

Highlandtown parishioner, 99, recalls life of the carnival

When Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Highlandtown attempts to put a number on its parish carnival, it goes to the source.

Rita Hubbel, who will turn 100 in September, has been a parishioner her entire life. She figures that the event predates the Great Depression.

“I figured if I was going to be 100,” Hubbel said, recalling a conversation she had with Redemptorist Father Bruce Lewandowski, pastor. “Well, then, maybe take about 10 years off. Say 90 years.”

Today’s carnival-goers, primarily immigrants from Central American nations, vie for live goldfish. Growing up in a parish that then had a heavy German influence, Hubbel recalled a different prize at the raffle booths of the late 1920s and early 1930s – live chickens.

Her mother’s uncle, she said, always seemed to win a chicken. He would give it to her family (as they had a larger yard) to run around for a few days before her mother chopped off its head and prepared it for a meal.

Living just a half-block from the parish, Hubbel’s parents allowed her and her three younger siblings to attend the carnival without adult supervision. It was a different time, she said, and adults had no reason to worry.

Her mother’s family has been in Sacred Heart Parish for five generations. Around the time of the start of World War I, her parents met at the parish’s Strawberry Festival. Her paternal grandfather, and then her father, owned Faulstich’s Bakery on

South Highland Avenue. They were married soon after, and sent their children to the parish school, now Archbishop Borders School.

“Our family has not moved far from the church,” she said. “They were really church people.”

The carnival took a hiatus during World War II, then enjoyed its boom years. Hubbel recalled that in the 1950s, the Catholic War Veteran Association – of which her first husband, Henry Ernst, was a member – worked the beer stand, while its Ladies’ Auxiliary – of which she was a member – sold ride tickets.

“Everything that went on at church, we worked at,” she said.

Hubbel said that the carnival drew crowds solely for its cuisine. All of the food sold was homemade, from crab soup to barbeque and crab cakes to hamburgers. Hubbel and her sister, Matilda, worked during the day in the kitchen preparing food before manning carnival booths at night.

Rides were not as extensive as those of today, save for a Ferris wheel and rides for children. Stands offered a selection of plants, flowers and linens.

Games and raffles were as popular then as they are now, with the Pot of Gold game sticking out in Hubbel’s memory. Players paid \$1 and chose an envelope, some filled with money, as their prizes.

Even after Hubbel stopped volunteering earlier this decade, she was recruited to peel potatoes in the church kitchen. The Baltimore humidity precluded her attending the carnival this year.

“I’d still go,” she said. “When you’re so used to being with those things (events) and doing those things, it’s hard.”

Father Lewandowski called Hubbel the parish's historian.

"She's the living memory of our parish," he said. "We really value her."

Then and now, the carnival is the parish's biggest fundraiser.

"It's one of the times the community pulls together and works together," Father Lewandowski said. "It's a great show of unity."

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