found out about when she and the other members of her family were tested for a hereditary aneurysm carried by her grandfather. Grace was relieved to hear she didn't have the gene for the aneurysm; but she was shocked to learn that she did have a previously undiagnosed heart defect that, left unchecked, could have been deadly.

Choosing to see this as a blessing in disguise, Grace went ahead with the surgery. And all went well. With the surgery that is. During surgery, her thalamus gland, which was obstructing access to her heart, was removed; not uncommon given its benefit is in childhood. As is standard with all organ removal, a biopsy was performed. It was then that the doctors discovered she also had Hodgkin's lymphoma.

To say that was salt in the wound would be an understatement. Yet, this is when Grace's character really shines. Three weeks after recovering from a very successful open heart surgery, she started the first of 12 rounds of chemotherapy that just finished last month. During chemotherapy she continued her school work, kept up her very popular Instagram blog - Grace's Wonder Heart - to document her medical journey, and decided it would be a good time to take on a major fundraiser - Light the Night Walk - to support the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada.

She started slowly, with a personal goal of raising \$2,500. In the end, she raised close to \$60,000 to become the second highest individual fundraiser in Atlantic Canada's history, and the second highest fundraiser in Canada this year. It was an incredibly impressive result. One that Grace is very modest about, but also happy with because it means she could help others. Along the way she was able to connect with other people who had like cancers, and share her journey with a new community. When she's asked about how she managed not just this incredible fundraising success, but her double medical emergencies, she talks about positivity and optimism - two traits which she has in spades.

As a result of this experience, Grace is more committed than ever to her dream of being an art therapist, with a goal of working directly with children. She turned to art herself during her months-long medical battles, and used art and photography to decompress and cope with her situation. In the future she hopes to use those art pieces to publish a book documenting the patient experience. In the meantime she continues to heal (she is thankfully now cancer-free) and plan ahead to raising even more money for Light the Night next year. And, she's also decided to stop sweating the small things!



We commend Grace for her courage, spirit, and selflessness; she humbles us all.



FACULTY PROFILE

Carolyn MacKenzie



Teacher turned counsellor Carolyn MacKenzie is the embodiment of Sacred Heart. Kind, moral, compassionate, empathetic, and devoted - not necessarily in a religious way, although she is that too - but to the students. It's not surprising; Carolyn has worked at Sacred Heart for 28 years. But what might be surprising is that after all that time, her desire to help, her interest in giving the students a sympathetic ear or a broad shoulder, has not wavered and in fact has deepened. That's not really surprising either considering today's youth face such hurdles in this day and age, pandemic aside.

When Carolyn graduated from high school in 1982, she had zero intention of becoming a teacher. She also didn't necessarily know what she wanted to be. She enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program at SMU and after her first year decided to major in Religious Studies, because it was the subject that most resonated with her. Professors at SMU took Carolyn under their wing, perhaps recognizing that she felt slightly out of her depth. For that she is forever grateful to the small university in the South End of Halifax, miles away - literally and figuratively - from where she grew up in a trailer park in Fairview.

When she graduated with her BA in 1986 she had her feet under her, and knew she could do more. She turned her attention to the education field and felt strongly that teaching was the right career path for her. Now fiercely loyal to SMU (she met her husband there, and her three children Allison, Daniel, and Joel all earned their first degrees there), she graduated with her BEd in 1991. Immediately after she took on a teaching role in the public system at a notoriously tough school. She hated it. Not the students; never the students. She just felt that she and the system were adding to the difficult situation many of these kids were already in.

Carolyn remembered back to when she was the Education Outreach Coordinator at Hope Cottage. She went into classrooms to educate about poverty, to help young people understand the fine line between them and the person in the line up to get a meal at Hope Cottage. At one point she was asked to speak to a class at SHSH. When she walked into the classroom the very first time, she felt like she was home. She applied for a job at Sacred Heart but she didn't get hired initially. The next year she tried again. The only problem was she was "heavily pregnant" when she interviewed in June with Pauline Scott. She was offered the job right away for the coming September, an opportunity she was both thrilled and crushed by - how could she leave a two-month-old baby to return to work? That's when her husband Leo stepped in to save the day. Knowing it was an offer too good to pass up, he offered to take a leave from his job so Carolyn could accept the position. It would not, by the way, be the last time Leo would do this for his family; he did it again for his daughter when she had her first child Emile.

At SHSH that year, 1993, Carolyn started teaching English in Grades 7 and 8, and Core and Religious Studies in the High School. She loved it. Sacred Heart was, in her words, "magical". Even though she had to take a very long bus ride to get to the School, she was happy every morning to do it. What was it that made it so magical? As she reflects on those early days she talks about the mutual respect among her colleagues and a level of professionalism and decorum she had never experienced before. And, she appreciated that the students were the center of everything.

