

Guardian Angel Church

Our Guardian Angel Church was not our parish church. Our Lady of Grace was the church we were supposed to attend, but my mother didn't like always being asked for more and more donations in the Sunday plate, so she started going to Our Guardian Angel Church, even before I was born.

My first real memory of the church is when I started going to catechism class when I was about 7 years old. I remember sitting on those hard pews at the front of the church with the nuns (I think they were Sisters of Mercy, but I'm not sure...maybe Sisters of Charity?) first teaching us the "Hail Mary." My cousin, Tina, who was 10 months younger than I started catechism class a little after I had and wanted to know why, after learning the first part of the prayer, we had to learn a new one. I told her it was the same prayer, but that wasn't what she wanted to hear, apparently. That's when one of the nuns came over to us and told us to pay attention and stop talking.

I loved the look and smell of the church...so ornately Gothic, with heavy, carved wooden doors when you entered and the majesty of the interior...from the intricate carvings on the pews and altar to the huge crucifix at the back of the altar.

Tina and I made our First Communion and were confirmed in Our Guardian Angel. The year we were confirmed, someone had the idea that, instead of veils, the girls were going to wear wreaths with a red bow on top. The bishop took one look at all that greenery and said after we were confirmed, we could go home and eat our wreaths as salad!

When we were about 13 or 14 we joined the Virgin Mary Sodality (at least I *think* that was the name). I don't remember much about what, if anything, we had to do to join the Sodality, but I do remember going to the church on Saturdays and polishing the pews and altar with lemon oil. I loved climbing up on the altar to polish the intricately carved wood.

It was an imposing church but it felt homey because the people who attended, for the most part, were regular, working-class people who

didn't have a lot to give the church in the way of money. That's why my mother chose this church...the priests there apparently didn't have any grandiose plans to build an annex or make any major improvements.

I remember how the confessionals were so dark, but you knew by his accent that Father Tessier was the confessor. He had a heavy French accent and he was pretty lenient. He always looked so sad, though.

Father McAvoy, the older priest, was a bit scary. It was said he was a drinker. He didn't do too much by the time I started being aware of things at the church...I think he said the early Mass and left the later (and longer) mass for Father Tessier.

I used to like going to Mass and following the service, which was in Latin, by reading my missal. It had English on one side and Latin on the other...maybe that was where my love of learning languages started.