

STA AFTER MASS STORIES (September 17 & 18 2011)

MY STORY IS NOT AS MUCH ABOUT PERSONALITIES AS IT IS ABOUT EVENTS AND HOW GOD CAN USE US TO CHANGE THINGS.

I am Carole Ferguson-Finnell and I came to know about Catholicism through a backdoor experience. But first I will introduce you to my family. My father was a successful entrepreneur and music mogul. He owned businesses and operated other enterprises on The Avenue. The Avenue was an area of the city where the African-American community found respect and was able to do commerce and enjoy entertainment without fear, denigration or exclusion in the segregated city of Indianapolis. The Chitlin' Circuit and the Road to Rock and Roll, a book by Preston Lauterback, went on sale in July of this year and gives kudos to my dad for the contributions he made to the music industry. Nuvo's two page article called him the Granddaddy of Rock 'n Roll in its July 20 -27th edition. My father was good looking and wealthy and with my grandparents' help he wooed and won my mother's hand. He was twice as old as she and she was his third wife.

My mother was a teen bride with no life experiences. Her family didn't have much money and her parents saw this match as a step towards the good life for her. My father enlisted a Caucasian friend to purchase a house in the Fountain Square neighborhood for his bride and himself since being Negro prevented him from purchasing the house himself. The neighborhood was all white and intended to stay that way. Although we were the only colored family in the neighborhood, other than being called a few derogatory names, no one bothered us. My older brother and I were born in that house. My mother was a full time homemaker and doting mother. She was the center of my world. My father was a workaholic and spent little time at home with us or dealing with our issues. We were financially comfortable. My maternal grandparents were a huge part of our lives and showered me with love and attention. My little world was perfect as far as I knew and I was happy.

My grandparents, mother, brother and I belonged to the Baptist Church and were active members. When I turned five a small crisis arose as far as my education. All of the public and Catholic schools nearby were for whites only. The colored school was blocks away and although my brother was trusted to walk that distance, half - day kindergarten would have meant a long walk home alone for me. I did not attend kindergarten.

As age six approached and first grade was expected the crisis grew more imminent. Around the time of this crisis my grandparents had begun to investigate the Catholic Church. They had met Father Bernard Strange, pastor, and his assistant Father Bernard Girton at St. Rita Church and especially liked Father Girton. At that time St. Rita was a mission church and the mission was to evangelize the black community. Both grandparents took instructions and were baptized. They informed my mother that St. Rita had a school and Father Strange ran a bus all over the city to pick up colored children and take them to his school. All that was needed to qualify for pick-up was to be a baptized Catholic. Problem solved for Carole's education. Both my brother and I were baptized before the semester began and the bus came as promised.

I loved my first grade teacher, Sister Mary Carmel, and whatever she said was golden to me. Catechism instruction was paramount in the classroom and I memorized and repeated it back to please her and she

was delighted. Sister continued as my teacher in second grade and she continued to be wonderful in my opinion. I felt valued and loved in her classroom and was happy. I had no hint of what was to come.

As I mentioned before, the Catholic schools in Indianapolis were segregated just as the public schools were. Bishop Joseph Ritter declared an end to segregation in the Catholic schools and he was strongly opposed by the local Ku Klux Klan. The Klan held a march in front of the Cathedral to express its feelings on the matter.

I turned eight and the third grade lay ahead. Father Strange, under the direction of Bishop Joseph Ritter, was to choose a couple of his St. Rita School students to begin the integration process in the Catholic elementary schools in Indianapolis. My brother and I were chosen and my mother agreed to the experiment. Although we lived within walking distance of St. Patrick Parish and school and were close to St. Catherine's we were assigned to Holy Name of Jesus School in Beech Grove, IN. Beech Grove was known as a stronghold for the Klan. I suppose the Bishop thought if integration could take place there it could happen anywhere throughout the Catholic elementary schools. I also wonder if he was not saying to the Klan "in your face!" African Americans worked at the B & O roundhouse in Beech Grove but did not reside there.

My teacher disliked me from the day she set eyes on me. She was an elderly nun who had taught at the school for years. My brother's teacher was young and vivacious and liked him right away. It didn't hurt that he was intellectually gifted and always at the top of his class. The threats began immediately from my teacher. She was critical of my knowledge of the math tables and said she was going to demote me to the second grade. My mother and brother worked hard to get me up to speed and that threat vanished. I was a very good student so she could not attack anymore of my classroom performance. At recess she told the class that I was a "nigger" and they were not to play with me. I was only lonely for a short time because Judy and Ruth ignored her orders and befriended me. Unknown, a storm was stirring with a segment of the parish. Meanwhile, while that was brewing, Sister found more ways to show her displeasure with me. I dropped a book while taking it from my desk. She called me to the front of the class and told me to bring the book. I was ordered to hold up my arms and hold the book out from my body. During this lengthy punishment my arms ached and felt like they would break off. Our third grade class went to Mass each morning before class. The church was located very near our classroom. The cloakroom was in the back of the classroom and while I was hanging up my coat Sister marched the class out and shut the door. I tried to open it and upon realizing it was locked I was filled with fear for I knew that when she returned I would be in for another one of her painful, degrading punishments. I knelt by the door and cried out to Jesus. I prayed as hard as I knew how asking Jesus to save me. Some time afterwards I heard a soft rustle near the door and a click. I turned the knob and the door opened. Looking up and down the hall, I saw no one. All was quiet and still. I was sure that Jesus had sent an angel to release me. I ran to Mass. My teacher never mentioned anything about my tardy arrival. Perhaps she, too, wondered how I got out of that room.

