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 Story by Courtney Dunham, Photos by Jenna Calk

School was never canceled because of snow at St. Boniface. Only a wood furnace blowing up could keep the nuns away.

Vera Boedigheimer chuckles as memories flash in her mind about growing up in Sublimity in the 1930s.

On that cold winter day when the old furnace finally blew, there was only one escape route out the second-story schoolhouse - down the slide. And Sr. Veronica was no exception.

The fire escape slide was used daily by the students, but to see a nun skid down in complete

habit attire was a sight Boedigheimer will never forget.

“They always were so poised and serious,” she said. “We were obviously scared at the time, but seeing her skid down definitely added some laughter to the day.”

School was canceled for a few days until the furnace was repaired, but future heating units would later contribute to many brief absences away from the classroom. In high school, the wood stove became a good excuse when Sister Veronica smelled smoke on the girls' uniforms. Boedigheimer and her class of six figured if they had to go to the bathroom in the outhouse, they might as well sneak a smoke. During World

War II, cigarettes were a rare treat not found in Sublimity. But Boedigheimer had a sneaky cousin in California who would send her Lucky Strikes from her family's store.

“We'd sneak out to the outhouse to light up and then leave it burning on the shelf for the next girl to smoke,” she said. “After we'd all filter in, Sister Veronica would look up and say, “I smell smoke. I smell smoke.”

The girls always responded, “It must be the stove.” Then the boy who was in charge of the stove would be reprimanded and blamed. “He knew what we were doing, but he wouldn't dare tell on us,” she said. “In fact, he would stir it all up to make it more smokier so it would cover up our smoke.”

Boedigheimer and her best friend, Toots Nightingale, may have escaped Sister Veronica's hand a few times but never the long reach of pastor Fr. Joe. Father Joe was considered the “general” of St. Boniface and whenever he entered a room, the students promptly stood up and paid fierce attention. One Father Joe sermon Boedigheimer will never forget was a scolding she and Nightingale received regarding too much exposure at a basketball game. “Toots and I were yell leaders together and we'd love to twirl around,” she said. “Well, I guess at one game, Father Joe thought we'd twirled a bit too much and exposed our pantaloons. Boy, was he ever upset at us.”

Pat Burns, who attended St. Boniface a few years later, remembers not cheering at the boys' games, but rather praying for a win. “We had many a good basketball game on that floor (referring to the now Sublimity Middle School gym),” she said. “I drove a nail into that floor when it was first built.” Burns said times have definitely changed in 60 years, and her heart aches about the peer pressure school children feel today. “The only thing I remember worrying about was who to sit by at lunch.”

What to wear was never a dilemma in the mornings for Burns and Boedigheimer, who wore a uniform all the way through school.

Something that never changed, though, is the big decision about what to wear to the school dances, she added.

Both woman spent their first few grades in a one-room schoolhouse and then moved to the two-story St. Boniface Grade School. Boedigheimer then went on to high school, in a two-room building with an outhouse. The high school was then torn down and a new St. Boniface High School was built, which is now Sublimity Middle School.

Boedigheimer didn't feel too sad when the old grade school and high school were torn down - probably since her mother, who was a school district clerk for 25 years, saved old photos and other memorabilia from Sublimity's past.

Burns, on the other hand, still misses the rings on the old playground. “When I think of my school past - that's what I remember most,” she said. “I miss playing on those so much.”