

March Interview for the Celebration of 115th Anniversary of St. James School St. James School during the 20's and 30's.

The following letter was sent by Pat Hopkins (maiden name Weeks) St. James Class of 1940.



Patricia Weeks Hopkins

There were 7 of us who went to St. James & remained friends our whole lives. Two stayed in Madison, but the rest of us moved away. We were friends through grade school & high school. Four of us went to UW, one to beauty school, one to secretarial school & one became a graphic artist; I'm not sure if she went to art school or just learned on the job. I have a sketch she did of our old school which I think I'll send to you. We kept in touch mostly with Christmas card letters when we were raising our families, but occasionally

one of those who had moved away would be back in Madison & whoever could make it would get together. When we were in our late 60's & early 70's for several years most of us got together for a 3 or 4 day trip. It was reminiscent of our late teens when we'd rent a cottage for a week at the end of the summer. . Now just the friend who's at All Saints & I are left, but we have some great memories.



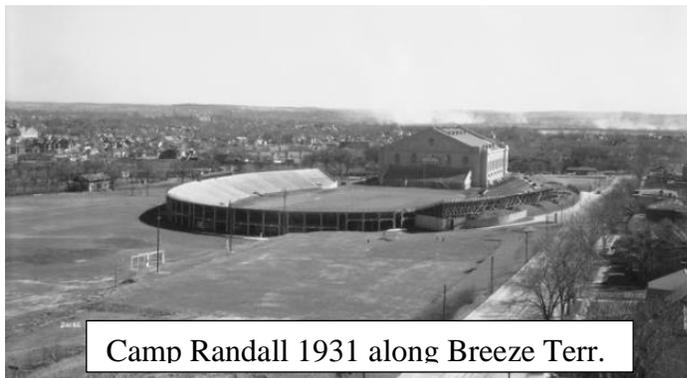
Pat graciously agreed to an interview by email. It is as follows:

Please tell us a little about what your school day was like: Did you walk to school? Did you live in the neighborhood? Did you bring your lunch or go home for lunch? How many students in your classroom? Did you have separate classes for art and music and physical education? Did you play sports, or an instrument? How did you spend your time after school, on the weekends and during winter and summer breaks? Please include any other details that you feel will give us a complete picture of your childhood and how it might differ from students today.

I went to St. James Grade School from 1st grade through 8th grade, from 1931 to 1940. When I went, we were taught by nuns, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Our class sizes numbered about 25-30. Besides the teachers for each grade, we also had a music teacher nun. One thing the nuns were adamant about was penmanship in cursive & my great grandchildren don't even learn cursive. And, of course, we didn't have computers—I don't think they'd even been

invented. I don't remember any nuns who taught art or physical education, so the classroom nuns did some art projects & also supervised the playground during recess. We played games, jumped rope or played jacks in nice weather. There was also at least one nun who cooked the meals in the convent where they all lived.

I lived about 6 blocks from school & we walked to school & in fact walked home for lunch except for really snowy days, when we took our lunch, which we ate in the school basement. We did have some kids who lived too far to walk home for lunch. I'm pretty sure we had an hour for lunch. I had a best friend who lived a block away & she & I usually walked together, but there were quite a few other kids in our neighborhood in all grades & the older siblings usually walked the younger ones to school. My best friend was Joan Nilles I remember us taking her youngest brother to school with us. Her brother Roger became a priest, Father Roger Nilles.



I was a bit of a tomboy, probably because our neighborhood had a lot more boys than girls & also no doubt because of the proximity of our house to Camp Randall stadium. We were all avid UW fans & there was a Knothole Club for kids allowing us to get in to see the football games. Obviously, they didn't have the crowds they do now. On football days, we earned a little money by charging for parking cars in our yard

& the alley behind our house. And during basketball season, we had a neighbor who was an usher & would let us in after the game started if they didn't have a full house. And, of course, I'm a big Badger fan to this day. I can watch most games on TV.

I did learn to play the clarinet but I'm a little vague on how I took lessons, because I don't think Sister Loyola, the music teacher nun could have taught all the instruments, so I think I must have taken lessons somewhere else or maybe not until I got to high school. We of course had a church choir. I did play clarinet in the West High band for four years. I wanted to go to Edgewood, but I had a brother with special needs who was at St. Coletta's & my folks were paying for him to be there & they wanted the other 3 of us to go to college, so they decided not to send me or my brother to Edgewood because of the cost, but by the time my younger sister was ready for high school she went to Edgewood.

After school we did have homework, but I don't remember it taking a long time. We played outside—kick the can, hopscotch, ball games—in nice weather & in the winter I ice skated a lot on the Vilas Park Lagoon, listened to some radio programs for kids—hero or adventure type programs—or played with dolls or played games. Of course, we'd never heard of TV.

In the summertime, I & a lot of St. James students spent a lot of time at a city-run playground named Milton & Charter behind the school. It was manned by college students. We could do arts & crafts, play board games or just hang out (as long as we behaved), and there was also a baseball diamond, volleyball nets or badminton. I'm sure the parents loved them to keep us occupied & we liked spending time there with friends, & probably getting out of doing chores at home. There were baseball & softball teams & we played other playgrounds in competition & took the bus to get to the other playgrounds if that was the only way to go. Oh, also I went to Mass & sang in the choir every day in the summer for which I got paid \$1 a week. And I'm not sure if it's true or if it just seemed like we went to confession every Saturday all year long. I don't know if my Mother thought we were that bad or if she felt like she needed it after dealing with us all week.

