



**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ST. WENCESLAUS SCHOOL -
1952...AND NOTES/MEMORIES/ANECDOTES FROM
OTHER DECADES.**

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ST. WENCESLAUS SCHOOL - 1952

ASSEMBLED BY John Chromy

ARRIVAL:

As a fourth grader during the 1952 school year, I, along with about half of my classmates, spilled out of the yellow school buses that had gathered us from family farms within a six or so mile radius of New Prague, in time for the morning bell which rang at 8:15 a.m. We were joined by our classmates who lived in town and either walked to St. Wenceslaus, or bicycled like Dave Bruzek and Jon Schmid.

PRAYERS AND MASS:

At 8:20 a.m., we lined up in our classrooms, recited an opening prayer, and marched **IN LINE** over to the church to attend the 8:30 a.m. School Children's Mass. 1st through 3rd graders sat in the children's pews on the front left side of the church built undersized to accommodate short legs and smaller bodies, while 4th graders and up sat in the regular, adult sized pews. We all sang the opening and closing hymns, and recited the key parts (Confiteor/Kyrie Eleison/Agnus Dei) of the Mass in Latin. While we understood little of what we said, we were able to recite it from memory, perfectly..

TO SCHOOL AND TO CLASSES:

9:00 a.m. and we returned to class, taking our seats. Eight desks in each row, they were connected by rails on the wooden floors running from the front to the back of the classroom. If one desk was to be moved, the entire row had to follow. Dave Bruzek remembers that the students who had fasted since midnight to be able to take communion at the Children's Mass, were given time to eat a breakfast sandwich they brought from home. Typically a simple peanut butter and jelly, it tasted beyond delicious to a hungry, active child. Hearts, minds and bellies nourished, The next hour and half was filled with academic learning.

10:30 a.m. the bell rang for recess. Students in the lower four grades went out to the playground for twenty minutes of fun and physical activity. There were swings, teeter boards, kickball, softball and in the winter, games of fox and the goose.

11:00 a.m. we returned to our classrooms for an hour of academics before lunch.

12:00 noon. We lined up and walked in an orderly manner to the church basement. The parish employed women to cook a hot lunch for us; simple meals of meat, potatoes, vegetables and a des; At each table, we said "grace" (the prayer of thanks for our food) before eating.

12:20 p.m. or so, we departed the lunch room, and to the playground for fun and physical exercise. Lots of activities and mostly, lots of joy. We played chasing games, softball when the weather was nice, and touch football in the snow.

1:15 p.m. found us back in the classroom for the next set of academics, practicing our work, filling our notebooks, completing worksheets and more. Usually there would be about two or three different academic topics or exercises covered by 3:00 p.m.

3:00 p.m. would bring a spelling bee or a arithmetic contest or a science questions and answer session (Betty Bruzek and Barbara Ballinger were always whizzes at these academic games).

3:40 it was on with the coats, hats, boots and school bags and out onto Columbus Avenue where we met the school buses already loaded with public grade and high school kids and it was off to tour the countryside dropping students off at their farm driveways.

N.B. Bathroom breaks generally were included in the recess periods. About 2:00 in the afternoon we often were treated to a cold glass of milk provided by Ballinger's Dairy (more on that in another chapter).

On the first Friday of each month at 3:00 p.m. we grabbed our belongings and marched over to the church for First Friday Benediction—a 15 to 20-minute service honoring the death of Jesus Christ and exalting the Holy Trinity. During the Lenten season this service happened every Friday and included the Stations of the Cross. In May, the focus of the Friday service was a rosary and songs praising the Virgin Mother Mary. From church we went directly to the busses for the farm kids and the town kids walked home.

On one Friday of each month we all assembled at 1:30 p.m. in the school performance hall. We marched in, to the strains of music played by the school orchestra and were seated by class with the youngest first and in front and the 8th grade last. Each class sat in an assigned area with their nun/teacher seated on the edge of the last row to keep the excited children in some semblance of order---for excited we were because we were anticipating some kind of entertainment, usually a movie like “Lassie Come Home”--- how we cried when Lassie courageously ran into the burning building to rescue an endangered child or ran for miles to get help when a child had fallen into a dangerous hole in the ground or was stuck on a log in a raging stream of water. Friday movies were indeed **MAGIC MOMENTS!!** We adored Lassie!!

