



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Do you remember these books? The first one was published in 1979, and kids just loved them. This series had a twenty-year run and made a ton of money for the publisher. The hook, and the thing that made these books seductive and addictive, was that whenever the characters came to a key decision-making point, the reader got to pick from several alternative plot lines. If you chose a direction that you didn't really like – say something bad happened to your favorite character, or things just got boring – you could return to the decision point and choose a different scenario. Most kids eventually read all of the plots and followed all the permutations of the “adventure.” There was a satisfying sense when you finished the book that a number of different possibilities for the characters' lives had been explored, and you, the reader, got to go with the one that brought you the most pleasure. How different this is from the standard novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, for example. No matter how many times you read it, Tom and Becky and Huck turn out okay in the end, and Indian Joe gets what's coming to him.

Video games are addictive for many of the same reasons (and, unfortunately, have replaced books in the lives of all too many children). The player has the controller in hand and can try all sorts of crazy stuff. If your character “dies” because you made a bad decision and walked into a virtual disaster, you can just use your other “lives” or reset the whole thing and start over. You really can't lose.

How different these “Choose Your Own Adventure” books and video games are from real life! Life is nothing but a constant series of decisions that result in endless ramifications. We are constantly “choosing our own adventures,” but the

catch is that if your choice leads you down a rough and nasty path, you cannot flip back to page 43 and select an alternative adventure that instantly undoes your disappointing choice. You can't just use another “life” and this time avoid the monster that killed you on Level 57 of the video game. Once you've blown it in real life, you've blown it. You can, sometimes, rectify things in your life, but the process of doing so, if it's possible, usually costs a lot of time, money, agony, and labor.

This is something to consider, and something I hope all of our St. Mary's families have considered, when they make a choice for a St. Mary's education. This edition of *The Messenger* has a number of articles that unapologetically make the case for the advantages and “payback” that come from a St. Mary's education. It's tempting in tough economic times, to rationalize choosing a different adventure for your child. But there is little more important than the quality of our children's education. A substandard, unfocused, unchallenging K-12 education sets children up for failure, or at least failure to achieve their full potential, in college and beyond. And it's really tough to go back and achieve mastery of the wealth of knowledge that a good education provides through 12th grade. And this is to say nothing of the moral and spiritual benefits that come from attending a school that has a whole community – parents, teachers, students, and friends – committed to bettering the state of our children's souls. Those of us who teach, study, and work at St. Mary's, those of us who befriend the school, donate to, and send our children to St. Mary's, all believe we have chosen our adventure well. I hope this edition of *The Messenger* reinforces that choice for you.

