



SAINT JAMES' IN THE CITY

ANGLICAN/EPISCOPAL

EVER ANCIENT | EVER NEW

THE FIRST 100 YEARS



Interview: Sara Jane and John Thies

You can't call it love at first sight. "I was only ten and singing in the Saint James' Girls' Choir," laughed Sara Jane, "whereas John, a Senior Server Acolyte, was a worldly 17. We knew each other, but just as friends." It would take nine more years, some chance encounters, and a mutual love of organ music before romance blossomed.



John Thies has been around Saint James' for a long time. He was baptized at the church on Saint Patrick's Day in 1946 and confirmed there in 1956. "My grandparents were among the founding members of Wilshire Presbyterian," said John, "but my mother loved the music at Saint James'. She became a member of the choir and my parents were married there in 1942."

Sara Jane was born in New York City and then moved to Los Angeles with her family when she was three. They lived with her grandmother in the West Adams district. In 1963 her family transferred to Saint James' parish and Sara Jane attended schools locally from St. Brendan's, on to Immaculate Heart, and graduated from the only local Episcopal girls school, Argyle Academy, now Campbell Hall High School.

By the early 1960s societal upheavals began to shake the established social order. John found the progressive social policies of St. Paul's Cathedral very appealing and in 1964 he left

the socially staid Saint James' to become a member of the downtown congregation. Years would go by before John and Sara Jane would see each other again. There was a sighting in 1970. Sara Jane, who had become the first elected youth representative to the vestry, had talked the church into trying a folk mass. "I sang," recalled Sara Jane, "and my friend Margie Schultz played the flute." John happened to be in attendance. When asked what part of the folk mass made an impression on him, John replied, "Sara Jane's white mini-skirt."

After a Sunday breakfast at Arthur J's, there was another chance meeting in the back of the church. "My father had recently died," said Sara Jane. "Somehow John knew about it and said he was sorry. That meant a lot to me." "I gave her my business card and asked her to call me if she needed anything," remembered John. "Of course she didn't. So a few days later I contacted Ingrid Ralston and flat out lied to get Sara Jane's number, then I phoned her and asked her out to lunch at the Marina." What did they talk about? "Organ music," laughed Sara Jane, "we both love organ music."



They loved organ music so much that they had each—with other dates—bought tickets to an organ concert by E. Power Biggs. They (Continued on reverse side)



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went with a group of four couples to the concert First Congregational Church, then to dinner at Robaire's. Then they politely ditched their dates and met up to go dancing at the old Hyatt at Wilshire and Normandie. Five weeks later, John proposed. "We were out dancing," said Sara Jane, "and I was so thrilled and of course said yes!"

They were married on October 26, 1974 in St. Paul's Cathedral. "That was awkward," remembers Sara Jane. "I was on the vestry at Saint James' – which was known as the wedding church – but John and I were going to be married at St. Paul's. St. Paul's had the big organ. It had to be there. Somehow we just made it work. We combined clergy and congregations and we had a wonderful wedding." But there was a larger point to it. "What we learned about liturgy and hospitality at Saint James' we put into practice at St. Paul's Cathedral."

For a couple of years they attended both churches. John introduced Sara Jane to the congregation of the Parish in East Los Angeles, and still on the vestry at Saint James', Sara Jane sponsored a union of the churches for a Fiesta event including Sunday eucharist followed by a fiesta celebration. From a Saturday cooking event in the kitchen, to the making of paper flowers and cutout banners, to the lively music of mariachi's the church was transformed for Eucharist that week. But by 1975 Sara Jane's vestry term was filled and in 1979 the earthquake damaged St. Paul's was demolished and the Thies', looking for an affordable home in which to raise a family, moved to the valley and changed parishes. Several years passed by until, in 1987, Father Bob Oliver invited John to be Master of (Anglican Liturgy) Ceremonies at Saint James' 75th anniversary. By then the older of their two children (daughter Kim and son J.P.) was ready for school and thankfully she was accepted in Saint James' School. Having seen the vision of Fr.

D'Amico, and the dream of Joe Debell begin with the building of the school's foundation, John and Sara Jane were early supporters of the school's commitment to excellence and it's mission of diversity. By 1991, the entire family was back at Saint James' Church.

They rapidly made up for any lost time in service to the church. John served two terms on the vestry and as senior warden once in 1996 and again in 2004-2007 and two terms on the school board having served as it's vice chair for 3 years In 2004 John was made Honorary Canon of the Cathedral Center of St. Paul by the Bishop of Los Angeles.. Sara Jane also found herself back in service, first in the choir and then on the vestry in 2001 and served two years as junior warden. Lately when not attending church, the Thies' spend every spare minute enjoying time with their two adult children, their son-in law Ken and his family, and their two grand children.

When asked about the greatest changes they have seen at Saint James' in the last fifty years, they both agree that it's in the ministries. "Great Music, the schools, the infant day care, the soup kitchen, the food ministry. While Saint James' had a strong music program, an extensive Sunday School, youth group, and adult education ministry, the most community based support we provided was to the Troop 10 Boy Scouts, and renting of the facilities for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Now we have important social ministries that speak to the heart of our mission as stewards of the church and followers of Christ," said Sara Jane.

"These days the biggest kick for me," said John "is standing at the altar rail on a Sunday morning. All the different cultures, all the different kinds of couples, families, and people, it thrills me. I look at everyone and I think that this is the community of Christ."