



Fun With Nuns

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I am now not, nor have I ever been, Catholic. I state that up front because without the benefit of being born into or converting to the religion, I somehow ended up in Catholic school for one year of grade school. Since that didn't scar me enough, I chose, willingly, to go to a Catholic college. An all-girls Catholic college.

I know for a fact that I chose this school based on an incident at College Day. The school's college recruiter suggested I was the kind of campus leader they looked for in a student, and the friend who was with me looked at the recruiter, looked at me, looked back at the recruiter and said, "JEANNE? At an all-GIRLS school?" Then she laughed so hard she literally fell onto the ground.

After that, I felt it was all about my honor and proving I could, indeed, survive at a school without males. My mother protested that, perhaps, graduating without massive debt could be an alternative choice, but I ignored her. This was about PRIDE, dammit!

The dorm nun even told my mother, in all seriousness, that since I was seventeen, if my mother just signed a single document, they could ensure I was required to go into lockdown at sunset every night. To her great credit, my mother demurred, stating that as far as her experience had ever told her, girls could do the dirty deed during sunlit hours as well as dark ones, and she felt going to college sort of implied learning how to come home at a reasonable hour for oneself.

It was a very good college—pricey, but good. It served me well and I did truly enjoy my time there...high on top of a mountain range, in buildings that had originally been a Jesuit monastery decades before.

My surviving a college environment reminiscent of Maria von Trapp's before she met that dashing captain and escaped a life of high white walls and lots of quiet was helped along by the fact that an extremely large university was just down the hill from my college. A university loaded with boys and fraternities. I think freshman year I was at school for three weeks before that university went into session. Those were a long three weeks, but I made up for them quickly.

I used to have a 1970 Chevy four-door Impala. It easily seated twelve on the inside and six in the trunk, and I used to shuttle girls down to the frats with me. This earned me a somewhat unsavory and slightly inappropriate reputation with some of the nuns and laypeople who worked there; they called me the school's Whore of Babylon. One woman used to routinely warn all the freshmen and transfer students to stay away from me, as I would lead them straight into temptation.

She was great for business. I always had a long line of freshmen and transfer students knocking on my dorm door, saying, "Hey, I heard you can lead me to temptation faster than anyone else alive! Teach

me, oh very wise one!" I don't think I surprise anyone when I say that among my many nicknames was Miss Corruption followed by whatever year we were in at the time.

So, my college years passed enjoyably, and then I went off to make my way in the wide world and find my own Captain von Trapp, preferably without the baseball team's worth of children already in tow.

However, my college is nothing if not good about keeping up with their alumna. After all, people who paid or borrowed \$120,000 to go to college are people said college wants to keep tabs on so that they can extract even MORE money from them.

Occasionally it will dawn on someone in the alumna's office that possibly, just possibly, all their students aren't still living in Southern California. You'd think the fact that the school is made up of girls from a wide variety of foreign nations as well as all around the United States would be a clue that a goodly percentage of the alumna body would have, call me crazy here, gone HOME after graduation.

That the school remains confident none of us ever left sunny SoCal is rather sweet, a love letter to smog and traffic, I suppose. Maybe it's just because the nuns have the best view of any location in all of Southern California and they don't realize that we'd have to marry Donald Trump the moment we graduate to have a hope of a similar view ourselves. Though the Donald seems willing to keep giving it a go with nice young thing after nice young thing, we have a few too many graduates for even someone of his wealth, willingness and comb-over to accommodate.

So, sometimes we go back home, and sometimes we take jobs in other cities, hard as it is to believe that anyone would leave the confines of the Greater Los Angeles Metro Area. Unless they were in love with clean air, less crime, less traffic, or just couldn't stand the thought of one more waiter or waitress telling them with deep sincerity that they were REALLY an ACTOR—while taking their order for chili fries and a large Coke.

Anyway, there are those occasional moments when someone in the alumna's office realizes the coffers aren't full, and someone else remembers there are other cities with alumna in them, and then someone else suggests to the president of the college that it's time for her to go on a road trip!

The current pres is a layperson, for the first time in a long time, if ever. I think I may have had something to do with her garnering the position, too. Not that I'd met her before she was hired, but I'd had an interesting time with her predecessor.

