

COLLOQUY

A JOURNAL FOR THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE
COMMUNITY ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
ANNAPOLIS
(COLLOQUY: SEE ERASMUS)

ISSUE #1, MAY 2017

COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS? WANT TO VOLUNTEER? CONTACT

COLLOQUY@SJC.EDU



photo by Joshua Price

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MS EVA BRANN, WHO SHARED HER INSIGHTS FOR THE SYMPOSIUM ON THE OPENING QUESTION, SPONSORED BY THE GRADUATE COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON INSTRUCTION.
SEE PAGES 22 - 24



1. TELLING OUR STORIES

DEAR READERS -

WE ASKED OURSELVES AND OUR FELLOW GI STUDENTS TO "TELL OUR STORIES"
- HOW WE LEARNED ABOUT THE SJC GRADUATE INSTITUTE AND THEN WHY
WE APPLIED TO THE PROGRAM.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO TOOK THE TIME TO SHARE YOUR STORIES.
IN APRIL WE HOSTED A GI COMMUNITY "TELL YOUR ANECDOTE / STORY"
GATHERING AROUND THE TABLE IN THE HARTLE ROOM TO CELEBRATE THIS
THEME. WE HOPE TO OFFER THIS GATHERING ANEW EACH SEMESTER.

THANKS TO MR WAMPLER, FIRST SEMESTER GI, FOR SUGGESTING THE "IN
PERSON" GATHERING ON THIS THEME AND THANKS ALSO TO MR.
MCINTIRE, CURRENT GI STUDENT, FOR HIS ENCOURAGEMENT AND COUNSEL
THROUGHOUT.

FOR THE NEXT ISSUE WE ASK FOR YOUR VIGNETTES ON THIS THEME:
MY FIRST GI SEMESTER:
1) A MOMENT OF REALIZATION, 2) OR AN INSTANCE OF WHAT I'D HAVE
DONE DIFFERENTLY, IF I COULD DO IT OVER...

PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES TO COLLOQUY@SJC.EDU

YOURS TRULY, THE GRADUATE COUNCIL, MAY, 2017

Matthew Dean, GI Alum (2016)

When I was in college, majoring in philosophy and the classics, my boxing coach and Ancient Greek teacher told me, as an aside, during a discussion of Euripides' Trojan Women, that SJC was the last bastion of western civilization. Then he went right on talking about Euripides, but I knew his most important teachings were contained in his asides. I remember thinking - well, I'm already a sophomore, so it's too late to go there now. After graduation, I spent three years teaching English in China. I returned to the college's website and learned about the GI program and submitted my application while I was still in China. It signified all that my teacher had offhandedly suggested; I therefore applied with great fear and much trembling. Nor did I apply before I visited in the summer of 2014. Jet lagged from a 13 hour flight, I drove to Annapolis to visit as a prospective student. The college was formidable, I remember thinking. Ms. Pincus sat answering questions while I fumbled through a list in my notebook. She was and is patient and kind. I doodled to stay awake in seminar, and then drank beer and asked questions at ASG. Sensing that I was in no condition to drive back to D.C., Dakota Fuller offered me a blanket and a place to sleep in the dorms. I woke before the birds and walked the campus. Summer morning at dawn gave an account of the town and college with which my wakefulness agreed.

Haley Prickett, current GI student

As a lover of learning, I was auditing one of my colleague's classes my second year of teaching. It was Classical Civilizations and I was reading many of the myths of *Ancient Gods and Heroes* along with teenagers in a boarding school in New England for the first time. I loved all of it.

My colleague, the teacher Mr. McDonough, would often sit in silence while we (the students) would try to piece together the legends of Heracles, the craftiness of Prometheus, the fickle actions of Hera, and so on. He would, in a very tutor-like way, ask a question, or point us to a passage that might help us make sense of what we could not. I found so much joy in the process of piecing the stories together, finding parallels and connections, and one day when I lingered after class to ask him what his thoughts were about--the scales of justice, and the relationship between appearance and reality. He did not answer me directly (or so I thought) when he said--"you should apply to St. John's for your Master's degree--you'd love it." I felt dissatisfied. But, I did some research, and saw you didn't need a GRE score— I figured, why not.

I applied and was accepted. I ordered my books and had no idea what to expect, but then, does one ever know what to expect when walking up to the seminar table? No. That innate unexpectedness is what makes St. John's what it is--there are no two classes that are the same, each is unique, each is organic, and each has made me feel as if I've spent my time well.

Jeremy Sheeler, current GI student

I ended up at St. John's like, I think, pretty much all GIs--by fortuna: chance or fate. For the last ten years, I had been reading philosophy and history in my free time, and recently began writing for various websites in relation to these studies. One day, I received an email from someone who saw a comment I left on a blog about a book he and I both admired very much: *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom. Apparently, what I had written resonated with him, and he googled my name and came across my writing. As luck would have it, he was also about to be visiting his cousins in two weeks, who just so happened to live in Baltimore, the very city in which I resided.

To make a long story short, when we met up, he informed me he would be attending a school just 45 minutes down the road the following fall, and welcomed me down to hang out whenever I'd like. So that following fall I took him up on it and began attending Friday night lectures and other activities on campus. As a result, he kept encouraging me to apply to the school, but I was hesitant, for two reasons: 1) I was still hoping that shouting into the abyss of the internet would somehow translate into a career; and 2) I only have an Associate's Degree.

As time went on, he finally convinced me to at least sit in on classes to see how I liked it. Within the first ten minutes of the tutorial, I was sold; and then having that followed by a precept on *War and Peace*, I was enthusiastic. I applied immediately, although I was worried because I did not have the necessary degree requirements. But thankfully St. John's is the most amazing/strangest school on earth, and the only real requirement is a love of learning. (Although I'd like to think my application essay had something to do with it, since, in my humble opinion, it is the best piece I have ever written.) Or perhaps it was just Fortuna continuing her work.

John Felis, current GI student

In the fall of 2016 after a long and much welcomed hiatus from formal education, I began looking into masters programs in my native Michigan, thinking it would be a good idea to study philosophy, which has always been a favored pursuit of mine for its own sake.

