



ST. LOUIS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Melissa
Jones

Detective Melissa (Jones) Wallace (STL '93) was honored with the Detective of the Month Award by the Major Crimes Bureau (MCB) in January 2021. She has been part of the Homicide Squad with the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) since 2001 and has also served on the Robbery Squad since joining the MCB in 2018. Before joining the MCB, she served as a domestic violence detective as well as a Criminal Investigations detective. In 2020 alone, Detective Wallace was called to 38 crime scenes and assigned 50 cases, ALL of which resulted in arrests and pending court cases.

St. Louis students had the opportunity to virtually meet Detective Wallace while she was on call at a recent incident. Read on to learn more about what she shared.

What would you say was your favorite thing at St. Louis?

My favorite thing about St. Louis is the fact that it led to life-long friends. The friends that I met in 1st grade are still my friends today all these years later, because the school was such a close-knit school that helped me maintain those friendships for a lifetime. That's my favorite thing about St. Louis.

How is St. Louis different today than when you were here in 1993?

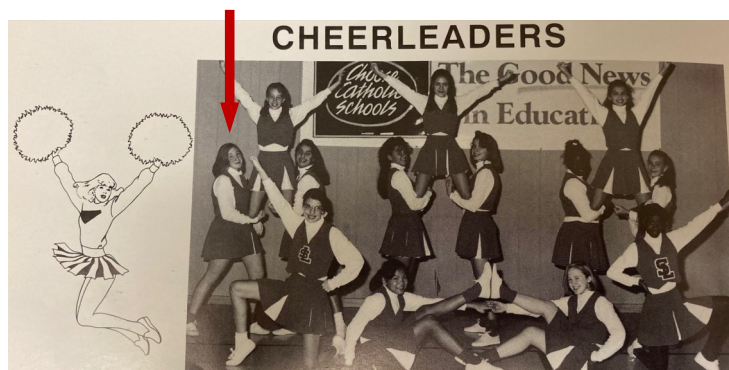
You know what, it's actually not that much different aside from the obvious things like technological advances, we didn't have any of that when I was there, but it's amazing when I come back for my son's events now, how much the school reminds me of the way it was back then. Even the cafeteria, the gym, aside from the minor upgrades over the years, it's very much the same which I enjoy. I like that.

Did you have any siblings that attended St. Louis?

I did. My brother Kevin Jones also attended. He's 8 years younger than me, but he went through kindergarten through 8th grade.

When you were here at St. Louis, were you involved in any sports or clubs?

I think I did cheerleading back then, and if I remember right, I think I helped with the yearbook at some point. I can't remember what other clubs there were back then, but those are the two that I remember...there may have been a Latin Club back in the day, and if so, I might have been part of that.



Who was your favorite teacher and why?

Who I remember, all these years, and she was still there when my son started, was Mrs. English. She was a teacher of mine I think when I was in 3rd grade. My son Reid is now in 6th grade and she was still there. She is definitely my favorite who I remember, and it was so nice to see she was still there with my son.

What is something that you learned at St. Louis that you still carry with you today?

Because St. Louis is a such a tight knit community, it really helped solidify friendships early on that I've maintained throughout my entire life up until this day. Just this morning on my way to work I spoke to my best friend who I met in first grade at St. Louis. I think that what it has taught me the most is the importance of these close friendships, and I love that about how close the whole St. Louis community is. That's why I chose to send my son there when we were making the decision about where he was going to go to school.

What are some important principles you think St. Louis taught you and how do you apply these to your every day life as a detective and a mother?

Well, obviously wanting to be a police officer you have to be able to want to help people selflessly. This is not the type of job where you make a lot of money. This is a job where a lot of people are not always happy with you. You see people at their worst. Very rarely do people call the police just to say "have a nice day" so we are dealing with people in their worst situations. I think with [being at] St. Louis for so long from so young just solidified that in me—this desire to want to help. [That is taught] through faith and kindness and love and caring, so I truly believe that is the reason why I ended up wanting to go into this type of profession.

Your son Reid is a 6th grader. Why did you choose to send him here?

Because St. Louis is awesome! It's the best! I had the best experience there, and honestly, it wasn't even a question. We live so close to St. Louis—we're practically across the street—so it wasn't even a hard decision to make. I just knew that's where I wanted him to go, because I had such a positive experience there, and it really set me up for success later on. After St. Louis, I went to West Potomac, and because of the education I received at St. Louis, I was able to get into more of the advanced classes at West Potomac, which then led to scholarships in college. My whole success through my schooling after I left St. Louis was a direct reflection of the level of education I received there. And I wanted that for my son as well. It was a no-brainer. I knew exactly where I wanted him to go.

What inspired you to become a detective?

These types of cases that I work on now are very serious. I have a strong desire to want to help the victims of these crimes and to successfully prosecute the people who have hurt them. I have a strong pull to make sure they receive justice, and this is why I transitioned from being just a regular police officer on the street to wanting to move into detective work to help these victims in these very difficult crimes.

What steps did you have to take to become a police officer and detective?

So the Fairfax County Police Department when I joined did not require any college. You could go straight from high school if you wanted to. But I did want to further my education so I did go through 4 years of college at Radford University, and I majored in criminal justice and also Spanish. I know there's a very diverse population here in Fairfax County, and I wanted to focus on learning another language as well to help that population. After I graduated school. I made sure I kept my grades up and my physical fitness up. I had to stay away from a lot of the other partying ways that my friends were doing in college, because I knew I had to stay out of trouble. I was able to get accepted to the police department just a couple months out of college. Physical fitness was a big part of that, staying healthy and active, and I worked patrol for 7 years. Then, when I knew I wanted to become a detective, I had to take certain classes to learn how to do it. I started taking different classes through our academy to prepare for when it was time for me to put in through the process. I was accepted and have been a detective now for about 12 years.

What is a typical day as a detective like?

Well, as you can see, I'm actually sitting in my car right now because we are on the scene of a very serious crime right now. So my typical day, I get up, I get Reid off to school, and we have to see what calls come in for a day. I think a typical day is the fact that a day is not usually typical. I never know what's going to happen. This morning, I had plans of doing paperwork, and those plans quickly got changed because of this incident that we're on right now; that you will probably see on the news later. I think what I can usually rely on is the fact that no day is typical. It can go from being very boring typing up police reports to all of a sudden, something really bad happens, so we have to run out to handle it. That's why I'm in my car right now; it's because I'm actually on the scene of an event as we speak, so it's very hard to predict what a day is going to look like.

What is the most interesting or challenging case you have been involved in?

The most challenging cases are always the ones that involve when children get hurt. Obviously being a mother, having a child on my own, it can be personal if something happens to a child, because those are truly the most innocent victims. So those are always challenging in the same sense. When I get justice for that child, it is then also the most rewarding. It can be very difficult at the same time as being very rewarding.

Interview conducted by St. Louis Catholic School Student Council members Sophie Arib, Addie Buffaloe, Julie Dunn, Frannie Miller and Serena Moss.