

IHM Memories from Jeanne McCauley Trott, Saint James Class of 1952 - Part II

Sometimes during these years, my mother would drive down to Lynchburg to visit the sisters at their Villa Maria school there. I remember making a bed with one of the sisters and being assured that there was a place for me in the community. I almost took them up on that promise.

My husband came to St. James in second grade and maintains memories of many of these same sisters, as does my cousin Tom, now a priest in Richmond. My cousin and godmother Ann was a “convent girl,” enrolled in Villa Maria and coming home on weekends. We were all a little anxious those days when Mother Clotildis came to each classroom to distribute report cards. My brothers too tell their sometimes colorful stories of the sisters who taught them at St. James. When my sister died at 15, Sister Anne Maria assembled the girls’ choir, to which Mary had belonged, to sing at her funeral Mass.

Somehow, through my family’s friendship with the sisters, these grade school years were enriched also by the cook Sister John Bosco, the artist Sister Kateri, the *Villa Madonna* Sisters Ann Joseph and Paul Bernard. Music was associated with those two, but especially with Sister Claudia, later Mother General. Sister Claudia taught us all the old hymns from lyrics on a cardboard sheet—*O Lord, I Am Not Worthy; Just for Today; Come, Baby Jesus; Tantum Ergo; and Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*. My classmate and friend remembers being fascinated by Sister Claudia’s pitch pipe that she drew from some pocket in her voluminous habit. There is a photo of then-Mother Claudia greeting my mother at my daughter’s wedding in 1987.



May Procession 1942
Five year old Jeanne Trott is dressed as a blue angel.

When our first child was baptized at St. James, the sisters welcomed him with love and laid him on the chapel altar. When he and his five siblings started school, our friendship with the IHMs was renewed. Each of them can name the sisters who taught them from first to eighth grades, and through O’Connell High School. Sister Pat Walsh, then called Sister Joseph Elene, entered our hearts and lives when she taught the older children to read in first grade. She remains there still.

How many other sisters are imprinted on my life? Sisters Anna Heffron, Joyce Bell, Helen David, Helen Maureen, Anita Miriam, Marita Jean McCormick, Maria Carmen and Jeannine Dawson, who remembers being my babysitter. Sister Rosemary Maguire, who grew up in a house that still stands halfway between the church and our house, blind for many years and who died last year at 87.

There were plays and musicals and pageants and tableaux. There were spelling bees and catechism questions and Palmer Method writing exercises. Those of us who could, walked home for lunch and others took a Greyhound bus from the hinterlands of Fairfax to get to school.

And always the IHMs. Strong, brave and dedicated women wearing blue woolen habits and tight-fitting bonnets through summer heat and winter cold. Long rosaries swinging at their sides. Strong, brave, dedicated, loving women whose lives are a hymn of praise to God. What can I say but “thanks.”

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