

# Jakob Vasquez

SENIOR - 3rd Place

Alumni Senior Writing Contest - 2016

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My Saints experience is very different from others. My first day at Saints, I wanted to leave and never come back to Saints ever again. I did not like it and wanted to transfer because I was so scared like a Freshman usually gets. My mom luckily convinced me that tomorrow would be better, and it definitely was. My Saints experience has been filled with happiness, loss, laughter, and faith.

When I first got to Saints, I was only hanging out with my two friends that came to Saints from my old school. I did not know anyone else, and was a very shy and reserved person. My mom and dad recommended that I run Cross Country, and I tried out and made the team. I was able to meet new people and make new friends with the coaches and with the students. This was an amazing first step for me to open up and not be as shy around people. I did not run well, but I felt at home with this team because they were mostly nerds like me. I was able to fit in with this team rather than playing football and not being able to fit in with that group of people.

My Saints experience also allowed me to grow in a faith that I had lost. From seventh grade to ninth, I did not believe in God even though I came from a Catholic family. I did not believe in him because my mom had gotten cancer, and it felt like God was not even there in my life. In my sophomore year, I had Old and New Testament as my religion classes. This brought me back to God and made me believe that he was here for me. I was also a Big Brother and a Kairos retreatant this year which affirmed my faith in God. I have my own set of beliefs now when it comes to being a Christian, but I believe that God is always in my life trying to help.

I discovered what the Saints experience was really about when my mother passed away this year. She was battling cancer for four years, and lost. When she passed, I did not tell anyone but the same night she passed, I had so many people from Saints call me. I did not expect this,

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but they all were telling me that they did not even know about my mom because I never told them before. They also wanted me to know that they were here for me. I also had some very close friends from saints drive up all the way from North County and Julian drive to Chula Vista the same night she passed. Mr. Horne, Mr. Hern, and many saintsman attended the funeral of my mother and talked to me. Father Bob and Father Kirk also called me into their offices and talked to me. This experience helped me cope with the loss of my mom in ways I could have never imagined. The Saints community was here for me, and I can still feel it.

Saints also allowed me to take part in the retreat experience for Freshman with being a Big Brother for the Freshmen Retreat. My two friends and I tried to make the experience as amazing as possible for our group of Freshmen. This was also an experience for me to act as a leader in something other than Cross Country and Track. There are very few schools that will allow someone to do this. During this retreat, we were having one on one talks after the prayer service and one Freshman stood out to me. He told me that he was able to relate on some level to the talk I gave about my mother passing away from cancer. He said that his mother currently has cancer and if I could relate to him about what he is experiencing. I would have never been able to help someone if I did not participate in this retreat, and this is why my Saints experience is so unique.

The experience I had at Saints was so much more than I could have ever imagined. I expected to go to saints, maybe participate in a sport, and hang out with friends. I did not expect to grow in my faith and meet people that would change my life for the better. I would never trade my experience for anything else in the world, and I am proud to call myself a Saintsman.