

Wilfred and Dennis Wappelhorst

Wilfred is Dennis' uncle and was born in 1930. Wilfred's dad was one of fourteen children. Wilfred grew up on a farm with two brothers and one sister. The family still owns the farm just north of Saint Charles along the Missouri River. His great great grandfather had a land purchase record in September of 1850. Wilfred believes his ancestors could have been founding members of Saint Peter.

Wilfred attended both Saint Peter Grade School and Saint Peter High School. He was taught by the Sisters of Notre Dame, and they always wore full habits. (The convent is now the Early Learning Center). Wilfred had one lay teacher for PE.

Every school day began with Mass. He studied the "3 R's" and had science in high school. The school year started after Labor Day and ended in June. He graduated from high school in 1948.

At lunch, kids walked to the Saint Charles Dairy. He has memories of the dairy selling fresh milk, ice cream, and the delivery man going to houses. Boys played baseball on hilly Jackson Street, which meant the field wasn't level. The pitcher was lower than the batter. It was level from home plate to first base, a steep downhill from first to second base, level between second and third base, and uphill from third base to home plate. If someone hit the ball over the fence at Jackson and Second, they had to retrieve the ball by going through the fence.

Kids also played shoot the marbles and tag. Recess was over when the large hand bell rang. The first ring meant to stop in place. The kids would make poses to entertain each other. The second ring meant class formation and marching into school.

The playgrounds were mostly tarmac with some brick but the side of the rectory was ground. An assistant priest decided to introduce soccer to the boys. The parish had purchased additional land on the side of the church. Even though grass was planted on it, Wilfred described it as twenty or thirty boys kicking mud. The kids also played by the rectory garage. They had to quickly scatter when Monsignor Strauss came out of the garage at a high rate of speed.

Wilfred made his Confession and First Communion in second grade. For First Communion, boys wore white knickerbocker pants, shoes, and a shirt. Through about second grade for Wilfred, knickerbockers were the attire of the day.

Most boys were servers but Wilfred wasn't able to be a server because he lived in the country and didn't always have transportation. He traveled to school for school days with family, neighbors, or on the school bus.

In high school, Wilfred was in the Glee Club. Catholic schools had an annual performance at what is now the Stifel Theatre (formerly the Kiel). When he was a sophomore, he felt humbled to portray Jesus.

Saint Peter Church collected metal for World War II when Wilfred was in grade school. The metal was used for ammunitions. The metal collection was in front of the school where the ballfield used to be. There was a large collection of pots, pans, and boilers. Two cars were even donated. The metal collection was twenty to thirty feet high. People were very patriotic. Wilfred remembers that students got in one donated car while other boys pushed it. Wilfred stated: "This activity was terminated quickly and there was no more joy riding in the parking lot."

Wilfred's brother fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Monsignor Strauss would go to the house and pray with families who had members in the war. One of Wilfred's neighbors lost a son in World War II. Wilfred was in the Air Force during the Korean War. He was stationed in Japan for two and one half years.

Wilfred was a purchasing agent at McDonnell Douglas for many years.

Wilfred has a daughter and he had a son that passed away at an early age. He was married for 57 years until his wife, Patricia, passed away in 2017.

Dennis' ancestors on his mom's side (Jeanette Wetter) came from Germany in the 1870's. Her dad and grandfather were stone masons. They built the sanctuary around 1923 and the rectory in 1940. Dennis' mom was very proud of that.

His mother remembered the Depression in 1929. Some kids in Saint Peter grade school had nothing to eat. They would have a lard sandwich – lard smeared between two pieces of bread. Lard is a semi solid made from pig fat.

Dennis was also taught mainly by the Sisters of Notre Dame who also wore full habits. However, towards the end of his time at Saint Peter Grade School in 1963, there were lay teachers, including Marcella and Mildred Boerding. He was taught by Mildred but then when her mother passed away, she had to stay home and help her father on the farm.

