

Betty Elmendorf

Betty Elmendorf attended Saint Peter High School, where she graduated in 1956. Her husband, Ralph, attended Saint Peter Grade School and High School and graduated in 1955. She and Ralph were married in 1957 until he passed away in 2022.

Ancestors and Early Childhood

Ralph's ancestors on his dad's side weren't original Saint Peter parishioners but they go very far back. Ralph's parents were Ralph and Francis Elmendorf and they were also Saint Peter parishioners. Ralph was the youngest of ten children. He lived at Second and Jackson and walked to Saint Peter School.

Betty's parents were Herman and Felicity Bethmann; she was the sixth child of seven. Betty grew up in the country. An advantage was that it allowed the family to be closer. She played with her sister who was three years younger. Her father was a farmer and his sons supported the farm. They drove the tractors but she was afraid of them and didn't want much to do with driving them.

She went to Saint Mary's grade school in Bridgeton in a one room school house. There were about three children per grade. The teacher would work with one grade but give assignments to the children in the other grades.

One of her earlier memories when she was about seven "scared her to death." She lived on Highway B near what is now New Town. There was a major flood and water was an inch from coming into their house. She and other family members were put on a barge and went to Dardenne Creek. The barge knocked down big trees. She just about fainted when the first tree went down. She lived in Pine Lawn for a few months.

Saint Peter High School

Betty almost didn't get to attend Saint Peter High School. Her dad was very frugal. He didn't want to pay the \$40 tuition. He said, "You don't need to go to school. You can be on the tractor with me." Her mom wrote to Betty's brother, who was serving in the Army, and he paid for the tuition for her first

year. Betty made sure to get very good grades. Her dad was very proud and paid the tuition for her last three high school years.

Betty and about four other girls were “from across the river.” It made it a little hard to make friends when the other students viewed them that way. She and the other four girls stuck together. They had a long commute to school. She lived in West Lake and walked to the bus which crossed the Highway 115 bridge. Then she had to walk from that bus stop to high school.

She remembers daily Mass. On Friday’s they could go to Pops, a delicatessen, and get doughnuts. Monsignor Strauss was there when she was in high school. She remembers that during Lent, they fasted for 40 days and had no meat on Friday’s. Her family ate tuna and tomato soup.

In her sophomore year she was elected as maid for Homecoming. Each class had a maid. When she did occasionally play softball, she was put in right field because they knew she wouldn’t catch the ball.

Betty liked Saint Peter High School. She and Ralph made life long friends, including Tom and Mary Boschert, and Carl and Valle Knoblauch. The Knoblauch’s were Diane Ilgenfritz’ parents; Carl was Ralph’s cousin. Betty continued to get together after high school with thirteen of her classmates.

Betty graduated in 1956 and was the last class at Saint Peter High School. She doesn’t remember any special ceremonies for that. Her sister, Virginia, was the first class at Duchesne High School.

Adulthood

One of the best things about high school was that she met Ralph in her junior year. She graduated in 1956, got married in 1957, and had her first child in 1958. They were married at Saint Charles Borromeo and the wedding reception was at the Knight of Columbus on Fifth Street. (Ralph was a member before they got married.) They joined Saint Peter right away because Ralph and his family were long term parishioners at Saint Peter.

Ralph worked primarily in the automotive industry prior to retirement. His last position was at Nixon and Company as an insurance adjuster. Betty also worked various jobs. They were generally as a bookkeeper. She worked at Standard Drug and Saint Charles County Fire Department, to name a few. She worked well into her sixties.

She and Ralph had four boys: Charles (Charlie), William (Bill), Timothy (Tim), and Terrence (Terry). Unfortunately, Tim was 25 when he passed due to a work accident. He had a six week old baby. Betty has nine grandchildren, 24 great grandchildren, with the 25th great grandchild due in September 2025.

All the boys received their childhood sacraments at Saint Peter Church and they were all altar servers. They all attended Saint Peter Grade School where Marcella Boerding taught all four of them. They all graduated from Duchesne High School.

