

A religious background

by [Mary M. Brown](#) in the [June 29, 2004](#) issue

In the year that I was born, at a small religious college in northern Illinois, witnesses recall how just after dinner one winter evening, a young confessor sparked a fervor:

forty-two straight hours of repentance, studious coeds and baseball stars alike, suddenly afire. They were warm with desire to admit their wrongs to their peers, to make

their sins public and announce themselves godly and free. I was born not long before those penitents were born again, before they streamed boldly onto that sacred stage,

became oddly patient and waited their turn in choir chairs to declare their shame—articulate, eyes wet. While they wept, I wept too, a generation and states

away, until Mother, who knew nothing of fire or college or regret, lifted me from cradle to font and rocked me in an arms-and-flesh theology, both of us quiet now,

neither of us with much, maybe nothing at all, to confess.