

Serendipitous visit to Bon Secours in West Baltimore

On this job, every day is a religious experience.



I've got an article in the Dec. 15 issue of The Catholic Review on Bon Secours Baltimore Health System. In late September, the health care provider in West Baltimore launched a new branding and mission with an ecumenical prayer service at 31 W. Fulton St., at the Cathedral of the Burning Bush Saint Michaels Deliverance Ministries. I was late arriving for the service, which included Monsignor Ed Miller, and it was only until I was on the steps of the church and saw the placques honoring war dead did it dawn that this used to be St. Martin Church, where my parents were wed.

Their vows were not made on the altar. It was a mixed marriage, between an Irish Catholic from dirt-poor circumstances in Western Pennsylvania and a Scot-German Protestant from the north shore of Boston who eventually converted. Our keepsakes of the moment include a wedding photo on the steps of the church that includes a priest and my Uncle Bud, the best man, who was known as Shorty *before* he lost his legs in a mining accident, but I digress.

My Dad was 17 when the Great Depression brought him to West Baltimore, where he moved in with his oldest sister and went to night school at Poly until he fibbed about his age, enlisted in the Army, and served in Pearl Harbor *before* the Japanese attack. My Mom had been in the Women's Army Corps, and the two met in Paris shortly after VE Day. Isn't that romantic? They made their first home in Curtis Bay and settled in Brooklyn Park, but every Christmas day we returned to his first neighborhood in Baltimore, where we visited his brothers and their families on Eagle and Payson Streets.

Other than an aunt's funeral at St. Benedict's and the occasional Night of 100 Elvises at the Lithuanian Hall, I haven't found much reason in recent decades to go back to those Baltimore neighborhoods. The loss of manufacturing jobs in Baltimore and white flight combined to shutter a lot of parishes in Baltimore, among them St.

Martin, which in 2008 closed and became part of Transfiguration Catholic Community. It remains a gorgeous worship space.

My parents were married there on April 27, 1946. I hadn't paid much mind to the date until 41 years later, when I called to tell my Mom that my Mary had just given birth to a son. Just widowed, my Mom was very happy indeed with the timing of the delivery, as it came on her first wedding anniversary without my Dad. She was thrilled to have a new Don in her life.

Thanks, Bon Secours, for the memories.