

Meanderings of a Youth

By Gerard M. Duff, O.S.A.

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Born to gentle Irish in 1934
Never alone being a twin,
Rear'd at the edge of Bryn Mawr,
Where Washington slept, Martin's Inn.

T'was a long flight for a stork,
Kiskeam and Coolnecart, knooks of Eire,
Our father from Leix and mother from Cork,
Did foster a bit of a seer.

Our sister, Peg, four years before us,
Blazed the path to Father Murtaugh,
And, himself being no fool,
Said, "let all Duffs 'tend my school."

May he rest in peace, my father,
Whisked to heaven in '39,
Good Counsel for me and my brother,
The age of reason was devined.

Can five year olds master academics?
Merion Mercys rise to the test,
Who pray while confounding the cynics,
"Foul" fumed Harvard psychologists.

December 7, '41, a day of infamy in Bryn Mawr.
Martin Avenue's finest marched to war.
Dear Lord, some did not return,
The word malaria was learned.

Conversations clipped by air raid sirens,
Buckets of sand, metal helmeted citizens,
All lights out, black curtains drawn,
Hydrants manned from dusk to dawn.

To thousands of soldiers we waved,
Displacing cars, bikes, buses they paved,
Lancaster Ave., where once we took toll
With tanks, cannons, jeeps, a death roll.

“The enemy may be listening,” ominous sign,
Next to the 10 most wanted, Braille for blind,
Boy Scouts of Bryn Mawr 3, from 11 to 7,
Paid the altar boys to teach them Latin.

“*Mens sana in Corpore sano*” we had to face,
Physical fitness hastened her pace,
Tackle without equipment, mumblety peg with a knife,
Bryn Mawr could end this strife.

Larry learned to play pool,
Should the last battle be fought
In Ardmore in a shootout. Some
Kids read *Buck Rogers* and *Popular Mechanics*
And built wagons on skates, the women to evacuate.

Marching and processions became a way of life,
Altar boy processions, Boy Scout marches of 30 miles,
School marches to the bathroom, cloakroom,
Confirmation processions culminated with the May procession.
The nuns rented “Death March Back to Bataan”
As a training film.

The Blue and Gold soar in scrutiny, stickball, hardball,
Golf ball, marbles, monopoly, cap pistols,
BB guns, pea shooters and sling shots,
Tree climbing Tarzans,
The water pistol fad lasted but a week.

Now I need not bore my patient readers
With tales of the P&W or car hitching rides on sleds;
Terrorist-like raids on tomato gardens, peace and apple trees.
Thank God Fr. Murtaugh was a bit deaf,
And we were aware of confessional secrecy.
Sisters Loyola, Ignatius, Cletus, Rita Marie, Gonzaga,
Philomena, Mercedes, Theophila, girls too spoke Latin and Greek
Come to think of it, Merion Mercys graced our school cajoling,
Scolding robes flowing preaching, screeching,
Sincerely teaching us rugged jewels.

Murtaugh, Mauch, Rafter, Rowan, Anderson, Carr, Tuohy,
And MacNamara, all men of heart, cheered us, chastened us,
Walked and talked us into loving Christ; letting us kneel beside them
With real lighted candles, brave men of Augustine,
You can all stand tall.

Keenan, Duff, Magee, Bailey, Fritz, Magean, Volker, Gallagher,
DeStefano, Coll, Downey, Gibson, Sinchetti and Curvan,
Did I miss one or two?

Looked at the other side of our street
At families who loved us too.

1947 put me on a train, at the Bryn Mawr Station,
My memory quietly faces the joys, the sadness, the gladness,
The madness, the facts, the fiction
With her shades from my childhood.

Deo Gratias Joe and Sarah, Charley and Anna,
You founded Big Brothers and Sisters in Bryn Mawr before its time.
The United Nations, my dear classmates, you originated, and
Lia with Ruth and their parents, Good Lutherans, taught us
Ecumenism that Christmas Day after our father passed away.

Thirty-eight New Years later, Palmer method quills this poem
From a room in the Nation's Capitol,
For Centennial Celebration's back home.

Since this script be in length, please excuse me.
Being a teacher I've too much to say.
Yet, each child, will you kindly, remember
"Contemplata aliis tradere."
From Humphreysville this bard has meandered,
Many miles, many times not a few, overseas,
Over trees, I have scampered
Join O.S.A., see U.S.A. pleasantly true.

Every book, every film, even Earth has a *finis*
But, said God "I shall make all things new."
Father Duffey doled the keys to Jim Martinez
May a hundred head peacefully toward two.
Next time you stroll Martin Avenue, which often I pray you can
Do remember this bard christened Gerard, got his start, left his heart,
in love with you.