We went out West. There it is. The truth is there isn’t an easy way, really, of telling our story. I could give the names of the places we came across and give an ample description of the meals and such, as well. But it isn’t in the details; not the real story of what we were doing out there in that land over the sunset.

We had some good times. We had some tough times, too. But making the trip was never primarily about any of that, really. It was about growing. And I think we did. And I think the country out there, with its challenges and wild beauty, helped us to do just that.

With canoes for the altar and cowboy-knights for his altar-boys, Fr. John Bourbeau offered daily Mass in the cathedral of the west.

We were looking out for each other; looking past ourselves and our own little wants. Whether...
The world before the birth of Christ was a world in darkness. Mankind had lost its way, and in the aimless wanderings of thousands of years, had grown cold and heartless. Only the Mercy of God could rescue the situation, but for thousands of years, hearts were not ready.

In the little village of Nazareth, God found a heart after His own Heart’s desire: that of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From the beginning she loved Him, and loved Him as no creature has before or since. Completely given, her wholeheartedness drew the Divine Word from heaven to earth. The Star of David was thus born into this world; a Beacon of Light shone in the darkness, and souls rediscovered Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

Centuries have passed since that fateful and beautiful moment in history. Christendom grew and blossomed over the course of hundreds of years, but we are long past the pinnacle of her glory. Gradually the Light has faded, blocked out by the selfishness in the hearts of men; the shadow has lengthened, little by little, and the world of today is darker than the one that preceded the birth of the Savior. Men have grown increasingly blind to the reality of God and, worse, increasingly indifferent.

It is through Our Lady that God yet wills to work. Queen of Heaven, Queen of Saints, Queen of Martyrs – she calls on souls willing to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Cause of her Son. That generosity is crucial. “We are trying to fight the whole world,” Chesterton warns, “[trying] to turn the tide of the whole time we live in, to resist everything that seems irresistible.” Such a task is impossible without complete commitment, regardless of rewards or even the reasonable expectation of victory.

Our Lady herself, in Chesterton’s Ballad of the White Horse, promises us nothing by way of human triumph:

I tell you naught for your comfort
Yea naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.

We have her word, nevertheless, that the battle cannot, and will not, be in vain. “In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

Ad astra per aspera then! Our one desire is to prove ourselves worthy of the honor bestowed on us by the Queen of Armies. Whether or not we will indeed prove so in the long run depends, in large part, on the generosity of our efforts today. Homework, chores, prayers – whatever is asked of us, we are hers, and we want to give of ourselves accordingly. The wholeheartedness of our efforts with the Blessed Virgin will draw the Savior Jesus to be born anew in our world, and in our own hearts.

Let us make it a good Advent.
through rainstorms or brilliant sunrises, we were being brought together by something out there and being taught something. We were being taught something by nature’s school, the realest school, and the most beautiful one that this man has ever come to knowledge by.

As the trip wound down, and many times thereafter, our minds would wander back to shooting in Wyoming or paddling down the wide Missouri. These things stick with a man.

But life, it flows; it rides on. And yet, just like the river, I think we take things along with us, things that we’ll carry for a long time. Sure, we were cowboys and river rats for a time. We toughed out their meals and rode their trails. But all along we were firstly the Honor Guard of Our Lady, being led by the Knights of the Immaculata.

Life can be too soft at times, and that can rub off on a boy. Now, just like before, we are back in a world that tempts us to take the easy way out. But we brought back some virtue from the wilderness, and the lessons we learned in that realest of schools will help us excel in the hardest of schools – the one of our daily duties – until the Sodality calls us to saddle up for another adventure.
Since 2004 the boys of the parish have been competing in the Soap Box Derby. This year’s champion, driving a car engineered by Fr. Kenneth Novak, was the sixth grader Charles Goldade.

Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* was the fruit of a long hot summer in McCabe Theatre for the girls’ summer theatre club.

Teachers took advantage of the pleasant autumn weather in Kansas and taught science in the “poetic” fashion, by going out into nature to observe and study Kansas plants.

During Fire Awareness Week, members of the St. Marys volunteer fire department visited the lower school classrooms to talk about the dangers of fire. The two firefighters who came to the Academy, Mark Campbell and John Thompson, are both graduates of the Academy.
The first grade boys took some time off from their desk work to see what farm work is like. Mr. John Yellico, the caretaker of the farm, gave the boys a tour of the historic barns and farm. He even let them hold the new chicks.