Each day, from 8:15 a.m. to 3:40 p.m. was started and ended with a prayer. That was what Catholic school students did, period. Just as we said “grace” before every meal or snack/milk food time. The prayers followed the Church's seasons, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension and Mary's month of May. It was a rhythm and a ritual that seeped into our very being. We learned and recited the seasonal prayers and we sang the seasonal songs. Throughout the school year there were some special treats---as Dorothy (Schoenbauer) Illg remembers on the feast of St. Wenceslaus in late September we were summoned to the church basement and Monsignor Popelka personally treated each of us with a 4 ounce glass of orange juice---a memorable treat for in those days a glass of orange juice was not a common part of our family diet. It was special!

Barbara (Ballinger) Geist recalls a fearsome windstorm/cyclone arising one day and school was dismissed of fear that the windows might implode. While walking from the school to her home the wind was so fierce that she had to hang on to a street light post until her father came and rescued her.

Dave Bruzek recently reminded me of the occasional softball games we had in the spring, pitting us 7th graders against the 8th grade boys. We had some really good ball players in the class of 1956 (John Rachac, Al Vanasek, Billy Dvorak, Jon Schmid, Roman Dorzinski, Milo Hartman) but our real secret weapon was the mighty John Pavek. Big, strong and confident this young man could really swing a bat. When he “golfed” a low pitch the windows on the convent or hospital were in grave danger. John could hit the ball a mile and he kept us in the games against the 8th grade loaded with the likes of Jimmy Kohout, Phil Timmons, Tom Jelinek, Dick Svobodny and more. These games were truly memorable and even our teachers came out to watch and cheer us on.

Our 8th grade year we had two games against the the Public School kids---and they matched our power slugger John Pavek with one of their own--Mick Milinkovich and they had one of the finest ball players in New Prague at the time, Mike Sharkey. I don't recall which school won the games, but I do remember they were exciting times and good memories.

ALL OF OUR TEACHERS WERE FRANCISCAN NUNS:

- 1st Grade: Sr. Angela
- 2nd Grade: Sr. Honora
- 3rd Grade: Sr. Parasceve
- 4th Grade: Sr. Adrehildis
- 5th Grade: Sr. Olma & sr. Nathaniel (class was split into two sections)
- 6th Grade: Sr. Alberta
- 7th Grade: Sr. Chrysostom
- 8th Grade: Sr. Benedict

Music Teacher: Sr. Imata

Principal: Sr. Angelita--- grades 1,2,3,7,8

Principal: Sr. Amanda--- grades 4,5,6

Pastor: Monsignor Cyril Popelka

Special Religion Instructor: Fr. Stanley Srnec

THUS WAS A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ST. WENCESLAUS SCHOOL IN THE EARLY 1950'S.

35-40 students in each classroom, one teacher taught all of the primary subjects, prepared our report cards, taught us our prayers and songs, inspired us when she could and disciplined us when she must.

SOMEHOW, WE ALL LEARNED MOST OF WHAT WAS NEEDED IN EACH SUBJECT, WE ALL GRADUATED AND WE ALL SUBSEQUENTLY SUCCEEDED IN HIGH SCHOOL.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT SWS IN 1950s - John Chromy



1956

Our class had around 40 students and only one teacher who taught all the subjects except music. Sr. Imata, the music specialist came in once or twice a week to teach basic music and the hymns for the current season of the church. And each week one of the priests came in to give us a special religion class.

CURRICULUM:

The curriculum was, like the rows of desks, pretty much designed to march us in a line through the basic learning process:

MATHEMATICS: In arithmetic the progression was addition in first grade; subtraction in second grade; multiplication in third grade and division in fourth grade; fifth and sixth grades led to longer/larger math problems, long division etc---and we were given cards containing 15 multi-numbered multiplication problems or long- division problems as homework. Some of us learned these processes more slowly than others but **ALL OF US LEARNED** our basic arithmetic/mathematics.

READING: A similar sequential pattern was followed in the literary arts. In first grade the focus was on recognizing, sounding out and printing the alphabet and reading simple sentences with the mediums being a giant alphabet in print and script across the front bulletin board above the black chalk board. Reading started with simple “Dick and Jane—See Spot Run” books and progressed into more complicated reading through the subsequent years. Those students entering first grade able to read were given extra books of increasing difficulty to read on their own while the rest us learned the ABCs.

THE ARTS: All were taught the basics of drawing, color charts and coloring, cutting and pasting posters/Christmas cards/Valentines. Third and fourth grade led us to painting and preparing seasonal decorations and murals for the classroom (Jim Yackley was superb at this artwork). Religion and art classes combined as we studied the pictures in the bible, posters of Jesus/Mary/Joseph and the saints and the stained glass windows of the church. Music too, was part of the arts program and we all learned to read music, sing children's and patriotic songs and by fourth grade if we were musically inclined we were encouraged to purchase /rent instruments and be included in the school orchestra. (Leslie Simon and Kathryn Novak were our lead trumpets, Barbara Ballinger was on the violin and Ron Tuma played a singing trombone).