The college was a'comin' to town on its bi-decade road trip to encourage alumna to a) give more money to the college and b) send our daughters there and thereby give them a LOT more money. Phoenix, with our large population of retirees, was chosen as a destination because we actually had enough alumna to confidently fill a room.

I was ambivalent, but my husband was rather excited. We have one daughter, my college had done well by me, and they seemed interested in our attending the event. Until this moment, this was the one and only time he was ever excited about a gathering such as this. That he's never again generated such excitement or interest should be a clue that all did not go smoothly.

I mentioned that I'd carried a significant reputation during my college days. "Oh, come on," he replied. "None of the nuns are on the internet. They don't know you were christened The Great Corrupter by a bunch of your 'net friends. It'll be fine. They probably don't even remember you were the school's wild girl."

With a great deal of what turned out to be prescient trepidation, I sent in our reservations.

It was a luncheon at a nice resort in town. We dropped off our daughter at a friend's house for the afternoon and headed off. I dressed up, to look nice. At least, I dressed up to look nice for my husband.

I have to mention here that most women dress for other women, to impress them. I stopped doing that a long time ago. I dress to make my husband, and other men, happy. I'm not all that interested in attracting the attentions or approval of women, I guess. My husband has always appreciated this. He, I might add, thought that I looked rather classy.

We arrived a bit early, so were wandering around this resort, and every woman we passed gave me the "slut!" look I'm rather familiar with. I wasn't dressed like a slut, but I also wasn't dressed like a casual tourist, and so I really didn't fit in. Once we were there my husband also chose to mention that my top was rather see-through. He blamed the bright lighting in the resort for why he hadn't mentioned this little tidbit at home, but I'm not sure I believed him then or now.

Finally it was time for the event and—with me now wearing my lightweight sweater buttoned all the way up to my neck—we got into the short line to check in. My nametag denoted my maiden name, married name, and graduation year. My husband's nametag clearly matched mine in the married name department. We put them on and went to greet the Sister in charge.

She was older and had not been the Pres while I was at school. I breathed a sigh of relief. She couldn't know me and therefore wouldn't ask awkward questions. I shook her hand, and she beamed and glanced at my name tag. It clearly showed I had graduated about

fourteen years prior. Long enough to be married and have the family and career going. NOT long enough to be the mother of a thirty-five-year-old man.

I mention this because Sister Pres looked at me and then at my husband, who was HOLDING MY HAND, and said, "Oh, and is this your son? What a handsome young man he is!"

Now, truthfully, my husband looks like Tom Cruise. I have always considered this a huge benefit and perk of marriage. And, while he, like Tom, still looks youthful, he does not look like a toddler. And, even if he did look sixteen, which he did not, what teenaged boy would be holding his mother's hand? IN PUBLIC?

It was a toss-up as to who was more shocked—me, my husband, or the ladies taking attendance. All of us stood there gaping for a moment. Steve recovered first, let go of my hand, shook Sister Pres' hand, and said, "I'm her husband, Sister."

"Oh, you're teasing me," she giggled at him, not letting go of his hand. "You're too young! You must be her son. And so handsome, too!"

The dawning realization that Sister Pres was FLIRTING with my husband took hold of him, me, and the attendance ladies at the same time. The horror we shared was probably different in nature, but still equal in intensity.

"No, Sister," I said, a little more strongly, pointing to my nametag. "He's my HUSBAND. I graduated in the early eighties. We've been married for eleven years and have an eight-year-old daughter."

"You're joshing," Sister Pres said, never looking away from Steve, who had managed to extract his hand from hers and was now clutching mine and doing that husband thing where, via little tugs and squeezes, the husband lets the wife know that it's time to GO. "You should be proud of a son like this," she added to me as an aside.

"No, Sister," one of the attendance ladies said urgently.

"Of course she should be proud!" Sister Pres said to her, clearly offended. "He's so handsome and polite!"

"NO, SISTER," the woman tried again, the panic clear in her voice. "He's her HUSBAND. See, here, on the reservations?" The other attendance lady nodded violently, clearly too horrified to speak, as she watched the president of the college go senile right in front of everyone.

