



# From the Archives

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## THE ORIGINAL ST. RITA'S SCHOOL

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**Located on the north side of Gouin Blvd.at Sault-au-Recollet**

I didn't think too many others would remember good ole St. Rita's, so I feel obligated to reminisce a little.

But first a short digression, please, to emphasize what English Catholic schools meant for many of us:

I lived in Montreal North on Sabrevois Street (3869 – funny the things you remember). When it was time for me to go to school, my mother took me to the nearest school, an English Protestant school. They wouldn't take me, because we were Catholic. We journeyed twice as far to a French Catholic school. They, too, refused me, because we were English. So, we had to travel all the way to Saul-au-Recollet, quite a distance, to be accepted at St. Rita's school. (1938 – 1939? – Can you remember that far back, huh?)

First, it behooves me to say a few words of gratitude to the early Irishmen, due to whose determination and foresight, the School Commission allowed them to open English Catholic schools. And then, they had the open-mindedness to accept anyone else who wanted to come to their schools, without demanding that they *become* Irish -- even though all of us have become a little bit Irish ourselves because their spirit has always been so embracingly alluring.

There was one bus that traveled along Gouin from the West (Cartierville?) and one bus that traveled along Gouin from the East (R.D.P.).

I don't remember my first teacher's name, but I remember that she was the most beautiful lady I had ever seen. (A premonition, perhaps, of all the beautiful ladies I would have the honour of working with during my career!)

But I remember that on Halloween she raffled off a cardboard black cat full of candies and I won it with the number 7, ever since my lucky number, though I have never won anything since!)

I also remember that when we started doing two-digit additions, I suddenly was lost. I had no idea how to proceed (was I not paying attention?) and was on the verge of tears (a very sensitive guy, you know), when the teacher told me to stay back at recess time. She showed me that you added the last two numbers, carried the tens, and then added the first two numbers. Nothing to it!!!

The other teacher I remember is Miss Cormier. She was a little "older" woman (a kid's perspective!) – an experienced teacher.

At that time, it seems to me, they added a grade 7 and there were a lot of "new" teachers coming in. Miss Cormier must have liked us, because she moved up with us for a couple of grades. I also remember that we didn't have any science books, so she used to dictate stuff that we had to copy into our notebooks. Imagine trying that now, huh.

She was strict – but not really... We had to sit still and silent just before lunch, as she walked up and down the aisles. (Don't ask me why.) One day I had a heart-shaped cookie, and, holding it in one hand, I was thumping my heartbeat with the other. All of a sudden, I felt the rap of a knuckle on my head – brought me right back upright. (Not really hard, just a reminder, you know)

I also remember the principal, Miss McManamin (I never saw it spelled, really). The only contact I ever had with her was when one of those "new" teachers "caught" us "running" in the hall. (We had forgotten our lunches in our classroom, so Miss Cormier let a few of us go back on our own. So, of course, we "hurried" a little and slid on the hardwood floors. For this we were sent to the principal's office.

I can imagine Miss McManamin's thoughts when she came back to her office, just at lunchtime, to find these five or six "ruffians" waiting for her judgment. She made a funny face, shrugged her shoulders, and lined us up for the strap. We each got one shot. (The only time I ever got the strap, and even though Miss McManamin didn't really put much into her swing, you know something, that stings.)

Other reminiscences: (If I ever write my memoirs...)

-My heartthrob, Anita Belsaitis

-Miss Mac let us play soccer

-Luke Callahan – the former British politician?

-"seconds" on the apple

John Reiser