

## Testimony of Jacqueline Thuin

Being a student, then a teacher with the Dames de Marie

My first contact with the Dames de Marie goes back to when I was 5 1/2 years old. Catapulted overnight into the nursery school of the Ladies of Marie de la Coquinie, following a miscarriage of Mother, I found myself surrounded by nuns all very kind and caring towards me. They helped me integrate and enjoy myself in this group of toddlers. Ah, the dolls' house and the puppet shows of Sister Marie Dominique, and the roasted bananas of Sister Marie Augusta!

There followed the six years of primary education at the Institut Léopold, then the six years of humanities, in the Greco-Latin section.

To be a pupil of the Dames de Marie is above all to feel recognized as a being in one's own right, with one's qualities, defects, dreams, family experience and of course also as a learner.

When one speaks of "the spirit of the Dames de Marie" the first word that comes to mind is the RESPECT. Respect for the person, both the teacher and the student, respect for authority, respect for the hierarchy, respect for the rules. When this respect is reciprocal, it necessarily engenders trust.

The Dames de Marie spirit is also dialogue, caring, a quality of listening, a real interest in each of the students, all of it based of course on our Christian values.

What was also typical was older pupils taking responsibility for the younger ones. What pride there was in moving from the Junior playground to the senior! Once in the senior school, each class had to prepare, in turn, weekly mass for the younger classes. It was our songs, our texts ... not those of the "old". We also participated or organized various charitable and humanitarian actions. In Poetry and Rhetoric my class, for example, put together a choir to go and entertain the elderly in a care home.

Being a student with the Dames de Marie meant receiving quality training. My colleague talked about cutting-edge teaching and that is more than true. I'm talking about the 1960s. The term HUMANITY carried its full meaning, aiming at developing in us the spirit of synthesis, the critical spirit, a well-structured thought, an open mind.

Sister Marie Sophie (Sister Madeleine) was our Latin, Greek and French teacher. She had the art of relating a Latin or Greek text to a novel or a film of the time. The "dead" languages were therefore very much alive to our eyes and we spotted very well the thought of the ancients in the present writings. She also knew so well how to take extracts from the novels to create "live readings" for us with background music etc ...

No area was neglected and the timetable also included courses in Music, Art History and Needlework. An optional dance course was offered after 4:00 pm, as the sisters felt that it could be of use to us. We learned the waltz, tango, cha cha cha and even rock 'n roll!

As soon as the Salle des Fêtes was built, the sisters wanted to equip the Institute with an enormous cinema screen. They regularly offered family film evenings and organized a cine-forum for pupils once or twice a year. Projection, discussions on the subject and cinematographic technique developed in us a real taste for quality films and the knowledge necessary to appreciate all aspects. Thank you my sisters

It was not uncommon, in fine weather, to find a class installed with his teacher on the lawn of the park to take a course.

Being a student with the Dames de Marie also meant wearing a uniform. I knew the brown, accompanied by its cap; Then navy blue. Some people, outside, may have described it as a form of snobbery, but that is a mistake. The real meaning was UNI FORM: we were all equal, without difference. Being a Dames de Marie student also meant having a correct and dignified attitude outside the school.

After graduating from the status of pupil to that of Teacher at the Institute of the Dames de Marie we discovered all that was behind the scenes of our formation. Beginning as a young teacher at the Dames de Marie meant receiving advice, help and support from the Headmistress, but also from her colleagues. The Dames de Marie spirit reigned towards the students, but also between us and between the Head and her teachers. Respect, trust, dialogue, interest are the foundations.

Sister Marie Philippe encouraged our educational experiences, but always invited us to share them with our colleagues during the teachers' meetings. We always knew what was tried out by one or the other, in which branches and with what group of students. We were interested in the results, and also in the students involved. This, of course, develops a feeling of recognition, esteem for work pride and self-confidence. Thus, following an experiment attempted by Mrs. Borgers, professors of Mathematics, we have all included group work in our learning techniques. This had a very good learning outcome, teaching our students teamwork, assigning tasks, respecting each other's skills while developing in them the qualities necessary for their future life in society.

Respect for the evolving student and teen was also reflected in our request to never put negative remarks in the reports. It is too easy to point a defect or a weakness, more important is to propose a remedy. No "lack of reflection ..." but rather " You might be interested in studying ...." We all had a small list on hand when we were writing thereports, because it is so much easier to point a fault than to find a cure.

The same spirit prevailed in class councils. We took the time to examine each student as a whole, the weakas much as the average or the very good. We were looking at everyone to help them improve themselves or get better. It took us a lot of time, but we did it very willingly. It was normal for everyone to be entitled to our attention. Service, availability, giving freely are also part of the Dames de Marie spirit. To accomplish this work made us proud and happy to be teachers.

When we merged with St Joseph's College we left the Sisters it was not with nostalgia, but with the pride of the work done and the hope of bringing the Dames de Marie spirit to life in another environment, amidst other traditions and with other colleagues. It was not always easy. But this spirit is still alive and has touched many. Personally, it carried me through my beautiful career of 43 years in the service of the young and it keeps!

Jacqueline Thuin

