

Gertie Meyer

Saint Peter Grade School

Gertie started first grade in 1939. At that time, students met in the classroom at 8:00 and then paraded as a class to Mass with the nun leading. For first grade, Sister Andrew led the 55 students, which were in one classroom, to their assigned place in church. At that time, there were four pews across with five aisles. The students genuflected as a class and the nun sat in back of the class. The high school students also did this.

After Mass, students marched back to class silently. People had to fast after midnight before receiving Communion. Those students that received Communion, who were the majority of the class, had ten minutes to eat, such as an egg sandwich or whatever they brought to school.

Each class in order had a bathroom break, while the other classes started. Students went quickly and silently, with maybe a whisper in the bathroom. The nuns didn't let the kids go to the bathroom individually; there were no room mothers at that time. The bathroom for the 1st through 4th grades was in the basement and the bathroom for 5th through 8th grades was above that. There were drinking fountains in the bathrooms but not in the hallways.

During World War II, they paraded out the doors facing the old convent and said the Pledge of Allegiance facing the flag. After the war, they went back to saying it in the classrooms. (As a side note, the words, "under God", were added to the Pledge of Allegiance when Gertie was in high school in 1954.)

Priests visited the classrooms weekly. It was usually Father Strauss. Sometimes it was Father Kampmann or Father Behrman. Students said, "Praise to you, Jesus Christ. Good morning, Father." Priests passed out report cards monthly, and they read the grade out loud. There was no shame. That was just the way it was.

Students learned their ABC's in first grade; there was no Kindergarten at Saint Peter. Kindergarten was held at public schools until the eighties when Saint Peter created room for Kindergarten classes. Students learned their 3 R's (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) in older grades. They also had Bible

History and Religion. There was no Science or Social Studies in grade school. Students weren't taught about World War II but they prayed about it.

There were double desks with boys and girls on the opposite side of the classroom. Gertie was one of the youngest students in class and struggled. She was paired with the smartest girl.

Students ate lunch in the classroom. The hand bell was the signal to start lunch. One student went through the whole school and rang it. (It was an honor to ring the bell and clean the chalkboard erasers.) Kids had to wait until lunch was over to get water from downstairs. Kids could only leave school with their parents' permission.

At recess, the boys played on the blacktop to Second Street. The girls played in the small area between the church and the convent. This area was originally built for horse and buggies. The girls jumped rope, played double dodge ball, skipped on the convent steps, and played tag. Recess was over when the big bell was rung by a kid, which was about 1:30 or 2:00. Students then had bathroom breaks in order.

No homework was done in school. School was dismissed at 3:00.

Gertie played the clarinet from grade school until her senior year in high school. She marched in all parades in grade school and high school. The bands led the march to Blanchette Park on Pentecost Monday. There was a big lunch and booths. Kids played all day and teenagers danced at night.

Grade school had no sports; Gertie played basketball in high school.

From fourth grade on, Gertie helped the nuns in the church every Saturday. She lived close to the church. The nuns cleaned the church and took care of the sacristy. One nun was very artistic; she had talent and patience. On the Blessed Mary side, she made a mountain scene of paper, with painted trees and a cave. At Christmas, Gertie got to help set up the big crib in the mountain scene and put out decorations.

Gertie remembers two special times going to see movies during the school day which were paid by Father Strauss. They saw The Bells of Saint Mary, and saw Lady of Fatima during the War.

When children made their First Communion, they bought the Adoremus. Girls had white ones and boys had black ones. It had music, devotions, litanies, and prayers for Confession and Holy Communion.

Gertie described the different Masses:

Regular Mass

High Mass, which had incense

Solemn High Mass. Priests carried the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with a canopy. There was music, incense, and an amount of formality.

Sisters of Notre Dame at Saint Peter

1st grade: Sister Andrew

2nd grade: Sister Antonette – She prepared them to receive their First Holy Communion and she did a beautiful job.

3rd grade: Sister Brittana - Her brother was in the service in World War II. Gertie really liked her. She helped clean the vigil lights.

