

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: BROTHERS IN SERVICE



You may remember them serving ice cream but they have become brothers in service far beyond. Phil proudly serves our country – as a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corp. After Montessori, Phil went to Unquowa and then Fairfield Prep. As Phil remembers: “Tom joined Prep as a freshman when I was a senior. We enjoyed our time together at Prep. I

did quite well, graduating Magna Cum Laude and went on to Fordham University. Realizing while there that they didn’t have the program that I was truly interested in, I transferred to John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I also received my Master’s Degree while I was there, graduating Summa Cum Laude.” Currently stationed in Quantico, VA, at The Basic School (a “boot camp” for officers) he will be there until December 2012 after which he will be sent to Pensacola, FL to begin training as a Marine Corps Pilot.

Tom serves in another way: as a Critical Care Nurse at Bridgeport Hospital’s Burn Center. After Montessori, Rumsey Hall and Fairfield Prep, Tom headed off to Florida State University. “But he too didn’t find what he wanted to do there” shares Phil, “[Tom] returned home and took an EMT course, through which he discovered his love of helping those who go through trauma. He enrolled at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT and graduated Summa Cum Laude and #1 in his Nursing class (of which there were 58 women and TOM). He enjoyed Nursing School!”

Service to others is a quality that infuses every aspect of a Montessori education and both Phil and Tom acknowledge the foundational role The Montessori School played in their overall inclination to serve. Specifically they cite the events of September 11, 2001 as a direct influence upon their educational and career choices. They were in high school at the time and spent a good portion of the day watching the newscasts about the event that shook the world. “We both decided that we wanted to serve. It didn’t matter in what capacity—just that we needed to serve.”

Their inclination to serve is grounded in a sense of gratitude: “Both of us are grateful to God. We are grateful for our freedom. We are grateful for our education. We are extremely grateful for our parents, and for their support in whatever we both choose to do. We are grateful to have each other and we are and will always remain the best of friends and brothers.”

Harkening back to their time at The Montessori School, they still have Phil’s “lime” from September 1995. MaryZ told them at the beginning of their final year at Montessori to go get a lime from the grocery store, and to keep that lime for the length of the school year and, “when you think that you’re not changing and growing, keep looking at the lime and see how that *changes* over the course of a year. That’s how much YOU change. Even when you think you don’t.” That is one of the most powerful experiences they still talk about today, seventeen years later.

Through the subtle and dramatic changes that have marked their years since The Montessori School, Phil and Tom’s commitment to service remains a calling and an honor.

Many of you remember the Montessori Alumni Picnic in June, 2009. An ice cream truck pulled up on the playground, with treats for all. Not just any ice cream truck; it was the Phil & Tom Ice Cream Truck, owned and operated by brothers and Montessori alumni Phil (UE '95) and Tom (LE '95) Topalian.