At the time, I worked at an optical supply company and while the people were good it not only left much to be desired, but seemed, at first sight and probably last, like a cheap satire from a 90's's movie. You know - the sort where the main character is perpetually unfulfilled and other such dribble that itself is unfulfilling to the viewer. Yet, art does imitate life or is it that life imitates arts. I don't rightly know. If only there was a place where strange people would care to discuss such things until they found the fulfillment that is lacking in almost all current art.

It was not so much that I didn't want to continue working at what we have thought to call for some reason a "grownup job" (because it is certainly the case that mothers who work in diners are mere children themselves); it was more so the absurdity of performing successive task after task with no discernable end in an ugly little building where all sunlight is replaced by florescent lighting. If I had not had the misfortune of reading Aristotle, I could have slept soundly with the fact that money was the end itself and by repeating this to myself in the fashion of modern psychology I could have probably gotten along fine for quite a while with full knowledge that I and those around me were, in truth, happy people. What bewildering paradoxes have been dumped on us in the wake of our five hundred year enlightenment. Supposed Knowledge had first set us free from many oppressions and then enslaved us to depression and finally it is in knowing that we find the latter out only to be too isolated by the fruits of the former to do anything about it.

But what luck! One day a friend of mine informed me that a place called St. John's College exists. I went online that night and read nearly the entire website, conducted other research into the program and the next day I began work on my admissions essay. Although I had never set foot on campus, I imagined it the perfect place to look for this new sort of knowledge, which does not know at all, but continues to think over it to one's betterment. In this, I have found no disappointment.

Patrick Anderson, current GI student

I don't remember when I first heard of SJC or the GI. It wasn't before I decided to attend the University of King's College as an undergrad, nor was it after I graduated. At eighteen I left New Jersey, where I anomalously grew up, and moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia. I spent six years studying the classics and philosophy, and being confused, less by these than by the vexations of early adulthood. I hoped by the end that the answers wouldn't come from a text or even a library, but from time and experience, accompanied perhaps by manual labor.

I put formal education on indefinite hold and moved to BC and later to Toronto, in pursuit of technical knowledge, friendship and love.

Traditional graduate programs having long since lost all appeal, the satisfaction of spending another four semesters reading and discussing enduring texts was for a long time impractical, not least because I knew that St. John's was the only place where that was still possible for me. Although the past seems to have more stability than the present, I can say that these days I farm near Toronto during the summer and fall of each year and attend the GI in the spring, which gives the theoretical time to engage the practical in a way I've long felt it should.

Andrew McIntire, current GI student

If I was to tell this story a year-and-a-half ago it would be a simple tale: I attended the St. John's College Naval Academy croquet tournament with a journalist friend who was writing a story about the event. It was there that I met recent alums of the Graduate Institute and learned of the program. At the time, I was considering leaving my corporate job, despite not having a firm sense of what was next. I had a lingering feeling that I had not yet received an education (whatever that means), and the GI seemed like a good way to spend my time while exploring options of what would follow my career as a government consultant. Simply put, many of the books I wanted to read were on St. John's College's reading lists, and exploring them in a classroom environment seemed like an enjoyable endeavor as part of an enriching community. As I saw it, my life would unfold as it would, and this would be a nice stop on the path.

Another equally true way to describe the motivations that led me to apply to the St John's College GI program begins much earlier than my 2014 attendance at the croquet tournament. An English teacher in my third year of high school had a framed piece of needlepoint on his wall that was crafted by his wife. It depicted what I thought was a simple enough phrase: "You are responsible for your own education." Now, this may seem tangential but it's quite important to the story: I am privileged in the sense that as a child I was immersed in culture, science, art, history, and literature. There were relative experts around me who shared their passion and knowledge of their respective areas of interest. I absorbed ideas from them to the degree that I could seem intelligent and cultured, and yet my own curiosities remained dormant. My adult life choices were largely informed by what I perceived those close to me thought was best; where to attend college, what to major in, where to pursue work, what career to choose.

In a practical sense, my opinions and choices that emerged led me to productive endeavors, and professional and personal successes. I could, however, never really answer the question, “Why?” Said another way, I was clueless as to what caused me to take the paths I took. In some sense, I had not taken responsibility for my own education.

I do not know if I was pushed or pulled towards the Graduate Institute. While working and reading with others who have amazing insights and impassioned minds, in this place, I still remain, and a familiar question followed me: Is what I truly want available to me here? If I am doing it right and if a St. John’s College education serves as a guide in the acquisition of knowledge about myself and the world that I do not already possess then I made the right choice to apply to the program regardless of my initial motivation.

John Richard Moore, GI alum (2015)

It all began on a Saturday afternoon in the mid-1990’s while I was mindlessly channel surfing in search of a baseball game. I came across something called “Book TV” and on that channel was someone named Eva Brann being interviewed as she sat in a room surrounded by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that were bursting with books. Naturally, I paused, and listened as she described a school that sounded remarkable, but almost certainly out of reach of someone with my engineering background.

Several years later I found myself out for dinner with some work colleagues and one of them had invited a friend who was a tutor at St. John’s to join us. Over a meal and a not insignificant amount of wine our conversation meandered to the way mathematics and science were taught at St. John’s. Apparently these folks thought it best to learn these subjects using “original” texts and to read about the topics in chronological order. By the time the tutor got to the story of how some early physiologist proved that blood circulated in the body and how shortly before that discovery was announced a number of dogs went missing in his neighborhood, I found myself intrigued with this school, though a bit put off my meal.

Several years later, increasingly frustrated with my job and desperately needing some kind of intellectual stimulation, I recalled the interview with Ms. Brann and my dinner with the St. John’s tutor. By this time there was an Internet, so I found the St. John’s website and learned that they had something called “Saturday Seminars” that could be attended by anyone.