One of the other things she also appreciated was the unequivocal support from the School, "I am forever grateful for having been a young parent working here." While it was one thing to be raising three young children at home, she was also studying for her master's degree at MSVU, which she earned in 1997. She was able to do it all thanks to the flexibility and support she received in her early teaching years at SHSH.

Certified as a counsellor, Carolyn kept teaching Religious Studies and Core, stopped teaching academics, and took on the role as School Counsellor, the one she continues to hold today. It was revelatory for her. She didn't miss teaching academics - she absolutely hated the marking - and now she had the opportunity to do what every teacher wants to do: respond to their students' needs. The one-on-one chance to hear from and help guide these young people gave her purpose and joy. A joy she still feels despite what is sometimes the heavy weight of today's world. Her eternal optimism and a conscious decision to never give up on hope is a big part of that joy.

She talks about how her role as a school counsellor has helped her parenting and how parenting has helped her counselling. This symbiotic relationship has served her well, both as a parent and now as a grandparent. Her face immediately lights up when she talks about her four grandchildren who age in range from 10 months to five years; they are clearly her epicenter. She is also enormously proud of her three children, and especially thrilled that her daughter Allison is also at SHSH teaching French in the Elementary School. Allison is following closely in her mother's footsteps - currently raising young children while studying for her master's degree. And of course there's Leo. Leo, who she first met at SMU so many years ago and to whom she is steadfastly devoted. Pride drips from her voice when she talks about their latest grandchild being named Leo; it sounds like it's a full circle moment for her.

It's clear family - the one at Sacred Heart and the one at home - is the heart of Carolyn MacKenzie's life. At 56 she has no intention of leaving anytime soon. Unless she becomes "dead wood" she jokes. Although in all seriousness she has tasked some of her colleagues with telling her if this ever happens. It's unlikely to. She stays current. And, she lives her own best advice - to do the best you can every day on what you can control and to not spend time or energy on what you can't. As a result, she has very few regrets in life. One she did have - worrying too much - is one she has learned to let go. This freedom gives Carolyn a lightness that she passes on to all who have the pleasure of working with her, and especially to her students, who have the fortune to be guided by her.



Remembering Sr. Anne Leonard

RSCJ (1930-2020)



Sr. Anne Leonard had a twinkle in her eye - always. It was a message of curiosity, of interest in whatever you might be thinking or doing, and it conveyed that she had knowledge or something cool to share.

It was in Rome that I first encountered this tiny slip of a nun whose strength and charming personality towered over me - I must be twice her size! I was preparing for final vows with ten others; together we represented Venezuela, Spain, Egypt, Columbia, Poland, and the United States. Sr. Leonard was the General Archivist of the Society. She oversaw 14,000+ letters in St. Madeleine Sophie Barat's hand. In addition to her letters, she showed us Sophie's travelling hat along with items of Janet Stuart's and Philippine Duchesne's, and she shared Society history from each of our countries. She also wanted to know about us - what brought each one into the Society, and the ways we thought we might serve our mission. Her knowing and curious twinkle continue to inspire me.

When I moved to Halifax in 2012, I had the privilege of living with Anne at Barat Residence on our campus. The twinkle was no less dim, her physical size was not an ounce more robust. She walked all over downtown Halifax as she traversed Rome. She was a Toronto girl, a horse-lover, a history buff, and everyone's friend. One windy day, she had to hold onto a light pole or she would have blown away; a stranger walked her back to campus. Her belief in the goodness of human beings never left her.

I was recently at Caritas Residence to visit Sisters Chu, Peterkin, Thibeau, and Pedersen (the sum of their ages is 391). Stories continue to emerge after Anne's death. Apparently, over the last year or so, when the RSCJ couldn't find Anne anywhere and assumed she had fallen asleep reading classic literature, more often than not she had returned from a walk by way of the Sisters of Charity Provincial Offices, and she was having a cup of tea and entertaining them. She continues to wink, knowingly, in our direction. Her wisdom, kindness, and goodness will continue to inspire all who were blessed to know this gentle giant.

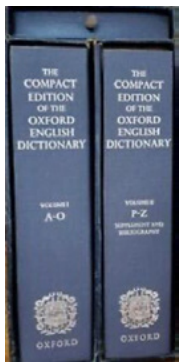
Sr. Anne Wachter, RSCJ

You can read Sr. Leonard's obituary [here](#).

