

Memories from the 1940's of our Youth while at St. Anne's Orphanage

“Am I really sure it happened? Was it real or did I dream it up? And why can't I remember it all?”

“You wake up in the middle of the night from a dream and it becomes reality! You see something that triggers a memory, hear a song, or maybe see someone that makes you think of someone from the past. It triggers fear in you, but you are not quite sure what to think of it. Then something tells you, “Yes, this really happened!”

These are some of the memories and feelings of the residents St. Anne's during the 1940's, showing it was not all good or all bad, and sometimes punishments of justified. They were children (not angels) and with all the children that the nuns were in charge of, discipline was needed to keep everything in order. They cared for the children the best they could, and for some, punishment was needed. This made some of them fear the authority of the nuns. Whenever they had to be disciplined or brought to see the nun in charge, there was fear due to not knowing what would happen. This fear would be in some of them for their lifetimes.

Some of the children felt it was a very creepy and abusive place. For example, getting the “stick” or being sent to the closet in the morning for wetting the bed, then having to carry the soiled sheets to the laundry. Or getting the ruler across the hands for whatever infraction or indiscretion that was committed. Some children never even understood why they had to go to the orphanage. They felt this was horrible and it affected them throughout their life. They wondered why the nuns could not understand that children need the constant love and support of a parent.

Events that were scary or traumatic to them were embedded in their memories. Some of the memories could have existed before coming to the orphanage; especially the feeling of being abandoned, left alone, and unloved. This was the cause of most of their problems with adjusting to life. However, strength of character was created, which helped later to put them on the right road in life. Some of the children were removed from bad situations and some were truly orphaned. Some children came to the orphanage because their parents were poor or could not provide for them and wanted to make sure that their children were taken care of and protected. There were many reasons why they were there, as orphans or as boarders. Some of the children so traumatized that they ran away; some tried to block out what they wanted to forget.

One thing the children looked forward to was singing in the choir. They got to be with each other and sing, as well as sing for groups of people who came to visit. The choir sometimes went to hospitals or nursing homes; this little get-away was treasured. During the holidays some outside families would take in children that had no place to go; these kindnesses made many fond memories for the children.

Most of the children remembered the swimming pool and the playground. One remembers, "There was the barn along with the huge pigs in pens that we did not know why they were there but you could hear the OINK's coming from them, oh and those Blood sausages!" At the foot of the hill in back were some woods where there were vines of "Concord grapes" and hazelnut trees. There were also fond memories of the nuns who took care of them, teaching them to play baseball. "We had a team called the Washington Senators; the nuns were really good at this game and we had so much fun!"

On occasion, figure skaters came to entertain the children. “One of the best times was when the ponies came and we would get to ride them. There were so many children and not always did you get the ride, so you waited and prayed that you would get a chance. One day looking out, we all saw an unbelievable sight; outside was the Budweiser Wagon with these huge Clydesdales pulling it! I for one was impressed they were so big and beautiful to see and to pat. This made the children happy and they talked of it for a long time.”

Some of the children realized that there was good and bad, and they adjusted. But others could not adjust to the abandonment and loneliness. For them, the difficulty created fear and many road blocks to happiness throughout their lives.