

MY STORY – SR. MARY ANGELA O’CONNOR, DMJ

I was born on January 20th, 1929 to Nora and Jeremiah O’Connor. My mother was a school teacher and she gave birth to seven children. My father was a farmer and he died of a massive heart attack at a fair in Abbyfeale 13 miles from home. My father died when the oldest was nine and the youngest was two. He was buried on Phylis, my baby sister’s second birthday. I was three years old.

I can’t remember anything about my dad except what I heard from my sisters and brothers. My mother (RIP) seldom talked about my father until I was her caregiver at the end of her days.

Dad was a very industrious farmer. He drained all the land and made it very productive. He built a two-story home across the yard from the farm. My mother told me that dad chiseled out a niche in the kitchen of our knew home, paneled it with wood and made a little shelf for a light and flowers to honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I was always attracted to dad’s act of love and honor for the Sacred Heart. As a result, I have great devotion to the Sacred Heart to this day.

I was told by Daisy my second oldest sister, that dad really loved me and was very proud of me. When his friends came to visit, dad would put me on his lap after a while and began to diodle and he’d put me on the floor. I’d dance for everybody and dad would be delighted and proud of me!

My younger brother was dad’s shadow. Everyday he followed him around the farm. Dad noticed that the rubber around one of the wheels in the trap had fallen off. He turned to three old Tim and said, “Tim, how would you fix this? Tim replied, “I’d use a hammer and nails.” That’s exactly what dad did. Later, he fixed it in the correct way when Tim was not in sight. Another time, dad was cutting the hedges in one of the fields up from the farm house, my mother, RIP sent my older brother to dad with tea etc. Liam noticed that the hedge was uneven, so he asked dad what that was. Dad replied, “There are birds’ nests where I did not cut. When the birds will hatch and the little birds fly away, I’ll cut the rest of the hedge.” This really impressed me and I wish I had known my dad. My first cousins and the neighbors told me how wonderful my dad was. After dad died of a massive heart attach, Philomena and I didn’t know what death was. I remember being taken to auntie Kitty’s home in Abbeyfeale to say good bye to dad. We were lifted up to kiss him as lay there on a bed. I heard a lady say, “Did you see the smile on his face when the children kissed him?” I thought dad was asleep, but I was frightened to see so many ladies dressed in black in the room. After dad was buried, my little sister and I would look in the field calling dad. When we couldn’t find him, we’d come home and cry. My grandmother gave us candy to pacify us.

At the age of four, I walked to school with one of my older sisters and brother. I danced for the teacher and students, but that’s all I remember of my first day in school. I attended Solondanny School, a little two-room school; about twenty minutes walk from our home. My first teacher Mrs. Maloney kind and nurturing, but Mrs. Brandon and Mr.

Charlie McCarthy were very strict. I was petrified of Mrs. Brandon. I think she took her frustration out on the students. Mrs. Keane, my Principal and fifth grade teacher was very kind and gentle, so I loved her. Then came John O'Connor who stayed at our home. I hated him beyond measure as I got several slaps everyday. It was my own fault as I didn't do all my homework. When my hands had enough slapping, I decided to work hard and Mr. O'Connor would let anyone who deserved a slap being slapped so he wouldn't slap one. We became the best of friends! Some weekends he'd stay at our home when the rest of us went to Mass. Each time I got a half a crown which was a lot on sweets (candy) which I shared with a poor family who gave me rides home from Mass.

Mr. O'Connor, RIP coached me to take a special state exam which was never done in our school before. I passed and there was great rejoicing! That summer Mr. O'Connor died of cancer and my heart was broken. I didn't share my grief with anyone. Next step in my education was attending secondary school at Coloiste Mhuire in Abbeyfeale, three miles from home. I stayed with uncle Pat and family the first year, and family. I did well. My sister Phil joined me the next year, so we walked the three miles back and forth each day to school.

My teen years were carefree, happy and full of fun and worked really hard in high school and I passed my Easter Orals and I got honors in Irish Certificate Exams. I loved Irish Language and I spoke it fluently.

At age eighteen, I told my friends that I was going to become a nun. Nobody believed me as I was a real "Tom Boy!" Some gave me a week in the convent while others gave me a day! 70 years later I am still a nun, thank God! My religious life had been up and down. I am so grateful to God for giving me my vocation!

I became a teacher and my first assignment was teaching sixty one first graders at St. Augustine's School in Culver City. Those days nuns taught class each day and went to college each Saturday and during summer vacation. That was very difficult as we had to study, prepare lessons and do our assigned chores in the convent. In spite of the difficulty of doing all that we had a very happy life in the community.

1950 – 1959 – I taught in St. Augustine School – 1st grade mostly 1 year in 4th grade.

1959 – 1960 – Our Lady of the Rosary – 5th grade

1960-961 - St. James the Less – 4th grade

1961- 1966 – Precious Blood School – a combination of 5th and 6th graders

1961 – 1962 - 1st grade

1966-1970 – St. Louis de Montfort as Principal and 5th grade teacher, from 1967-70 taught 3rd grade for half a day as being Principal was a full time job.

1970-173 – Mary and Joseph Retreat Center in Cherry Valley. I became the plumber there. Sprinkler heads in the whole property and I became a "jack of all trades." I fixed broken tables and chairs etc. I also cooked at times plus I cleaned the five houses after the retreatants and visitors went home. I also was the chauffeur. It was an extremely busy and exhausting time for me! I also taught CCD at Sacred Heart School in Redlands and substituted in every classroom there. Sister Sheila Walsh, RIP was my inspiration and we

worked very well together. I also substituted for 1 day in Banning Catholic School and three days in Beaumont Junior High 7th grade.

1973-1977 – I taught 3rd grade in school and I was at St. Louis de Montfort as Principal.

1977-1979 – I taught at St. Augustines

1979-1980 – Retreat Center at PV – I planned menus, ordered food and did the shopping.

1984-1985 – Sabbatical Rome – I had the joy of taking a photo with St. John Paul II. I was also blessed to go to the Holy Land during Easter 1985.

1985 – 20- - Marian Residence Retirement

NINETY YEARS OLD

Even though I am ninety years old, I feel God is calling me to do His will each day. I don't know what the road ahead will be like, but I know God will be there for me with His strength, courage, and enlightenment.

Dear Heavenly Father, I place all trust in you. Please look out for me so I'll be safe and happy with you in heaven one day. Amen



A Dozen Wishes for You

As you go through the road of life I wish you:

Enough WEAKNESS to keep you humble,

Enough STRENGTH to do an honest day's work,

Enough AMBITION to help you succeed in life,

Enough PERSEVERANCE to pursue your dreams,

Enough JOY and HAPPINESS to make life worthwhile,

Enough LOVE to cast out fear and to bring hope to the downtrodden,

Enough TRIALS to challenge you to be an understanding human being,

Enough COMPASSION to enable you to be a beacon of hope for others,

Enough DISAPPOINTMENT to aid you in being an empathetic person,

Enough BACKBONE to urge you to strive for a better and safer world for all,

Enough COURAGE to navigate through the storms of life and to be a unique you,

Enough FAITH to believe that with God as your helper all things are possible.

Mary Angela O'Connor, DMJ