

Faculty Spotlight: Kathryn Stewart

Kathryn Stewart is no stranger to Campion. A graduate of the Class of 1985, Head Girl 1986-7, and a Biology Teacher for over 20 years, Ms Stewart is also the Sixth Form Supervisor and faculty advisor for a number of co-curricular activities including the Ministry Outreach Programme, Lifesavers, the Sixth Form Association and the Astronomy Club as well as “The Campionite” Magazine and “The Student’s Voice” newsletter. Although she admits to it being initially “rather daunting” teaching alongside many of her own teachers, Ms Stewart quickly settled in at Campion and began her own tradition of producing outstanding results with her students every year. Here, Ms Stewart shares a few of her memories and delights of being both student and teacher at her beloved alma mater.

What was the inspiration behind your career choice?

My inspiration came from several sources—many family members, including my mother were educators, and I was blessed to have had the positive influence of several of the finest teachers at Campion (people like Jean and Kippy Chin, Neville Smith, Cherry Neufville etc.), all of whom made me want to do for others what they had done for me. Making a meaningful contribution to Jamaica has been a strong motivating factor.

You’ve seen a lot of changes at Campion during your tenure.

There are obvious changes such as the many infrastructural improvements that have taken place (and continue to do so). It’s a far cry from when the canteen was shared with goats that would wander in from off the street and graduation was held on the tennis courts! Another big change is the vast number of co-curriculars now available—that is a fantastic achievement and truly facilitates all-round development of the students who make full use of the opportunity. Other changes are a bit more subtle—there has been a bit of a transition in student attitudes, but generally Campionites do push themselves to achieve, and that has remained constant for the last couple of decades. The “sameness” for many years was also to be found in the presence of certain stalwarts...and that lent a welcome stability to Campion.

You mentioned the infamous goats, what other memories, both as student and teacher, can you share with us?

As a student—probably Ministry Outreach—cramming into the rusty minivan and going down to Eventide Home and Marigold Children’s Home. The spirit and energy of the tight-knit group was just incredible. We did walkathons, school plays and treats galore—often with other Catholic high schools. June plums rolled in salt and Chinese sweets from Fudgie...invigorating political debates led by Mr. Smith (in place of a test)...Pepsi wagers in Kippy’s classes...exciting swim meets at a packed stadium with an incredible show of school spirit and close-fought races.

As a teacher—the immense joy of seeing youngsters coming into their own and becoming people for others. Sharing in their successes—personal and academic—along the way has been a tremendous privilege. Lifesavers and Christmas Concerts were always great fun; and the Sixth Form Retreat has become an experience to look forward to. Teaching lower school English, Mathematics and Science was a great learning experience, and teaching my own sister and cousins was a hoot! I also have many fond memories of the London International Youth Science Forum over the years, and, of late, the *Jamaica Cancer Society’s Relay for Life* that Campionites have embraced wholeheartedly.

Looking forward, what would you like to see happen at Campion in the future?

I would like to see an upgraded sixth form lab—as is being done for the other labs (thankfully!). I would also like to see outreach activities strengthened and extended. A continued and even greater emphasis on the worth of each person, the need for values like a strong work-ethic, generosity and honesty, and the importance of teamwork and nation-building would be welcome. The initiative shown by students who worked with me on “Kick Butts Day”, an anti-tobacco event, and who drafted petitions and made representation in Parliament, is a quality that should be encouraged.

Tell us about your teaching style. How do you keep it fresh?

I never stop learning. I try to keep up with current research—my students will tell you of my weakness for new Biology texts that come out! It’s a fairly fast-moving field—the information I teach today is different in some ways from what I learnt and the syllabus content has obviously changed over the years. At the end of each academic year, I try to do a “Teacher Survey” with my students (anonymously) and then apply their honest feedback to my methodology—adjusting and fine-tuning along the way. Our mantra is “we love biology”—this was a flame lit in fourth form by Mrs. Chin—and I strive to convey this passion to my students and employ different techniques in the classroom as best as I can.

What is your impression of today’s Campionites?

Campionites tend to have a pretty good focus on their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them. Generally, at the sixth form level, I find them to be disciplined, receptive and interested in learning. I enjoy the fact that there are those who will challenge the teacher intellectually—a good debate is refreshing and keeps you on your toes—I often learn from them too. Most importantly, I am impressed by those who seek to develop the “whole person” rather than make excuses or take the easy way out—we have been blessed with a number of these individuals who have given generously of their time and talents, and in turn, have grown tremendously over their time here.

Do any students stand out?

That is a tricky one—there are too many to list! I really love “my kids”, even when they are challenging. It always strikes me when the odd student comes back and says how difficult he/she was—I rarely remember it that way. Each one is special—quite a number have overcome serious odds on their journey through Campion and have my utmost respect and admiration. Many have pushed themselves out of their comfort zones—with some nudging! I have met some amazing people and am always thrilled to see them follow their passion in life—some have even gone on to become teachers themselves. When they go on to make a contribution to society—be it Jamaica or the wider world—that brings me great joy. There has been sadness too with those who have lost their lives far too young.

Finally, how does it feel to have influenced so many?

The opportunity to influence so many other lives is humbling. It really is a great privilege to teach—that lesson comes home strongly at each graduation exercise. I have made mistakes along the way but I strive to learn from them and hope that there will be an overall positive outcome, even if it is not realized now.