

REMEMBRANCES of Father Stephen

by Father Jim Carney, S.J. '43

I first met Steve Duffy when I arrived at Regis in June of 1950. In September I began my great teaching experiment as a wet-behind-the-ears scholastic. And the wet became wetter as my ebullient freshmen began to teach me how to teach. I hope that I learned enough from them to become at least a tolerable teacher.

Some of my fondest memories of that three-year period of my Jesuit life centered around Father Duffy. In addition to helping me with hints on how to teach the bubbly freshmen, we engaged in a small disagreement in our respective classrooms. Steve was a Yankee "hater." I put the "hater" in quotes because there was no way in the world that he could hate anyone, even the Yankees. However, he was convinced that the Yankees bought pennants through their purchase of star baseball players. I had been and am a Yankee rooter ever since my dad took me to see Lou Gehrig in the "House that Ruth Built." Steve and I went at the Yankee disagreement in our classes and left the students totally befuddled. Steve heard one of the freshmen ask; "Do Father Duffy and Mr. Carney argue that way all the time?" I had won my first minor skirmish with the frosh.

One of Steve Duffy's teaching methods was his extensive use of visual aids. His room in the Jesuit Residence on 83rd Street was packed with these aids. I can remember kidding him unmercifully when I passed his room on the 5th floor of the residence (my room was just beyond his) as he prepared for his next day's classes. It was his custom to leave papers strewn -all over the floor. "When are you going to clean this mess up?" was one of my kindlier queries. I usually got only a quizzical look as a reply, but you could be sure that by 11 :00 P.M. everything was back in perfect order. He was ready to take on the next day's classes.

I wish that my memory was better (it is getting dimmer and dimmer) and I could recall the great stories emanating from his teaching methods. I have only fragments: the classroom window pole, Odysseus, his antics on his desk, acronyms and so on. I'll have to trust you to let me know about some of the imaginative teaching devices. In his own words:

"The hunt for visual aids is a source of great delight to me. Each year brings a harvest of ads and cartoons about Moses

parting the Red Sea, David conquering Goliath. Peanuts is a goldmine, and even Broom-Hilda has her encounters with God. I intend to describe my poster collection as an extracurricular activity. I figure that the Middle States visiting committee will be surprised at seeing Bible posters from Time, Newsweek, the New Yorker, Sports Illustrated, The New York Times, and The Daily News. And The Staten Island Advance as well, a boy who dropped out of Regis used to send me his finds." (This same boy, now a man, came to Father Duffy's wake at Regis.)

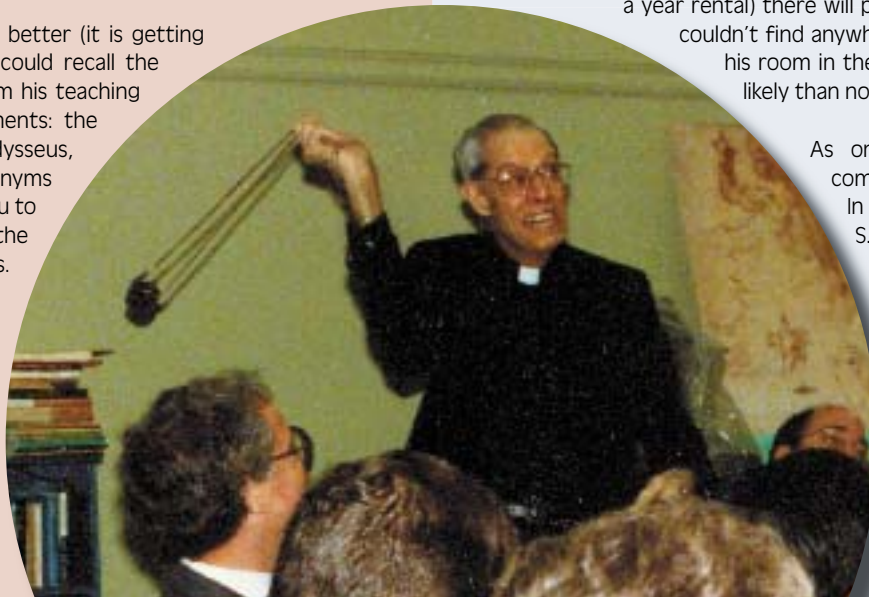
Given Father Duffy's long apostolic work in Regis, 56 years (the school is only 91 years old), there have been many noteworthy celebrations and events to mark his progression through these many years.

