

Malia and Anne Lawlor attended the boarding school for seven years, leaving when the war had ended, as had the restrictions on housing so that we were able to live in the duplex our mother owned in Crafton.

When my parents separated, my mother must have struggled to find someone to care for us, to no avail. There was no support from our father; our mother worked as a registered nurse. She probably had a succession of young babysitters. The only one I can recall was dismissed soon after we recounted our fascination with her capturing her cigarette smoke between two drinking glasses, although there might have been some other, more serious, lapse. Nora knew that her sister-in-law, Gertrude McShane, had sent two of her girls to the boarding school, so that's where we ended up.

In early September, 1939, when Malia had just turned six and I was almost five, we began our schooling at the Divine Providence Alpha School for Girls, on Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There were probably about 100 girls in eight grades, not all of them Catholic. We were taught by Divine Providence Sisters, in an order begun by Bishop Kessler in Germany. The school was a large white brick edifice with a red roof, topped exactly in the middle by a steeple with a large gold cross. The grounds included a farm with cows, gardens, a playground, and a house for the priest, an artificial lake, a walk with Stations of the Cross, a grotto featuring the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Bernadette, and a small pool with fish. The chapel, directly across from the front entrance, featured a lot of marble and the usual stained glass windows. The girls' side of the building was to the left of the entrance, with Mother's office, a parlor, and classrooms on the first floor, the music room, a small gym, kitchen and refectory in the basement, and dormitories and a playroom on the third floor. This was the motherhouse for the order, and the nuns were somewhat cloistered from the girls in the section of the building to the right of the entrance.

Dolores Horne and I were so young when we came to the school that we spent some time with Mother, including accompanying her to the attic of the building, where the nuns kept the trunks they had brought with them when they entered the order. Eventually we were absorbed into the first grade with the older students.

The dormitories featured six single beds with privacy sheets on rods going all around the beds. No doubt these were used when the order's Sisters

returned to the motherhouse from their assignments across the country, but since students weren't there in the summer, I don't know for certain. We were expected to dress and undress behind the curtains when donning and offing our nightwear. The students remained in those dormitories until they were in the seventh grade, at which time they moved from the dormitory to share a small room with one other student. The "Lawlor girls" were assigned to the same room, consisting of two single beds, a nightstand and a closet with shelves above it. We didn't have many changes of clothing, but evidently at some point our shelved clothing was in disarray because I can clearly recall one of the nuns standing in front of the closet, hands on hips, declaring "You Lawlors think you're the cream of the crop!" I don't know about Malia, but it was clear to me that if there were any girls who knew surely where they were in the pecking order, it was the Lawlors. We didn't have any money, we rarely had a visitor, and we didn't have the numbers of uniform blouses, etc. that some of the other girls had. In fact, we had only one blouse into which to change on Wednesdays...the day when we were served beets, with predictable results. I finally learned to carefully put my blouse in the laundry basket, in case I had to wear it again before it was washed. Name tapes were sewn into each of our garments; the nuns did the laundry.

At mealtimes, we marched to "In a Country Garden" down to the refectory,

Malia usually went her own way, so I spent a lot of time reading when we were in the playroom. I did develop a friendship with Henrietta Mosakowski. Interestingly, in that relatively small group of students, three of us had a hare lip and cleft palate – Anne Wells, in a grade above, and Barbara Needleman, about my age. There were several Jewish girls in the school, one other being Diane Rose, and as an adult, I have wondered how their parents felt about their immersion in all things Catholic. I have no memory of what they did when we received instructions in sacraments like Confession and Holy Communion. Because of anti-Semitism, the girls' parents might have felt that they were safer being in that boarding school than in the general population.

The bathrooms were interesting, consisting of three bathtubs in marble walled compartments with doors, and three toilets, also behind doors. In the center of the room there was a long table with a shelf under it. For morning ablutions, students filled grey speckled basins from a utility sink. I assume we kept our toothbrushes, washcloths and soap on the shelves. We probably

had a bath once a week, at which time we must have shampooed our hair. Nuns bathed the younger girls.

On the residence floor was something called the medicine room, a narrow room with shelves from floor to ceiling. The bottom shelves were covered with a dark-blue patterned cloth on a string (elastic was in short supply during the war years) and a stool. Medicines were given there as needed, and I clearly recall being turned over the knee of a nun to receive a spanking with a plywood paddle that usually had a red ball on a string attached. I truly can't recall being naughty enough to merit a spanking, although I remember that I was among those milling around near the crab apple trees when Malia was getting the fruit and, since she was a ringleader, it was assumed that I too had eaten the forbidden fruit.

It must have been "guilt by association" that resulted in my joining by naughtier sister at what was called the "bad table" in the refectory. Eight were seated at each table, and portions for four were placed at each end of the table. Since there were no more than five at the bad table, we were able to call dibs on the extra portions well into the next week.

Malia had a touch of rheumatic fever at some point, necessitating her being dosed with Dr. Upjohn's tonic. As usual, we were considered (by everyone else) as joined at the hip, so at 4:00 P.M., the two of us went to the refectory to get the dose of tonic. We were skinny as rails, so I might have looked like I needed the tonic as much as Malia did; maybe my lasting good health can be attributed to my taking it. I think we often got an apple from the kitchen nun to take away the taste of the tonic so the experience wasn't all bad.

