

LMU: A Family Affair
By Michael Petersen

“The things I learned in philosophy classes, I still quote to my children today.”
Frank Page, LMU Alum

For me, LMU is a family affair. Our history goes back to 1955, when Charles Brockmeier, my mom’s uncle, first entered Loyola University. The legacy continued in 1978, when Charles and my mom, Diane Cunningham, convinced my great-grandma that LMU was the place for her granddaughter. Grandma Brockmeier, who wanted my mom to attend the all girl’s Mount St. Mary’s, reluctantly agreed. But Grandma Brockmeier also had one condition: stay away from the boys. My mom agreed, and then promptly met my dad, Brad Petersen, at the Orientation dance the first night.

I’ve been surrounded by LMU alumni my whole life. My parents, seven of my aunts and uncles, both my Godparents and numerous family friends all graduated from LMU. And now here I am, an LMU student myself, joined by my brother Andrew and my cousin Zack. Is my experience unique? Hardly. Families have been a staple of LMU life for years. For the Centennial Oral History Project, I interviewed two such families: the Page brothers, and the Delja family.

John (’61), Steve (’62), Mike (’68), Frank (’73) and Joe (’75) are the Page brothers. Their father was a Yugoslavian immigrant with no schooling, and their mother had only an 8th grade education. “In 1957, when I was a month shy of 4 and John was almost 19, our father died,” Joe Page said, “His dying wish to our mother was that each of us graduate from college. Our mother took that wish very seriously.”

She also took her Catholic Faith seriously, and made sure the boys all went to Loyola. “My mother said, ‘You’re going to a Catholic school,’” John remembers, “Loyola was the only Catholic school except the girls’ schools... so that’s why I came.” His brother Steve quipped: “We have the same mother. And she said the same thing to me.” Mike, Frank and Joe followed suit. Their sixth brother, the only one who didn’t go to Loyola, became a priest. “The Catholic Faith has been very much ingrained into our family,” summarized Joe.

It was this strong Catholic Faith that brought the Page family to Loyola, and they haven’t left since. John Page has been a Professor in the Engineering Department since 1962, Steve is on the Board of Trustees, and Joe is on the Board of Regents. The next generation is involved as well: John, Mike and Joe all have kids who are attending LMU or have already graduated, and Frank’s son is applying next year.

Then there’s the Deljas — another strong LMU family. Dennis Delja of Loyola and Beatrice Delja of Marymount personify the University’s unique history. They met just before the merger, graduated in 1974, and married. Since then, all four of their sons have graduated from LMU: Dennis Jr. (’00), Chris (’02), Nick (’03) and Matthew (’07). And their family has added more LMU graduates: Chris married Jolie Randall (’03), and Matthew recently married Ana Martinez (’07), in Mexico City with LMU’s own Fr. José Badenes performing the ceremony.

LMU: A Family Affair

By Michael Petersen

What accounts for this multi-generational dedication to LMU? “You grow up here. This is where you become who you are,” Ana said. Her father-in-law, Dennis Sr., concurs: “I think it’s something about living here four years. It becomes part of your DNA.” And those memories and stories of growing up at LMU get passed on. “We made the mistake of coming here for Mass with the kids. We should have taken them to a less expensive school,” Dennis Sr. quipped.

My own family experience has been similar. I’ve grown up with my parents’ stories of LMU, and now endure their similar grumblings about my tuition. For me, the family connection has only enhanced the experience. The fact that my parents met at their Orientation dance certainly made my own Orientation dance a little more intimidating. When I was thrown into Foley Fountain on my birthday, I was taking part in the same tradition my parents had, years before. My dad and I even have the same favorite professor, Dr. Tritle of the History Department. Unfortunately this tradition will end with me: Dr. Tritle has sworn that under no circumstances will he teach my children.

Explaining the impact of LMU on his family, Dennis Sr. noted that “from a family perspective [LMU is] a unifying center. I think we all have that in common, the experience, which I think is unique to families.” His daughter-in-law, Jolie, agreed: “It is really meaningful, and we all find a lot of joy, I think, in sharing all the memories and funny stories and things like that.” Stories like the one Dennis tells about when he was an RA, and wrote up his own brother, Chris. My interview with the family was the first time their mother, Beatrice Delja, had heard of it. “You wrote up your brother?” she asked. “Well, I wrote him up for a lesser offense than he was getting in trouble for,” Dennis Jr. responded. Ah, family....

Like the Deljas, the Page Brothers have also seen the impact of LMU on their family. Steve Page recently felt that family connection at the 2011 graduation: “Because Joe’s a Regent and I’m a Trustee and John is a faculty member, we get to wear the long robes... Plus we all get great seats. And then Mike’s son graduates and he’s got the long robe on, so there are the four of us in our regalia. And it was kind of a neat family day. There we were, together. It’s part of the Loyola tradition as it continues with the children.”

In many ways, LMU is a family’s home away from home. “I still get homesick. I still get lumps in my throat because I miss something in the air that’s here,” Beatrice said. As Mike Page said, “The campus is gorgeous. The dorms are great. People are phenomenal. I wish I was their age again. I want my kids’ life.”

My own entrance into LMU rekindled my parents’ LMU fervor. My mom headed straight for the bookstore and bought a bunch of LMU shirts: not for me, but for herself. And my dad has a newfound interest in LMU basketball; he and my younger brother Matthew go to more games than I do.

LMU: A Family Affair
By Michael Petersen

And as LMU reaches its hundredth year, we all look forward to the future relationship between LMU and our families. As for Dennis Delja, his greatest wish is simple: "Free tuition for my grandkids."