



### RISKY BUSINESS AND THE GOALS OF EDUCATION

When I consider how boring my life is, I want to stop writing this column and do something adventurous. Decades ago, I went through a phase of reading epic sea-faring works such as Melville's novels, Richard Henry Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," and Conrad's "Lord Jim." I supplemented these with land-based adventures, such as histories of the Hudson's Bay Company, Lewis and Clark's original journals, and chronicles of Fremont's expeditions in the American West. And that's just keeping it in North America and within the past few centuries. I also reveled in the path of glory carved by Alexander the Great, the Roman conquests, The Rise and Fall of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, European adventures in Central and South America during the Age of Discovery, Marco Polo's travels, and so on. The list of exciting lives and exploration goes on and on. Life, it sometimes seems, used to be a lot more interesting.

My life is decidedly unlike the lives of the adventurers whom I enjoy reading about. I spend a good deal of time watching The Golf Channel, changing the oil in my riding mower, and monitoring the chemical levels in my swimming pool. I can't quite picture Alexander the Great or Captain Cook doing those kind of things. From my perspective as an American suburbanite, I envy the persons I read about who had years to wander the wild world, interact with new peoples, new lands, new cultures, new philosophies, and fresh modes of existence. People who could engage in free-thought, adventure, and conduct grand trial and error experiments with life. Granted, these adventures sometimes ended disastrously, often for all the parties involved. And I realize that for the mass of mankind, life was, as Hobbes famously put it, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." At least it wasn't homogenized and vapid.

All I have to do to induce despair in myself about the intellectual and moral progress of mankind is look at the average teen's Facebook page, scroll through Direct TV's menu, walk through any shopping mall in America, or eavesdrop on a conversation

wherein some guys display way too much "knowledge" about the BCS Bowl system. A movie called "Idiocracy" came out a few years ago that hits a little too close to home for the average American. "You only go around once in life" the old Schlitz commercial told us. As thinking creatures born into an infinite universe, given an incredible gift of life from our Creator, we might aim a little higher from day to day, be a bit more adventurous, a bit more philosophical, a bit more creative, a bit more willing to exercise our intellects, a bit more edgy, a bit less boring.

Fortunately, I don't often find myself wandering down this path of despair about the vacuity of modern life because I walk into work at St. Mary's five days a week. We have a workplace, a school, an environment, that one of our teachers last year described as a "white hole." By that, he meant the opposite of a black hole, that phenomenon that sucks everything in and emits nothing. St. Mary's, on the other hand, attracts the cleverest and most creative people in the valley. As its teachers. As its parents. As its students. And St. Mary's emits talented, creative, thoughtful people into the world. We have people here who are not afraid to travel. Not afraid to take intellectual risks. Not afraid to think for themselves, learn other languages, visit far away places, and go on to careers and lives that embrace all the adventure and learning and innovation with which God has imbued the world. All you have to do is look at our alumni profiles and the exploits of our current students to realize that St. Mary's produces remarkable people who take advantage of the excitement, sense of wonder, and adventure still, and forever, immanent in our world. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." It's our job as parents and teachers to reveal that constantly to our children. It's a process that unfolds itself every day and every year at St. Mary's and continues to make the risky business of education an exciting pursuit here on Black Oak Drive.