As to health matters, I had eczema on the insides of my arms, which was usually treated with ointment, and I puzzled my mother, a registered nurse, when I developed not one, but two huge angry boils on my arm. I also recall that we had the sort of measles that kept us in the dormitory with drawn shades, at a time that might have been a school vacation, since there were no other students around. The Sisters regularly gave everyone a dose of Milk of Magnesia with a drop of something dark brown (I'm sure it was good for us) in the center. Periodically, we lined up to have one of the nuns go through our hair with a fine-toothed comb in a search for head lice. I never heard that any had been found, so I don't know whether the procedure was proactive or reactive. I can never recall a child being bedridden because of a heavy cold or any other ailment.

Since there were so few children in each class, we were fortunate to receive an excellent education. Malia and I had adequate intellects because I clearly recall Martha Miller having her head banged against the blackboard by a nun because she was slow to get a lesson. Every paper carried at the top right-hand corner the initials “JMJ” to indicate that the work being done was dedicated to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We were taught religion as one of our classes, and, when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, I studied the picture showing the knife raised above the child. Even at that early age, I said to God “Don’t ever ask me to do that!”

When we were preparing to receive the sacraments of Penance and Communion in the second grade, I can recall seeing beautiful drawings, done in colored chalk, of grapes (for wine representing the Blood of Christ) and stalks of wheat, representing the Body of Christ, on the blackboard. I so fervently believed in the presence of my guardian angel that I recall moving over in the seat attached to my desk so as to leave room for the angel. Don’t you wonder what sins were recounted in those first confessions? The ceremony for First Communion was memorable because each communicant was attended by an “angel” – an older classmate – dressed in pale pink or blue gown – who walked down the aisle with her. My sister and I wore dotted Swiss dresses, headbands of white satin with a small blue flower, and white shoes and stockings, and carried a small clutch purse containing a prayer book, scapular and rosary.

The uniforms were by Nancy Cahill, and were uniformly ugly, of course. The skirts were pleated blue serge, with white cotton blouses featuring short sleeves, slightly puffed, with bands around the arms and waists, with a black floppy tie pinned to the collar. Tan stockings and sensible oxfords topped off the ensemble on weekdays; white stockings, held up by rolled garters, were permitted on Sunday. My sister and I were scandalized (and unprepared to do the same) when other students stripped off the stockings and donned socks on their way home on the bus. Because of wartime shortages, eventually the uniforms were changed to more modern attire, including – brace yourselves! – socks instead of stockings. Students were allowed to wear their own choices of underwear, ribbons and jewelry. On St. Patrick’s Day, a small green ribbon could be worn on the uniform, and on St. Joseph’s Day, two days later, a small red ribbon honored that saint.

Since Pittsburgh was a steel-manufacturing center, and thus a likely target for bombing raids, the students participated in air raid drills, a nice change in the routine. We donned our robes and slippers and went outside the bedrooms to sit in rows in the hall, well away from any windows. I've often wondered how the sisters handled ration stamps, to be used for food and soap, etc. Our mother was late with a payment one month, and she lost her temper with the principal when she heard that we weren't given a cup of milk at mealtimes until she was no longer in arrears. My best recollection is that the tuition was \$100 a month. When she had a little bit more money, our mother paid \$5 a month for music lessons for each of us. My sister and I both tried the violin, but when I left in the seventh grade, I was accomplished on the marimba phone, of all things. We both took piano lessons as well. Neither of us has had a musical career.

For entertainment toward the end of our stay, I can recall gathering around radios to listen to programs such as "Inner Sanctum" and "The Green Hornet." Sometimes, movies were shown in the auditorium – quite a few Deanna Durbin films and documentaries about the making of steel and so n.

There was a room on the lower floor of the school that was used for indoor games, with cubbyholes in which we stashed our roller skates (with keys), jump ropes, balls and jacks, etc.

Our mother smoked about a pack of cigarettes in a week (probably all she could afford) yet we were embarrassed because the nuns made it clear that it was a bad habit. One nun told us that whistling made the Blessed Mother cry.

We didn't see our mother, our only visitor, often because getting to the school required taking a trolley and bus, and money was in short supply. She paid to have her uniforms and caps laundered and starched, and paid to live in the nurses' home, since she couldn't dislodge renters from her duplex because of wartime restrictions that froze the rental and leases. I used to play a little game during Mass on Sunday – if the tapers in the holders on both sides of the altar were lit immediately, our mother would come. It didn't always work.

I don't recall feeling upset about leaving the boarding school in May of our last year. After all, we were going to live with our own mother, in our own home.

In the last year of high school, from which I graduated at 16, I took advantage of a scholarship I won to attend any of the institutions of higher learning in the area. I chose Pennsylvania College for Women (now Chatham College). At 17, I entered the work force, electing not to continue in college since my mother, a widow and my sole support, would lose Social Security benefits for me at the age of 18. I worked three 1/2 years in Pittsburgh, then moved to Washington, D. C. where I worked as a secretary in a law firm. After 18 months there, putting in as much overtime as I could manage, I drove across country with a friend to San Francisco, she took a plane back to Pittsburgh, and I drove by myself to Seattle. I sold my car there, flew to Alaska (where I didn't know a soul), and worked for attorneys in Anchorage. I was pleased to have been there when Alaska received statehood. After 18 months, I returned to Washington, D. C., married, had three children, and worked for attorneys until 1977, when I went to work at the office of the Governor of Alaska on Capitol Hill. Gov. Jay Hammond's second term of office ended at about the same time as my marriage, so I returned "home" to Alaska, working for the Municipality of Anchorage until I retired in 1999. In retirement, I have served on the Board of the Anchorage Senior Activity Center and of the Retired Public Employees of Alaska. My daughter and grandchildren live in Anchorage; my two sons are in Maryland.

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