

More Stories!

Forum

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Tommy Meets Sister

By Robert J. O'Connell

How times have changed. This is a story of retribution. As such, you know that it must be from the past. Tommy and I were in the seventh grade class of Sister Regina at the Cathedral School.

Tommy's father was the Mayor of Syracuse, a well known and liked Irish Politician. Tommy on the other hand was a snip, brash, boisterous and not usually polite. Other than his parentage he had little to recommend him. But he was the Mayor's son and used that position to get his own way in the school yard. There was a fairly large contingent of children who wanted to take him down a peg or two, but refrained because of the potential recoil.

The school we attended was populated with two types of children, both the haves and the haves nots. We were all there because of the central location of the school near both the seats of government and the local public housing project. Although physically deficient in many ways compared to the palaces that children attend now, the school did stand out because of its Academic standing and the discipline meted out by the nuns. The school was run by Blue Nuns, most of whom were pleasant helpful people. Sister Regina was the seventh grade home room teacher and strongly on the stern side of the distribution. She was also an business woman, running, as she did, the only candy concession in the School. When the lunch bell rang selected favorites would move a card table into place in the open back door of the classroom. Sister would then unlock the file cabinet which held the candy bars. Bars were a nickel and the profits were distributed to the missions. Many children, including Tommy spent much of their lunch hour standing in the line in the hallway waiting to buy candy. Occasionally sister would raffle off a stale bar during class. I once spent a quarter for five chances and finally won a very old Clark bar. But normally when the end of lunch bell rang the store was closed promptly and class resumed. Those remaining in line where often disgruntled but accepted their disappointment. Tommy was not one of these.

On this memorable day Tommy had just laid his nickel down and picked up his Hershey Bar when the bell rang. Sister told him to return the bar and take back

the nickel as the store was closed. Tommy rejected this timing and retreated to the melee in the hall where he ate the bar. Sister was visibly upset. We then expected the usual punishment. A trip to the principles office. Our principal Sister Ferdinand (a.k.a. the bull) was a squat disciplinarian with a brass bound meter stick. Which she would routinely wield with effective force on the palms of the evil doers sent to her. I still have the scars on my knuckles from my one visit to her office. But this is another story perhaps. After class resumed and we were all settled down Sister approached Tommy's desk and asked him to stand. He stood up in the aisle opposite Sister. A few quiet words were passed between them. Sister asked him to come closer and as he leaned across the desk she cold cocked him with a right hand to the side of his head, so fast he never saw it coming. Tommy collapsed into the aisle and began wailing that Sister would be sorry. He said he would tell his father and sister would be in big trouble. She only nodded and told him to take his seat and open his Algebra book as though nothing had happened. Tommy had the good sense to remain quiet the rest of the day. We all internalized this event. It fit quite well with our image of Sister as a no nonsense teacher.

About midmorning the next day there was a knock on the front door of the classroom. And we could see the face of the Mayor peering in through the small window in the door. Tommy grinned and stated that Sister was going to get hers now. Sister exited the classroom and was out of sight in the hall for a few moments. She then came in with one

hand behind her back. She stood on her podium and announced to all that she had just had an interesting meeting with the Mayor about the recent incident with Tommy. She then displayed a large box of fancy chocolates that she had been holding behind her back. "These are from the Mayor" she announced and he has asked that I share a piece with each of the children. She walked up and down the aisles of the room offering a piece to each of the children but making a point to exclude Tommy with the comment that he had already had his candy. She further stated "His honor has also given me permanent permission to beat the meanness out of Tommy when ever the opportunity arises" as he is getting tired of beating him himself. Tommy remained contrite and obedient the rest of the school year. Sister continued to raise money for the missions. The Mayor was reelected. Are we better off now? Some would say NO because there is not enough payback for our sins. I still feel a little glow whenever I have a Hershey bar.

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