By fourth or fifth grade it was clear that some of the students were distinctly artistically talented and others were not. The specially interested/talented ones went on to have assigned lead roles in decorating the classrooms, creating school plays and serving in the school orchestra/choir---that said, **ALL OF US LEARNED THE BASICS OF ART AND MUSIC.** And in fifth grade a new teacher, Sr. Alma, introduced all of us to a musical instrument--a symphonette (sometimes called a recorder)--a 7 inch plastic flute-like instrument that you played by blowing into it on one end, and it had finger holes which allowed you to play various notes on the basic scale. Again, some played well and others of us struggled with even this basic instrument, but give Sr. Alma credit for making a special effort to create music and musical talent in our fifth grade.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY: In third grade we began to study geography via maps and posters of North America and the Western Hemisphere. Included were puzzles of the United States so we could learn the size/shape and place of the 48 states. Fourth and fifth grade brought world geography and the moon/stars/skies into our world of learning- --and of course we studied and only partially understood the concepts of longitude and latitude on the large globe which hung from ropes and pulleys (so we could lower it to our height) in the corner next to the teacher's desk.

SCIENCES: We began in third grade to learn the basic sciences through easy texts and observing the natural elements of wind, water, leave coloration, winter dormancy and spring awakening of the trees outside our class windows. We each created a small album of colored leaves so we could identify the trees by their leaves. In fourth and fifth grades we studied birds, caterpillars, worms etc to learn of their life cycles and eating habits. In sixth and seventh grade we progressed to some structured biology and botany learning from textbooks, more observation and some experiments.

THE CLASSROOMS:

There was a classroom set aside specifically for each of the 8 grades and almost all of our learning took place in the designated grade classroom. Until 1953 all classes were in the old 1913 building:

- 1st grade was on the first floor straight in front of the stairway (where the Principal's office complex is now located).
- 2nd grade was to the left in the NW corner of the first floor
- 3rd grade was also to the left in the SW corner
- In 1952 the 4th grade classroom was in the basement on the left in the NW corner
- and the 5th grade classroom was to the right in the NE corner of the basement.
- 6th, 7th and 8th grades were on the second floor of the old building along with the
- the school performance auditorium which was a large room in the middle and left
- corner on the north side of the building.
- Starting with the 1953-54 school year classes were moved to the new building and we had our 6th, 7th and 8th grade years on the second floor of the new building.

NOTES ON SWS LIFE IN THE 1930s

In a telephone March 2018 interview with Lucille Nickolay, who attended the school in the 1930s, she shared these insights/memories:

- She doesn't remember a lot of details, but she thought the classrooms, teaching sisters and studies were very similar to what has been described in the "Day in the Life of SWS--1952"
- She remembered being "very frightened" on entering this huge school building on her first day of school in first grade
- She remembers the Franciscan sisters as good teachers though a few were very strict and somewhat frightening to some of the students
- She remembered that many of the farm family children only stayed in school through the fourth grade, "till they received the sacraments" (i.e. Confession; Holy Communion and Confirmation), then they returned to the work on the depression-era family farm.

NOTES ON SWS LIFE IN THE 1940s

By Darlene Witt

- Recess time, for the girls, was spent jumping rope, teeter-totter riding, (which of course now is completely forbidden) taking turns on the swings, and playing a game of "drop the hankie". The boys played ball. Playground equipment was very limited back then.
- Every First Friday everyone went to Mass and Communion. We all carried our breakfasts to school (after having fasted from midnight) and we were able to buy a cup of cocoa for 5 cents. We sat at our desks and imagine the smell of 37 egg sandwiches being unwrapped at the same time!
- Father Popelka came to each classroom and distributed our report cards - a very quiet time - always a little scary!