The Convent Library

The last Monday in October is National School Library Day in Canada. **Canadian School Libraries** sets aside this day every year to *celebrate the central role that libraries play in the education and development of young people*¹. This story celebrates the fact that there are many ways for libraries to educate young people.

Between 1970 and 1981, the Convent Library was managed by the steady, soft-spoken Sister Pauline Martin. The library was quiet. It was peaceful. It was bright and immaculately dust-free. And this “chapel of learning” was appropriately situated on the way to the chapel. Sun poured in south-facing floor-to-ceiling windows across the spines of books. It illuminated the contents of all shelves, high or low, and ensured books nearest the floor were equally valued as those at eye-level upper shelves.



One area that the sun purposely did not touch, however, was a midriff-height table stationed at the south wall between two windows. On it stood a single item: *The 1971 Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (over \$100 in 1974, or \$635 today²). Volumes rested inside a slipcase bound in the same dark blue linen as the books themselves. The table was pristine, to permit the wide spines of “A-O” or “P-Z” to lie perfectly horizontal without interference from other reference books. And a tiny button atop the books drew forth a small drawer containing a magnifying glass (magnification was much needed, because four pages of the original Oxford dictionary were micro-printed on each page of this compact edition). Sister Martin might have even laid a pair of white linen gloves beside the dictionary, but perhaps no budget remained because the dictionary purchase likely consumed her entire annual acquisition budget.

Many of us students were surrounded by books at home, so we did not give them much thought. We purchased books through school book clubs with money provided by our parents. We belonged to the Halifax Memorial Library. We visited the main Dalhousie Library up the street. And in our parents' homes we had studies, dens, or even dedicated libraries lined with classics such as Encyclopedia Britannica, Will & Ariel Durant's *History of Civilization*, and Winston Churchill's epic *World War II*. For us, books were just books. We left them open, spine up. We turned page corners to mark our place. We splashed them with juice. We thumbed them with dirty fingers and even dropped crumbs between the pages.

For Sister Martin, however, books were highly-valued and she transmitted this sense of value to all the students who visited the library. For me, the Oxford Dictionary was a very special book that actually taught me to value what is valuable to others simply because it is valued. Seeing Sister Martin handle that dictionary with reverence was a lesson in respect. She told me how much it cost, reverently demonstrated how to remove the volumes from the slipcase, lay them flat, open the covers while cradling the spines, and turn the transparently-thin pages with the lightest touch. I did not know at the time that Sister Martin had been a nurse, but saw an almost surgical precision in her actions combined with a tenderness that must have come from years of patient care. I complied with every step of her lesson every time I consulted that dictionary, and proudly counted myself as one she trusted to use it. And I came to automatically treat every book with the same care, whether dog-eared or priceless.

Sister Martin inspired a lifelong reverence for books, as well as for quiet, sunny spaces. More importantly, she elicited a respect for the values of others – to value what they value. A sacred lesson indeed. A Sacred Heart lesson.

- Paula (Farmer) Thomson '80

1 <https://www.canadianschoollibraries.ca/csld/>

2 Statistics Canada. Table 71-607-X Consumer Price Index Data Visualization Tool. Price Trends 1917 to today

ALUM PROFILE

Max Taylor



HOMETOWN

I was born in Toronto, but I consider Halifax home, it's the city that raised me.

WHAT GRADES DID YOU TAKE AT SACRED HEART

From Grades 7-12; the core years. I graduated in 2016.

WHICH TEACHER HAD THE MOST IMPACT ON YOU?

This is going to sound so cheesy, but it's true. I had close relationships with pretty much all of my teachers, so there isn't one that stands out; literally every single teacher I enjoyed. Sometimes I may have been too close with some of them, and perhaps divulged too much information! But, they all had different advice, and the relationships I had with them is one of the reasons I liked the school so much.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU LEARNED AT SHSH?

Well there are two things really. The first is that the School teaches the little tiny things and values you don't pick up on at first that you realize later are so important. Simple things like holding the door open, now I hold the door open for literally everyone! And the other thing is that because my class was small I knew I had to get along with them if I was going to be together with them for six years! So, I now have an ability to get along with everyone no matter the circumstances.

WHAT DID YOU DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER GRADUATING?

