

Ave Maria

by Sean Scallon

TAMMY ORMSON GAVE much of herself to Catholic education, both as a student and as a teacher. And yet so much was taken from her.

Ormson lost her *alma mater*, Mount Scenario College, when the Ladysmith, Wisconsin, school closed a few years back because of financial trouble.

She then lost the school at which she was a teacher and principal for 16 years, St. John the Baptist in Plum City, Wisconsin, when it was closed in 2006 by the diocese of La Crosse.

At the time, Ormson wasn't the principal. She had left St. John's in 2003 to run her family's grocery store in nearby Spring Valley. Yet the shock at St. John's closure could be felt all the way up County Highway CC. "It was a surprise when I heard that it was closing," Ormson told me. "It was a good school. It wasn't in any kind of financial trouble. I and many others couldn't really understand what was going on. And it hurt personally to see a place you gave so much of yourself to simply not exist anymore."

Yet the closure of St. John's opened a path for Ormson, one that brought her back south to Plum City to take charge of a new private academy in the old St. John's school building.

Many St. John's parents still wanted their children to attend a Catholic school, and they needed someone to help lead the effort to create one. Ormson's teaching experience and her background as a principal, Plum City native, and high-school coach made her the perfect candidate.

Former St. John's parents and students approached Ormson about leading the new school, and her name gave the effort instant credibility. The group investigated similar schools throughout the state to

see how they were run. Then they approached the Most Rev. Jerome Listeki, bishop of the diocese of La Crosse, to seek his blessing.

"We're not a part of the diocese's education system, but we wanted a school that teaches in the Catholic tradition, and we needed the bishop's approval to be listed as such," Ormson said. "I had never dealt with him before, none of us had, and there could have been some bitter feelings about what happened to St. John's. But we had a good, open-minded discussion with him. We were very well prepared and made a very good presentation about what we wanted to do with our new school, and he approved it."

AVE MARIA ACADEMY opened in the fall of 2007. It has a preschool of eight students known as the Little Lambs, and eight students are currently enrolled in grades K-4. Children come from Plum City, but also from Durand and Spring Valley. Ormson is the only full-time teacher on staff, with a half-time preschool teacher. The remaining staff, from the secretary to the custodian, are all parent volunteers. "We couldn't have Ave Maria Academy without the parents being involved with it," Ormson said. "That's how much it means to them. They want a traditional Catholic education for their students, and they'll give of their time to make sure the school runs properly."

Besides time, Ave Maria has received such necessary donations as educational supplies, books, computers, science equipment, desks, and other learning materials. Parents help to shape the core curriculum of Ave Maria, which currently includes Spanish, sign language, and computer education. Students participate in weekly

Mass at St. John's, and they visit the residents at the Plum City Care Center. "It's like a little family," Ormson said. "The other day all of us, parents and students, went to lunch together. That family atmosphere is what we offer along with small class sizes, a Catholic-based education, and a chance for parents to have close involvement in their child's education."

The 45-year-old mother of two (who recently became a grandmother) finds what she does now is not much different from what she did at St. John's. "St. John's was a small school as well, and we combined grades just like we do here," Ormson said. "The kids are not taught at the same time in the same subjects. The classes aren't as big, but we had a 25 percent growth rate from when we first started to now, and other interested families around are taking a look at us. Perhaps one nice difference between Ave Maria and St. John's is not having to do all the diocesan paperwork, which leaves more time for teaching."

Ormson was flattered and grateful when she was approached to lead the effort to start Ave Maria Academy, but it was also a new way for her to get back to doing what she loves. "That's the way life is sometimes," she said. "Things change, and there are new paths for you to take, and some of them lead right back to where you started."

That could be true for other Catholics or anyone wishing for a traditional way of life and a traditional education. Perhaps such small schools as Ave Maria are the first steps on the path back.

