

Home at Noon
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Elementary school was for me, looking back now after 38 years, full of revelations of who I am today. Just starting in life away from my mother for a full day, having to leave my safe haven... home, it was traumatic to say the least. I remember clearly, clinging to her, bawling my eyes out, as she pulled away from me in front of the school, and left me to fend for myself on my first day of First Grade.

Kindergarten had been blissful, the room was full of art supplies, a jungle gym to climb and hang from. Snacks were with milk that we'd take turns getting with a little red wagon. Naps were sweet, taken on our rug brought from home, we'd curl up listening to music, allowed time to dream and drift off for a bit, and gently brought back to reality by the tickle of a big bright colorful peacock feather. It was the year I shared my grandpas Indian coin on the big rug where we'd have circle time. And the story of how a big frustrated German shepherd, that ended up being a lost Police dog, found out after I had gotten bitten and received stitches to my cheek. Kindergarten was full of love and only half a day, I was always home by noon.

The next fall I was rudely awakened; it was a big scary world. My first day of First grade I was dropped off in front of St Thomas Aquinas; a catholic school. I knew no one and I was wearing a brown plaid uniform with a white shirt underneath and short socks with brown shoes. My hair was long and brown and put in pigtails for the first day, my eyes were moist and face red and puffy, not a very good first impression, but I did not care, I wanted my mom, more than that I wanted to go home. My teacher was a pretty tall brunette who later in the year threw a great Christmas party and was kind and gentle every day not just that first day.

Despite being in a school where God was the main topic, we had Mass every Monday morning, even though we'd had just endured

Mass on Sunday and Sunday school, I found myself hearing the Devil on my shoulder whispering in my ear, louder and louder each day.

I began to throw my mayo sandwiches away instead of eating them, sin.

I began to “find” money so I could buy a bag of chips at the school store, sin.

I began to tell elaborate stories to anyone that would listen, sin. Temptation was everywhere I turned though, at home, at school, I always was hearing the devil whisper in my ear.

The winter brought snow that had to be plowed into huge mountains in the parking lot in front of the school. A Billy goats dream I tell you. While we’d wait for our bus to come, we’d play on the mountains, running, sliding, falling; not nearly as graceful as the animals we were emulating. It was all great clean very wet fun. That is till I missed the bus. Not once, not twice...I lost count. Once my nice pretty teacher gave me a ride home, I remember walking into the house my mom standing at the stove cooking dinner. Why was I soaked? Someone pushed me in a puddle. Lie.

Next time I had to go find help, I was on the last bus that day and everyone was gone except unfortunately I found the principle, a pretty blond blue eyed nun, Sister Helen. She helped me use the phone to call home. This time they wanted names of who pushed me down. Lie, lie.

For the bus ride to school I had to walk to a Plaza and wait in a laundry mat for the bus. It was always moist in there and the window was always full of mosquitoes. I discovered cute boys and started chasing games outside while we’d wait for the bus. Once while looking back to see which one was chasing me, I ran smack into a post, it knocked me to the ground and left me with a black eye. How’d I get it? Lie.

I took to hitting a cute older boy on the head with my tin lunch pail. I don’t know why. He’d run fast as he could to class after the bus would stop and let us out. Sin.

One day while walking to the bus stop, the neighbors a block over had a new dog, a big Shepherd looking mutt, it was out in the yard with the kids. Being terrified after my traumatic episode with the Police dog in Kindergarten I desperately stuck out my thumb at a car that was coming down the street, a lady stopped for me and let me in her car. I told her the truth of my fear, and how I didn't want to miss my bus. She lectured me to never ever again hitch a ride, I was only 7, oh my! She was an angel. But I had hitched hiked... and never told my parents...another sin.

Second grade came and my devils voice did not subside. This year I had a nun for a teacher, Sister Marie. It seemed the voice got louder, but this time it was also saying maybe you don't belong here.

