

On the Bingo Incident  
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I don't know if bingo is still played these years. What I'm recounting here happened back in the 1940s.

Drawing on the Wikipedia description:

Bingo is a game of chance in which players mark numbers on a card with tiles or dried beans that match ones the game host (caller) draws at random. The players compete to be the first to have a winning arrangement—five numbers in a row, vertically, horizontally, or diagonally—and take home the jackpot for that game. When players have numbers arranged in a row, they call out "Bingo!" which prompts the game host or an associate to examine the card to verify the win. After a winner is declared, the players clear their card of the tiles and the game host begins a new round of play.

So it's people sitting at tables covering numbers on a card—or perhaps two, even three, cards, you can purchase as many as you want to increase your chances of winning—looking to get five in a row lined up. This is in something like a church basement, and typically it's working-class people. I don't picture suburbanites taking to bingo.

Mother liked to play bingo, but Father said she was forbidden from doing it, that it was bad, unacceptable, evil—somewhere in there; the son, who was seven or eight at the time only really picked up on Father's threatening manner toward Mother (and since he was so close to Mother, toward him). The son thought about why sports gambling, which Father did almost daily, was OK and Mother's bingo wasn't, but Father's menace snuffed that out.

One afternoon--it must have been during the summer with the son off school--Mother took the son with her when she dared to play bingo at the American Legion hall on the second floor in a downtown building. The son sat next to her and watched her play.

Sometimes she played two cards. She seemed happy. The son doesn't remember her winning any games. She was so quiet he worried she wouldn't say "Bingo" loud enough to be heard, but the winner also raises a hand and they'd be sure to see that.

The side door to the bingo hall opened. There was Father. Grim, silent, The Mask of Death.

Father began walking toward the table where the mother and son sat. As he neared, Mother stood up and they both turned and walked toward the door, Mother in the rear. Not a word had been spoken.

Neither Father nor Mother as much as looked at the son. The son got up from his wooden chair and followed them out the door, numb.

Thinking back, it is probable that things halted in the bingo parlor as people took in this silent procession.

The son doesn't remember the details of what happened later, only that he covered his eyes with his hands and cried and cried.