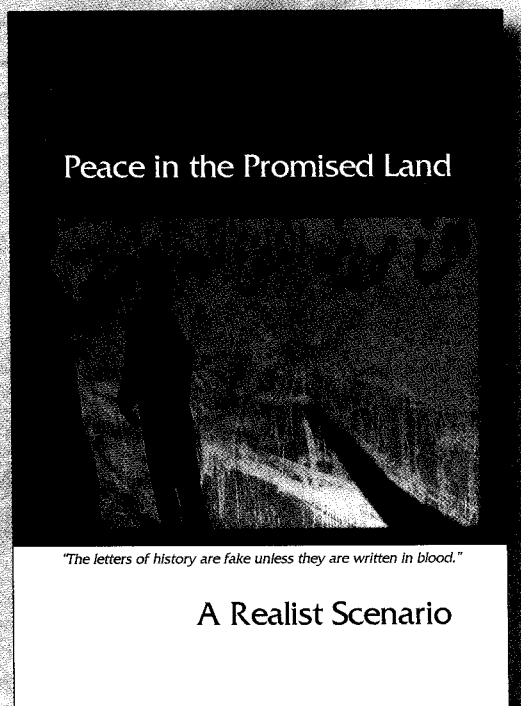
Sean Scallon is a freelance writer and journalist living in Arkansaw, Wisconsin.

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The White Man's Burden

THE HAVOC WREAKED by the Haitian earthquake reminded me of Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," originally published in *McClure's Magazine* in 1899. Kipling believed that Western man had a duty to uplift and modernize the uncivilized world but seemed resigned to the ultimate failure of such efforts. Some saw his poem only as a justification for colonialism, coming as it did at the peak of the rush for overseas possessions. The poem is much richer and deeper than that, and full of irony.

None of this was examined when I was in college during the 1960's. Although I had professors who mockingly referred to its title, the poem itself was not read. Students only understood they should repudiate the notion of the White Man's Burden as ethnocentric and condescending, yet one of the highest callings on campus was volunteering for the Peace Corps.

This same kind of contradiction remains with us today, and there is no better example than the two-century disaster that is Haiti, the country that occupies the western third of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. The French first arrived on Hispaniola as pirates early in the 17th century, settling along the island's western coast. The buccaneers not only raided but developed tobacco plantations. More French arrived, and sugar cane joined tobacco as a cash crop. By 1790 there were 30,000 French, 30,000 free mulattoes, several thousand free blacks, and half a million black slaves in what the French called Saint-Domingue. It was the wealthiest French colony in the

New World, profits then coming principally from sugar, coffee, and indigo.

In 1791 a slave revolt erupted in the northern portion of Saint-Domingue and spread in fits and spurts. The French not only confronted the rebels with military force but, in an effort to gain allies, granted more civil rights to the mulattoes and free blacks. Although the Jacobin government abolished slavery in the colonies in 1794, the rebellion continued, now concerned with factional strife and independence. The involvement of the Spanish and British complicated the situation. Nonetheless, by the summer of 1795, Toussaint L'Ouverture, a well-educated free black, had risen to leadership of the rebel forces and was in control of two thirds of Saint-Domingue. Much of his war was now fought against various factions of mulattoes, who were badly outnumbered and ultimately nearly exterminated. Emerging victorious in 1801, L'Ouverture declared himself emperor-for-life.

By now Napoleon ruled France and, not sharing Jacobin sentiments about abolition and colonial independence, sent 20,000 troops to depose L'Ouverture. The French force won the battles but lost most of its men to yellow fever. L'Ouverture was captured, sent to a prison in France, and soon died of tuberculosis. Back in Saint-Domingue, Jean Jacques Dessalines defeated the disease-decimated French force and established the new nation of Haiti in 1804. Some 24,000 French settlers who didn't escape to New Orleans in

time were butchered. Dessalines became the new emperor-for-life but was assassinated in 1806.

HAITI DISINTEGRATED into warring factions, and the infrastructure built by the French deteriorated rapidly. Periodically during his reign, which began in 1818, Jean Pierre Boyer, a mulatto who had been one of the revolutionary leaders during the 1790's, enforced a limited degree of unity and stability. The American Colonization Society was encouraged and sent 6,000 manumitted blacks there in 1824. Nearly all of them quickly returned to the United States, aghast at conditions in Haiti. Boyer was deposed in a coup in 1843, and more than 30 coups followed. The Marines landed in 1888 and again in 1914 to restore order. In 1915 the United States began an occupation of Haiti, enforced by the Marines and lasting until 1934. Several Marine legends served there, including Smedley Butler, Dan Daly, and Chesty Puller. The United States poured millions into Haiti, building schools, hospitals, harbors, roads, and bridges.

As soon as we left the Haitians reverted to their old ways, characterized by indolence, voodoo, rape, mutilations, murder, and brutal despots such as "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier and their death squads. Earthquake or no, Haitians survive through foreign aid and the work of hundreds of private U.S. and European charities. The White Man's Burden. ♦