Once again I was doing the chase game, I took to the monkey bars, climbed up top, and started to crawl my way to the other side. When I looked back, the boy was quickly gaining on me, so I leapt to the ground, landing face first. I burst into tears, the pain; the blood, my nose. I staggered across the playground toward Sister Marie who was twirling jump rope. She calmly kept twirling till I was on top of her, then she guided me to the nurses station, where I stayed on a cot till my mother came and got me and took me to the hospital for x-rays. Nothing was broke but it did not look so pretty for my ballet recital that weekend.

At Christmas time, the day before break, I was eagerly waiting for our party. We were doing penmanship in our black and white notebooks when Santa finally arrived with candy canes. I threw my notebook into the desk, and with great disappointment took it back out and continued the lesson, after Santa left the room. No party like first grade, no party at all.

I was warned like everyone else in class to not put my finger in the rat cage, she was pregnant and would bite if provoked. That rat bite me so hard, she would not let go of my finger that was stuck between the slots in the cage. I had to leave and go get a shot that day. The next day when I came into class she had had her babies that night.

With all this pain, disappointment, and sin after sin that I was seduced to commit, I started my campaign to go back to Public School. I begged, I pleaded, I heard an inner voice saying stick with the campaign, don't give up. There is a place you do belong. In third grade I found myself back at Public School with my kindergarten buddies. The campaign had worked. My mom and dad gave in. I was able to dress in my pants and a shirt with sneakers. Bring dolls to play with at recess, and there was no ruler for discipline sitting on the desk, and best of all no Sisters. They were a tough lot I say.

As the school year continued I'd still heard the devil, but his voice was fading, the lies became less frequent.

I was cast in a play as Pocahontas, in Peter Pan, but traded roles with a blond blue eyed girl, and became a lost boy instead. She wanted the part badly so I gave it to her. When I reflect back now, I can see why the teacher had wanted me in the part, long brown braids, brown eyes, I fit the part more than anyone else in class. In fourth grade I had my long hair cut off, for one full day I wore my red knit hat and hid in the coat closet as much as possible. My teacher was Mrs. Diener, my favorite teacher of all of them. She coaxed me back to class and complimented my new style. She was cool; she let us have praying mantis in class, after they mated we got to watch the female eat the male. She also had guinea pigs, it was my first pet to have on my own, and I love guinea pigs still. My mom recently told me I had been one of favorite kids that year. We got to go to camp timbers in 4th grade and stay for a night; I still have the book we made about our stay. I played softball, but soon found out I was not cut out for that sport, I got hit in the face numerous times by the ball.

As I continued to adapt to Public School life, I still wrestled with the devil. I started wearing a mood ring when they came to be popular, and it was always black. Black meant worry, and I was. I was worried that I would die and not have enough time to redeem myself and get Gods forgiveness. I would pray as my mother

drove through town that we would not crash. I wasn't ready to die that day or the next. I had a lot of making up to do.

Gradually I grew out of my fear as I progressed through my childhood and could rationalize a bit more. A few years later my family stopped going to the Catholic Church.

After attending a neighbor's church I came to find an inner peace within, when I found out about the Golden Rule;

“Do unto others as you want done on to you.” That phrase resonated with me, and that is what I started to carry with me. It gave me peace of mind, and a new way of life. The devil no longer sat on my shoulder; well... I could not hear him as clearly anyway. I continued on with my life, without much thought to God, but always throwing a prayer or two his way when a plane started to drop in mid air or I was so sick I thought I was going to die, it was only the flu, mind you. The devil was around I know, but so was God, because as I look back through my later years, He reached out and plucked me many of times out of harms way.

I now find myself back in a Kindergarten atmosphere, safe, warm, home at noon. I'm able to snack and nap, and dabble a little in art. I am developing a new relationship with the Creator, and it is a pleasant one, the devil is drowned out by another voice that is guiding me toward only good things. I like Kindergarten, this I know for sure.