

1945

SACRED HEART

Harry Boglin:

I was born on Farnsworth and Hastings. In 1947 was when we moved to the Brewster projects and I started coming to Sacred Heart around that time. My parents were from the West Indies. The one thing interesting about the Brewster Projects, we were the first ones to live in "government condominiums" There were doctors, lawyers. Jesse Steward was the first black sargeant on the Police Department. Many policemen lived there. Mr. Hamlin was an executive for Metropolitan Insurance. There were a great number of school teachers. There were a lot of doctors who had just started their residency. There were people who had private businesses. There was a guy who had a tow truck who lived there. A number of them worked at Hudson's downtown. A number of them were maids. A lot of them did day work in Grosse Pointe. It was housing for middle income Blacks.

I was an altar boy at Sacred Heart. At that particular time there were 20 some altar boys, I believe. We were called at that time Knights of the Altar. Most of the altar boys hung out with each other. We didn't play with the other boys in school or anywhere else. We'd get out of school for a funeral. We used to fight over 6:00 mass at the convent because after 6:00 a.m. mass the nuns would give you breakfast. It wasn't breakfast; it was more like a banquet. There were about 18 nuns, and all of them wanted to serve you a plate.

Maryann Humphries:

St. Peter Claver started in 1911. It had been a little protestant church at Elliott and St. Antoine. That's where we went until 1938. This was a German parish. They gave us this church.

Anthony McCauley:

I can remember about 1945. I started first grade in 1945. I had brothers and sisters who were ahead of me already going. I was supposed to go at six, but I remember my father telling me that they were going to start me at five. If I could keep u, then I could continue to go. So I did.

I can remember very clearly getting in trouble and having to do penance for being out of your seat or talking and turning around. One of their favorite penance was having you write X number of times, "I will not do whatever."

For instance, they might say, "Write this 50 times and bring it in tomorrow." If you didn't write it or bring it in, it doubled. It would behoove you to do it the first time. From that experience, I learned how to write with three pencils. You can put three together and write that way and get your stuff done much faster. They didn't say how small, large, whatever. You could arrange your pencils just right.

Maryann Humphries:

Sometimes you would have it already done from the last time you got in trouble. You knew you would always get in trouble again so you wrote it down and you brought it in already written.

Anthony McCauley;

I wasn't an altar boy. I tried out to be an altar boy, but I was just a little bit too rambunctious. You had to be quiet and learn your Latin. I learned Latin, but I wasn't quiet. Mr. Moore was the custodian here that used to be here for years. He used to call me Beans. He said, "You were never still. From the time I first saw you come in here, you were never still."

I can remember very clearly, when we had to go to the bathroom, they would line us all up and march us down the hall to the bathroom together. The girls went this way and the boys went that way. In the boys bathroom, when you went down the steps I would always try to see how many steps I could jump down to the bathroom. When I was mellow, I could maybe jump three or four. I would grab the banister. It was about 15 steps. My goal was to try to jump all the way to the basement and not touch the other steps.

I was constantly moving. I used to run a lot and you weren't supposed to run. You were supposed to be real pious.

When we were in class, I can remember very clearly getting caught doing something and having to go up to the front of the class and kneel down and face the blackboard. If you turned around, then you would get popped. I remember getting popped on more than one occasion. If I told my father, he'd pop me again. So I learned not to tell him.

I can remember my fourth grade teacher, Sister Bernadette. I thought she was an angel. I really enjoyed her. All the nuns were white.

At that time Wonder Bread and Silversup used to put their bread in waxed paper. They asked us to collect that and bring it in. We would use those, take the blocks of wax and chip it up real small. It was sprinkled throughout the entire building. Then you were given the assignment to put the waxed paper on your feet and you would go out there and slide up and down the floor. And you would be like the floor like that. It was a combination of punishment and work. If you did it during the school day, then it was like a little reward. You got out of class, and you could be in the halls. If you stayed after school and did it, it was like punishment because no one wanted to stay after.

