

MEMORIES OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY & JOSEPH

We were asked at the end of last year if we would write about some of our memories of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph over the years we have known them.

I was 3 years old when they first came to be a part of my life and I have been taught by them, worked with them, taught with them, taught for them and been associated with them ever since and so, to date, I have had nearly 78 years of continual association with them.



I will try to pick out some particular memories of these years that have stayed with me. MOTHER MARY MICHAEL was the Head Teacher at St. Elphege's Preparatory School in Wallington where I first went at the age of 3 with my two sisters Anne (now Sr. Mary Goretti), Imelda and later our brother Francis, who was the first head boy of the school. I remember M. Mary Michael as a very large and rather formidable person, especially if you are very small and shy. She got on very well with Daddy and so she must have had a kind heart and a great sense of humour. One particular memory was of being at Assembly (I was only 4) and M. Mary Michael asked me if I wanted to "be excused". I said 'No' as I did not want to walk out in front of the whole school; later she asked me again later still she asked Anne to come up and take me home to Mummie to be changed as I had left it too late ! (We lived opposite the school.)

M. Mary Michael was a good support to us all and I remember her sitting in the kitchen cleaning the cutlery with methylated spirits - I always associate that smell with those days. Sadly M. Mary Michael suffered from cancer of the ear and suffered a great deal of pain.

M. Mary Damien and M. Marie Paula both taught as young nuns at St. Elphege's when I was there - little did I know then how much M. Marie Paula would influence and support me in my teaching life, and what good friends we would become.

I won a scholarship to Coloma Grammar School - then situated in West Croydon. M. Mary Cuthbert was Head of Coloma then and M. Augustine and M. Mary More and M. Duchesne taught there during my years there.

M. Mary More had a good influence on us as we neared the top of the school and she had the foresight to prepare us at that stage for the Catholic Schools Religious Certificate which we would need if we wanted a place in a Catholic College. My closest friend at the time in the group was not a Catholic but M. Mary More took time to prepare her for her Baptism and acceptance into the Church, with myself as her witness. I remember M. Mary More suggesting little aids to prayer for us, e.g. each time we saw a policeman (they were always in evidence in those days!) we could say a prayer for the Holy Souls. I continued to do this for many years and used and adapted the idea in other ways for many more. One day she took a group of us down to the basement and taught us to sing the Dies Irae - she explained that the nun for whose Requiem we were going to sing it had not yet died and she did not want her to hear us !!

Our sister Anne had entered the Novitiate at Forest Hill, whilst Imelda and I were still at school, and her clothing ceremony took place in the chapel at Coloma. It was a very beautiful ceremony. The postulants to be clothed came in as brides for the first part of the ceremony. I remember Anne in her bridal dress leaving the chapel carrying the habit she had received. She returned later, after her beautiful black hair had been cut, wearing the habit for the remainder of the ceremony and the Mass. My tears prevented me from getting good photographs on that day. Sr. Mary Goretti has always been a shining example of the Religious Life and a loving support, not only to our family but also to our many friends.

Having worked for a year unqualified for M. Marie Paula, she advised me to go to College and train as a teacher. As I needed another 'O' level to get into College, it was arranged for me to go to the Convent in Scarborough and work for a year as M. Mary Hilda's secretary, and for M. Mary Clare, then Head of the school, to prepare me for my 'O' level Scripture exam. After I had been there some time and no one had mentioned my Scripture studies, I approached M. Mary Clare to remind her of the arrangement - she greeted me with that memorable vague look and sweet smile (that only those who knew her will recall) and said vaguely, as she was wont to do, 'Oh yes, I was supposed to help you wasn't I - come along to my room and I will show you what to read.' I don't recall any further help - though she might have given me some, but I did get my 'O' level exam (and later recommended from Endsleigh College to do a degree in Divinity!!)

