

Out of the classroom and onto the airplane. Peter Mundy takes his middle-school students around the world.

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Peter Mundy wants nothing more than to educate, motivate, and mentor his young students â?? and to travel with them around the world.

The 63-year-old Castro resident teaches seventh- and eighth-grade history at Cathedral School for Boys, where heâ??s worked for 27 years. He has taken his students on trips to Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Israel and annual biking trips to Yosemite. He takes his students to some of his favorite places in San Francisco, including a federal courthouse, and heâ??s found a spiritual home of sorts at the school.

The trips are more than sightseeing expeditions. In Puerto Rico, the boys poured concrete to help replace homes destroyed in a hurricane. In the Middle East, they visited the West Bank and met with Palestinians and Israelis after studying the regionâ??s conflicts for months. The trips to Yosemite are grueling, covering 185 miles over three days.

The long-time educator is married with two sons and a daughter. His youngest boy will be starting at Boston College in the fall, and then all three of his children will be living on the East Coast, he said with a trace of sadness.

Seventh graders rock

His students help fill the gap. His job has plenty of humdrum routine â?? like many teachers, he dislikes grading papers â?? but the foreign trips and long bike rides make this job uniquely satisfying.

Boys of middle-school age are often considered difficult to teach, but for Mundy, itâ??s the perfect age. â??You can really see the light bulb going on,â?• he said of teaching seventh graders. â??Iâ??m excited every day to go to work. They inspire me.â?•

Right after graduation each summer, Mundy and his students climb on their bikes in Livermore and head for Cathedral Beach in Yosemite Valley. The journey follows two months of training, a chance for

the boys to build stamina and for Mundy to get to know them.

Seeing an inexperienced rider become strong and confident is particularly gratifying. â??Last year I had a student who was pretty much a beginner cyclist who hadnâ??t done many previous physical activities, and he became a confident and able cyclist who was able to complete a very demanding trip,â?• Mundy said. â??This was an incredible achievement for him and a very rewarding experience for me.â?•



Peter Mundy and students near the end of a three-day bike trip to Yosemite. (Photo courtesy of Peter Mundy)

The Puerto Rico trips were organized by a faculty member who established a relationship with a community of people who had been squatting on government land. They now have permission to remain but need help rebuilding almost every summer after hurricanes pass through.

â??For the students, it is a great way to become more culturally aware and to work to improve the lives of others,â?• said Mundy. â??They were struck by how many neighbors would help out (without pay) in the building of the houses.â?•

On another trip, the boys stayed with families in Nicaragua and worked with a local organization that raised money for students needing assistance. They worked in a shop that made ceramic pots and other items for the Nicaraguans to sell at a market. â??The Nicaragua trip was part language immersion and part service,â?• said Mundy.



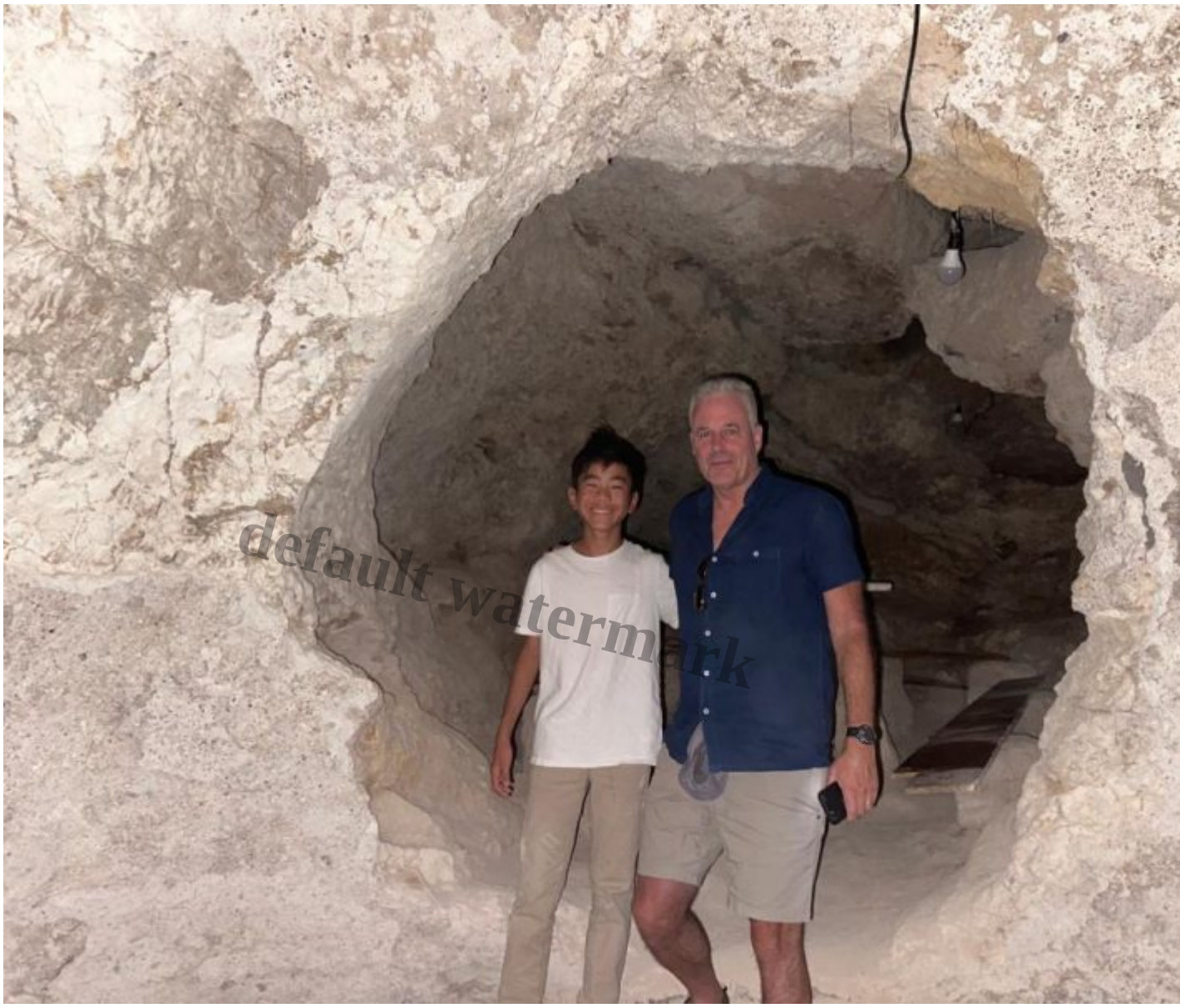
Peter Mundy. (Photo by Mary Anne Lewis)