I felt confident that I could pass myself off as “anyone” so I decided to sign up for a seminar on Book I of Plato’s *Republic* given by Bill Pastille. That was all it took. It turned out that St. John’s conducted a variety of community seminars, and that I could attend Weekend Seminars and something called Executive Seminars, of which I quickly availed myself. But it turned out that all the Weekend and Executive Seminars being offered were not enough for me. The books, the conversations in the seminars, and the people participating in those conversations were like a powerful opiate – I needed more and more to satisfy my craving. And just like an addict, the craving eventually forced me to stop working (fortunately I was close enough to retirement that this was not as grave as it sounds) and enroll full time in the Graduate Institute.

Celine Healey, current GI student

My first experience with St. John’s College was after I moved to Annapolis with my family in the early 1990s. Whenever I had the chance, I would walk the campus and wonder about all of the people who had been there before me. Becoming a student was only a dream at the time, and I used to tell myself if I had to do it all over again, this was the place that I would choose, but I was a working mother with two sons, and returning to school didn’t seem to be in my future.

When the economy declined, I lost my job working as an institutional investor for a corporate credit union. I looked for work for over a year without success. It was a tough time for me, personally, to go from having a career to no longer having a sense of purpose. My husband Dan suggested that maybe it was time for me to go back to school. I had not completed my undergraduate degree, and it had always been a stigma for me. Finally, this seemed like the perfect time. After I earned my undergraduate degree I wanted to continue with graduate school, but I could not find a single program that was interesting to me. I was tired of taking a bunch of required classes that I had no real interest in. Once again, I found myself at a crossroads.

One day I was looking at the SJC website to determine when the croquet match was taking place. It was something I had always wanted to attend and never took the opportunity. While I was looking around the website, I noticed the Graduate Institute. I had no idea that the college had a graduate program. I read the reading list and I could not find one thing I did NOT want to read. I was over the moon. I quickly contacted Mr. Crouse, went for a visit, and attended a few classes. I applied, and thankfully I was accepted. My experience has been more enriching than I could have imagined, sometimes I still can’t believe that I am a student here.

I only have a few classes to finish before I graduate. However, I will always maintain my ties to SJC. It is my academic home!

Elizabeth Janthey, GI alum (2015)

I regularly attend theater productions in the DC area. In 2009, as I waited for a play to begin at the Olney Theater, I browsed the program and discovered a tiny ad for the GI program at St John's College. I had heard of St John's and vaguely knew that they read books, but I had no idea the college had a graduate program. At that moment, I decided that attending this program was exactly what I wanted to do when I retired. In 2012, I finally notified management that I was leaving, and only then decided to visit the school. I did the readings and sat in on a tutorial and a seminar. Yes, I concluded, attending the GI program is exactly what I wanted to do. My last work day was in August of 2012, and the very next day I started to write my application essay. My subject was Plato's *Meno*. I had absolutely no idea that was the first dialog each incoming GI student reads with his cohorts nor did I know it was the first and most important dialog discussed in the Philosophy/Theology segment. Luckily, I centered my paper on the dialogue's dramatic structure and I don't think I made any sweeping and silly pronouncements. I was so young and naive in those days that I never even considered the possibility that I might not be accepted.

But I was accepted, and I began my career at St John's with the 2013 Spring Semester in Politics and Society. Classes were much harder than I expected, and the reading much more difficult and time consuming. Three weeks into the semester, I was questioning my sanity and thinking perhaps I had made a mistake; everyone was so much better prepared than I was and so much more articulate. But this is really where I wanted to be, so I would not allow myself to wimp out and quit. And it was the best decision I ever made; I met inspiring and dedicated tutors along with thoughtful and insightful classmates. I read authors like Aristotle and Hobbes, whom I never expected to ever read because I was sure they were too difficult or out of date or inaccessible. I will never forget the satisfaction I experienced upon understanding a difficult passage or finishing *War and Peace* or delivering a labored-over preceptorial paper. I graduated in May of 2015 after completing all five segments; receiving my diploma that day was the proudest moment of my life. Oh, by the way, Mr. Crouse told me the notice I saw in the Olney Theater's program was the first and only time St John's ever ran such an ad for the GI program. So, I ask you, did fate draw my eye to that tiny bit of text in the back of the play bill?

Bonnie Naradzay, current GI student

I learned about programs at St. John's College in Annapolis because I attended a summertime week-long session that was housed at St. John's in Santa Fe, though the session was not connected with the college. My first encounter with St. John's tutors was when I met some who gather weekly in a courtyard there to play music on the fiddle and other musical instruments, including a washtub bass. I myself was learning Irish fiddle tunes at the time, so I was captivated. And in line at mealtimes, I chatted with St John's students – undergraduates and those in the GI program who were attending summer semesters there. The stories they shared, and the joy they felt, stayed with me. One student told me about the legendary Eva Brann. Curious to learn what might be available at the Annapolis campus, since I live in Silver Spring, Maryland, I wandered into the SJC Santa Fe administrative offices to find out how I could learn about events back East.

Months later, I received an email about seminars on various stories to occur one winter morning on the Annapolis campus. Too many choices! I signed up for Dostoevsky's "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man." The textual, communal way of abiding with the story, starting with a guiding question, was new to me, and I was hooked. So, I started signing up for "community" weekend seminars with Mr. Pastille and Mr. Townsend. GI alumni sometimes participate in these seminars, and I began to learn about the GI program, still a mystery, from them. Although Mr. Townsend mentioned the Executive Seminars, and said he'd been leading them for at least twenty years in Washington, D.C. at the Cosmos Club, I assumed these were for, well, Executives. But that was a misnomer, because I got in.

Around this time, after I'd participated in a four day Piraeus discussion of Dante's *Inferno*, I got wind of the free Friday Night Lectures in Annapolis and learned there would be a lecture on Ugolino's tears. I can't explain it, but that evening, despite a blinding rainstorm, I had to go. Getting there was a nightmare; I could scarcely see to drive, and the Beltway and Route 50 are never easy. Arriving, I felt a huge relief. The lecture was worth the trip. Then one day in late August, 2015, just before starting my second year with the Executive Seminar (with the other non-Executives), I had an overwhelming urge to apply to the Graduate Institute. Sitting in my cubicle at work, I found the website, called the number, and, as fate would have it, Mr. Crouse picked up the phone. Thinking the program might start in mid-September, I asked him when the next semester would begin. "Next Wednesday," he said. "If we get your application by then, and you're admitted, you can start." With no time to spare, I assembled the required materials.

