

A story from the 1940s

For us our mother was sick she needed help, but the church told mom to put us in the orphanage! So, we were shipped off and our journey began. God felt abandoned at the cross, so he knew how we were feeling when we left the only home, we knew this day. Well I could see God had a plan for us and it is not what happens to us in life but how we react to the events in our life that is important. We were the lucky ones we would not stay at St. Anne's long some would stay until they were old enough to go out in the world on their own if they were not adopted.

We arrived at the Granite St. property where there was about 250 children residing and being taken care of. The first look at the place was overwhelming and intimidating. It had a long and winding staircase that seemed to reach to the sky from the main entrance. I can remember my job was to sweep the wooden stairs with a small brush and loosen the dirt that hundreds of shoes walking thru left behind. We had no privacy, sharing sleeping quarters in a room where 50 other girls slept in white iron beds that were close together in rows and rows. A large classroom occupied the floor was where we would get dressed and our clothes were kept, it was by the restroom that had toilets and little sinks, bathing was usually once a week we would take a shower that were with showerheads that were overhead, this was dreaded because it was an unpleasant experience. For modesty sake you took our shower fully clothed with about 12 other girls, covered with a white sheet like garment. No one could see your scrubbed dry skin burning from the harsh brown soap we used. Meals were eaten downstairs consisted of beards, potatoes and cereal.

Saturdays were the day of rituals, after our showers, we dressed in our clothes for the week and assembled in the main room. The priest swinging a thurible of incense and chanting in Latin the official language of the church, we proceeded in a double line with the smallest child thru the entire building. There was no Joy in this journey it was solemn and sad. It emphasized that we would never have God's love. The sermons were of hopelessness and we would never achieve goodness. We had to accept that and try hard each day to receive God's blessing. Not once did I truly feel loved by God.

On arrival we said our goodbyes in the small room on the ground floor. We were given a black dress with a white stiff collar and cuffs, with very rough underpants and a long shirt, with long black stockings and high buttoned shoes. We were placed in a large room with other girls where we talked about ourselves and suddenly a nun in charge grabbed me by the back of the neck and told me to go and tell the Mother Superior that I was talking and was sent to see her! I saw her and told her why I was sent, and she grabbed me by the front of my dress and smashed me across the face. The impact left me speechless nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I left the room tears flowing and red marks on my face scared, angry, and embarrassed.

Life was run on a strict schedule at St. Anne's, marked by the ringing of the bells and the sound of a metal clacker. Ten minutes no longer to get ready for the day, getting up

out of bed at 5 am by the toll of the first bell. For me those shoes with so many buttons were difficult to put on and tie up. Many days my ears were red and sore after an impatient nun pulled them because I was too slow. Then to help me be ready on time I got dressed under the covers only to get caught and was whacked all over my body, back, fingers even my face. They would even use their bare hands and a wooden spoon.

Looking back to how we were treated by the nuns, their cruelty and intimidation tactics were used to dominate us. It worked. We were afraid of them; they controlled us totally both physically and mentally. We accepted what they said. We had no other choice! I can understand some of the nun's actions were determined by what they were taught by others but cannot understand the cruelty they showed the children in their care. Their teaching was negative and that you were a sinner and must do good works to find a way out. One thing I know now is salvation is not dependent on good deeds, it is free, a gift to me from God's goodness. I never heard this before and was astounded.

I can say there were some good times like going downstairs to see a movie. The excitement levels raised for us all for we had no outside entertainment, not even a radio. To get to see the movies such as Rin Tin Tin someone had to pay the dimes required to attend. This meant that the orphans were not permitted to see the movie and were forced to stay in the room with their backs to the screen so they could only listen to the soundtrack and hear the others laughter. Sadder by this I could only imagine how they must have felt.

In the orphanage, none of us had very much. Unlike most kids on the outside, we were rarely given candy, except on special occasions, or if we went out on an excursion. Day after day it was potatoes, cereal, and vegetables, with very little meat. It was hard to trust a God who would allow children to bear the cross of hunger, but to have this hardship endorsed by people who were supposedly our caretakers was tough. The message we learned was loud and clear; we were not worth anything. In all my years I cannot remember ever praying to my heavenly father. I always approached him through Mary or one of the saints. It seemed God was somewhere else, and you had to go through an intermediary. In our greatest trials he is closer than we know. I know this now because we were bought with a price and we are so valuable in God's eye.