4th grade and 5th grade: Sister Alfred – She went to the next grade with the kids.

6th grade: Sister Wilma

7th grade: Unsure

8th grade: Superior Sister Mansuetus

These nuns lived in the old convent where the chapel currently is. There was a total of 16 nuns living there. Eight nuns in Saint Peter Grade School, four nuns in Saint Peter High School, the principal, the Music teacher, Sister Fiesta, a nun that did cooking, and a nun that did laundry.

Facing Clay, (First Capitol) the first 1/3 of the convent was a chapel. Then there were rooms and then the kitchen and laundry. There were benches and a statue in a fenced in area with a high privacy fence.

They had to go to the principal, Mother Superior, in order to get new shoes, Apostrophe eyeglasses, etc. Due to their vow of poverty, their medical needs were cared for by Dr. Kister, who was paid by the church.

The nuns were there to help the kids. The nuns even helped the girls learn how to jump rump, although they didn't jump rope themselves. Gertie stated, "Credit should go to the nuns. They were strong in their way of teaching."

World War II

Gertie was very aware of what was going on with World War II, even though she was in grade school. The U.S Government was constantly calling (drafting) more and more men. Her Uncle Ralph was drafted even though he was slow mentally and was in his mid 40's. Men in their late 30's were drafted and worked at ACF (American Car Foundry) in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Older men were being drafted into the war. Gertie's father was almost 50 and received a new rating near the end of the war, which meant he was closer to being drafted. However, he was passed over due to having several dependents. Her oldest brother, Joe, graduated from high school and they were worried about him being drafted. Gertie's family had relatives and friends in the military.

Many items, such as shoes, food, and clothing, were rationed. Skirts had to be short at the knee and tight because there was a lack of material. There were no big lapels on jackets. Silk stockings were gone because silk was needed for the parachutes. Makeup was gone. Toothpaste tubes were recycled for their tin and lightbulbs were recycled for their metal. Her dad was a rural route mail carrier so it was a little easier to get tires, gas, and oil.

People were generous in spite of their own hardships. Gertie's sister gave up her shoe stamps so a friend's sister could get new shoes for her wedding.

Gertie remembers her family buying stamps for war bonds. They listened to the radio every evening since there was no TV. Sometimes, they could catch the Navy's ship to shore news.

Gertie's family had Victory Gardens at the back of each of their residential lots, the same as anyone capable of doing so. Victory Gardens were grown to show support to the troops so that commercial agriculture went straight to the troops. The citizens of Missouri became extremely patriotic as all Americans did. People flew flags at each house, and/or hung smaller flags inside their windows to show that they had a serviceman serving in the armed forces. Blue stars were added to the banner depicting the number of family members serving. Gold stars replaced the blue stars if the family member serving had died during service.

Saint Peter High School

Students were separated by subjects, such as History, Biology, Chemistry, Shorthand, Typing, and Music. Sister Ambrose was the Music teacher. Students played basketball on the third floor of the Hall. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts used the rooms.

Kids had more freedom in high school; they didn't have assigned bathroom breaks. Kids could buy food at restaurants for lunch and after Mass, and eat in the classroom. They could get sandwiches at Locust Hill Dairy at Clay (now First Capitol) and Second, Tom Pallardy Cafe, and Zerr's across Clay. Continental Restaurant and Dohrman's Bar were at the current Pio's. It was 10 cents for a cheese sandwich, which was hard for some to pay.

On Friday's and Saturday's, they went to a show. Then teenagers would go to a place called Teen Town. First it was at Filling Station Duquette at the beginning of the 115 Bridge. It wasn't well supervised so Teen Town was moved to Saint Charles Borromeo, which opened two classrooms. Any teen from anywhere could go there if they behaved. This included the public schools. Kids could buy sodas and chips, enjoy music, and sit on the benches and couches.