Almost as an afterthought, while calling Mr. Crouse to check on details, I asked him, “How much is it?” When he told me, I laughed with disbelief and said, “That’s the exact amount I’ve saved up to replace my heating and air conditioning system!” Mr. Crouse replied gravely, “This is a much better use of your money.”

Nathaniel Booth, current GI student

During my later years in college, I was granted an internship at the Census Bureau. I worked there for three summers and was on course to receive a job when I graduated. The summer of my senior year in college, in the last week of the internship, our higher ups invited us to a career and opportunities meeting to let us know – that there were no careers or opportunities available. The program had lost its funding and was not able to hire us when we graduated. So, after I graduated, I hustled hard to find a job, an internship, heck –any kind of opportunity. I started to wrestle with the idea of going back to school to get my masters, but I knew I didn’t want to get a “trade masters” such as an MBA, or study law or public policy, but I knew I wanted to study and learn. I started looking up programs on philosophy and liberal studies and in 2012 I stumbled across St. John’s College’s Master’s Program. I looked at the Great Books and the type of study and became instantly excited. That same week I scheduled a visit, got a tour of the campus, and sat in on a tutorial on Aristotle’s Ethics.

I loved my visit, but something inside of me was not quite settled. I didn’t think it was practical to just sit around and read books; what was I going to do with that? Because it didn’t make sense, I pushed the idea of St. John’s out of my head, although never far from my mind, but I needed to make money and start my career, right? I ended up getting a job for a nonprofit in DC as an Assistant Project Manager. I got raises, got promotions, was sent to training courses and got all sorts of professional certifications but I was FAR from satisfied. I hated the monotony of the day, the three-hour daily commute, pretending to be interested during meetings about procedures. I was completely unfulfilled. I picked up a book called *The Defining Decade*, and one of the main premises of the book was about not putting off your passions, or “dreams,” in hopes of the “right time” because now is the right time. It resonated with me greatly, and no matter how far I pushed St. John’s out of my head, I couldn’t shake that THAT was all I wanted to do, read those books and learn. So, after four years of professional work, I quit my job, used my savings to pay off my bills, and came to St. John’s in the summer of 2016. Truthfully, it has been one of the greatest decisions I have ever made.

Nothing is better than engaging in this community and diving into the depths of the texts, surrounded by fellow divers. I am a proud G.I. Johnny (Term credited to JOHN TOMARCHIO).

Amy Bittner, current GI student

In high school, I excelled in mathematics, a skill which led to pharmacy school and a career as a pharmacist. As such, I never imagined myself at a liberal arts school, despite the appeals of my high school friends regarding the benefits of a parallel literature and history class which we were offered. Years later, while determining that a classical education was what I wanted for my daughter, I discovered a book entitled *Well-Educated Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education You Never Had*. I was hooked. A few friends and I read *Don Quixote* and discussed it at the park while our preschoolers played. My enchantment with the classics had begun.

A few years later, our homeschool tutorial began its Great Books program with the help of a St. John's GI student. He held lunchtime discussions for moms on Plato's *Meno* and *The Republic*. Although other moms dropped out, I was there until the end, taking in every word and asking lots of questions. The next year I started tutoring high school Great Books classes.

After reading works of the Ancient Greeks and Romans for several years, I knew there was more after Augustine's *City of God*. I also knew that there was more to learn about how to approach these books. It was like looking out a window, hungry to go outside and explore what I knew was there but hadn't experienced. In a restless state, I rediscovered the St. John's Graduate Institute that I'd all but forgotten. After studying the website, I requested information, which sat next to my bed for two years.

Eventually, after sticking my toe in with a weekend seminar on works of Joseph Conrad and then a Saturday session on the Federalist Papers, I knew St. John's had what I was looking for. With my oldest child graduating high school, the time was ripe. There was a lot of hand wringing about whether I could pull this off at my stage in life, but once I enrolled, I knew St. John's GI program was what I had been looking for. Graduation is right around the corner, and the experience has been everything I hoped it would be and more...challenging, enlightening, fulfilling, and life changing.

Sean Hutzell, current GI student

My undergraduate degree was in Humanities and International Studies, and my theses were on two unlikely topics: a reflection on how photography impacted the civilian perception of death during the American Civil War, and a study of Scotland's whisky industry, which was an attempt to understand connections between tourism, culture, and theories of alterity.

Courtesy of my alma mater, Washington College, I was given a grant to go to Scotland, conducting interviews, touring distilleries, and of course, drinking my way across the highlands. As a photographer myself, I used the opportunity to continue my work with landscape and natural photography, while increasing a portrait portfolio of interviewees, capturing the location and the people who creating the *water of life*.

After college, I worked as a professional photographer, both independently and for a photographer based in Baltimore. My photography had already been used for advertising programs at Washington College that I had participated in – a trip to the Native American Reservations in the Southwest, where I heard stories of First Man and First Woman at sacred Navajo sites; a trip to Tanzania, where I taught at schools and hunted with native tribes; Study Abroad experiences across Europe, with a home base of study in Milan. I finished my education by representing Iran at a Model United Nations Conference in Seoul.

To subsidize my fungible schedule and income (not to mention an acquired taste for whisky), I worked at a liquor store. There I put my theoretical knowledge into practice as customers tested my knowledge on what kind of red chardonnay they should buy, or where the six packs of Blue Moon wine were. I enjoyed the company of my coworkers and the knowledge I gained, which helped me independently pursue both a sommelier certification and whisky ambassadorship, but I was not intellectually stimulated. I wanted more and began my search to return to higher education. I had already rejected a chance to study history at St. Andrews, so I was prepared to start from scratch. I had just two initial requirements:

- I would look locally, so I could continue my photography work.
- I would not take the GRE, which would not accurately reflect my liberal arts education and the adventures I've had so far.