- We carried our lunches to school and at noon we gathered in a large room in the school basement to eat. There was a very small kitchen area in one corner where we got our milk. It was very exciting when the little kitchen started serving us hot lunch in the late 1940s.
- There was an end-of-the-year all school picnic. We traveled by bus out to someone's pasture and played the whole day. One year it was at our farm (Julia and E.T. Schoenbauer farm). Our woods had a creek running through it - and Sister Honora actually took her black shoes and stockings off and waded into the water! Imagine all of us seeing a nun without her shoes on!
- Going to the auditorium was always a treat! Minnesota became a territory in 1849 and the school put on a all-school pageant one hundred years later. Sister Benedict (Gr. 8) was directing our grade in a speak and song presentation. She kept backing up and imagine how horrified we all were when she went overboard!
- Sister Imata was always humming! She came to each room to teach music, along with her movable piano/organ. Two boys were always chosen to carry it to the next room.
- When we made our First Communion, we were escorted up to the main altar by 2 boy and 2 girl angels - these were chosen from the first grade. We went up in a group of 4.
- Many grades were grouped together for the Sacrament of Confirmation. I made mine in the 4th grade. We had one couple sponsor for everyone. Everyone's greatest fear was being asked a question by the bishop and not being able to answer it. Very scary!

NOTES ON LIFE AT SWS IN THE LATE 1960s AND EARLY 70s

Diane (Bisek) Chromy got together with several of her friends and provided their memories of life at SWS in the 1965-1972 period.

The school's enrollment had grown to the point where it became necessary to have two classrooms for each grade. Each student was assigned a homeroom in first grade and she/he stayed with the same group of homeroom classmates throughout the eight years. The teachers, by now were a combination of Franciscan nuns and lay teachers:

1 st grade	Sr. Dorita	Sr. Laurencita
2 nd grade	Sr. Beverly Ann	Sr. Dashantel
3 rd grade	Mrs. Ballinger	Mrs. Riesgraf
4 th grade	Sr. Lillian	Mrs. Florence Mickus
5 th grade	Mrs. Witt	Sr. Regina
6 th grade	Mrs. Flaherty	Mrs. Mikolasek
7 th grade	Mr. McLoone	Sr. Monica Marie
8 th grade	Mr. Berg	Mrs. Mielke

Principal(s): Sr. Chrysostom and Sr. Jean Secretary: Joyce Kajer

Each school day began with attendance at mass and the classes started with Morning Prayer and Pledge Allegiance to the Flag. Lenten season brought on the Stations of the Cross. In those days (as was true back in the '30s and '40s, the girls were required to cover their heads when in the church. Girls without a chapel veil had to place a kleenex on their heads. Going from the school to the church was a semi-formal walking in silence and single file.

They recalled that there was no school the day after Halloween because it was a church holiday, All Saints Day.

We were assigned a homeroom in 1st grade and stayed with that same group of students and until Junior high (6th to 8th) all classes were held in one room. Starting at Junior High we moved to various class rooms for speciality classes (science, art etc) but always stayed with the same homeroom classmates.

We remembered beginning in 3rd grade to learn penmanship (i.e. writing in cursive) and how to count money. Each school day included snack time and a milk break (white or chocolate). Two students were selected to go to the cooler collect the milk distribute it to all their classmates. We had canvas covers for our desks to protect against spills though It seemed often one or the other student threw up causing much consternation.

At recess we recall playing marbles and in winter the parking lot always had a big pile of plowed snow which made for great fun playing " King on the Hill". On hot days we were given a glass of orange juice in the church basement and sometimes we were given ice cream treats from Ballinger's Dairy (Editor's note; Ballinger's Dairy was right across main street from the school and for at least forty years played a memorable part of school life at St. Wenceslaus ---the Ballinger family members were active in St. Wenceslaus Parish, their children all attended SWS and from their dairy store came the school milk and ice cream supplies).

Life at SWS included a modicum of health care. Each year we were lined up in the church basement and given several immunizations, also included was a once-a-year flouride pills and each student was given blue(boys) pink(girls) cards to take home and remind our parents to take us to the dentist.

In the mid-1960's St. Wenceslaus School began charging a tuition fee of around \$100/student starting around 4th grade. This reflected the hiring of some lay teachers who had to be paid a modest salary. And around 1969 a uniform dress policy began for the girls, which included plaid jumpers and white blouses.

In 2nd grade religion classes prepared us for 1st Communion and were taught by Monsignor Popelka and Fr. Ryan and the same was true in 4th grade as we prepared for the sacrament of Confirmation. During the 1965 to 1972 school years we were also taught religion by several Assistant Pastors including Fr. Raymond Zweber, Fr. Alfonse Kubat (a refugee from Czechoslovakia), Fr. Charles Jirik, and Fr. Jerry Hackenmueller.

Other memorable items from the 1965 to 1972 period included a St. Wenceslaus Boy's Basketball Team sponsored and coached by the Knights of Columbus---Oh, and 8th grade graduation included a special class field trip to St. Croix.