Students at Cathedral School, where tuition averages around $46,000 a year, had an opportunity to visit as well as study the Middle East before the Hamas attack touched off the current war.

â??The trip to Israel in 2023 was called â??a pilgrimage to the Holy Land,â?? and its main purpose was to immerse the students in religious history,â?• he said. It was â??probably one of the best trips of my life,â?• said Mundy. â??It gave students a real understanding of whatâ??s going on in the region and was both historically and spiritually enlightening.â?•

For Mundy, seeing a region in person that heâ??s studied and taught was quite meaningful. â??You could feel the emotions of the place. We studied the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for three months, so the students were very aware of the political situations and the tensions there.â?•

The group, which included parents and grandparents, stayed in East Jerusalem and visited Nazareth, Bethlehem, and the West Bank, â??so we heard a great deal about the Palestinian perspective.â?•



Peter Mundy and student Jacob Wong on a visit to Bethlehem in 2023. (Photo courtesy of Peter Mundy)

Mundy puts a special emphasis on the Middle East conflict in his classes. In a recent seventh-grade class, Mundy asked his students, â??What is Israelâ??s worst nightmare?â?• Several hands shot up, and many of the students immediately voiced their opinions. The teacher never did reveal his answer to the question.

Mundy,a passionate court watcher, recently took his class to view the action at the Phillip Burton Federal Courthouse in San Francisco. â??Over the years, weâ??ve seen some really great attorneys.â?• Some of his students become so interested, they donâ??t want to return to school afterward.

Mundy feels valued by his students and believes he plays an important role in their lives.

â??Boys have a stereotype of being not as sort of emotional or looking for this kind of relational teaching experiences. But I find them sort of craving an interaction, especially boys with men. Thereâ??s just something I feel that a need is being filled for them.â?•

Mundy, a native San Franciscan, earned a history degree at Berkeley and later left for Spain for a couple of years, where he taught English and became fluent in Spanish. When he returned to the United States, he began teaching history at Stuart Hall moving on to Cathedral School after nine years.



Seventh grader Connor Toropov prepares to answer Mr. Mundyâ??s question. (Photo by Mary Anne Lewis)

He enjoys reading historical fiction, particularly novels by Graham Greene, John Steinbeck, and Colson Whitehead. His wife, Alberta Neilson, is a former learning specialist who now coaches people with ADHD. She and her husband are avid athletes; sheâ??s a runner, heâ??s a biker.

A spiritual home

Though he was raised Catholic, Mundy said he found a spiritual focus at Cathedral School, which is adjacent to Grace Episcopalian cathedral. â??I think itâ??s a really spiritual place,â?• he said, noting

that the upper school (fifth through eighth grades) meets every Wednesday for chapel and the entire school meets Friday mornings in the chapel to sing hymns.

â??Just a little bit of quiet time, (before) a really long academic day,â?• he said. â??I find it a really great time to reflect on things, not just always be on the go.â?•

Mundy said the chapel sessions are more spiritual than religious and he is attracted to the Episcopal point of view. â??Iâ??ve had all three of my children baptized at Grace Cathedral during an upper school chapel. So, all my students were there, which was special to me.â?•



An enthusiastic Peter Mundy leads his class. (Photo by Mary Anne Lewis)

The students come from a variety of faiths, and some are atheists. None of that matters when it comes to chapel â?? everyone attends, Mundy said. â??We have an amazing chaplain,â?• who has creative ways to talk about whatâ??s going on in the world and getting the students to think about their own spirituality. â??Itâ??s very non-dogmatic.â?•

This summer, the chaplain is planning a trip to Ireland, where students will explore the pagan roots of Christianity. â??So, I was like, sign me up,â?• said Mundy, who has never been to Ireland. The two men plan to spend a few extra days at the end of the trip to visit Dublin, where theyâ??ll do some sightseeing.

Mundyâ??s long career has progressed in ways he never expected. Like a lot of young grads, he had no particular direction in mind when he left school. After dabbling in business for a few years, he moved to Spain. Back then, teaching â??wasnâ??t on the radar.â?• While there, he needed a job and landed a teaching position. â??I loved it and that sort of made my decision for me.â?•

He hasnâ??t looked back.

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