

I love a parade

I wonder if anyone else from Utica, or any city, remembers walking in the Catholic School May Day Parades of the 1950's. It could be quite cool on the first of May in upstate New York, but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm of what seemed like thousands of kids in the 8th through 12th grades from all over the city. Well, OK....hundreds. Many hundreds.

Since the school uniforms had to be on display, no outer coats were allowed. Brrrr !! "Don't worry, young man," Sister Catalina told me when I complained I was shivering, "your hot air will keep you warm." It could get pretty chilly standing around on side streets like Noyes and Sherman until it was our turn to file into the main stream of coats and ties and blue school jumpers already massing their way up Genesee Street to the Parkway.

As an adolescent, I of course wondered just how I was supposed to LOOK as I marched in the parade. Was I supposed to look Holy? No can do. Pure? Outright impossible, but I'll try next week. Proud and haughty? OK, I could do that.

Arriving at the Band Shell at the foot of the city's ski slope, we tramped into a semi-circular formation....boys on the right, girls on the left, if you please.....hailed out our rosaries and got down to business.

Somehow over the next 20 minutes....no one knows how these things happen....not all of the boys were on the right and many of the girls were no longer on the left. Thoughts of purgatory evaporated in furtive conversations about who was with whom at the dance last Friday night. Nuns roamed

the edges of the throng watching for Pissers, boys who would shoot out of the crowd at high speed running for the nearby woods. The girls just suffered. High above us on the hill the lions at the city zoo began making love. They were not known for their subtlety. On a quiet night you could hear them reach some sort of climax all the way down to Rutger St. If my family was sitting out on our porch on Cornhill when Leo began to feel his oats, my mother would leave and go in the house. My father would get unusually quiet. I would pick up a magazine and begin to read. In the dark.

I don't think whatever we were honoring or protesting or marching about was all that clear to us. Mary was mentioned. As the Mother of God, Mary was vehemently anti-communist and didn't much like the Soviets. Only God and Bishop Fulton Sheen knew what she thought of the Chinese. Russia had its own May Day to honor communism, we were told, so ours was to counteract theirs. No one ever told us May Day originally honored workers and labor. The Russkys said that was communism. So here we were in a sense marching against workers' rights while our blue collar parents cheered us on. Catholicism could be confusing.

It is difficult now for me to fully appreciate just how excited we were about life at age 15. I'm still a happy person, but the chemicals coursing through my blood have evidently changed over the past 48 years. The sweeter ones have been diluted. If my knee were in better shape, I'd take myself back to Utica on an early evening in May and walk the parade route again. Not for religious reasons this time. But to re-capture at least one fleeting moment from my youth. I assume Leo is gone. I hope Mary isn't.

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