

There's No Place Like Home

By Katharine Clemente, Academy of Our Lady 4th Grade Teacher

If you are wondering whether or not the title of this article is a shameless plug for our Spring Musical, it definitely is, and everyone should come to see our students perform *The Wizard of Oz Jr.* in May! It is also, however, a sentiment that has come home to roost for me in the past year and a half. Many people know that I am a graduate of Academy of Our Lady. In fact, I am a member of the first graduating class of Academy of Our Lady, Class of 2000. I was a lifer; Pre-K 4 all the way through 8th grade, and the fond memories and formative moments in faith and education abound.

When I was hired two summers ago to teach here, a flood of emotions hit me all at once. Excitement, joy, and pride topped list, but right behind them were apprehension and outright fear. I had returned to Academy on countless occasions in the 16 or so years since my graduation. Some of those visits were simply friendly, some were to do college course-dictated field work, or to serve as a substitute teacher, and many more for my niece's and nephew's various concerts, ceremonies, and sporting events. Still, though, my hesitation in 'coming home' stemmed from realizing that my high expectations of what it could be like to work here, came from my memory of what it was like to be a student here years and years before. How likely was it that it would *feel* the same? Because, when I was a student here, it felt wonderful. I loved it. I loved it so much that I was hesitant to return to it for fear of being disappointed by the realities of life. Most of the teachers who had taught here when I was a child had left long ago, the administration was new, and by then, I had worked in the field long enough to know that not everywhere is as pleasant as I remembered it being here. Would it live up to my childhood expectations?

It did. It has. And it is my fervent belief that it will continue to do so. From the moment I ended my initial interview, to planning for this year's Catholic Schools Week, working here has been a tremendous joy. Of course, it is in great part due to the students. Their enthusiasm for learning and boundless joy, keeps all of us going and keeps all of us coming back every day. And while it is true that I have many happy memories of times with friends, my greatest influences were my teachers, and similarly, it is my colleagues who have made the experience of coming home so rewarding. Never before have I worked with such a large group of people who are all united behind the same beliefs: we are here to educate, we are here for our students, and to be successful, we must be here for each other. The lessons I have learned and the inspiration I have drawn from simply working side by side with them are invaluable. Their willingness to share ideas, offer comfort and advice, and to pitch in when necessary, has fostered a feeling of family among the faculty. And that is the feeling I remember most from being a student here. I am grateful beyond words that it has not faded. So, when we invite you to attend our Open Houses this Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, know that we are not simply inviting you into our school, but into our home. We take such pride in it. So, please, visit us and experience for yourself something I have known in my bones for as long as I can remember: There's No Place Like...Academy of Our Lady!