DREAMS BECOME REALITIES

The character of the campus was changing dramatically after World War II. Many returning veterans, faculty as well as students, had seen combat and, having lived through experiences of which nightmares are made, were hesitant when it came to talking about the war. Military chaplains William Leonard, SJ, Robert Drinan, SJ, William Kenealy, SJ, and others, were pleased to be reassigned to Boston College by their Provincial Superior. Also, the Jesuits, who had relinquished St. Mary's Hall to the Army during its Army Special Training Program, were recently back in their renovated facility.

All of the students seemed to have a sense of purpose about them. They were older, they were desirous to carve out careers, and they were happy to be in school. They were familiar with places in India, Europe, Africa, and islands they once knew only by name. The war was mentioned briefly in a bantering way or in an ethics class or courses in history or geography. The debating society had a pretty good go at discussing “The Just War” now and then. John Donovan was asked by a freshman if the war proved to be an educational experience for him. John’s reply was something like, “Yes, I believe it probably was. You see, I could always spell ‘Normandy,’ but now I know exactly where it is and the many ways to get there.” For the young men who left campus as boys and returned as men, extracurricular activities had little appeal. A colleague mentioned that having been invited to join the Glee Club, he had to bite his tongue to keep from saying “You must be kidding.” Soon the mood changed, and students were not only singing, but they were performing in drama productions, writing for the Heights and Stylus and, of course, playing on the gridiron.

This was a time when little black-and-white television sets were replacing the old Philco radios which families sat around to hear the news of the day or listen to favorite programs. One could buy a car for what he or she would put down today as a first payment. The war in Korea was devastating, and it was painful to see so many going off to serve in the military again. Because the draft age was raised to 22 years, and because faculty helped students complete their coursework before they were called to service, the Korean conflict did not affect Boston College to the same degree as did World War II. There were wake-up calls during this time which affected all institutions of education. Sputnik gave everyone food for thought, as did the Brown vs. the Board of Education’s ruling that “separate but equal” was not equal.

Changes in programs of study were endorsed by the Board of Trustees, planning councils, and key administrators. At the undergraduate level, there was an increase in the number of courses in the social and natural sciences as well as more courses in mathematics. The philosophy requirement ran through all four years. Academic counselors, among whom were James Moynihan, SJ, and David Dunigan, SJ, were on hand to assist students in designing courses of study. We have been told that many of the counseling sessions took care of a few emotional problems, as well. Soon, Weston Jenks, a new doctoral recipient from Fordham University, established a counseling program at Boston College, which has since become a
model for other institutions to emulate. At the graduate level, the Board of Trustees was in support of existing programs being reexamined, and for the addition of three new doctoral programs in history, economics, and education. The library began to acquire new holdings, especially those which bolstered courses in business administration, which Seavey Joyce, S.J., Dean of the Business School, designed.

The word was out about Boston College, its expansion, new programs, scholarship, and assistantship enticements for a diverse, committed student body. President Michael P. Walsh, S.J., made many of the recruitment trips to Jesuit high schools himself. He was pleasantly surprised when a fair number of students who came to Boston College opted for the honors program. A search for a scholarly, high-caliber group of graduate students was also begun. Alumni who were teaching in recognized colleges or universities were notified to spread the word about their alma mater on the move. And last but not least, a clarion call went out to all major universities about opportunities for faculty at BC. No stone was to remain unturned until all departments and schools at the University had the most scholarly, research-oriented, knowledgeable faculty to revitalize existing programs, and to build, shape, and promote the new course plans and related research.

One individual from this time, who touched all departments in some way, was John E. Murphy, S.J. On the one hand, Father was a brilliant scholar who read and spoke flawless Gaelic and who could trace Irish history from decade to decade. Father Murphy and Martin Harney, S.J., were a duo who would often entertain groups of colleagues with Irish folklore. On the other hand, Fr. Murphy was in charge of numerous University operations, which included security, the post office, and the bookstore. The rules he put down were ironclad. For example, many pieces of campus mail were returned to faculty because of tape on the envelopes. Mary Kinnane, former dean of women in the School of Education, used to tell the story of her writing to Fr. Murphy about purchase orders for books. She addressed the envelope the way his name sounded, “Johnny Murphy, S.J.” Her correspondence was returned with, “No such person at BC.” Mary did get her books eventually, and she and Fr. Murphy became good friends.

John E. Murphy, S.J., touched base with his security people early, very early, every morning after he and Jack Foley, director of the audio visual department, had coffee together in the basement of Campion Hall. Security personnel were few in number during the '50s and '60s, and they shared an office with others in the former service building near Campion Hall. It is said that if one wanted to know what was happening on the dust bowl or downtown, either Jack or Father would be the one to ask. Rumor has it that when John E. Murphy, S.J., entered into his eternal reward, six people were hired to replace him. This has never been refuted!

When members of the Oral History Committee met with Tom O’Connor, the University Historian, who is also a subject in this study, Tom had this to say: “The decades on which you are focusing reflect a time when the lay faculty group began to take shape. As the new throng of lay faculty formed a relationship with incumbent Jesuits and lay people, a definite
transformation was occurring. Nothing like this ever happened before or since.” Tom ended 
his meeting with us by saying the period we chose to observe is truly “sui generis.”

Excerpts from Donovan, SJ, Charles F., Dunigan, SJ, David R. 
FitzGerald, SJ, Paul A. History of Boston College. From the 
Beginning to 1990. The University of Boston College Press, 
1990, pp. 240-70. Also, excerpts from O’Connor, Thomas H., Ascending the 
Heights: A Brief History of Boston College from Its Founding 
to 2008. Linden Lane Press at Boston College, 2008, pp. 1-50, and 
recollections of the compiler of this study.