I went to Queen's University to study psychology. I took one semester there but I found it too big and a bit overwhelming, so I left and travelled in the second semester. When I came back I moved over to Bishop's University, a much smaller, more remote university in Quebec to study business and sports marketing. I fell in love with everyone around me. I have one year left at Bishop's but because of COVID my last year has been kind of derailed. So I'll either go back for the final year, or finish my classes, which are all business related, at SMU.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

I just ran in the Halifax mayoral race, and now I have a job I'm loving as the Youth Engagement Chair for Liberal Leadership candidate Randy Delorey. My role is to tackle the low levels of youth interest in political politics. Low youth engagement is a problem world-wide, and one of the reasons I ran for mayor. Right now I make a lot of videos, reach out to young people to see what they want, meet different MLA's to learn about what they're doing, and generally be an ambassador for young people. I think of myself as a middle man between the province and young people.

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO RUN FOR MAYOR?

Well it was a strange thing. Eight months ago, when I was stuck in quarantine, my mom made a comment about doing it which I didn't think too much of. But then I listened to an interview NBA player Chris Paul gave about encouraging young people to vote in the US election, and so I looked up the stats for Halifax which were terrible and thought maybe I can do something about that and help one of the candidates. And then I thought, that's not good enough! If I'm going to make a splash, I need to dive in head first to make a difference. There was some stress, especially in the beginning, but then I think I found my stride with the debates, and then just like that it was over! As an aside, it was easier to run for the mayor's office than it was for Head Boy in Grade 12 because I had one mark lower than 75%!

DO YOU HAVE POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS NOW?

I'm pretty comfortable behind the scenes, there's less scrutiny, less roasting. But if the opportunity arises in the future I'm not saying yes and I'm not saying no, but I am leaning more yes than no.

WHAT'S THE ACHIEVEMENT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

Again, I think this is a corny answer, but to this day what I'm most proud of is sticking with the good friends I grew up with and went to school with. Some guys go away to university and make all new friends, but I have stuck with the people who raised me and who I grew up with, and I'm proud of that.

WHAT WORDS OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THE CLASS OF 2021?

Remember that life is not a race; life is a marathon. But that being said, if you're in a race and the gun goes off, and you look behind you and nobody else is running, don't stop.





We're producing our own **power!**

In late October we "flipped the switch" on our rooftop solar project and Sacred Heart is now producing its own energy - a green initiative we are thrilled to have completed in less than 18 months.

The project started when we won inclusion in the Nova Scotia Solar for Community Buildings Pilot Program through a partnership with Sacred Heart parent Robb Apold and his company Natural Forces Solar. Once that happened, we were able to quickly raise over \$200,000 thanks to the generosity of our community including impactful donations from the RSCJ (Religious of the Sacred Heart) and alumna Debbie Coles '76. We then went to work to build a solar photovoltaic (PV) array on the roof of the School that is now generating power and revenue. This warp-speed project implementation is a result of the hard work and passion by so many in our School community - students, faculty and staff, alums, the Board, partners, and donors.



That passion for more environmental sustainability and stewardship has given the School and our students a three-fold win that will be felt for decades to come. The project allows the School to sell the PV electricity it generates directly to Nova Scotia Power at a 20-year fixed-price contract. The revenue from the sale of that power will all be directed to the School's Bursary Fund to support Sacred Heart students who need tuition assistance. The environmental benefits are substantial, in less than two months the project has already saved over 1,800 kg of CO2 emissions, and virtually planted 57 trees. These benefits can easily be tracked using an innovative data tracker which shows real-time results of the project. This data is also valuable, dynamic information for the classroom, and will be integrated into STEM units, projects, and other curricular areas now and over time.

Thanks to all who made our wonderful school so much greener!

This Year's
Christmas
Fair was
an Online
Success!



The annual Christmas Fair, one of our community's most beloved traditions, and one of the Parents' Guild's most important fundraising events, took place in late November. And even though it was unfortunately not an in-person event, it was still an amazing community-building event and a huge success thanks to the hard work of our Parents' Guild and the generosity of our community, including our alums. Together we raised over \$32,000!



Popular Fair traditions like wreath sales, wine by the case, and used uniforms all went online this year. The wreaths sold out in only a few days, there was the usual high demand for uniform pieces and most families got what they were looking for, and the number of wine cases sold went well beyond previous years and expectations. Speaking of expectations, the Silent Auction moved online this year for the first time ever, and it completely surpassed hopes thanks to the incredible response from our community both in terms of donations and bids. Many commented how user friendly the process was, and it allowed alums from near and far to take part.

On Saturday a small group of volunteers spent the afternoon at the Christmas Fair Drive Thru ensuring contact-less delivery of items to families. It was a festive scene that included Santa (Dr. Wally MacAskill - Senior School Principal) and Buddy the Elf (Mr. Stephen Tugwell - Elementary School Principal), Christmas tunes, and fantastic Christmas decorations! The Fair, like so many events this year, was a virtual success thanks to the adaptability and positive spirit of so many in our community.