In 1979 when Steve held the office Director of Vocations, one of his many Extracurricular activities, I convinced him to extend his West Coast stay so that he could visit with alumni at our meeting in San Francisco. The presence of "Father Regis" guaranteed the largest attendance ever.

In 1977 the yearbook which was dedicated to him, the citation read in part" . . . Your endless assistance has helped many a Regian to survive the rigors of 'The School of the King.' Memories of the Bukidnon Bookie and crash courses in Latin will remain with us forever. You are truly the sparkplug behind the Big Red Machine."

In 1981, the 50th year of Father's entrance into the Jesuits, the alumni had this encomium to offer him, "Father Duffy... a generous man with a flair for the practical. Need a tool, some practical help, a thingamabob, or whatever?" The court of last resort is Father Duffy's desk. Alongside the football slips, the Latin tutoring guides, the stationery store (one cent a year rental) there will probably be exactly what you couldn't find anywhere else." P.S. I used to go to his room in the Jesuit Residence and, more likely than not, he had the requested item.

As one gets older, celebrations come with greater frequency. In 1986, Father Bob Kelly, S.J. '44 and Greg Rapisarda celebrated 25 years of teaching at Regis while Fr. Duffy clocked 40 years of teaching. Fr. D. always managed to stay ahead of everyone. At that time he wrote an article which showed the great variety



V. Duffy, SJ

on the extracurricular activities he directed. The title of the article: "Old Duffers Never Die... They Just Swing Away." And did he swing away! No only did he teach full time schedules of Greek, Latin and Theology at various times, he headed up an inspiring array of extracurricular activities. In his own words:

"My extracurricular activities changed frequently: The Owl, The Regis (a literary quarterly), the Community Action Program (C.A.P. was started by Fr. Owen Daley, S.J.), golf lessons in the Phys-ed class with Ed Lata, and tennis lessons for groups and individuals after school. Also, I covered Freshman Orientation, the Sodality, the Thanksgiving Food Drive, and the Lenten Mission Drive during my varied career. You might remember the stamp I had made:

Mitebox

- 1) to make money for missionaries and
- 2) to make you missionary minded.

To make students more mission-minded, I added five more months to the Mission Drive by running a football pool from NFL games in September through to Superbowl Sunday in January. About 120 bettors paid ten cents for a slip- just pick the winners, no point spread. Half the take went to the missions; half went to about six or seven winners each week. Our acronym was BBFFSJ - Bukidnon Bookie's Fund for Social Justice. Some thought it meant: The Bukidnon Bookies Fund for Some Jesuits."

"Memories of the Bukidnon Bookie and crash courses in Latin will remain with us forever. You are truly the sparkplug behind the Big Red Machine." — *excerpt from 1977 yearbook dedication*

Mention of the "old duffers" brings me to his golf game. He was a better than average golfer. He could also teach golf. In fact, he invented a strange contraption for teaching a learner how to swing a golf club, no mean achievement. Some of you have seen him demonstrate its use on the Regis stage. I am unable to describe this mechanism to you.

I was an average golfer and usually tried to avoid playing Father Duffy because the results were usually quite disheartening for me. Once I got close to beating the golf maestro. I was ahead after seven holes of a nine-hole golf course. I could smell a victory. However the eighth hole was a dogleg left and my undoing. I hooked a shot into the woods. End of threat. The record is closed. I never beat him.

In 1986 Father Duffy described the state of his golf game: "In the last three years I've become despondent about my golf game. I play almost every day on my two week vacation. I've broken 100 only once in those three years. (Fr. D. is 71yrs old when he wrote this.) In my youth I had three 78's. In the past I have used my platform to improve the golf game of some of my Jesuit friends. And now, every spring day brings an inner voice saying to me "Teacher cure thyself." So, to get into shape for my vacation, I've been walking up two flights of stairs in school and in the Jesuit Residence as a regular training exercise. Pray for me, brothers, that I get a 99 this summer."