One memory I have of Rev. Mother Mary Hilda who was a lovely person to work for, and we got on very well - she was given a new little kitten for the Convent and I used to play with it a lot. I used to wiggle the end of the rope which was the bell-pull in the corridor and it learned to jump up and cling on. Each afternoon Rev. M. Mary Hilda went for a rest as she suffered from severe headaches. If I needed her I had to pull the bell once. One afternoon, when all was quiet, the bell rang once and M. Mary Hilda came down to see who needed her. I assured her innocently that I had not rung for her - but I did notice the kitten, now almost fully grown, wandering down the corridor proud of its latest

achievement! Not only could it jump and catch the bell pull but it could now ring the bell - M. Mary Hilda returned to her room perplexed, and the secret remained safe with me!

Living in Scarborough was a happy time for me. I got to know the Sisters who worked in the kitchens very well: Sr. Anthony, Sr. Roch and Sr. Ben; they were lovely people, working tirelessly in the kitchens and around the house. I went down the staircase into the kitchen soon after I went there and was greeted with alarm! It seemed that this was out-of-bounds for lay people but I had not see any of the other nuns go down there when they told me. I assured them that my legs were younger than theirs and there was no way I was letting them run up and down the stairs with food for my lunch and supper, and I would go down and bring it up for myself. The Sisters were amazed at my boldness but very grateful and no one ever stopped me from doing it! Also, whilst I was there, a group of young nuns, including M. Mary Dymphna, had contracted tuberculosis and they were sent to a Sanatorium in Surrey. I remember going out one day into the woods and picking a big bunch of early snowdrops, wrapping them well in wet cotton wool and newspaper and sending them through the post to Mary Dymphna to encourage her to get well soon. The snowdrops have always remained a link between the two of us.

When M. Marie Paula was asked to take over Regina Coeli school she asked me to go with her for two days until she settled in as she did not know any of the staff there. I did go and was upset about when I saw the state of some of the children and their lack of happiness and joy. I hoped one day I could go back and change things.

I was fortunate when I left College to be offered a place on the staff of 3 different schools and, although Regina Coeli was not officially recognised at this point, I chose to go there and so I had M. Marie Paula as my first guide in teaching. She was a wonderful Head teacher and as time went on, at least to my knowledge, 5 of us from the staff there later became Heads of Catholic schools - what a great testimony that is to her. When she was sent to start a new school down in Basingstoke she offered me a place on the staff. I agreed to go for a year to help her get the school started as, again, she knew no one there and had to interview and appoint a staff.

When I returned M. Mary Constance needed an Infant teacher at Coloma Preparatory school and I worked there with her for a year. I remember her as a very holy and humble nun; she was quite formal in her approach to teaching and did not allow the parents beyond the school gate. Influenced by M. Marie Paula, my approach was quite different so the parents used to come up the fire escape to my classroom to see me about their children! Judging by the testimonial I was given when I left the school, although M. Mary Constance could not work that

way and never objected to my doing so, she could see the true value of working closely with the parents in the education of their children.

I was appointed Deputy Head of a newly built Catholic school in Addiscombe with a new Head and all new staff. Sr. Mary Lees was on the staff there; she persuaded me to join the Croydon Philharmonic choir and I recall many happy memories of her, Sr. Celia and myself at rehearsals and at wonderful performances we gave of *The Messiah*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, *Masses* by Mozart and Beethoven and many more great works at the Fairfield Halls, the Albert Hall and the Festival Hall. My grateful thanks to Sr. Mary Lees for persuading me to join the choir - she even taught me a little Welsh song to sing for my audition!

I was later appointed Head of the last Catholic Primary school to be built in Croydon: St. Chads in South Norwood. I was the first Head Teacher there able to appoint my own staff. There were no nuns available at that time for me to have on the staff, but I was able finally to put into practice all the skills, wisdom and love for the children that had been nurtured in me by my own family and my second family, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, to create a very happy and successful school.

I have had the privilege of being on the Advisory, and later the Management, Board of the Emmaus Retreat Centre from its beginnings, and it will be a sad day for me in 2017 when we have to close the Centre.



Sr. Mary Goretti, Imelda and Mary 2017

I have been an Associate for many years and all my memories of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph are happy ones. I feel very blessed to have had their influence in my life.

Mary Betchetti
4th September,
2016