On a chilly Saturday afternoon, the Academy soccer team, under Coach Eric Varnado, brought home the KCAA State Championship title for the second year in a row.

Joseph Busateri, First Grade, as St. George.

Thomas Beck, First Grade, as St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Robert Awerkamp, First Grade, as St. Michael.

Nathaniel Thomas, Fourth Grade, as St. Denis.
The Forest

Andrew Thibeault, 6th Grade.

In the woods the trees had just turned red and gold and the sunshine sent rays of light dancing about through the leaves as they rustled together and waved in the wind. The sound of the sudden dash of a cotton tail rabbit across the crisp leaves found his ears. Some geese flew over his head, honking their goodbyes, not to come back till spring. He heard a squirrel busy gnawing on a walnut on a nearby oak. The wind swirled about the trees sending sounds like moans and groans, as if the trees did not like feeling the oncoming winter. He heard the trees’ dead leaves being crunched under his feet.

The Apocalypse

In the spring of 2014, Joseph Moats, SMA 2015, won the Apocalypse Art Prize, a $10,000 prize, for painting a triptych of the apocalypse based upon St. John the Evangelist’s vision. The painting was to follow the style of Medieval art. The painting presents an allegory of the spiritual realm – all eyes are fixed on God, Who is enthroned in Heaven and at the same time at work in the physical world.

Above: Alcuin, an 8th century teacher, poet, and scholar, drawn by Fifth Grader Trea-Marie Quain.

Right: A pencil drawing of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, with the Christ Child, by Eighth Grader Philip Madrid.
The Crucible: The Cross for Crusaders

Edmund Pflum, SMA 2017

Each year the SMA high school boys take on the Crucible, a test of moral and physical strength, a competition between the houses, the brotherhood of the school.

Per Aspera: the struggle starts with a call to “fight the good fight,” and then a blessing and a prayer for the purpose that all do what they can do for the house and for God.

A whistle sounds starting the sprint for heavy tractor tires which the boys flip for over a hundred yards across Miege Field. The next struggle ensues with several house members, particularly those new to the high school, straining their shoulders in a run carrying a hefty log up Gideon’s Way and back to College Creek. Then there’s the race of speed and agility up the creek, which holds its own obstacles.

But the event is more than mere individual physical exertion and competition. The tire and the log illustrate the need of teamwork. Camaraderie also is required in the next challenge when members of the house carry another house member on a stretcher through a field to a check point.

There is a moment’s pause, a brief rest. It is but a quick rallying of the spirit of the houses by the boys’ chaplain, another call to practice manly virtues, to put aside mediocrity. Then they’re off again for the leadership challenge and then the long run through Sir William’s Hollow, the creek, the obstacle course, and down a dusty road. In this final foot-race, all are involved from the new students to the leaders, leaping over logs, slogging their way through the creek, and crawling beneath the ropes of the obstacle course.

Finally, in the distance the end appears. The goal posts of Bishop Miege Field appear, and then the final leg, a 100-yard sprint to conquer the Crucible, the great expression of will-power.

Ad Astra: Chanting and cheering, the house-brothers of the lower school encourage all across the finish line, showing that a true Crusader must persevere to the end to be victorious.

First Quarter House Results

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The Probatio: The Test of Nobility
Elizabeth O’Leary, SMA 2015

The initiation of new members into a group does not immediately bring to mind images of virtue and a test of the strength of charity. However, the Probatio of the Bellarmine Houses is exactly that.

Instead of flipping tires, carrying logs, or running an obstacle course, the applicants for each girl’s house must pass an arguably more difficult test: the giving of self. As the girls often find out, their trip to the Manor, though it sounds simple in theory, is more than just a few hours of volunteer time. Genuinely caring for, and trying really to love each resident, especially when he or she is disconsolate or senile, takes patience and a forgetfulness of self that many young people lack. This requires selflessness and a conquering of natural repugnance to what is not understood or pleasing.

When these are overcome, the time at the Manor becomes viewed not only as a meritorious spiritual hurdle, but even as enjoyable time well spent. Many who have already completed the Probatio express a desire to return and bring a little more light into the lives of the residents. The virtues of patience, zeal and charity are not only the requirements of the Houses but are the traits of true womanhood. The Probatio is not just four hours of community service, but is a real initiation and the first step towards the ultimate goal of the house. That is, growth in virtue.