The school was fairly crowded, with two classrooms per grade and about thirty kids per class. Fifth grade met in what is now the Adult Faith room. Sixth through eighth grade met in The Hall where the handicapped parking lot is now. The Hall was part of the high school when Wilfred was there. The high school building was torn down when Dennis was in second grade. When Dennis was in fifth grade, the cafeteria and new classrooms were built in the school.

Dennis also started every school day with Mass. At that time, people could not eat between midnight and Mass. After Mass, the children could buy a doughnut for a nickel and milk for four cents. At lunch, kids would go to the confectionary where the parish center now is. It was chaos at lunchtime with several hundred kids playing softball and basketball. Kids also played marbles. They carried them in a pencil like plastic case.

Dennis' favorite subject was math. He remembers Monsignor Strauss always passed out report cards.

Dennis made his Confession and First Communion in first grade. Children went to Confession once a month during school. Both Wilfred and Dennis remember it as being scary – going in the door and a mysterious priest.

Dennis became a server in fifth grade. It was considered a privilege to be a server. The older boys were always helpful with the younger boys. Father Don Dyer was in charge of the servers. During Forty Hours of Adoration, the servers knelt on the hard surface for hours. Father helped them through kneeling as much as possible. Holy Week and Easter were busy times, especially for servers. At the closing, there were about thirty or forty servers on the altar at one time.

Dennis remembers Pat Henning, his older brother, and Jerry Billing becoming priests. They went to the seminary right out of grade school and lived there. One girl became a nun right after she graduated from high school.

Dennis went to Duchesne High School. He remembers that there was a CYC dance with a jukebox every Friday night. The dances were well attended. Father Wesloh ran the CYC. He was also the guidance counselor. Dennis stressed that Father was good to work with.

Dennis was a plant manager at a company that made automotive parts. He has three children.

There were four priests when Wilfred was young and three when Dennis was young. Both Wilfred and Dennis remember Monsignor Strauss as being very personable. He knew everyone in the family. Wilfred also remembers Father Behrman, Father Rau, and Father Poelker.

Dennis remembers that Masses were packed. At 9:00 every Sunday morning, there was a High Mass. Every candle on the bottom and six on the top were lit. There were four servers. The Mass was in Latin and was somewhat long. Children actually didn't understand it. Windows were opened and there were no fans. There were no microphones when Wilfred was in grade school.

Saint Peter Church had bells in the bell tower. Generally, the custodians rang the bells during the week when Wilfred was younger. They were automatic when Dennis was young. Wilfred remembers that the organ had to have the bellows pumped. There was a long handle on the side of the organ. People were assigned to do this.

Wilfred remembers that at Christmas on the Blessed Virgin Mary side, the church was greatly decorated with lights. Various statues were decorated. People looked forward to these decorations.

Both Wilfred and Dennis said that during Lent, the whole school was at Stations of the Cross every Friday. Fasting was just on Friday's. There was a lot of peer pressure to make sure you stuck to it.

Wilfred remembered "Pentecost Picnic". On Pentecost Sunday, starting after Mass, there was a big procession from Saint Peter Church to Blanchette Park. It went from Clay (now First Capitol) to Main Street to Clark to Second to Morgan to Fifth and then Randolph. The whole school and parish participated. The kids would play on the playground. Everyone got a free hot dog. There was a great chicken dinner in Memorial Hall at Blanchette Park. Everyone looked forward to Pentecost Picnic.

By the way, Wapelhorst Park was named after Wilfred's brother. Also, Father Innocent Wappelhorst built the church but he was no relation to Wilfred or Dennis. Father eventually moved to Milwaukee.

Father Wappelhorst wrote a book in Latin called Ceremonies of Mass. Priests would say they were “studying their Wappelhorst.”

Both Wilfred and Dennis appreciated the changes after Vatican II. They described the priest facing the people at Mass as a wonderful change. They liked the all English Mass, not having to fast between midnight and the Mass, and more participation by lay people. At first, lay men participated as lectors. They needed young people. Father Wesel picked Dennis and it was such an honor.

Wilfred and Dennis both described Saint Peter parish like a family.