Sister Pres never looked away from Steve, but she finally, after a few more discussions by her of how young and handsome my husband was and a few more protests by me that he was MINE, dammit, she finally, regretfully, accepted that he was both married and not a teenaged boy.

I thought the ordeal was over, but I was wrong. Sister Pres decided to escort us around and introduce us to everyone else personally. There were only two other men in the room, both easily in their seventies, there with their wives who were equally old. The ladies had clearly come in hopes to see some other alumna they could still recognize alive and at least somewhat kicking.

What they were not there for was this particular intro. Sister Pres dragged us over, told us their names, and then said, "This is Jeanne Cook, one of our alumna. And this is her husband, Steve. Can you believe that he's her husband, not her son? He's so young and handsome! But they insist that he's really her husband, not her son, so I guess I'll have to believe them. I'm sure you'll all have lots to talk about." And then she dragged us off to another set of folks and did the exact same thing, over and over again.

By now Steve looked like he was living in a horror movie. The attendance ladies were talking quietly between themselves, clearly determining if Sister Pres would have to be committed to the Old Nuns Home the next day or if she could finish out the road trip, albeit with a gag in her mouth. The other people just gaped at us. I mean, what do you say to an introduction like that?

We managed to slink over to where we were sitting. While I looked around for someone, anyone, under the age of sixty, Steve looked at the little placards at our places. He about had a heart attack and clutched at my arm. "The...the prices..." he gasped.

"What? I already paid for lunch," I muttered to him, still scanning for hair not white, grey or blue and skin not wrinkled like raisins, without much success. "It was like thirty a head, but that's to be expected for this resort and my school."

"No," he waved the piece of paper in front of me. "The tuition! It'll cost," he added quickly, "almost a hundred and fifty THOUSAND dollars to send the kid here!"

I adjusted what I'd spent for inflation. "Yeah, sounds about right." I looked at the paper. "Oh, it'll cost more. You just looked at tuition. You forgot room and board. Add on another, oh, fifty thousand."

Steve blanched and, to control himself from making a reply he would regret both sooner AND later, looked around the room. "There's only one woman here even close to your age," he hissed.

He was right. She was older than us, but not by more than ten years. She'd brought her teenaged daughter with her. Somehow, Sister Pres had not tried to fix the girl up with my husband. I was shocked she'd missed this opportunity, but I guess she just wanted Steve for herself. The teenaged girl, having missed none of our interactions with Sister Pres, was clearly making plans to go anywhere else BUT this college, even if the only option was the streets. By then, I couldn't blame her. At all.

After lunch, or what I was now thinking of as the longest two hours of my life, Steve and I got back into our car. We sat there, silently, for a few long minutes.

"Look," he said finally. "I don't think I want to spend a hundred and fifty thousand dollars PLUS room and board to send our daughter to a school where the leadership is completely shocked that one of their alumna was able to get married and have a child. Not to mention to a school where the administration is led by someone well past ready for retirement."

I wasn't in total disagreement. But, I wondered, was it just that Sister Pres clearly had a thing for Tom Cruise, or was it more personally centered?

I called one of my girlfriends from college and told her about the encounter. After I'd gone through the whole, sordid ordeal, I jokingly said, "I really had thought they'd taken my picture down off the nun's dartboard when I graduated."

"They did," she replied. "But that was 'cause it was full of holes. They got a new one and put it right back up."

"Oh, come on," I laughed.

There was a long pause. Then she spoke again. "Um, you didn't know? I always thought you knew, 'cause you used to joke about it all the time."

"Didn't know what?" I asked, confused and now more than a little suspicious.

She sounded embarrassed. "Well, um, you know, I used to visit the Sisters' residence once a month, to help out. And, um, well, I try to go up once a year or so, just to check in on them and see them, particularly the older ones, before they pass on."

"Yes?" I prodded.

There was another long pause. And then, the cold, hard truth. "They really DO have a dartboard."

"And?" I asked, determined to force it all out of her.

"And," she said, and I could hear the cringe in her voice, "they have your senior picture on it."

I thought about this. "I can't blame them," I said finally. "It was a terrible photo."