

SACRED HEART CONNECTIONS

Betsey Beckman

50 Years to Celebrate!

*The Great Hall stands empty now.
Long past are its years of fame.
Seldom are there visitors here,
but those who come, cherish its name.*

*“What great hall do you speak of?” you say.
“What building could you possibly mean?”
‘Tis the silent old Sacred Heart,
the lovely old Sacred Heart,
which now stands alone on the hill.”*

This is a poem I wrote at 13, not long after my last days at Sacred Heart in Cincinnati, just as I and twenty other classmates finished our 7th grade. The school, founded in 1869 and otherwise known as Clifton, closed its doors one hundred and one years later, in 1970. It was a heart-wrenching experience for us to have traveled with our little band of girlhood friends to the cusp of teen years, only to be cast asunder to an array of other schools.

Since 1970, the gorgeous building of the old Academy of the Sacred Heart has been renovated into some very innovative condos. The main chapel has become a living room, the curved dome of the cupola is now a master bathroom, and the hand-carved wooden ceiling lifts up over a loft bedroom. Curiously, my cousin's family has recently moved into this setting, and now lives in the chapel space where many of us received our First Communion over 50 years ago.

When I learned of this connection to the “Great Hall”, I felt the nudge to call together my classmates for a 50-year reunion! With the help of one of my besties from 7th grade (Amy MacConnell Templeton,) and the help of Facebook and more, we were able to track down most of our class members from that era.

With the onset of COVID, we resorted to gathering on Zoom. I was able to find my uniform from 7th grade and fit into it (sort of!) I had the joy of creating a slide show – “Sacred Heart Then and Now”, integrating photos of the building and our classmates into a retrospective. We were even able to find our 7th grade teacher, Sr. Mary Hagele, RSCJ, and were all touched to hear that she has been praying for us every day for the past 50 years!

Besides mining hilarious memories, we also were able to honor the powerful foundation that we all shared. Our experience of being nurtured in the values of community, kindness, inclusivity, prayer and service were named by many. We lifted our signature cocktails designed for the occasion (topped off by strawberries halved in the shape of a heart) to toast to our foundational memories as children of the Sacred Heart.

At age 63, I wrote a new poem, which we read as our closing prayer. I share it here as a taste of “goûte” for this joyous occasion. Here’s to the next 50!



*Betsey Beckman,
Then and Now
Sacred Heart
1970-2020*



Sacred Heart Prayer

*Those were simpler days,
when white gloves kept us safe,
congé kept us happy,
primes kept us good,
and prayer kept us holy.*

*In our saddle shoes and blazers,
we learned, we played,
we high-jumped, we sang,
we curtsied, we crowned Mary,
we wandered together, protected
in a field of two hearts
encircled, ablaze.*

*For five decades,
our hearts have been tested,
tried, emboldened, enlarged,
broken open, embraced.
O Sacred Heart,
may we return in love,
may we open in love,
may we walk always in love.*

Amen.

— Betsey Beckman

Betsey Beckman, a dancer, author, spiritual director, and video producer lives in the Seattle area and is the founder of The Dancing Word: Embodying the Sacred in Liturgy and Life. (www.thedancingword.com). Her slide show *Sacred Heart Then and Now* is accessible on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP3IDU6_iKs&t=70s