

Memories of DMJ

Memories of Coloma Prep. part 2 Sheila Barrett

Politeness was something held in esteem at Coloma prep. (There was also a Politeness ribbon awarded at proclamation). Opening doors for teachers, standing up when an adult came into the classroom, politeness was part of the education, moulding the whole child. In the novitiate, when I read the Founder's writings on courtesy and politeness, Coloma Prep immediately came to mind. It rang so many bells... Looking back, I think almost all the Founder's pedagogy found expression in Coloma school. The place was warm and welcoming and caring. There were rules to be adhered to and you certainly knew about it if you lapsed or crossed boundaries. Every child was 'known' by all the teachers, each was treated as an individual. There was colour and vibrancy that aroused curiosity in every corner, so many things waiting to be discovered. Even the smells of furniture polish and over cooked cabbage were inviting.



Sr Barbara, my second teacher, was the first sister I remember to wear the new simple habit. I remember she had black musical note cut-outs, which could speak to her!

The Founder was right about the blue scapula being cheerful, I thought it really pretty. I loved studying the teachers' outfits. Mrs Borrett always looked as if she were going to a wedding! Her hats were feathery and flowery in pretty pastel shades which matched her crimplene suits; a different colour for each day of the week. Miss Fealy was a bit more subdued, and her grey hair was always immaculate. I couldn't work out why she looked young but had grey hair! She had skin like peaches and cream.

We had a regular supply of student teachers which we loved; their clothes were different... Mary Quant like. I loved sling back shoes in bright colours which were in fashion in the mid-sixties. The students' lessons were more fun; they would tell us when the examiner was coming so we knew to be extra 'good'.

Sr Joseph Marion prepared me for First Holy Communion. It was an adventure walking from the prep by the 'out of bounds' areas into the 'big' school to the chapel, where we practised kneeling along the altar rails and receiving the host, without letting it touch our teeth.

I made my first confession at St Mary's Church, West Croydon where Canon North, the parish priest was another God-like figure in my psyche. Every Tuesday we used to process down to St Mary's for Mass, two by two, girls with white gloves on and those unusual royal blue hats and boys with their caps on. There was a uniform inspection before we set foot outside the door! Once in the church, I used to gaze up at the ceiling, statues, lights, pictures to entertain myself during the sermon. Occasionally a child might be asked a question. Thank God, it was never me!

One of my happiest memories was being the May Queen for the annual May procession. I think I was eight or nine and all the parents and dignitaries were invited. There was a heavy scent of lily of the valley and bluebells and wallflowers all around the gardens. I had to

crown a large statue of Our Lady with a crown of flowers outside Loretto. I felt close to Our Lady that day. One of my favourite hymns has always been 'Bring flowers of the rarest'

Religion lessons were high priority at Coloma. I used to love 'colouring in' and later, attempting to draw the stories from the Old and New Testaments. Sister M Constance used to take us for religion in Lower prep, which was Mrs Rainey's class, as she was not Roman Catholic.

One of the phrases we repeated over and over again with M. Constance was the response of the characters in the bible when they realised they were being called by God: 'Here I am, Lord, your servant is listening!'

I have many more memories of Coloma Preparatory School. I feel privileged, along with my sister and brother, to have been able to go to such a lovely school and all down to my parents' sacrifices and their desire for the best for their children. Coloma, thanks to the fidelity and dedication of the sisters and staff, was a happy and cheerful place where children knew they were loved. I think it positively oozed Canon Constant Van Crombrugghe's spirit!