

Perhaps it is an inevitable sign of aging that prompts reflection on "days gone by". Most of those memories, though, tend to be warm and comfortable and provide a pleasant respite from the realities of today. Mentally I have revisited the places that produce those memories for me. They are St. Bernard's Church, grammar school and Loretto High School.

My memories easily drift back to find me standing in the middle aisle of that big church, head craned upward to look at the detail of the ceiling. I have scanned the walls and have seen the stained glass windows with the stations of the cross between them. I have peered into the balcony and pictured myself sitting on the gospel side, a particularly good vantage point from which to view both the liturgy and the crowd below.

The gospel side of the balcony was close, but not too close, to the organ which was massive in size and flanked by mighty pipes. Oh, how it rang out under the guiding hands of Mae Oshatz! Monsignor Ryan was frequently seen walking shepherdlike and silent down the middle aisle with his monsignor's cap perched on the back of his head. In the days before microphones were available to help the faint-of-voice, Fr. Hartnett had no difficulty being heard in the far recesses of the church. He frequently gestured with emphasis to make sure his message of God's word was understood.

Christmas Eve liturgy was always special. I can almost feel the snow crunch underfoot as I walked the blocks from home to church. "Adeste Fideles", "Oh, Holy Night", and my favorite of Christmas hymns, "In Old Judea", the choir sang at Midnight Mass. Then came the "low Masses" for those faithful who could stay up that late.

There was Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday with the liturgy sung in Latin. We didn't understand all the words but the music was beautiful. "Oh, Mary we crown thee..." was sung as the wreath of flowers was placed on the head of the Blessed Mother's statue during the very ceremonious May Procession. How easy it is to be taken back to relive those feasts and occasions that were so majestically celebrated at St. Bernard's.

The years of grammar school passed quickly into history. They were punctuated, though, by some educational happenings that molded me forever. Mother Lillian directed the activities of the school for many years from her office at the top of the front stairs. Mother Lauretea was the first nun I "really knew" as an anxious first grader. She was a very patient lady who could "teach a stick to read", as one of her peers said. Without her patience in slowly developing reading skills, I wonder if the printed word would mean as much to me as it does. In third grade M. Philomena admonished, "Sit up straight... you'll have round shoulders." Indeed posture was emphasized for no betterment.

Mother Mary Ellen fell heir to the "office at the top of the stairs" when M. Lillian left. She had no problem maintaining discipline. When M.M.E. entered a classroom, her appearance demanded attention and silence quickly descended. If she was not pleased with our department we were notified in French! Her technique guaranteed to quiet the most unruly of children. The stately nonsense Loretto nuns quietly year after year, brick after brick put into place the foundation of our education.

Four more years at Loretto High School "refined" me some more. Mother Edwarda was principal. I remember being impressed by her beauty. She had a lovely face - almost cherubic - and a personality to match. I never heard her raise her voice. She taught us senior religion. Religion was an integral part of our education. We understood "all this" was temporary.

Mother Berenice, who taught English, had a devotion to polysyllables. She was always challenging us to expand our vocabulary, "Use a word three times and it's yours." Mother Berenice was a good example of one who had command of the English language and enjoyed using it.

The "weak link" in my educational chain had to be math. Mother St. Edward has to be given credit for somehow getting me through Algebra. It took patience and added time but I made it! M. St. Edward also gets credit for providing my first job. "Go see my friend at the hospital." I was hired.

Mother Leah, who taught me business, encouraged my interest in nursing. To each of us of God has given talents. I believe M. Leah was quick to realize the business world was not for me. She was right.

The events during my four years at Loretto were memorable - the dances - the proms - the receptions before, when we brought our escorts to the convent to meet the nuns - the Christmas candlelight concerts and the plays. In our senior year, Miss Jacquet was head of the drama department. The Mikado was delightfully presented. It remains today one of my favorites.

We were surrounded by music. It was an important part of every occasion or event. The love for good music passed through like osmosis. Today it is a very important part of my life. The "Panis" we sang then was included in my wedding ceremony twenty-five years ago and recently at our twenty-fifth anniversary mass.

The Loretto graduation had to be the hallmark of occasions. It culminated four years of education and hopefully refinement. The roses - the flower girls - the flowing gowns came together accompanied by "Pomp & Circumstance" as we walked down the aisle of St. Bernard's. Four years of schooling were over but we had memories enough to last a lifetime.

How fortunate we were to have had the benefit of such an education. I consider myself fortunate to have these memories that are warm and comfortable to have such a respite.

Thomas Wolfe said "You can't go home again." Indeed you can - from the vantage point of the gospel side of the balcony.