After a few misses, I stumbled across St. John's College. The program was diverse, and it appealed to my sense of wonder and distinct interests.

I applied in October of 2015 and was accepted. In November, I visited the college for the first time. I started the program in January, 2016, and graduate in May. I look forward to continued textual readings and many more conversations with friends, this time with a dram or two as we share our thoughts.

Donald Antenen, current GI student

I dropped out of high school in Cincinnati, Ohio after my sophomore year and shortly afterwards earned my GED. I did not plan on attending college because I thought higher education was corrupt and corrupting (I was right: it is). After briefly living in a tent in New Orleans, I moved to Kentucky and worked in a series of low-paying jobs. In Kentucky I met my wife, and we moved to Philadelphia so that she could earn an advanced degree in social work. I decided that I wanted to learn ancient languages, so I studied Greek, Latin, and Biblical Hebrew at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated in 2015. I liked being in school and wanted to read and learn more, so we moved to Annapolis so I could continue my studies at St. John's.

Like everyone who likes to read old books, I had heard of the College and envied its reading lists. I also befriended a few Johnnies in Philadelphia. It turns out that St. John's is even more interesting than I thought it would be; it is less a place for reading old books than it is a place for experimenting with new ways of thinking. While the opportunity costs of pursuing a vocationally useless masters degree in my late 20s are high (and I should have been thinking about how best to support my family), I have no regrets.

Now I am managing the office of a small marketing firm, translating Genesis from Hebrew prose to English verse, and trying to figure out a career that will allow my wife to stay home with our daughter. Over the coming decades I hope to help discover or create new modes and orders of thinking to replace the collapsing scientific and philosophical epoch that began in the 17th century. However unhelpful my time at St. John's has been to the pursuit of a career, it has been pivotal for my thinking about the future(s) of thinking. And the contemplative life is the best life, right?

Joseph Keegin, current GI student

I was 19 years old in 2006 when I dropped out of college and devoted myself to extremist leftist politics and radical environmentalism. I spent four years hitchhiking and riding freight trains to various protests and conferences and such

before moving to a small mostly-off-the-grid farm in southern Kentucky to escape the insanity of it all. I passed two years making plants grow and reading books until a friend did some bad things and ended everything. I moved north to Lexington and spent a year preparing expensive breakfast foods for money and using my free time to write poems, record music, and read voraciously and omnivorously. At the end of 2011 my best friend died, and I moved to Louisville. In response to those years of tumult and loss, I felt desperate for permanence, so I decided to go back to school to study philosophy. I also studied German because I liked how Kafka's despair and melancholy reminded me of my own, and I wanted to read his books in German rather than in translations.

It didn't take long in my philosophy program to realize that I didn't care much about logic beyond its influence on crafting coherent speech and writing and its use in making fun puzzles to work through. Nor did I share the enthusiasm for grand philosophical systems that was demonstrated by so many others in my program. My teachers all seemed to think that philosophy in our time consists primarily of research essays about great thinkers or logical analyses of their arguments, but I wasn't convinced. I read Plato's "Meno" and learned that philosophy has something to do with living and involves asking way weirder and more fundamental questions than anything I had been reading had dealt with. A seminar on Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" left me bewildered and amazed and gave me a taste of what it's like to engage in a search for truth with others.

All the while, I became ever more aware of the deficiencies of my education. I noticed that for every one book I encountered written by a great and visionary thinker, I read a dozen essays by professors in academic philosophy departments whose names I will never remember.

My German studies didn't fare much better. I enjoyed puzzling through the Althochdeutsch of the *Nibelungenlied* and memorizing poems by Andreas Gryphius and Neidhart von Reuenthal, but my classmates were always too afraid to sound stupid by speaking clumsy German, so they remained silent as the moon. Most of them had no real interest in German beyond the language's being a whimsical and novel curiosity or maybe an eventual gateway to a job. The class sessions were passionless. I devoured Schiller, Lessing, Goethe, and Brecht but could never find a willing interlocutor with whom to discuss them. It became clear to me that there was something I was trying to find in my education that I wasn't getting, though at the time I could not have elaborated what it was.

At some point my old friend Don Antenen moved to Annapolis to enroll in the Graduate Institute at St. John's College. I'd never heard of the school, but he regularly sent me dispatches from his time in the program and it all sounded wonderful. Reading wonderful old books themselves rather than articles about the books; class meetings based on discussion, not lectures and note-taking; classrooms filled with people from a wide range of backgrounds, all engaged on the search together. I visited over a summer when classes weren't in session and Ms. Pincus took me on a rainy tour of the campus. I visited the next spring, talked with Mr. Crouse about his life, and sat in on a class about Hegel with Mr. Zeiderman and a seminar on Augustine. I felt very intellectually at home. I moved to Annapolis in August and started classes shortly thereafter. I am beginning to understand what I have been looking for.

Robert Tonucci, current GI student

I was first exposed to SJC in a Summer Classics seminar in Santa Fe in 1993. We read the Iliad in six days, and the lead tutor was John Agresto, then the President of SJC Santa Fe. After that experience, I wanted to attend the GI program, and I longed for the chance to do so.

In 2009 I lost my security clearance. In April 2011 I paid off my house. In November 2011 my father died. I decided to turn post-mid-life crisis into post-mid-life renaissance, so in June 2012 I quit my job and decided to use my GI Bill benefits. After two years at the U. of MD, College Park for a library science degree, I applied to the GI in Annapolis (writing my entrance essay on Quentin Crisp's 1984 self-help manual *Manners from Heaven*). Since then, it's been one miraculous moment after another: learning to read a clause at a time rather than a sentence at a time, and learning from Hobbes and Aristotle to shake off pusillanimity and small-souledness (not to mention tuck in my shirt and not wear sneakers and socks after 5 PM).

I've now been shown the door (i.e., I'm graduating). I'd love to do the four year undergrad program, but my GI Bill benefits have almost run out---although I'm considering starting a GoFundMe page to raise money for the tuition....

