

IHM Centennial Celebration — Share A Memory

IHM Memories from Jeanne McCauley Trott, Saint James Class of 1952 — Part I

My life within the embrace of the IHM sisters began before I was born in 1938. When my father brought his New England bride into the heart of his Virginia family, his mother and Mother Clotildis were neighbors and great friends. They were allies, guiding my mother's entry into this parish and this town. The IHM sisters welcomed me and my subsequent siblings too. In my cedar chest upstairs is a baby's pink ruffled taffeta coat and bonnet; memory claims they were made for me by Mother Clotildis.

When I was five years old, my best friend Anne Julie and I were recruited to lead the May Procession, dressed as angels with billowing gowns, made by our mothers and the sisters, and wearing impressive crowns and wings of sparkling cardboard. I remember standing on a stool in the convent parlor, nervously still as a sister trimmed the neckline of my blue angel dress with a pair of large scissors. The angel gown is in the cedar chest too.

Later that year, Sister Callista welcomed me to first grade. I was still five years old, and she called me Jeannie-bud. She taught us to read about Dick and Jane from a big flip-chart. Amazing to us, it had the same pictures as our little readers. Sister Callista loved the Infant of Prague and dressed his small statue in gown and cape the colors of the liturgical seasons. The red velvet cape I have (in another box) may be one she made or it may be the creation of one of the other sisters who loved the Infant too. The rose window above the altar is dedicated to the memory of Sister Callista (and the Infant of Prague). She died far too young.

In second grade, Sister Mary Hugh choreographed my introduction to the moral life, an incident in which Anne Julie also played a role. The "director" was the unfortunately named principal, Sister Severa. She projected a stern face but could not hide the smile animating her eyes and lurking behind her lips.

On the last day of third grade, mumps kept me home but Sister Miriam Cephas called my mother to report that I had won the honor of General Excellence. Sister Cephas and I were in touch in her final days at Camilla Hall. Her notes are in another box.

Sister Christopher taught both fourth and fifth grades, shepherding dozens of boys and girls through awakening self-awareness. Another friend and classmate remembers that during these years she wrote little plays based on Bible stories and Sister Christopher would send her to the seventh grade classroom to perform them.

In seventh grade, Sister Maria Martin took me aside on the playground and taught me, in a few words, the difference between a sensitive conscience and scrupulosity, a lesson that formed my moral life, awakened with Sister Mary Hugh.

Sister Bon Secour ran the eighth grade, a single classroom of more than 70 students. There was small room for nonsense but a wide embrace of varied behaviors. Sister Bon Secour showed me that I could write. We were in correspondence until she died. It was in eighth grade that our pastor Father Mullarkey brought us all over to the church to teach us the Latin responses to the Mass. Girls were excluded from serving in the sanctuary, but we knew the Latin as well as the boys.



Stay tuned for Part II of Jeanne's IHM memories next week!