Bob Vanasek remembers that in the '60s, the Parish Church Festival took place on a Sunday in September resulting in festival leftovers of chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy, desserts of pie and cake being served for the school lunch on the following Monday. Bob recalls that these were the best

school lunches in the entire school year (Editor's note: in those days much of the food at the festival were home made goodies donated by the individual families, the result being not only great chicken/ham dinners but a wide variety of homemade cakes, rolicky, kolacky and pies reflecting various church members' recipes and as I recall a certain amount of competition amongst the women regarding who made the best desserts and kolacky---the resulting savory festival dinners made the St. Wenceslaus Parish Festival a legend in Minnesota Catholic circles and drew many diners from other towns and especially the Minneapolis and St. Paul environs).

NOTES ON LIFE AT SWS 1973 – 1982

Cathy (Zaun) Sullivan

I remember starting St. Wenceslaus School in Kindergarten. Back then we went all day, every other day. It was a little difficult adjusting to the school schedule but milk breaks and nap time helped! Little did I know then how St. Wenceslaus would help to form the person I am today. There are so many highlights I remember from my elementary school days. They include:

It was tradition that at midnight Mass on Christmas, all of the first grade students would process down the aisle to begin church singing "Oh Come Little Children." Getting dressed up in our very finest outfits and getting to stay up late was so exciting.

Preparing to make our first sacraments in second grade was also exciting but a little nerve-wracking, especially stepping into the confessional for the first time.

Music class with Mr. Wagner, who's now Deacon Wagner, was fun. He used to have a puppet that would perform and sing songs for us which we found very funny.

There were so many fabulous teachers at the elementary school level that I just can't name them all. I can say that they all did a great job of teaching and more important instilling a faith base that still stays with me.

Junior High at St. Wenceslaus meant split time with New Prague Junior High. We'd spend our mornings at St. Wence and then bus over to the Junior High. Most importantly, it meant the end to uniforms! Some other memories of Junior High:

I remember when St. Wence got their first computer. I was in seventh grade. We were only allowed to use it as a very special reward. It only displayed a black screen with green text and really didn't do much other than we could play Oregon Trail.

Mr. Hardy taught religion and took us on field trips to visit other types of houses of worship which I found very interesting. It's the only time I've been in a Jewish Synagogue but I still remember some the details I learned that day.

Mr. Danielson did a great job with the plays that were put on by the students which he directed.

It was tradition that the final field trip and celebration for the 8th grade graduating class was an all-day trip to Taylors Falls. Fr. Zweber led the way hiking the cliffs and then we all took turns jumping off of the cliffs into the water. It was quite an adventure and one we all loved.

SOME PERSONAL NOTES FROM SARA SCHOENBAUER NOTES ON LIFE AT ST. WENCESLAUS SCHOOL IN THE EARLY 2000s.

Growing up in New Prague, St. Wenceslaus School became my second home. It's the place I established my faith, attending church with my teachers and classmates each week (editor's note; by this time daily mass attendance had given way to a weekly event), and the place I began to know the importance of friendships. Throughout my nine years there, my friends came and went, and it taught me about relationships with both my peers and my teachers. I found that the staff constantly supported and pushed me in my academics, and overall as a person. They taught me how to work hard, meet deadlines, organize my time, complete my work to the best of my ability, and perhaps most importantly, establish values by which I should live. The well rounded-curriculum equipped me in the arts and sciences and prepared me for the intensity of schoolwork in my years to come.

Although the days of St. Wence are long gone, I still look back on my days on the playground running around, in the lunchroom enjoying the friendliest staff and tastiest food (to this day, it continues to surpass any other school lunches I have ever tasted) and celebrating Catholic Schools week with dress-up days and roller skates.

St. Wenceslaus School has undoubtedly shaped me into who I am, and I am forever grateful for the friendships and memories made, faith I found, and support and encouragement from the staff. I carry the values I obtained then, with me today. And I can say with certainty that I am proud to call myself a St. Wenceslaus alum.

**Assembled by John Chromy
Class of 1956**

With invaluable input from Dorothy (Schoenbauer) Illg, Dave Bruzek, Tom Borak, Stan Chromy, Barbara (Ballinger) Geist, Darlene Witt, Bob Vanasek ,Sara Schoenbauer, Diane Chromy and friends, and Lucille Nickolay

All readers are encouraged to forward any insights, additions, corrections, thoughts, anecdotes and comments about school days at St. Wenceslaus School in the 1940s and 1950s thru the early 2000s. If you forward items they will be included in the next edition of this document, otherwise all these stories will soon be gone forever, because we who remember are getting old and life at SWS has moved on and is a very different community and parish Learning Center today. Send additional info to:

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