Michael Birdsell, current GI student

I found St. John's College via Bangkok, Thailand, where I landed in 1997, after a promising career in San Francisco left me asking, "Is this all there is to life?" I set out to search for answers, literally. My goal was to explore the world

and then attend graduate school. My journey started by teaching English on Japan's southern island of Kyushu, which led to a history teaching position at the International School of Bangkok (ISB). It was there that I first learned the Socratic method. The humanities faculty at ISB encouraged this style of instruction. Ironically, I tried to push through Plato's *Republic* shortly after college, yet its message was not resonating within me at that time, so it went back on the shelf. That said, it was indeed this rich experience at ISB that led me to St. John's and to rediscover the *Republic*, 17 years later.

After teaching in Bangkok, I returned to the U.S. committed to teach, to grow, and live a multi-cultural life. I worked with Native American students of the Navajo and Tohono O'odham Nations in the desert southwest. I slept in ancestral Hogans, took part in Navajo spiritual ceremonies, sheared and butchered sheep and made "home calls" down never-ending dusty roads to visit students who lived in mud-walled, dirt-floored "modern" Wickiups. I also taught at international boarding schools in northern California and Arizona that focused on outdoor education, and I made a home in the beautiful Sierra Nevada mountain setting of Lake Tahoe. Life was good. All I needed was to start working on a Master's degree in something – most likely, history.

Instead, I accepted an opportunity working with university researchers and eventually joined a team promoting an inexpensive breakthrough in cancer detection. This team included a researcher from nearby Georgetown University, yet this was not my connection to St. John's. No, this would occur via a beach bench in San Diego. I sat on this bench in 2015 to study for an offshore sailing certification, and there I met my future wife. She crews on a sail racing team here in Annapolis and asked if I sail. A little over a year later we married, and I moved to Annapolis. But wait, what about Bangkok? Well, this is a wonderful story of the long and winding road that often takes us directly to where we want to be in the first place!

If we rewind 17 years to my time in Bangkok, she was teaching at a nearby International School in Singapore. A mutual friend decided we should get together, yet the only contact we ended up having was a tour of Bangkok I gave her and her family one day during a visit. They took lots of pictures, and I ended up in their family photo album. So after a 45-minute conversation, 17 years later, on that beach bench in San Diego, she recognized me and asked my last name. She then proclaimed, "You toured me around Bangkok!" Shortly after we arrived in Annapolis, and just as casually as she asked my last name on that bench, she turned to me and said, "you should check out St. John's Graduate Institute. I think you would love it." She was absolutely right.

I finally read the *Republic*, and it is the best book I've ever read, so far... I couldn't have imagined the intellectual stimulation, community, and sense of belonging that awaited me here at St. John's College. It's the most enriching experience of my life, and I'm just getting started, again.

Staci Hill, current GI student

Because I enrolled in the GI program soon after I graduated from college, my route to St. John's may seem fairly straightforward - but to me, it feels just as circuitous as others' stories. I went straight to college after high school without thinking about why I should be in college in the first place. Moreover, I was guaranteed admissions to USC's Pharm.D. program if I completed my undergraduate degree with a sufficient GPA, but I had no idea what pharmacy was. I knew it would be lucrative and demand a knowledge of chemistry (a subject I am very fond of). After my first program meeting, I realized I wanted nothing to do with pharmacy. And after three months into my freshman year, I realized USC was not the right place for me. I transferred to Middlebury College my sophomore year and could not have been happier. I was beginning to taste what it meant to be liberally educated (although in retrospect, I realize just how far away I was).

At Middlebury I majored in chemistry, and in my senior year my professors were encouraging me to apply to Ph.D. programs right away. But that did not feel right. In December of my senior year, I was sitting in a room full of books in my friend's apartment and stumbled upon Eva Brann's *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic*. After reading the first few pages, I needed to learn about the author. I found out that Ms. Brann is a tutor here, and so it was through her book that I discovered St. John's. I browsed the college website and found the GI program, and I became hooked. The fact that I wanted to come to St. John's to earn a Masters in the Liberal Arts before pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry was a difficult thing for me to articulate. So I played it off as a joke for a while. But I could not shake the idea that the program was what I had to do - what I needed to do - before I did anything else.

The following fall, after an internship abroad, I applied both to Ph.D. programs in chemistry and to St. John's Graduate Institute. I started St. John's the subsequent spring as I began to hear back from chemistry programs. I was fortunate enough to be able to defer my acceptance to a Ph.D program in order to finish St. John's. I will forever be grateful that it worked out so well and that I could complete the program here. St. John's is the perfect program for anyone interested in the sciences. The curriculum - while not overtly scientific - teaches

you the key to doing successful science: how to ask a question and how to start exploring an answer. It seems simple enough, but after four years of college and four years of high school where scientific truths were presented as such, it becomes difficult to ask yourself why? or how? or when? Often I felt all the questions I was asked had answers, and the answers were in the back of books or behind the professor's desk. But once I ventured into a research setting, questions were unanswered and sometimes not even formulated. As a scientist, you need to know first and foremost how to ask a question and then how to go about answering it. St. John's is perfect preparation.

For this reason, I could argue that attending St. John's was a good decision. But St. John's would be just as important to my life even if I were not to go on to a Ph.D. program after graduation. My experience here has shown me just how much I want to read and learn and the lengths I can take to pursue my goals. For instance, I am currently writing a master's essay on Euclid's *Elements*. To enrich my understanding of this text, I have been auditing an undergraduate math class. Finally, St. John's has shown me how to read a book well while endowing me with the Sisyphean aspiration to continue reading great books. Because of this, I will never be bored for the rest of my life. And for that I am most grateful.

Leland Ellis, GI Alum (2016)

In the mid-1990s, I accompanied my wife on a visit to Kenyon College (Gambier, Ohio), where she was awarded an honorary degree. She had entered Kenyon in 1969 (the first year that women were admitted) thinking that she wanted to be a writer, but graduated three years later (the first woman to graduate from the college) as a biologist, and went on to MIT for graduate school. In her remarks during the commencement ceremony, she spoke of her interest while a student in forging new linkages across 'Middle Path', the brick sidewalk that separates the beautiful idyllic campus into the liberal arts and humanities on one side, and math and sciences on the other, a divide which few students in her class dared to cross. As I had majored in chemistry at a large state university, and had the opportunity for very few electives in the non-sciences, we discussed at length during our walks on campus whether it might be possible some day for me to return to academic studies and explore any number of 'paths not taken' while in college and graduate school, and a small liberal arts campus setting was certainly appealing.