Periodically, especially on the weekends, you could come into the nuns house, the convent. You could work over there. A lot of the kids liked to get in there I guess because of the mystique. Same thing in the father's house, the rectory. You just wanted to get in and kind of look around and just see what was going on. If you

were good and you were chosen to be one of those who would help out, then you got a chance to come in. They would give you little treats. A lot of times it was a little sandwich or maybe some juice.

Emma Johnson:

Sacred Heart was very good to me. I joined in 1952. My kids were not going to Sacred Heart until a sister there sent me three cards--for the oldest girl and the oldest boy and the next oldest child. I asked her how much would I pay for their tuition, and she said that it would be half payment for all of them--\$250. She said that she had seen in the project that kids were not in school. They were out in the neighborhood, and they were not going to school. They had a round table discussion. They read how many children people had that had joined the church. They voted on it, and they voted for the the three oldest children I had.

Father Kirchbaum was a German priest, I told him I couldn't get them no stockings, no shoes. He said, "Well, I got a drawer here, and you've got a namesake, and every year they put money in that namesake. That's like a Godmother and Godfather. They put money in a drawer for their names, their Catholic names like Mary. The person who gave it had that name.

They would collect toys and clothing for the children, and one time a girl's school in Grosse Pointe would pick different children's names. The girls would come here and pick a name out of that box. That child would write down what they wanted for Christmas, and they would get that chld what he wanted.

Father Kirchbaum went in there and got the namesake's money and gave it to me and told me to go downtown to get the things. I told him how I might never pay it back, and he said, "You're not supposed to. That's what they're there for, to help the poor people in the neighborhood. That's why the church was here, for low income people that could not afford to get the things, like a confirmation dress. But he wouldn't tell me who was doing it. That was a secret.

My oldest son, Charles, he was in the first grade. He didn't understand because it was confining. Sister Anthony went and got a baseball bat. She got him a football, and she got him a basketball, and she went in the school yard and left her class as was playing in the school yard with him.

Maryann Humphries:

Another thing I can remember about toing to school at Sacred Heart is that we were led to believe that the only church was the Catholic Church and if we went to a Baptist churach, we would be punished. If we did, we had to go to confession.

I feel personally there was prejudice right in the school. In all activities that I ever participated in, I was always put at the top of the class. I was not an A student, and I think that had a lot

to do with my complexion. As I grew older, I realized it was wrong. Another time, when I was older, I went to Father Kirchbaum to confession, and the priest would not forgive me. I don't know why he wouldn't. I didn't kill anyone. I went to another priest and told him, and he forgave me and told me to forget about Father Kirchbaum.

Harry Boglin:

One of the principles that is needed for the Black community and the Blacks that live in the United States is extreme discipline. One of the reasons that I was made to go to Sacred Heart, even though I wanted to go, was extreme discipline. I was extremely rambunctious. My nickname is "Spanking" and that is because I got a lot of whippings every day. I was always doing something, breaking windows, shooting people with my b.b. guns.

I was made to go to Sacred Heart, and there was a change in me that my mother used to pray to God every day for. When the street lights came on, I was in the living room. Before Sacred Heart, God knows where I was.

Once when I was visiting my aunt who lived over on the west side, I went over to a restricted area of the railroad tracks and was caught by the police. I was seven or eight. The police arrested me. My mother found out about it and called Father Kirchbaum. I was called out of class and had to report to the rectory. He said, "I understand you do not know what restrictions are. You don't know that you're not supposed to go in certain areas. I am shocked that an altar boy did these things. I don't want to hear about this again. You say the rosary."

Maryann Humphries:

There was a policeman for the Brewster Project. His name was Shorty Black. That was what we called him. He looked out for all the kids in the neighborhood. And if you did anything mischievous or whatever, he made sure that your parents knew about it. That was in the late 40's and 50's.

Emma Johnson:

My son, before he was large enough to go to school, he was outside on his roller skates, and one of his skates came off, and he didn't know how to put it on. I saw the policeman bending down. He saw the policeman coming along and asked him to put on his skate for him. He was a White policeman.