I would be remiss if didn't mention that Fr. Duffy's exploits were recognized beyond the walls of Regis. Fordham awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. The citation as read by Father Joseph A. O'Hare '48, then President of Fordham, read in part: "Father Duffy is no Mr. Chips. He runs book among his students to raise money for missionary causes, or more exactly, to raise their consciousness to a level where they might see that sympathy with global human needs and habits of personal sacrifice are integral to the education of a smart young man."

The well-deserved honors kept coming. In 1990 the yearbook once again was dedicated to Father Duffy who completed an unprecedented 45 years of teaching that year. In the words of the dedication: "...Throughout these years Fr. Duffy has had an influence on the life of every Regian: father, friend, teacher tutor, golfer and priest. ... Words alone cannot possibly do justice to Fr. Duffy and it seems only fitting to dedicate the 1990 Regian to him."

The dedication also adverted to Father Steve's role in their Freshman Orientation: "A tall, lanky priest, dressed in black but wearing a golf cap and carrying a golf bag, he placed a can in the middle of the auditorium, walked up to the stage, and bet the audience twenty-five cents a person that he could chip a golf ball into the can. The audience laughed and fell silent when he actually did it."



In the spring of 2001, a final tribute was paid to Father Duffy in celebration of his 56 years of teaching at Regis, a pinnacle I can say no one else will ever reach. It was the last tribute paid him because in a few months he would move to our infirmary. More about that a bit later.

Ron Ferreri '62, long time V.P. for Development, wrote in the RAN: "Fr. Steve Duffy is one of those remarkable teachers and human beings everyone should have the privilege of encountering once in a lifetime. ... Father Duffy touched the lives of thousands of Regians. Despite his roots at that institution on West 16th Street, no one can claim his title of Father Regis. ... His teaching methods brought out the best in everyone."

On April 5, 2001 Steve slipped a note under my door. The final chapter of his life was about to unfold. He wrote in the unique Duffy scrawl: "You are the first to know that I am scheduled for Murray Weigel Hall (N.Y. Province Infirmary). ... Today (April 6th) I told Father Rector that I was very peaceful about M- W... Relax! Rejoice! You'll soon be free! Thank You. Steve

On May 2, 2001 Father Rector (Tom Smith, S.J.) drove Steve to his new home. I accompanied them. Steve was very composed during the trip and after his arrival. It was a move he had chosen because he felt that the time had come for him to do so.

That composure never deserted him during the 3 plus years that he was there. I tried to visit him at least once a month when the weather was warm enough. Steve fitted right into the Murray-Weigel community and quickly became a favorite of the M-W staff. No surprise that that happened.

When I visited, I got there about 11:00 AM.; we chatted for a while and then attended community Mass at 11 :30 AM. I joined him for lunch at a table for four. On one of my recent visits he totally surprised me by commenting: "You don't know who I am." "Steve," I replied, "After knowing you for over fifty years, I think that I should know your name." "No. You don't. Wait and see."



F. A. S. T.
 . Feel
 . Act
 . Speak
 . Think
AS CHRIST WOULD
Stephen V. Duffy, S.J.



After our lunch he began to direct our tablemates about what he wanted them to do. I watched in amazement. Bishop Martin Neylon, S.J. was in a wheelchair he moved away from the table a little bit. Then he steered Father John Boyd, S.J. '34 (who was blind) to the front of the wheelchair. Our little convoy was in place. Steve then directed John to start to walk after he had aimed him in the right direction. If he veered too much to the right or left, Steve corrected him while pushing the wheelchair behind him. Eventually this strange procession made it to the proper room for the Bishop and John. When it ended, Steve turned to me and said: "Now you know why I am named 'pusher:'"

While at Murray-Weigel Hall, he was the same Steve Duffy I had known for so long. He was always the pedagogue, always interested in people. I was one of his special projects. Those of you who know me know that I am incorrigible. Right from the beginning of our friendship, he very gently tried to keep me on the road to perfection. In one of our last meetings he gave me the card with the letters F.A.S.T. His sister, Connie, who with her husband, Larry, were Steve's weekly visitors, crafted this card. Connie posed and took the famous golf picture on Steve's 90th birthday.

Toward the end, I would say in the last two months of his life, his memory failed him completely, but he was basically in good health. During that period he mentioned that he could not read, a huge cross for him.