About a decade later, I did manage to go back to school part-time while now a federal employee, initially for a ‘mid-career’ masters degree in international public policy (international economics, South Asia Studies), followed by additional courses in applied economics, computer science, and systems engineering. After ~7 years of study in the social sciences and engineering at Hopkins, I retired from federal service and was again ready for a change. But what next?

Looking around the web in the spring of 2013, I stumbled upon a SJC Annapolis web page announcing the Summer Classics, and was immediately drawn to an offering on the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers. And it was at the opening reception on Sunday evening that I first heard that there was a Graduate Institute, where an AGI alum (don’t remember who) said that if I enjoyed the week on campus, then I should really think about applying to the GI. And so on Monday I dropped by the BBC to visit with Mr. Crouse and learn more about the program, and he arranged for me to sit in on a tutorial (Augustine) and preceptorial (Zarathustra) while I was on campus that week. And the week’s experience was indeed all that I needed to return home and organize my application, and then begin in the fall of 2013 with the Segment on Mathematics and Natural Sciences.

And the contrast between the earlier professional masters programs and the GI could not have been more dramatic. Rather than nondescript urban and suburban buildings and classrooms, endless blizzards of powerpoint lectures, all too rare in-class discussion, and written exams (even blue books), here at last I was on a small liberal arts campus, where I immediately gravitated to my favorite benches in front of historic McDowell Hall, conveniently situated for forays into the bookstore, library, and coffeeshop before class, and the unforgettable experience of SJC-style conversations around small wooden tables. And no ‘middle path’ to navigate, as math and science is integral to the liberal arts at the college! So, in sum, how did I find the GI? Purely by chance!

Jerome Dausman, GI Alum (2011)

St. John’s College is different because learning is first. When I showed up as an incoming freshman at my well-known engineering university, the first thing I was required to do was visit the Registrar’s Office to make sure they had all the money in hand they said they required. Only then did I receive: a dorm key, an orientation schedule, and the list of classes for which I was registered. Not so at St. John’s: the first thing we do is attend a seminar on a Platonic dialogue. And not just any dialogue, we discuss *The Meno*, a dialogue on what it is to learn. And in that discussion we learn (or I should say we *begin* to learn) what a real discussion

of ideas is all about. Only after that introduction to learning do we return to the mundane tasks.

But my Johnnie semester started even before that. Less than a minute after parking on King George Street, the first person I encountered on campus was a short older woman dressed in a light blue jacket and skirt walking toward me as I head toward Barr-Buchanan for *The Meno*. She looked lost in her thoughts, and though I knew she noticed me, she was not looking at me. So I took the liberty of asking “Are we having a good day?” With enthusiasm she replied “Oh yes!” and gave me a smile much bigger than her size would suggest. Well, after *The Meno*, registration, lunch, and other details, I took a seat in my first regular class, a literature tutorial in McDowell Hall. Our tutor was a few minutes late, and we all turned when the door opened and a short older woman dressed in a light blue jacket and skirt entered. Since that day and that smile Eva Brann and I have been good friends.

So why did I sign up for the GI program? When my son Daniel started his freshman year at St. John’s, I was delighted, in part because I knew all the assigned readings were posted online and I could read along with him, year-by-year. Well, that’s what I thought. My problem with the curriculum became evident immediately. You see, the College only assigns about half of Herodotus – and a lot of good stuff is skipped! And then came Thucydides with the same partial reading. Well, I had to read both of them cover-to-cover, but as Daniel finished his freshman year, I was still doing readings from January! And I realized that I wasn’t getting to discuss them with anyone. This had to change. What was the solution? Sign up for the GI program!

In May of 2011 graduation was held indoors because of the threat of rain. I didn’t mind sitting on stage with my fellow GI’s. Why? We were all seated in a semi-circle, and across the stage from me I got to see my son in cap and gown. Some of the icing on the cake was his receiving the prize for the best senior essay. The final icing on the cake? We moved to New Jersey shortly thereafter and, since I had gained the habit of discussing things I’d read, I started the New Jersey alumni chapter. So you see, St. John’s and the GI experience don’t need to end. If you are reading this, you can join SJCCConnect.com and find out about discussions in your area. If none are nearby ... start your own alumni group!
JFDausman@alumni.StJohnsCollege.edu

2. GI COUNCIL ON INSTRUCTION'S SYMPOSIUM ON "THE OPENING QUESTION" (OPENED BY MS BRANN)

On May 4th, over twenty-five people from the GI community, both current students and alumni, gathered around the table in the Hartle room to partake in an hour-long conversation - the term Ms. Brann prefers over "discussion,"- on the all-important Opening Question. After some initial remarks, including the idea that a question should point towards the possibility of an answer, she talked about various categories of opening questions and asked us for examples of memorable questions. A lively conversation ensued, ranging over a variety of topics: sometimes a person may ask a question in an effort to shine rather than to wrestle with the text; how does one ask a question about Euclid when all one wants is to nail the proof; what happens if, at the end of a session, most of the questions are never addressed...

At one point Ms. Brann indicated the importance of visualization, particularly in talking about literary texts. Her example was seeing Homer's placement of the ships on the beach in the Iliad: the ships of Achilles at one end, of Ajax at the other end, and of Odysseus in the middle. At the end, Ms. Brann shared her optimistic view of the future growth and increasing importance of the GI program (see Colloquy's interview with her, below). It was a wonderful beginning to a GI tradition: a symposium each semester on a topic, not a text!

3. INTERVIEW AND INSIGHTS FROM TUTORS

COLLOQUY INTERVIEWS EVA BRANN

On a sunny spring day in April, Eva Brann paused from preparing for her senior seminar and seniors' orals to talk with us about St. John's Graduate Institute.

