

St. Malachy's School  
Montreal. Quebec  
Al Fitzgerald

St. Malachy's, the parish, and eventually the school, were a big part of the first 12 years of my life growing up in Snowdon. I was baptized there in 1942 and St. Malachy's was where I was confirmed and made my First Communion in the spring of 1949.

St. Malachy's School would only open its doors in the autumn of 1953, consequently, in the late forties and early fifties most English Catholic children of the parish attended St. Antonin's School. St. Antonin's was a French school of the CECM, but must have had at least as many English classes as did its French sector. The school was situated at the southwest corner of Queen Mary Road and Coolbrook Avenue.

In 1948, the year I started school, a grade one class was opened in the basement of St. Malachy's church to alleviate overcrowding at St. Antonin's. The following year a grade two classroom was added, which meant I didn't arrive at the main school until grade three, in 1950.

Attending this basement annex of the big school was a pretty good way to ease into the school system, and I suppose we were fortunate to have been provided with this rather intimate setting under the caring eyes of the pastor, John Britt, and curate, George Thoms.

While I was a student at St. Antonin's the principal was Edward Gallagher. Mr. Bennett and Orlando Spragia served as successive vice-principals during that time. Later on I would run into at least three of the teachers of that era at St. Antonin's when I was studying at The St. Joseph Teachers' College: Ann (Cardegna) Langlois, Martin O'Hara and Tom Francoeur.

My teachers over the six years in Snowdon were, in chronological order, Eleanor Macintyre, Miss McKenna, Caroline Clarke, Michael Sinchak, Frank Logan and Frank Bushell. Other teachers I remember being there at that time were Teresa Lyng, Ted Bochner, Rose Kelly and Mrs. McCarthy.

I have great memories of those years. Mr. Sinchak's choir, which I didn't have the voice for, was the pride of the school, the library that functioned over each lunch hour by Miss Cardegna and the training as an altar boy that I received from Mr. Bochner are but a few that come to mind.

That altar boy training ultimately afforded me an amazing amount of missed class time as I was frequently called upon, along with future colleague and friend Leonard Tynan, among others, to serve funerals on many a weekday morning. With those duties, and the added responsibility of being a brigadier, Mr. Bushell was able to keep me out of his hair a fair amount of the time in grade six.

It was in the schoolyard at St. Antonin's that I fell in love with the game of dodge

ball and learned how to play American baseball and stando against the wall of the duplex facing the yard. There was pretty aggressive trading of, and playing for hockey cards in that schoolyard, as well. Montreal Canadian fans all, we were nevertheless pretty anxious to get the whole set of 105 Topp's NHL cards. Who from that era doesn't remember the great action shot of Chicago goalie Al Rollins one of those years - names like Bill Quackenbush, Sugar Jim Henry, Fleming Mackell, Eric Nesterenko, Gordie Howe, Ted Lindsay, the Rocket and Boom Boom!

I have vivid memories of a very jolly, affable, and large, policeman who escorted us across Queen Mary Road. Nothing but the best in those days before crossing guards. I also remember a handful of students who travelled every day from Cartierville, which seemed like a long way to come to school, but weren't those kids lucky to live so close to Belmont Park!

It was the annual school trip to Belmont Park that was the highlight of the year. Streetcars were chartered to transport the entire school population from Snowdon Junction directly to the park. As exciting as the rides at the park were, the streetcar's ascent and descent of the trestle over the CPR tracks at the overpass near Blue Bonnets Raceway and the way it raced through the fields in St. Laurent and past Canadair, swaying from side to side.

Mr. Francoeur was the emcee of the races that got us started at Belmont Park each year. It was a thrilling day from start to finish, evoking stomach butterflies of anticipation for days in advance. It truly ranked right up there with Christmas and June 23rd, the last day of school.

In 1950, Princess Elizabeth visited Montreal and her motorcade came past the school along Queen Mary, after her visit to the Veteran's Hospital. We all got a pretty good look at her and the Duke that day.

After Mass every Sunday during the 1952-53 school year we followed the progress of the construction of the new school being built next door to the church. Father Britt and many of our parents and the PTA had worked to get the school built over so many years. Disappointingly, the school was not ready for occupancy on the day after Labour Day in 1953, and we had to return one more time to St. Antonin's. The new school would not be available until the end of September.

Ultimately, the month-long wait seemed insignificant as once we got there we were greeted with state-of-the-art green boards and the prescribed yellow chalk. We knew of no other school that had an intercom system, and despite our unfounded concerns that the principal would be constantly monitoring us, all these new innovations were quite a source of pride when bragging to our friends from Royal Vale School at the other end of MacDonald Park.

Macdonald Park, incidentally, became the venue for a couple of monumental snow-ball fights between our two schools in that, the only year I attended the new school.

With a new building came a new principal and a new organizational structure. No longer co-ed, Frank Rowe took over from Mr. Gallagher as the new principal of the boys' school. The girls' school came under the administration of the Sisters of Providence.

It would have been hard to imagine in the fall of 1953 how relatively short would be the

existence of St. Malachy's School. This facility, so modern and so desperately fought for by the community was an early victim of changing times and demographics. In August of 1954, at the end of my grade six year, our family moved away from the parish and a new chapter of my life opened up in Lachine.

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