

ANTHONY FAUCI '58

By Christopher Connell '67

Anthony S. Fauci has always been a take-charge kind of guy, a standout on the baseball fields back in Brooklyn's Dyker Heights and a fierce competitor in CYO basketball. He also stood out in the classroom, tops in his class in grammar school and near the top both at Regis and at the College of the Holy Cross. He returned to New York City for medical school at Cornell, completed his internship and residency there and decamped in 1968 to work for the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. He's been there ever since.

But New York left its mark on Tony Fauci, not least in his residual accent – a voice familiar to many Americans from countless Sunday morning television talk shows. Fauci is the face

of the government's long, difficult but increasingly successful fight against the AIDS epidemic. Early on, even before he became director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in 1984, Fauci recognized how great a threat this mysterious "gay plague" posed to the public health.

Fauci has counseled every president since Ronald Reagan on how to fight the epidemic, and built NIAID into the fourth largest institute at NIH, with a \$2.4 billion budget. When the nation confronted the threat of anthrax this fall, it was Fauci who turned up frequently at the side of HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson.

Fauci is a legendary workaholic who combines this public persona and demanding managerial duties with ongoing, hands-on scientific and medical work. He remains an active researcher and laboratory chief at NIAID, and still makes rounds

to see AIDS and other infectious disease patients. He has published more than a thousand papers, articles and letters. He accomplishes this by working an 80-hour week, arriving before 7 a.m. and seldom leaving before 8:30 p.m. on weekdays, and putting in most of the day on Saturdays. In his "free" time, he is the principal editor of the world's best-selling textbook of internal medicine. He skips lunch, spends an hour a day working out, and finds time to drive his three daughters – ages 9, 11 and

14 – to their various gymnastic events and track meets. Dinner hour weeknights at the Faucis – his wife, Christine Grady, works fulltime as a bioethicist at NIH – is 9:30 p.m.

Fauci is the grandson of Italian immigrants, descended from the owners of a bathhouse for whom a street is named in Sciacca, a seaside town in Sicily. His American-born

father, Stephen Fauci, was a Columbia University-educated pharmacist who with his future wife, Eugenia, as teenagers at New Utrecht High School. The Faucis opened a neighborhood pharmacy.

The couple had two children, first a daughter, Denise, and then the son born on Christmas Eve 1940. He remembers festive dinners with the extended family that spanned Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but no birthday cake. Colleagues at NIH threw his first birthday party when he turned 30.

The Faucis had a car, but lived modestly. "We didn't spend a lot of money on clothes, and we rarely if ever went on trips," the son said. He laughed when asked if the neighborhood kids regarded him as a nerd.

"No, not at all, but nobody who grew up in the neighborhood where I grew up could be con-



Dr. Fauci speaks to National Press Club

sidered a nerd. It was a pretty tough neighborhood. I was very much into sports,” said Fauci.

His education began at a parish school, Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the Dominican Sisters taught both Denise and Anthony. Denise moved on to the Sisters of St. Joseph and Fontbonne Hall Academy on Shore Road, while her brother, to no one’s surprise, made the cut for Regis in 1954.

Tony played basketball for the CYO team at St. Bernadette’s, and baseball at Dyker Heights Park by Gravesend Bay, at Coney Island and occasionally on the Parade Grounds in Prospect Park, a few pop flies from Ebbets Field. He was 5-foot-6, 130 lbs., with sure hands and a decent bat, and he remembers seeing players who started their ascent to the big leagues from those sandlots: Sandy Koufax, Joe Pepitone, Ken Aspromonte.

He compiled a near perfect record at Our Lady of Guadalupe. The nuns pulled his old report card out when he came back to deliver the commencement address in 1999.

“He’s always done everything, with nothing suffering,” said his sister, now Denise Scorece. “He always did all his school work, he always did sports, he always had friends. He played the piano beautifully as a young child. He always wanted to do *everything*. And that just carried into adulthood.”

Fauci credits his mother, who died of cancer at age 55 when her son was still in medical school, with instilling that drive. “She was always the more assertive one about pushing for excellence. My father is a terrific guy, but very laid back. My mother always was looking for things better, and always wanting you to do well in school,” he said.