COLLOQUY: What are your thoughts about the future direction of the Graduate Institute?

Ms. Brann: I see the Graduate Institute program as the future of St. John's College. Four year undergraduate programs in the liberal arts are at risk because increasingly, students out of high school seek a job-oriented education. High school graduates attending the College are more technically adept, and the program reflects this. Yet job opportunities in some sectors are diminishing because of the changes wrought by technology, including job replacement by robots. Even though classical liberal arts educations may fade, people arriving at the middle of their lives want to examine their experiences through engaging with these texts.

Graduate Institute students certainly benefit from their life experiences as they work with the readings. The GI program may expand to resemble the current undergraduate program more closely, and vice versa. Just a few years ago, the history segment was added to the four semester choices, and many GI students choose to complete a fifth semester. Now there is talk of adding a music segment, a sixth semester opportunity.

COLLOQUY: What are your suggestions for GI students when they graduate from the program?

Ms. Brann: Now that you've read and discussed a text once, you can see that you will want to read and discuss it again, even ten times more. Form a reading group!

COLLOQUY: Thank you!

NOTE: Ms. Brann co-leads Summer Classics seminars at the Santa Fe campus. This summer, from July 3–7, 2017, she and David Carl will lead a seminar on Socrates' Forebears: Two Presocratics, Heraclitus and Parmenides. During the second week, Ms. Brann, with Janet Dougherty, will lead a seminar on four classic Western Novels: *The Virginian, Shane, True Grit, and Valdez is Coming.*

TUTOR INSIGHT: MR. ZEIDERMAN'S APPROACH TO READING A TEXT FOR CLASS –(NOT A RECOMMENDED APPROACH FOR ALL. YOU NEED TO FIND YOUR OWN.)

1. I read the entire text through a first time, without underlining:
Whatever time it takes me
2. I read it through a second time, this time underlining or marking the margins, as I notice items I wish to remember. *The time is generally about 1/3rd of the time of #1*
3. I read it a third time, reading only what was NOT underlined or marked.
Quickly, only 10-20 minutes.

4. MR. ZEIDERMAN'S TOAST TO THE GRADUATING STUDENTS SPRING 2017

A few weeks ago, there was a meeting in the Hartle room. It was advertised as an occasion to share anecdotes: what brought those present to attend the GI. I hadn't meant to attend the meeting because I was never **in** the GI. I therefore had no legitimate anecdote. I was on the way to check the M & M supply when I was seen. So, I couldn't sneak away and was trapped.

When it was my turn to offer one, I had no idea what to say. So I told the truth. I said I had avoided any connection with the GI for many years. How could I read and discuss a specific text with students who lacked a familiarity with the crucial texts that preceded it? I came to the GI as a tutor because I was separating from my marriage, and I needed some extra pay. So I couldn't then offer that as an anecdote. However, as a faculty member in both the GI and the undergraduate Program, I felt I could at least offer a brief account of how I felt GIs and Undergraduates differ. Since then that incident has been on my mind and I think it supplies what I then lacked.

With the undergraduates I feel we are primarily investigating the genesis of ourselves. We undertake this through examining in discussions a chronological sequence of canonical texts. Instead with the GIs, though these same texts play an important role, I now feel we are always more or less explicitly exploring the boundaries of our current categories and therefore the boundaries of ourselves. These boundaries are in fact captured in the very names of the five segments that are offered here.

With the undergraduates we focus on the tension between us and the text. With the GIs what is always at issue is the location of the text within this set of rubrics. Is Hegel's text Philosophy or History or is it more like a weird Science or even Theology? Is Euclid's Elements Mathematics or somewhat like Literature, like a Petrarchan sonnet sequence? Since then, as I mentioned, I have been reflecting on my role as a tutor through what jumped out unthinkingly at that get together. In this toast, I offer it as the anecdote I didn't then have.

With the undergraduates someone in the class might notice a subtle point or an oblique reference in a text and we all might see something we overlooked. With the GIs what is crucial is not in a tiny detail or a Greek word, or a surprising adverbial phrase. Rather what is crucial is becoming explicit about the way these

very rubrics and categories are spread through the world and how they shaped our vision and our previous lives. In short it is our experience as adults of our various false starts, you might even say our very failures, that are crucial. It's the memory of a wrong turn we once made, or a career that was unsatisfying or that is ending that brought us here.

What brought you here is the sense that your very identity is threatened and at issue. It stems from a sense of incompleteness, from a barrier, you had run into, in your route through these very rubrics and categories that shape our world. In other words, I now see more clearly what is essential in the GI. It is the uniquely and painfully hard won but very deep and profoundly personal sense that these very rubrics, these categories, are inadequate to account for what we should become. And you came here to discipline yourselves to explore these categories and together with us perhaps create new ones.

The undergraduates often imagine they are in Paradise, as a journalist friend who never attended St. John's once called it. But also as those, like myself, who did actually attend as undergraduates realize: undergraduates are just as frequently in Hell as in Paradise. This descent often results from a frustrating blind date with Plato, Newton, or Kant. However, GIs are neither in Heaven nor Hell. Instead you are inbetween, you are in Purgatory. You seek with the help of discussions of these textual landmarks to chart an entirely new way for yourselves through the world.

And as I thought more about this since that day in the General's room I realized that you and I are not different. From that incident I realized that I too am finally attending the GI exactly as you are. For I too am seeking a path through our assumptions and categories, a path through the gaps of our world. We are here therefore truly peers and fellow pilgrims. By pooling our perspectives we seek a path through what might lie between and perhaps beyond all these current categories. We are venturing into a completely uncharted landscape in which all of us will have to place landmarks.

With the undergraduates I can at my best be a guide. With you I am at my best when I and my fellow tutors are your consciences to keep us all looking when we falter and begin to replay our habitual pasts. We need one another to avoid the behaviors and platitudes that we have all inherited and employed and that we all came to the GI to go beyond. I therefore toast you and all of us not as faculty members or students, but as fellow GIs. So I ask you all to break tradition and a boundary. Please all raise your glasses to us all as fellow pilgrims as we wend our way together to a possible Canterbury.