There was a dance generally every Friday evening at Teen Town. They jitterbugged to live bands or a jukebox. One year, seven girls all bought the same crinoline dress but in different colors. At that time, girls wore poodle skirts, sweater sets, scarves around their neck or ponytail, and ballet slippers or saddle oxfords.

The next place was The Silo at Blanchette Park. It had a lounge on the top floor. It stayed open long enough that her children went to gather and dance there. Teenagers also hung out at Moe's and Gillin's. They spent a lot of time at Blanchette Park where they could play ball. It was a great place for wedding receptions.

Students also went to each other's houses. High schoolers came to Gertie's house. They danced inside and outside the house. Gertie loved growing up here.

Gertie wanted to give recognition to Gib Fishbach. He donated **all** his time for years and years to get a basketball team started at Saint Peter High School. This was around 1946. He lined up other teams to play, buses to travel in, and he got the uniforms. He took care of the Hall. He was still doing this in 1953.

Vince Heembrock taught American and Ancient History at Saint Peter High School. He took over after Gib.

Gertie mentioned Marcella and Mildred Boering. Marcella was one year younger than Gertie and Mildred was two years younger. They both went to college for teaching. Mildred worked in the cafeteria after her father, Clem, passed away.

Layout of Buildings at Saint Peter

Saint Peter Grade School was in the current 1924 school building. Saint Peter High School was where the handicapped parking is alongside the church. The old convent was where the chapel currently is. The parish center was all houses. People couldn't play or park there.

The current church parking lot used to have about three homes located at First Capitol and Second. One year, Gertie's brother rented one of the houses and her family went there for Christmas. Saint Peter Church tried to buy the houses but the owners wouldn't sell.

As a side note, it was all country back then. Highway 40 is now West Clay. Highway 40 and 94 joined and went to the 115 Bridge. There was no Highway 70 until 1963.

Interior of Saint Peter Grade School

From the main entrance of Saint Peter Grade School facing the rectory garage, the boys' restroom was down the stairs on the left, and the girls' restroom was on the left just past the boys. The furnace room was on the right. Beyond that was a long basement with a big room. Up the stairs from the entrance, there were four classrooms; there were also four classrooms on the next level.

Interior of Saint Peter High School

Saint Peter High School was known as the Hall. Saint Peter consisted of the following:

Basement: Bathrooms, Young Men's Dramatic Club, a two lane bowling alley, a bar, and a furnace room.

First floor: Principal's office, four classrooms consisting of Freshman through Seniors, and the library.

Second floor: Entry hall, kitchen, auditorium, stage and gymnasium

There was an exit behind the stage that crossed pigeon's alley to the next building. This building consisted of the Chemistry Lab, Sciences, Typing Lab, and History consisting both of American and World History. Beyond that was the priest house that had been changed to the scouting space.

Deacon Tom Willbrand

Gertie's husband, Bob, was the same age as Deacon Tom and they were friends. Bob went to Saint Charles Borromeo Grade School and Chaminade High School. Deacon Tom went to Saint Peter Grade School and High School. Deacon Tom and Gertie's kids went to school together. She described Tom as a gentle, beautiful man.

At Deacon Tom's Ordination, the Saint Peter High School choir and three additional choirs joined together to sing. The four different choirs had been taught differently.

Gertie shared several stories about Deacon Tom. One day when Deacon Tom was with his son, he saw a man without any shoes and gave the man his own shoes. On another occasion, Deacon Tom was riding bikes with Father Don Carey when Father had a slight stroke. There were nurses bike riding behind them. They came by and got an ambulance.

Ancestors

Gertie's grandparents on her dad's side, Joe and Josephine Ohrmann, were married at Saint Peter in the 1890's. (They changed their name to Ohrman during World War II to be more Americanized.) Her grandfather died when her dad was 16 and was buried at Saint Peter Cemetery, just like many other relatives. Her dad was the oldest of the five remaining children. Gertie's grandmother and her dad worked to support the family. Eventually the other kids had to work to support the family. The sisters quit Saint Peter High School.