One afternoon a well known Indianapolis business man and member of the Holy Name of Jesus parish came to the classroom and said my mother wanted me to come home. He went to my brother's classroom with the same message. My teacher told me to take all my belongings, in fact, she helped me pack up. We, as trusting children, got in the car with this stranger and he drove to unfamiliar places threatening us and telling us not to come back to Holy Name School.

When he finally took us home my mother was beside herself. She contacted Father Strange, who contacted Bishop Ritter, who contacted the FBI stating we had been kidnapped. I do not recall exactly what happened between the man who took us from school and the FBI but I remember Bishop Ritter said he would lock up the church and school of the Holy Name of Jesus. He called it an interdict. His thought was that if Ronald and Carole Ferguson could not attend the church and school no one else could either. Mother refused to send us back. A flurry of activity took place. Several parishioners came to our home and begged my mother to let us return. Some parishioners turned against those who masterminded the kidnapping. One parishioner, Mrs. Fahle, became a friend to my mother and gave her support during and after this ordeal. On the advice and encouragement of Father Strange and Bishop Ritter we returned to school and finished out the year. My brother finished with straight As and I finished with straight Js. JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, JESUS. He was the best teacher Holy Name of Jesus Parish and I ever had. As for me, Jesus taught me that he is FAITHFUL and I can trust Him. He taught me that when you or someone else does something wrong you won't get away with it. He taught me to forgive my trespassers as He forgives me. I learned that I can be strong and endure difficulty. I learned to pray and I learned that he can open doors that appear impenetrable. The lessons learned that year have sustained me throughout life. (I still believe His angel freed me from that classroom.)

The summer after school ended my parents separated and I moved to Cleveland with my mother. When I returned to Indianapolis I returned to St. Rita School.

THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING HERE

. I AM ABOUT TO SHARE MY FAITH JOURNEY THROUGH ILLNESS AND MUCH OF IT I WAS TOO ILL TO KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING. AND THE OLDER I GET THE MEMORY PLAYS GAMES. SOOOOOOOO.... I AM PREPARED TO READ MOST OF THIS.

On January sixth 1975 I went to Methodist Hospital Emergency with severe abdominal pains. I was bent over in pain, couldn't stand upright. I was sent home with prescriptions for Fleet's enema and Phenobarbital, a pain reliever.

The following morning my stomach had swollen so I looked as though I was pregnant. I went to physician Dr. Paul Batteis who took one look at me called an ambulance. I was taken to Methodist Hospital the seventh of January. On the 18th of August 232 days later I was released from University Hospital. That's 232 days and nights in two (2) different hospitals.

I had a ruptured appendix that led to Peritonitis and Diverticulitis. Infection of any size and location can be fatal...even an infected fingernail. Over those seven plus months I had eight abdominal operations. They called them operations then because you were cut. None of this "procedure" business with lasers and moonbeams...I was cut and have the scars to prove it. I lost several feet of colon and also my belly button.

I had so many tubes and hook-ups' that it evoked the question from someone, "can you get Mars" on that. During that period my heart stopped twice, I had a complete bowel obstruction, was given last rites by Farther Joe Dooley and placed in Hospice.

I grew up in Pennsylvania and was born into a: "Churched family". Early on I heard about the power of prayer and faith. My mother Louise Hunter taught my family and me how to live and to fight. She contracted Cancer at age 39 and died at age 46. She lived seven years with pain so severe it was carved into her face. She taught us how to endure pain and suffering with Prayer. I've always believed in the words of the old spiritual "The Lord will make a way somehow if beneath His cross I bow".

I had some great medical persons at Methodist Hospital. Dr. George Rawls was my primary surgeon. Today he is my bridge partner, role model and the 'big brother' I wish I had growing up. I also recall Dr. Richard Graffis an early expert in Internal Medicine.

1975 was the 'good ole days' in the hospital world. One could smoke cigarettes not only on the grounds but inside the hospital and even patients in hospital beds. I smoked a pack and a half every day I was awake and when I would run out.

My HNIC (Head Nurse in Charge) Carrie Kemp (God rest her soul) claimed she would be on the lookout for one for me. She'd always say "I'll be right back with one Chief!" And I'd see her again when she came back to work her next tour of duty. I have yet to get a cigarette from Nurse Kent.

What I don't remember was the many days and nights I spent under the influence of drugs. I was in so much pain and with such heavy drugs. One day I was awakened and informed I had been given a colostomy (from my drug induced stupor I said...'a what' and went back to sleep without hearing an explanation. They resected the colon and removed the colostomy in June 1976.

