

### Sister Mary Gabriel

In my twenties I was in hospital and was lucky enough to share a side room with Sister Mary Gabriel who was a brilliant conversationalist with a great sense of humour. We had many chats and many laughs. Because she was a nun she was given a screen, in addition to her bed curtains, so that she could partition off her part of the room for extra privacy, however this was not what she used it for! Every night we would “put the world to right” and then I would excuse myself and nip down to the seating area outside the night porters office to have a cigarette. When Sister Gabriel found out what I was doing, and it didn’t take her long!, she told me not to go down there but to have my smoke in the room with her. “We won’t get caught,” she said, “I’ll put my screen across so anyone coming into the room won’t be able to see us”. So we would open the window, she would sit on her bed and I in her chair and I would have my smoke while she chatted-luxury! So we would continue until the inevitable happened--the night sister came in and called out for Sister Gabriel. I immediately threw my cigarette out of the window and turned to find Sister Gabriel shaking talc into the air and waving it around with her towel!! Satisfied, she sat back down and demurely invited the night sister behind the screen. When the night sister had left I turned to Sister with open admiration for her quick thinking actions, she laughed and said, “I haven’t been a headmistress all these years without learning something from the girls”!!