Tidbits

Big kudos to **Emma Smith '01** who was recently awarded the Distinguished Service Award from the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) for her impressive array of volunteer work. Emma attributes her passion for volunteering to her early foundation at Sacred Heart, and we are so proud to see her contribute so much to our community.



Hats off to **Nicholas Ramsey Fernandez '16** who was recently awarded one of the prestigious C. David Naylor Fellowships for 2020 (read more [here](#)). Nicholas is studying for his Masters at the University of Toronto in medical biophysics, specializing in pediatric cancers. He was honoured to speak directly to Arthur and Sandra Irving, funders of the Award, and to meet Dr. Naylor, for whom the prize is awarded. We're looking forward to hearing more about Nicholas' research and his impact in this field in the future.



Congratulations to **Max Taylor '16** for his recent HRM mayoral run. A late entrant to the race, Max's goal was not necessarily to become the city's new mayor, but to encourage young people in particular to get out and vote. A popular social-media influencer, Max seems to have been successful - this year's municipal election turnout was the highest since 2004. We admire Max's civic-mindedness and look forward to seeing what's next for Max. You can read a profile of Max in this edition.



Hats off to **Ashleigh McKeen '11** who graduated this past spring from the University of PEI with her degree in veterinary medicine and is now working in Shediac, New Brunswick. We're thrilled to now call you Dr. McKeen, DVM.



Congratulations to new dad **Alex Carter '11** and his wife Natalie who welcomed their first child, Elle, earlier this year in Calgary, to **Elizabeth (Hirsch) MacGillivray '03** and her husband Michael who welcomed their second baby earlier this year as well, and to **Amy Reitsma '00**, who welcomed her new son Delwyn Alexander Pascoe, a nephew for aunts Casey Reitsma '05 and Maggie Reitsma '07.

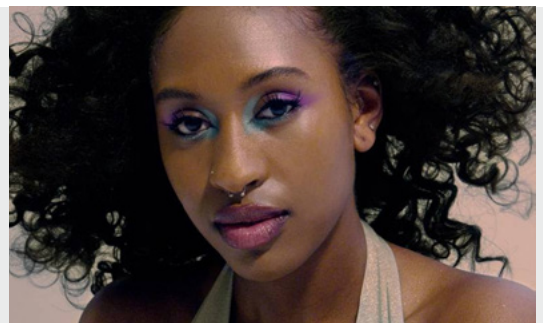
Well done to **Lauren (Langlois) Bell '09** who recently opened her new business, Teaspoon Cake Shop, in Dartmouth. It looks awfully sweet!



Congratulations to **Alexander Sapp '14** on his marriage this summer to Michelle Johnson, and to **Verena Rizg '05** who married Chris McMahon in September. Our best wishes to the happy couples.

A Miller family update on past students **Samantha** who went to USC in LA where she graduated in 2018 and is now a senior consultant with KPMG in Toronto, and her sister **Alyssa** who attended Queen Mary University of London in the UK where she completed her Masters in BioChemistry and graduated top of her class to win a full scholarship to Cambridge University where she is doing a PhD in Chemistry. Their mom, Carole-Ann, wrote recently to thank long-time Elementary school teacher Warren Kane for having such an important early influence on her daughters.

There was a lot of excitement in the Millar family household this year. Congratulations to past student **Zamani Millar** who won the SOCAN Foundation's Young Canadian Songwriters Award, and to her sister **Nzingha Millar**, who was the recipient of the Young Woman of Distinction at the Progress Women of Excellence Awards. The Award, presented for Nzingha's outstanding contributions to her community, was presented in person in October by Sr. Wachter, representing Sacred Heart, a sponsor of the event.



Once again, **Claire Bennet '14**, with the help of her group Choirs for Change, created a project for the annual Nocturne event. Claire wrote the poetry featured in this piece, sung by the Polaris Choir which also includes a number of Sacred Heart alums. Each choir member recorded their vocal pieces alone and the conductor painstakingly pieced them together to create this digital piece; a practice that has become more familiar during this pandemic and our need for distanced singing.

Well done **Simone (Ghosn) Metlege '09** who has started a new business called Boxed Bites Catering which provides specialty and beautifully-prepared charcuterie boxes, boards, and tables. Simone, who is working with classmate **Lauren (Langlois) Bell '09** on some of her dessert box offerings, is giving back to the Mental Health Foundation through her sales. You can watch an interview with Simone [here](#).



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Share your stories, news, photos, and announcements, or pass along regards to a favourite teacher or former classmate. **Drop Miriam Regan an email!**

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