I remember the late Sam H. Jones, Executive director of the Indianapolis Urban League certainly, my closest friend, visited every day. When Sam didn't visit I knew he was out of town. These daily visits were especially important because pain was always present and you feel you are always alone.

Lonely and dark! And what hurt so much was that I couldn't see my children! My "Bride" spent many, many days and nights in the room with me when I was not in Intensive Care. It was good for me and the hospital saved a nurse as Robbie would apply medication and change bandages. Robbie knew my case better than most of the nurses and the hospital didn't hesitate to use her free skills. She was able to do this as Pree Jones, Judy Harkness and Myrna Hobbs were taking care of our children Mark and Marci. These friends would see to it that they were transported to school, fed and bedded down with their children. But, I so missed my children!

I had many Code Blues and people in white gathered around looking sometimes almost helplessly at me. My illness had so many anomalies and aberrations that medical people had not faced before. So many times I would see looks of worry and frustration on my Physicians faces. As I look back it occurs to me that a great source of their inabilities was that I was surviving.

Most patients died and were buried in days after entering the hospital with such advanced infections. And I'm surviving for weeks, then months.

Prayer Persons from STA visited Frs Marty and Joe Dooley and Bob Kennie and his crew.

Ministers from other faiths would visit and upon seeing that I was Catholic would apologize and try to exit without praying. I'd almost tackle them at the door. I remember especially Rev Luther Hicks a popular Methodist minister would stop by and pray for me. There was a united prayer service as I learned so many people of different faith were praying. I knew it and could feel my strength emerging.

Pain. I was on the highest amount of Morphine that my body could tolerate to control the pain. Specifically, the painkiller Demerol which is highly addictive! It's the same drug that is rumored to have been given to Michael Jackson in the moments before he collapsed and stopped breathing.

I don't remember being given "Last Rites" or being placed in Hospice. However, I remember an incident when I was literally on my 'deathbed' when I arose removed all my tubes and connections and my "ventilated" hospital gown and was standing at my bedside when a nurse asked "are you planning to go somewhere Mr. Williams".

My Support Team led by my "bride" and Visitors helped emotionally. My Supervisor at Indiana Bell Glenn Craig was like a big brother during the crisis.

Dr. William Hoffman a very close friend who practiced Endocrinology at Wayne State in Detroit had been pleading with my "bride" to transfer me to Indiana University Hospital to take advantage of the "teachers" in that great institution of learning. Ultimately, he said "don't call me about this until you have transferred Charles to IU Hospital".

Finally, she did! So one day in March I was transported to my new home, IU Hospital. Pain and loneliness are the same the world over. There were plenty of both there. But there was also HOPE and his name was Dr. John Jessup.

I'll never forget the day Dr. Jessup entered into my life. His introductory remarks were. "My, you don't look good! You've been in the hospital a long time and you're very sick. Well I'm going to operate. When I open you up, I'm not sure what I'll find. But, I'll be like a hunter in the woods. I'll be ready to shoot bears or to kill snakes". He concluded by saying, "You couldn't possibly have anything I have not successfully treated"! WOW I was ready to go to the Operating Room **Then and There!**

After being released from the hospital, I had a wonderful surprise. St V De P with Phil Brady, Jerry Foster, doing all of the work and Herb Carmichael, John Vanderbosh and Bill Habig all of the supervising had completed the renovation of the master bedroom and closet expansion that I had started before the illness. It made a special and most appreciated homecoming!

Fast forward about a decade. My bride and I joined a Faith Sharing group with STA families: Tom and Mary Ellen Brown, Fred and Linda Evans, Ernie and Sue Kobets, Keith and Kelly Norwalk, Bill and Bernie Paradise and Joe and Brenda Smith.

After the 1975 illness one would never expect to hear what happened in 1986. My "bride" and I had gone to a fundraising celebration. I was walking off the dance floor and suddenly was struck by pain in the chest. It felt like an elephant was sitting on my chest. We, my bride and I left for home. She drove. When we arrived home, I had difficulty getting out of the car. Robbie yelled at me to get back in and she raced to Winona. An emergency Doctor saw me immediately. After hooking me up to the EKG he said "You're having a heart attack.. and it's a big one". He said it in an informative manner but how would you say that to NOT startle the patient.

Dr. Paul Terry Batteis was out town and that created the opportunity to meet my Cardiologist the late Dr. Ray L Henderson who would become one of my best friends. I was transferred to Methodist Hospital where I had triple by-pass surgery.

A wonderful moment occurred while I was recovering from open heart surgery in the hospital. I was wheel chaired down to a reserved a room in Methodist and our sharing groups families, **everyone** of them and the children were there to greet me. It was close to my birthday and near Xmas. What a wonderful gift.

I praise and thank the Lord for the many gifts I have been given... My 'bride' and dear friends at STA are at the top of that list. St. Thomas is indeed a caring Community.

Finally,

My bride tells the story that after my heart stopped twice and I was given last rites. She says I was a reject and that God did not want me and she is soooooo glad.

However, I say God was not finished with me yet and has work for me!!! What do you think?

THANKS!