

Maryknoll—The Picture Archive  
by  
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There it was—the main seminary building on a picture post-card. It looked unchanged from the day I arrived in the fall of 1961. I'd found it in a treasure-trove of photos in an online archive maintained for the past 20 years by a former classmate.

I didn't know what I was expecting when I started a Google search for "Maryknoll, Glen Ellyn," a couple of weeks ago. What I stumbled upon was the archive, elaborately indexed, with literally dozens of links to personal collections of photographs, reminiscences and miscellaneous documents, like graduation programs. Some of the collections were identified by year, with several of them from my time at Glen Ellyn, 1961-1963. For a whole week, I sat at my computer, as if in a trance, until the wee hours in the morning, clicking on link after link. I was looking at pictures of scenes and people I hadn't thought about in almost 60 years, but that were now as familiar to me as if I'd left the seminary only last week.

I had started to write about my seminary experiences a couple of months ago, as part of a series of memoir-essays beginning with my earliest years in the Catskills. I slowly realized that there were significant gaps in my memory, particularly from my seminary years. If I was going to write a memoir that would be taken seriously, I needed to fill in at least some of those gaps. So, I initiated the Google search with nothing more than the vague hope of finding *something* to add specificity and concrete detail to my writing. I

found it in the archive.

As I stared at picture after picture on my computer screen, including, incredibly, pictures of me, I soon slipped out of the here-and-now and slid into the there-and-then. Without understanding why, my heart started to race, as images of the long-forgotten boys I'd hung out with came up on the screen. Moreover, several of the pictures were of places on the extensive seminary property that had special meaning for me: the toboggan slide and the hand-ball courts, on each of which I'd spent a lot of truly enjoyable time in the longer winter and the shorter warmer months, respectively. With each successive picture I felt myself sinking deeper into the past, and both reveling in the experience and mourning what was long gone.

Why?

After a couple of intense therapy sessions, I finally understood: looking at the pictures in the archive, I was in some mystifying way vicariously going home. Not to that home where, Robert Frost wrote, "when you go there, they have to take you in," but to the place and time when I had felt truly *at home*. Where for the first time I had felt accepted and, in a word, safe.

And where, for the first and last time in my life, I played sports and loved it.