

WMAR incident brings back Rodgers Forge memories

For a child growing up in Rodgers Forge a few decades ago, the neighborhood was magical.

We raced bicycles in the alleys and played “wall ball” against the garages.

On snowy days we sledded down the hill by St. Pius X Church.

Every weekday we walked across Heathfield Road to Overbrook and up the alley to St. Pius X School. At the end of each day, our mother and younger siblings were waiting for us at the bottom of the hill on Overbrook Road.



When we were older, we ran a Bible Camp for the parish children, making coats of many colors out of paper grocery bags and wallpaper scraps and singing “There Were Three Jolly Fishermen” at the top of our lungs.



On hot summer days, when our mother needed something from the grocery store, we’d argue about who had to go, and then about who got to go. We’d wander the Giant, enjoying the air conditioning, shivering in the dairy aisle, and then carry our bags of groceries home.

To get to the Giant, we always cut across the Channel 2 property, either going through the parking lot or walking across the sidewalk in front of the building, kicking rotting crab apples from the tree whose branches stretched over the sidewalk. Then we’d shimmy down the steep dirt path the neighbors had worn in the hillside next to the Giant shopping center.

Yesterday a man drove a truck into the lobby of that building, the WMAR building, and then barricaded himself inside. Suddenly our old neighborhood, and those places I remember so well-and still see occasionally-were thrown into the view of news helicopters hovering overhead.

I saw a picture of WMAR employees gathered in the church basement which I knew as the Lower Church, and I heard that the school was under lockdown.



Then I saw photos of the children, released from school, meeting their parents at the bottom of the hill we used to climb to get to school. One morning on that hill one of my classmates slipped and fell on the ice. We knew we could knock on any neighbor's door for help. Soon enough we were in Mrs. Freeze's living room and she was calling our mother.



I haven't lived in Rodgers Forge for 20 years, but I believe the neighborhood culture is much the same. You can't walk to Caldor's or McCrory's anymore and there's no movie theater by the Giant where you can sneak pizzas in and pay \$2 to watch a movie. The Easter Bunny doesn't drive through the neighborhood in his convertible anymore, tossing chocolate eggs to smiling children.

But I suspect the friendly, close-knit nature of the neighborhood, the school, and the parish is the same.



No one person, whatever his motives, challenges, or illnesses, can change that.

Now that those scary moments are behind us, I'm experiencing a rush of childhood memories that have come flooding back. I'm also realizing I should pray more for those who are mentally ill and that I should do more to fight evil in our world.

Mostly, though, my prayers are prayers of gratitude that everyone involved is safe.