

# St. Anthony grad recounts Catholic school upbringing

On Ann Hennessy's first day of school at St. Anthony of Padua in Baltimore during the Great Depression, the young girl knew she had better be good or her parents would suffer otherworldly consequences.

The pastor had given a rabble-rousing homily a few weeks earlier warning that the flames of hell awaited parents who did not send their children to Catholic school, a theologically dubious position that has long since changed.

But back then, the priest admonished that no good Catholic should allow his little ones to be educated "among the heathen."

Sister Auberta, a Franciscan nun dressed in a black and white habit and large collar, guided Ann into her seat in a double-row of desks. There were more than 90 students in the class and the nun sometimes squeezed three students into two seats.

Young Ann, who then went by "Elsie," sat "still as a statue" in her seat, she said, scared that if she were kicked out of school her beloved daddy would go to hell.

The harrowing first day of Catholic school is just one of many memories of Catholic life in northeast Baltimore Ms. Hennessy recounts in vivid detail in her new book, "Becoming Ann: A Baltimore Childhood."

Ms. Hennessy, a 77-year-old semi-retired psychotherapist and columnist for the Kent County News, lovingly recalls happy and poignant events she experienced growing up in Charm City and attending St. Anthony, Notre Dame Preparatory School and the College of Notre Dame of Maryland.

The author recalls dressing up in a fancy white dress, veil and cotton stockings to make her first Communion. She also recounts grand May processions, a softball-playing nun and the perils of challenging the sisters on doctrines of the church.

Ms. Hennessy said her time in elementary school was spent diagramming sentences,

memorizing the Baltimore Catechism and participating in elaborate patriotic musicals choreographed by the nuns. Tuition at St. Anthony was \$10 a year, she said.

“It was a wonderful education from the nuns in those days,” Ms. Hennessy told The Catholic Review. “Children were expected to learn and do what they were told and that’s what we did.”

The author said she sometimes fantasized about what the “publics” did in school. “Publics” was the term Catholic school students used to describe students in the public schools.

Ms. Hennessy said she wrote the slender, 168-page volume to honor her father and highlight the people who made a difference in her life. She will donate \$10 to St. Anthony for every book purchased by a current or former parishioner of St. Anthony or any graduates of the school. When ordering, readers should mention their connection to St. Anthony.

“I hope many readers of The Catholic Review will take this opportunity to enjoy a story about a Catholic school student of a bygone era, while at the same time helping St. Anthony’s Church,” she said.

Call 410-778-6286 or visit [www.baltimorechildhood.com](http://www.baltimorechildhood.com) to order the book.