Her mom, Theresa Darling, lived in Portage and then in Alton on farms. She caught a horse and buggy from West Alton to the bridge to the streetcar to Brown Secretarial School in Saint Louis. (She didn't go to high school.) She worked in Alton at Sib's. Then her friend, Edith, got her mom a job in Washington D.C. Gertie's aunt also worked in Washington D.C. for a few years. Their mom eventually decided it was time for them to come home. She caught the train and brought them home.

Her dad was born and raised here. Her dad's sister introduced her mom and dad in Saint Charles. Harry and Theresa were married in 1926 in Alton. Her dad was 6'4 and her mom was 5'1.

Gertie was the fourth child of six. Jeneanne Niggemeier, three years younger, is her sister. They are the only two remaining of the six children.

Their dad's mom and his brother, Uncle Ralph, a bachelor, lived with Gertie and Jeneanne. Her mom watched Norb Shierding, a cousin, during the day while his mom worked.

Saint Joseph Hospital

When she was in school, the hospital was in the same place as it currently is. In the early 1940's, there was a side entrance across from Third Street; there was no Emergency Room entrance until she was about in fourth grade. Only nuns worked there; the nuns were still there when her children were born.

The hospital has been improved and enlarged at least four times. There used to be big, nice homes on the east side of the hospital. Dr. Gossow had his office in one of the homes. When her children were born, they were in a two patient room. The hospital gradually had private rooms.

Gertie related the story of one of her children coming too fast and being born at her house. Doctor Kister cut the cord while her mother helped. Her husband was working at Emerson. There was no ambulance so she went in a hearse to the hospital. Gertie was put in a small closet and her daughter was in a separate room.

Gertie's Family

Gertie's husband, Bob, was in the Army and worked at a desk because he had a heart murmur. He also peeled potatoes and remembers potato peels up to his knees. He lived in Camp Rucker, Alabama and

went to college while there. After the Army, Bob mostly was an estimator at Emerson Electric. After his dad died, he took over the Mid Town Paint Store on Kingshighway. He managed the warehouse and he kept it for about ten years. Gertie stayed home with the kids until Patterson Nursery School asked her to cook.

Gertie and Bob had seven children: Debbie was the only one to go to college; she went to Mizzou and became a lawyer. Then there was Michael, Alan, Mary, an accountant, and Renee, who just lost her husband. Finally, Barbara, and John.

Bob just turned 56 in October 1989 when he passed away. His heart valve had to be replaced because of a staph infection from a previous heart valve replacement. This was one of the first heart surgeries performed at Saint Louis University.

Gertie was 55 when Bob passed away. She had worked in the assessor's office part time. She now worked full time at the Saint Charles County Collector.

All the children went to Saint Peter Grade School. All of them attended Duchesne, except John. At one time, Bob and Gertie had three kids at Duchesne. After Bob passed away, Gertie couldn't afford Duchesne and John went to Saint Charles West.

Volunteer Work

Gertie was a room mother for 17 years. She volunteered in the school cafeteria. (Her mother babysat so she could volunteer.) She and Jeneanne made drapes for the cafeteria in the new school. When Saint Peter Grade School changed uniforms, they sold material to the parents.

Gertie started a fair at the school. Shops were set up so the kids could buy things; there were hundreds of products. Bob made stilts and Gertie made aprons.

Gertie was involved in the Sodality but still cleaned the church sanctuary on her own. She was very involved in the Daughters of Isabelle. She went from Auxiliary to Knights.

She and Bob were in the choir a long time. Jeneanne led it. As a side note, Gertie and Bob and Jeneanne and Joe socialized a lot and went on weekend trips together.

Gertie's daughter, Debbie, was on the committee to build the parish center. They had to submit plans to the government regarding cutting off Third Street.

Saint Peter Church

There used to be three confessionals – the third one was where the crosswalk is now. When she was in school, they went to confession every week. There used to be a communion rail and the baptismal font was in a different place. She didn't like the Vatican II changes except she loved the Mass being celebrated in English.

Gertie stated, "It's the most beautiful church I've seen, even the Basilica."