Ralph was very involved with the boys' basketball, baseball, and football. Betty only wanted them to be in one sport per year; Ralph said that they could play all sports if they had good grades.

All the boys have volunteered at the Knights of Columbus.

Parish Center

Monsignor Peet put a notice in the bulletin around 1990 requesting that someone take care of the parish center. Betty volunteered and was hired to manage the center. She ran all aspects of the center, including cash management, hall rentals, and maintenance oversight. She checked the bathrooms every week to make sure they were clean. The parish center continually had a cash surplus to help fund the parish operations.

The biggest events at the parish center were the fish fries on Friday's during Lent. Carl Knoblauch stated that, "We need fish fries." Ralph and his cousin, Carl, went to Saint Paul Church in Saint Paul to learn from them because they had good fish fries. The Saint Paul members taught them the recipes and how to make the fish breading. The menu includes catfish, cod, shrimp and frog legs.

Betty managed the overall fish fry and ran the inside operations. She made many phone calls to get workers. They came every week and then every year. Carl and Ralph ran the frying operations. People had to work many years before they could become a fryer. During inclement weather, the fryers have worked under an awning.

The fish fries have a very good reputation. They usually have 1,300 to 1,600 dinners per fish fry. The line can stretch around the parish center. They only ran out of food one time with the last five people. Those people all came back. Betty said many many times that the fish fries were successful because of the workers.

The sausage dinners were started about two years after the fish fries because the parish needed money.

Betty was in charge of the kitchen. She oversaw the ordering. She “prayed a lot” regarding this. She and Ralph both actually prayed about events at the parish center. Ralph was good at estimating food and he worked with Betty regarding this.

Betty and Ralph did this for thirty years. Kim Setzekorn stepped in and has been doing really well; she wanted to do it. She and Kim had many meetings every year.

Chicken dinners were also held in the parish center during the parish picnic. The Ladie’s Sodality was in charge of this. The picnic had different rides and games. There was a parade every year. It started at the church, went to Jackson and Fifth, to First Capitol, then back to the church. One year Betty and Ralph were grand marshals. Betty dressed up as a nun one year.

The parish center was also rented for wedding receptions. There used to be four weddings per month but now there’s about one wedding every other month. Betty stated that “Kids stopped getting married.”

Saint Peter school used the parish center to play basketball games and put on plays. Other schools and organizations have rented the parish center for miscellaneous activities.

The boys also helped at the parish center in later years. They would help clean. If the bartender didn’t show up at a wedding reception, the boys would do it.

Church and Priests

Betty and Ralph liked various things about Vatican II, such as the priests facing the people, no fasting from midnight until Mass, and the Mass being in English. Other people were not happy with the changes, though. She likes the changes made with All Things New. The 7:00 a.m. Mass is filled as though it were Christmas. Her family really enjoyed Midnight Mass, and that’s when it was actually at Midnight.

Betty and Ralph and his parents have worked with many priests. Ralph's dad worked at ACF (American Car Foundry). He would do paperwork at the rectory on the weekends. When Monsignor Strauss retired, he asked if it would be okay if he ate dinner with Ralph's family. He would drive the car with a rosary in one hand and the wheel in the other; sometimes he hit the curb.

She described Monsignor Peet as a "good guy." Priests were super and easy to work for. Monsignor Hampe was the hospital chaplain and was super. He would say, "Before your feet hit the ground, thank Jesus." Father Ghio liked the desks of the office people to be empty when they left work.

She enjoys the current priests, Father James Theby, Father Chris Schroeder, and Father George Staley.

Betty enjoyed parish hospitality. The people that helped were so reliable and she and Ralph enjoyed it. She really did enjoy parish hospitality and missed it the first year. The people at the fish fries and parishioners are like a community; like a family. The choir is beautiful and the church is beautifully decorated, especially at Christmas and Easter.