

Karen '61 and Orrin Gabsch

BISHOP'S PROFILE

By Anita Palmer

Giving back not a cliché for this dynamic couple

Karen Milburn Gabsch '61 and her husband, Orrin, are ardent advocates of The Bishop's School. Their longtime support has been personal and financial, public and behind the scenes. Their two children (Tracy '88, Jason '90) graduated from Bishop's, but the La Jolla couple's singular motivation has been to help the School continue its heritage of excellence—a heritage that Karen says shaped the very essence of who she is.

"I have always been grateful that Bishop's was in my life," Karen said emphatically. "I feel I owe a lot to Bishop's."

Karen enrolled in The Bishop's School in seventh grade when it was still a girls-only institution under the guidance of Headmistress Rosamond Larmour Loomis. Karen boarded during her junior and senior years, not because she needed to (her mother has been a long-time resident of La Jolla) but "because I wanted to."

Living on campus gave her a strong sense of belonging. She learned to share and to get along. "It was kind of like a long slumber party. You were with your friends in the serious times *and* the fun times," she said.

Attending Bishop's "was a very grounding experience," continued Karen, whose class size was 52. "It was a small community. You were held accountable."

She recalls the rules were stricter back then too. "Kids today are not as neat and tidy as we were required to be," she said, laughing. She remembers polishing her shoes for uniform inspections. The only jewelry that was allowed was a St. Christopher's medal and senior rings. And if the girls went off-campus wearing their uniforms, they were not allowed to



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talk with a boy.

"We were to represent The Bishop's School at all times. We were taught to respect the School and what it stood for, and we did."

That training got tested once when Karen and her roommate were at the beach on senior privileges and ran into a boy Karen liked. Yes, they did speak with him. When they got back both girls felt badly about breaking the rule but were also afraid that some of the other boarders might have seen them and would turn them in, so they confessed straight away. (The headmistress thanked them for telling her and sent them off.) "Our headmistress loved 'her girls.' To this day she still calls us that. To have that kind of an influence in your life, well, I feel very fortunate. I came away with a strong sense of self. I was very well prepared for the world."

That preparation, both academically and emotionally, showed up after graduation when Karen attended the University of Wisconsin. Such a large

state institution was in huge contrast to a small California girls' school, but Karen excelled. She met Orrin, soon to be a pharmacist, during her senior year, and they were married two years later by Father Frederick Stephens in St. Mary's Chapel.

Orrin, born and raised a Midwesterner, warned Karen's mother that he would be taking her daughter away from California to live in the Midwest. After two years of living in Dubuque, Iowa, Orrin recalls with a laugh, he told Karen's mother he was giving her a memorable birthday gift: he was bringing her daughter back to California.

The Gabsches have been here ever since, living in the same warm and rambling home on La Jolla Scenic Drive South for 33 years.

Upon returning to La Jolla, Karen immediately began volunteering with the Alumni Association. "In those days we put on horse shows to raise money for Bishop's. It was exhausting but so much fun."

Karen served as president of the Alumni Association for three years. She chaired the Bishop's Ball and sat on the Board of Trustees for six years. She didn't slow down volunteering until her last stint on the Board after Jason graduated.

"From 1968 to 1991 I don't think there was a year that went by in which I didn't do something."

Her reward, she said, was the gratification of knowing her efforts helped perpetuate her beloved school. "It wasn't just something on my to-do list. I've done everything because I wanted to. I go onto the campus and I feel as if I have partial ownership, that part of it is me."

Two of her proudest moments as a member of the Board of Trustees were



Karen and Orrin were married in St. Mary's Chapel by the Rev. Frederick Stephens.



Orrin, Tracy '88, Karen '61 and Jason '90 following Tracy's graduation from Bishop's in 1988. One of Karen's proudest moments as a member of the Board of Trustees was when she gave Tracy and Jason their Bishop's diplomas.

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For years the Gabsches also hosted a new-parents reception in their home. "It meant a lot to meet new parents. And it meant a lot to introduce Bishop's to them," they both observed. "Today, years and years later, we'll meet someone and they will remember being welcomed to Bishop's at our home."

Karen is appreciative of having been able to serve on the search committee that found Marlene and Michael Teitelman, whom she credits with guiding The Bishop's School for the past 23 years with a constant vision toward the School's future. "They have the same core values, morals and integrity [the School teaches]. Mike is a huge part of the stability of the School and, of course, Marlene is the woman behind the man!"

Orrin and Karen had the pleasure of making a donation to the new Science Center and naming a classroom/laboratory in honor of the Teitelmans.

"We surprised them! We were touring the building and they saw the sign on

the door, and they were actually speechless! It was an exceptional experience to see their joy and surprise."

Orrin, who owned a number of pharmacies, including Burns Drugs, that he sold in 1991, has not only supported Karen's work but put in hours himself. "I've been very involved throughout the years, and the reason I continue to be drawn to Bishop's is its consistent excellence," said Orrin. "Not many institutions can boast that same steady and unchanging quality."

Both Karen and Orrin are very active in the volunteer community outside of Bishop's as well. Karen dedicates time to Scripps Clinic, Scripps Green Hospital and Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine, chairing fundraising events that have raised \$1 million in the last four years. She is passionate about animal rescue and the San Diego Zoo. And she works with women who deal with alcohol and drug addiction. Both Gabsches serve on the board of a long-term recovery home in Ramona. Orrin is active in La Jolla community activities

such as the La Jolla Town Council, the La Jolla Community Planning Association and the La Jolla Rotary Club. He also serves on the Board of Directors of Landmark National Bank.

Another passion the vibrant couple enjoys is Western art. Their home is decorated with original paintings and sculptures, mostly by living artists with whom they have built personal relationships.

The couple recently returned from a trip to Italy and Croatia. A bad spill on a bicycle trip from Bologna to Venice that dislocated Karen's elbow did not stop them from enjoying Croatia, which they described as even more beautiful than the French Riviera. Their next adventure? They are planning an excursion through the Panama Canal.

However, traveling the world doesn't mean that Karen and Orrin Gabsch have left The Bishop's School behind. In fact, they often find themselves talking about the School with the people they meet.

"We are so grateful for having had Bishop's as an integral part of our family and our lives."