Eventually something happened to him (it was originally thought to be a pacemaker problem) and he was taken to the hospital on Saturday March 19th at 1:00 P.M. Fourteen hours later he went to the Lord. Father Regis had attained the goal of his life - he is at peace.

Now that a little time has passed, I've had a chance to reflect on my friendship with Steve. 50 years is a long time to know someone.

Our friendship was a casual one; there were not any deep self-revelatory sessions. Steve was quiet; I was noisy. He was very self-contained, not flamboyant. There was never a harsh word because I don't think that he was capable of uttering one. As this article progresses, I believe that you will see that Steve Duffy revealed himself the most in his writings. I will conclude with some of the most poignant selections from Steve that I am aware of.

Steve and I lived on the 5th floor of the Jesuit Residence on 83rd Street for what seemed like ages. He had the same room since the fifties; I was in mine for 25 years and still am. Each night when I passed his room I could see him preparing his classes. One time I asked him if he still got a case of nerves before going into a class. I was astounded to get a "Yes" to my query from the Master Teacher who always seemed to me to be so composed.

In the Jesuit community Steve was quiet and reserved and tended to stay out of the limelight. He spent hours and hours in his room reading or preparing his classes. And he seemed to be perfectly content to do just that. He always seemed to be calm and serene. I never saw him lose his temper although at times I'm sure that my antics got to him.

I know that he was very devoted to his family and they to him. I was aware that there were celebratory trips taken to Scranton, PA where family reunions were held. He was clearly a great favorite of his nieces and nephews who turned out in force for his wake and funeral. One came from Los Angeles, another from Montana. The attached tribute was written by a devoted niece, Ann Scavullo, and reflects the great love of his family for him. A fuller account of his relationship with his family will have to wait another day.

I never heard Steve talk about his innermost thoughts about his role at Regis, but he did write about how he felt in a seminar conducted for Jesuit high school educators in Washington, D.C. Some excerpts from his talk at the seminar follow: "My first theological reflection on my role as high school teacher occurred a few years after my ordination (1957). I was very happy in my work, but I kept wondering whether a priest should be in high school work. After a lot of consulting, reflecting and praying I solved my problem by an act of faith in the Society of Jesus: Superiors knew what they were doing; they had good reasons for running high schools, and for assigning me to Regis. So I took it as God's will that I stay at Regis.

I saw it as a mandate to bring God to high school students."

"I have a poster which I hang front and center in my classroom at the beginning of freshman year. The top line is: 'Life. Consider the alternative.' That comes from a newspaper ad in which Life magazine publicized the fact that it needed only 8 days to reach the news-stands whereas all the others needed ten days or more;



"I saw it as a mandate to bring God to high school students." — Fr. Stephen V. Duffy, S.J.

"I am sure that at this moment heaven is a more enjoyable place because he is there. No news in that. He did the same for all of us at Regis for 56 years." — Father Jim Carney, S.J.

and they listed all the others. I put the Chi-rho crucifix underneath the word 'Life', and I explained my pitch in the words of St. Paul. 'For me to live is Christ.' (Phil. 1/21) And the alternatives made me glad I was a Christian, and they should be glad too."

"So whenever or wherever I am with my students I try to treat them as Christ would treat them. I try to treat them with personal concern, with respect for their human dignity. (I am convinced that showing irritation at a student

diminishes his sense of his own worth.) I try to treat them as adults. And one day at prayer I got the idea to treat them as if they were my nephews and I had them in class. For me, all this adds up to treating them the way that Christ would treat them."

"Let me sum up my reflections on the divine import of teaching high school students. 'I see myself radiating Christ to my students at all times: in the classroom, outside the classroom, when I'm teaching, when I'm not teaching. I do this by my concern and love and respect for them. I do it by being friendly in my dealings with them."

"My reflections brought into focus the image of Christ traveling with his companions, being with them 24 hours a day, and always having an effect on them by the way he dealt with them."

"I hope I'm dealing with my students in a Christ like way."

I can honestly say that in the opinion of this one Jesuit friend, Steve Duffy lived up to his ideals in a way that I truly admire. I am sure that at this moment heaven is a more enjoyable place because he is there. No news in that. He did the same for all of us at Regis for 56 years.

