

A Reflection on NDA's 50th Anniversary in Park Hills, KY

In the fall of 1961, 1699 Hilton Drive looked like acres of mud, dotted with derricks and bulldozers. It was dubbed the “New Frontier of Notre Dame Academy” as the Ajax Construction Company began moving dirt, taking down trees and leveling the ground in preparation for the new Notre Dame. Students contributed by saving Pepsi bottle caps, selling Kermess tickets, and donating proceeds of plays they performed.

I was a freshman, brand new to high school, and just as new to NDA was Sr. Mary Jeanne Therese, a fledgling English teacher who would inspire me to become one, too. NDA was 548 strong and the 203 enrolled freshmen made up the largest class in the school's history. At the old school site, the second floor lounges and lecture rooms, popularly known as “sophomore heaven,” had to be transformed to classrooms. We were indeed outgrowing our building on Fifth St. in Covington.

In the fall of 1962 Bishop Richard Ackerman sealed the cornerstone of the new Notre Dame Academy, filled with a list of the then current faculty, medals and a rosary blessed by Pope John XXIII, a picture of Sister Mary Agnetis, who had done so much to acquire funding for the construction from Conrad Hilton, and newspapers from September of 1962. Another change was happening as well—the navy blue jumpers worn by all students were being replaced with white blouses, charcoal gray pleated skirts and blazers with silver buttons. Everything and everyone was looking more modern.

Finally the day came: it was October 29, 1963 and Hilton Drive, Park Hills, KY was at last the address of Notre Dame Academy. The spirit of Fifth Street was carried to the new school, a spirit devoted to Mary as its patroness and the simplicity and dignity she embodied, represented by a wooden statue standing at the entrance. The worn, well-used building that had housed the secondary school since 1906, had been replaced by a sprawling four story structure with long, sparkling corridors; the old wooden desks had given way to new aqua, yellow, coral, brown and platinum colored ones—the same ones that many of our students are seated in today. We brought all our school books, notebooks and other paraphernalia in shopping bags, trekking down the winding drive to claim our tall, shiny lockers. We found that the new Notre Dame harbored a

Snack Bar, student lounges, an Office Practice room equipped with state of the art electric typewriters, a Home Economics room, a Choral room, a magnificent new chapel with stained glass windows symbolizing Faith, Hope and Charity, and an Art Room replete with an outdoor patio. The new school had indeed been worth the wait. Sister Mary Immacula, the principal, moved Mass celebrations to the spacious auditorium/gym in order to accommodate the ever-increasing number of students, and the rituals of Hilton Drive's NDA began.

It seems unbelievable to Sr. Mary Ethel, Ms. Judy Hodson and me that we started as senior and juniors in this location 50 years ago. While so much has changed, some things remain the same. Our devotion to the Blessed Virgin, our NDA spirit, our dedication to learning and to making a difference in the world, all echo the values that the Sisters of Notre Dame embody.

One of my classmates, Denise Gehring Schickling emailed me her thoughts on this 50 year anniversary. She said,

"It was bittersweet leaving the "old" school with our shopping bags full of all our textbooks...I felt we were a small part of NDA history getting to attend the old and the new. A lot of things changed--I would not be riding the bus anymore, no more classrooms in the hallways--but we were going to a beautiful state of the art school. We lost a little coziness but we were the first students to attend a school that has offered a great education to girls who have become women making a difference."

Denise went on to major in pharmacy and is now owner of Crestville Drugs in Crescent Springs where she has employed many Notre Dame students over the years. Sr. Mary Ethel, Ms. Hodson and I have chosen to teach and work at NDA "lo, these many years," serving the student body here as once Notre Dame served us. We embrace the ideals that we learned here on this very site—to take our Notre Dame education and experiences with us into the world that is always changing, and to “pay it forward.”

Congratulations to the Sisters, the lay faculty and staff, many of whom are NDA alums, to all alumnae present here, and to all who have brought us to this day in 2013. As we continue to expand, grow and change, we remember what Notre Dame Academy has given us and

continues to give all its students--roots and wings.