In your letter you spoke about the great friendships formed at St. James that carried you through life. How beautiful that was! Could you speak a little about what a Catholic education meant to you? Did it change your life? Did you have a favorite teacher that influenced you?

I feel like my Catholic education instilled moral values that I hope I've kept most of my life, not that I've always been that good but I've always known right from wrong & tried to do my best. I didn't marry a Catholic, which was hard at times, but my husband who died 17 years ago, never gave me a moment's trouble bringing them up as Catholics & in fact would stand behind me if they balked at going to Catechism (my church did not have a school until later) or Church. Our oldest son married a Lutheran & became a Lutheran. The other two sons married Catholics & raised their children as Catholics but unfortunately although their kids call themselves Catholic they sure don't go to Mass regularly. It seems to be a trend in all religions these days. I do have a great granddaughter in Catholic school in Chicago, I suspect mostly because of Chicago public schools, but maybe there's some hope for that generation.

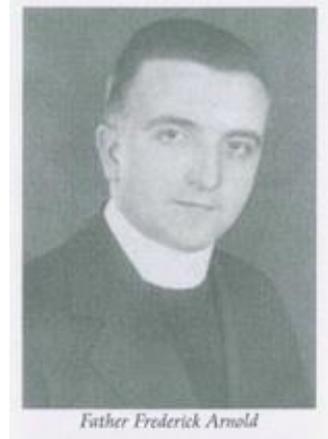


As far as having a favorite nun, it would probably be my 1st grade teacher, Sister Casmos, but I really liked them all except one who was a retired nun who came in for a half year in 6th grade to substitute for anyone who got sick & for some reason took a dislike to me, & I don't remember seeing any of them hitting students but they could get very cross at some of the troublemakers, mostly boys. I guess we girls were better at being rule followers.

Did you have Christmas programs when you were at St. James? Many of the recent alumni recall the Christmas Programs as highlights, but I'm not sure when that started.

I don't remember any Christmas programs, but we had a very active CYO group when I was in high school, led by Father Arnold. We put on some plays & had dances.

Do you think that world events in any way shaped your experience at St. James? You were attending during the Great Depression and between the World Wars, did that have any impact on you or your family?



Yes, the depression was still with us during my grade school years. My Dad fortunately had a job. He worked for the Railway Post Office which I guess doesn't exist anymore. I don't really know how they sort or transport mail these days. He traveled mainly from Madison to Mason City, Iowa, & back, sorting mail on the train. Anyway, I was probably more oblivious than I should have been because I knew there were a lot of poor people, including classmates. I wonder if the parents paid tuition or if the church donations paid all the expenses for the nuns & their upkeep, & I don't know who paid for books & supplies. I have no idea if the convent is still there & re-purposed. Probably the last time I was at St. James was for my father's funeral in 1976.

I do remember us sending our outgrown clothes to some younger cousins where there were 5 kids & their father was out of work or didn't have enough work. I also remember Mother making sandwiches to give to a "hobo" who showed up in our alley one time. And I had an older cousin who was in the Civilian Conservation Corps & I think they worked on projects for the WPA. When the war started, I had several cousins who were in service, all of whom came back but definitely were affected by the experience.

Tell us about your schooling after High School and about your friends too.

My major in college was business—insurance to be specific. I had to choose a specific business major & I was working part-time at Farmers Mutual, which became American Family, so that's what I chose. At that time the offices were in two or three older houses off the square so it really grew! I started in the mail room but ended up using a dictaphone, something very obsolete now. I also worked in the registrar's office at the UW some & after I graduated I worked for the Wisconsin Public Service Commission for several months until my marriage for the grand sum of \$75 a month.

Of the eight of us, five went to the UW & even joined the same sorority, but we all had different majors. One went to secretarial school, one went to beauty school & the one who drew the picture became a graphic artist—I don't remember if she had any training or learned on the job. Three remained in Madison, the others went to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Minnesota &

Milwaukee. I did find a couple of pictures of 4 of us on one of our after retirement jaunts, so I'll send it.



My husband's family owned a lumber & fuel business in Rockton, so that's how we ended up in Rockton. His father had been killed in a car accident when he was 14 & his mother wanted him to come home as the business had been run by a manager since his Dad's death. He also spent a year & a half in service during WWII before returning to the UW. We were going to try it & possibly he would go back to law school. Well, we made friends & had babies so he ran the business until it closed in 1967 when the big lumber yards took over. His major had been real estate appraisal so he opened a real estate & appraisal business. He kind of wanted me to have an insurance business with it, but by that time my insurance learning was a thing of the past, so I got a broker's license & managed the sales office while he concentrated on appraisals. We sold the business & retired in 1992. My husband was a train buff so he spent a lot of time on his model railroad & watching trains, while I played more golf & bridge.

It was kind of fun recalling those days, but I'm sure I've forgotten a lot more than I remember. Well, I hope this is helpful.

Thank you so much, Pat.

This is the 1st Grade Class from 1934-35 with Sr. Mary Casmos. (This is the correct spelling of Sr. Casmos name.)

The last boy in the first row on the right is Pat's brother.



1st grade 1934-35. Sister Mary Casmos is the teacher.