

The Sin List

By Barbara McLaughlin

In the fourth grade I kept a "Sin List" in my top bureau drawer. Nunhood floated before me as my destiny, reinforced by images of Sally Field as the Flying Nun, Julie Andrews as an almost-nun, and Audrey Hepburn's incandescent beauty in "The Nun's Story." I loved the wimples, the long rosary beads hanging from the neck and the waist, the various forms of headgear that nuns sported. My Nun Ginny Doll had pride of place on my bureau; I feverishly searched toy catalogues, stalking nuns for my doll collection.

Keeping a sin list is not as easy as it sounds. My bedroom was in the attic of our old colonial house and anytime I would sin, no matter where I was, I had race up two to three flights of stairs to get to the list, mark down my sin with salient details so that when I went to confession on Saturday afternoon at St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church, I would be SURE to cover all the sin bases and fully disclose my perfidiousness.

"I was mean to Mary."

"I was fresh to Mom."

"I snuck a gumdrop when Nana wasn't looking."

"I thought mean thoughts about my teacher."

Egregious sins, dragging on my soul--I recorded every darned (no damned allowed) one of them.

I was the Sin Stalker, the Sentinel of Sin, the Sinologist, the Sinapologist.

Every Saturday afternoon I went to confession...pushing aside the heavy red velvet curtain, entering the quiet darkness of the booth, waiting for the tiny, sliding door to be opened by the priest on the other side of the screen, saying the obligatory, "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it has been one week since my last confession, these are my sins." I would hear a stifled sigh of despair from the dimly-seen priest through the screen when he realized that, oh yes, she was back, the nine-year old Sin Lister. About 30 sins in, inevitably the priest would interrupt my litany: "My child, say three Hail Marys and four Our Fathers" -- a desperate attempt to stem the penitential tide. For my part, convinced he hadn't understood the fullness of my fall from Grace (I had been fresh to Dad, too), I would hasten to assure the priest (who was longing for his afternoon highballs after a long afternoon of confessions) that I was not done sharing my wrongdoings.

The long-suffering Father would hasten to assure me that God understood and forgave all and to go in peace to Love and Serve the Lord, thanks be to GOD and slam the little trapdoor door shut in my face.

A bit nonplussed (there were at least 7 more sins) I would grudgingly leave the confessional and, just to be sure, I would double the assigned penance, before leaving to sin once more.

"I wish I had Nancy Keegan's Barbie's Townhouse"...(the sin of lust...).