Fauci knew early on that he would be a doctor. “There was never any pressure on the part of my parents or others, but it was always as if it were silently understood, for as long as I can remember,” he said. “Back in those days, unlike today, the people who were very bright and the smartest would either be a doctor or a lawyer or a priest.”

The entire family pitched in at the drug store, especially on Sunday mornings when the

crowds poured out of St. Bernadette’s after Mass. The elder Fauci would fill prescriptions in the back, while Denise and Tony helped their mother at the register. Their apartment was above the store, on 13th Avenue and 83rd Street.

His father gave up the drug store when his wife died, moved into the city and became a pharmacist at Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospitals, where doctors had tried to save his wife. The son suspects his mother’s illness might have been caused by exposure to the chemicals in a dry cleaning shop where she worked when she wasn’t in the pharmacy.

Early on, the young Fauci exhibited the discipline that he later brought to the laboratories at NIAID. He’d get up before sunrise for a 75- or 80-minute commute via bus and subway to Regis. “At least once a week you’d have to get there at 7:30 to go to Mass,” he recalled. “I was the captain of the basketball team, so I’d practice every day after school for a couple of hours, come home, eat, do a little homework and then play basketball for St. Bernadette’s. Then I’d finish that, come back, study a couple of hours, and go to bed.

“I always had a system of compartmentalizing things and getting them done: You’re on the train, you read, you do some homework. You get off the train, you go to school, you come back. It was fun because it was always very busy,” he said. “Actually, that probably fared me well in what I do now because I keep putting hats on and taking them off: I’m here at the office, I’m downtown at the White House, I’m across the street seeing a sick patient, I’m in the laboratory doing an experiment. You’ve got to have the ability to bounce back and forth.”

Regis attracted boys from all five boroughs, the New Jersey suburbs across the Hudson, White Plains and Westchester. The Jesuits operated several other preparatory schools in the city, including



Brooklyn Prep (alma mater of Joe Paterno and Joe Califano), Xavier Military Academy (Antonin Scalia) and Fordham Prep (Vin Scully and Mario Gabelli). Regis had been opened in 1914 as a free school with a special mission of educating the sons of Catholic immigrants. The anonymous donor was the widow of a New York mayor, and her heirs provided additional support for the school down through the decades. It remains free today, with a modest endowment, and depends on the generosity of its 10,000 alumni for most of its \$7 million operating budget. It continues to draw boys from all five boroughs and the sub-

Fauci can still rattle off the itinerary from New Utrecht Avenue to the five-story school with the landmark, classical facade on East 84th Street. “I used to take a bus from 83rd Street and 13th Avenue up to the BMT Seabeach local line that would go from 73rd Street and Fourth Avenue; that would take me to 36th Street, switch to the Express, take the Express to 14th Street and Union Square, switch to an IRT Express that would make two stops, one at Grand Central and one at 86th Street, get out at 86th and walk across to Regis,” he recalled. “It was all rush hour.”

By sophomore year, Fauci knew he would be a pre-med in college, and he knew where he was going because in that era, “the smartest guys from Regis who wanted to do pre-med automatically went to Holy Cross,” he said. Although his father had gone to Columbia, it was out of the question that a Regis graduate would attend an Ivy League college or any non-Catholic university. “I try to explain that to people now and they don’t have a clue of what I am talking about,” Fauci said.

Jesuit schools in that era were known not only for the rigors of the classics- and language-heavy curriculum – Fauci took four years of Latin, three of Greek and two of French – but for their

steep rate of attrition. More than one Jesuit headmaster admonished quivering freshmen at orientation to “look to your left. Look to your right. One of you isn’t going to be here at graduation.”

Fauci remember nothing like that. “We had a few dropouts, but not that many,” he said. At Regis, “they felt that you guys were smart enough to get in here, you should be smart enough to graduate. I only remember losing a couple, less than a handful of people that I knew. Maybe there were people that I didn’t hang out with that got booted.”

In fact, the Class of 1958 lost almost 40 boys from the 175 who entered with Fauci in September 1954. It wasn’t until the 1970s that Jesuit schools abandoned educational triage. Now, they operate along the lines of the medical school model that Fauci remembered, with far less attrition.

Fauci remembers not just the priests, but also the

scholastics, Jesuits in training referred to as “Mister Murray” and “Mister McCann,” who taught many classes at Regis. “They were really terrific. They would bring out the best in you. They’d be tough but not bully-ish at all, unlike some [other orders] that you heard about where they just smacked people around for no reason at all. They taught us how to formulate our thoughts. The phrase that I still use 30 years later is *precision of thought and economy of expression*. Get your thoughts in order and express them succinctly so people know what you’re talking about.

“All of those things were absolutely critical to my formative years. As much as I was a sports fanatic, the academic excellence aspect is the thing that I really remember about Regis, and the importance of having a critical mass of very smart people around you,” he said.

The Owls basketball team went 20-5 in Fauci’s junior year, then slipped a bit his senior year. Basketball brought “an extraordinary feeling of

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accomplishment and teamwork. Being a point guard you clearly had to be the guy who was the general of the team. That was fun, having an impact on how the game went, handling the ball most of time,” he said.

He traveled to Worcester in 1958 still harboring thoughts of making the Holy Cross basketball team as a walk on. But the Crusaders were stocked with bigger and better athletes, including Jack “The Shot” Foley. Holy Cross had won the NCAA championship in 1947 with a couple of guys named Bob Cousy and Tommy Heinsohn. Fauci’s basketball days were over. He took an A.B. Greek pre-med degree, mixing classics and philosophy courses with the requisite science courses needed for entry to medical school.

Fauci worked construction during the summers. Before his final year at Holy Cross, he labored in a crew building a new library for Cornell medical school — his next stop. When Cornell celebrated the centennial of its medical college on April 14, 1998, Fauci told this anecdote:

“One day during lunch break while the rest of the construction crew was sitting along the sidewalk on York Avenue eating their hero sandwiches and making catcalls at the nurses who were entering and leaving the hospital, I snuck into the auditorium to take a peak. I got goose bumps as I entered, looked around at the empty room and imagined what it would be like to attend this extraordinary institution.... After a few minutes at the doorway a guard came and politely told me to leave since my dirty construction boots were soiling the floor. I looked at him and said proudly that I would be attending this institution a year from now. He laughed and said, ‘Right kid, and next year I am going to be Police Commissioner.’”

The Jesuits at Holy Cross pointed their top pre-meds to Harvard Medical School, but this time Fauci resisted their instruction. It was “without a doubt the best decision of my professional life,” he said. “To me, it was paradise. I loved medical school.”

Fauci finished his residency in 1968 at a time when Surgeon General William Stewart was proclaiming infectious diseases a thing of the past. Fauci



ignored the unfounded optimism. Long before the AIDS epidemic hit, he made a name for himself as an expert in treating vasculitis and another inflammatory disease called Wegner’s granulomatosis.

He stayed on a course he set out for himself back in Brooklyn, with no detours, mid-life crises or corrections. Burnout is common among long-time AIDS researchers, but Fauci remains avid about his work. “There is still so much undone.... What do we do in sub-Saharan Africa? What do we do about developing nations? To me it’s as exciting now in 2001 as it was when we first started it.”

With a full head of salt-and-pepper hair and weighing only 15 pounds more than in his high school playing days, Fauci looks much younger than his 61 years.

But isn’t science — and scientific discovery — a young person’s game?

Fauci has heard this question before.

“Obviously if you look at the contribution of individual creativity, people peak in their 30s and 40s,” he said. “But the one thing I think most people agree I have is very good vision of where a field is going to go and good instincts about what to pursue and what not to pursue. Recognizing that HIV was going to be a problem years before people did, and saying, ‘We’ve got to put a major effort on HIV.’ Understanding now where we need to go *vis a vis* international things. Understanding the landmines and the pitfalls. That’s an ageless thing. You could be 40, you could be 70, you could be 20. If you got it, you got it.”

And Tony Fauci’s got it.