

Memories of my time spent with the congregation of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph

Miriam Cairns (Daley)

I entered the Convent at Castlecor, Ballymahon, Ireland as a postulant on the 16 July 1960. I spent eight years in the Order. Mother Mary Francis was the Reverend Mother at that time.

During the year, seven other women joined the group. Eight people also entered the Novitiate in Forest Hill in that year. This is significant as 'our' year were the first to break the tradition of going to Louvain in Belgium for our final year as novices prior to our first Profession. The reason for this was that they couldn't accommodate all of us there so Mother Mary Gertrude had to cope with all sixteen of us. A Saint if ever there was one. God rest her soul.

Why you chose the Order

I didn't actually choose the Order. I'd completed a training course at St. Ultan's hospital, Charlemont St. Dublin. Following completion, I'd been employed as a nanny to three children in Mount Merion. By now I was twenty years old and at a bit of a dead end when Mother Mary Francis 'suddenly' appeared at the house where I worked and asked me several searching questions. Result, I resigned my post and Mrs McKenna made my dresses for me. Tess and Bridget, her daughters, also former Ladies of Mary, met me in Melbourne Australia years later where we shared many happy memories. Sadly, Tess has very poor eyesight now but Bridget, a widow, is still dancing!

I suspect Mother Mary Francis found me through a Carmelite priest who was my confessor and confidant, but I don't know for sure.

Places where you lived and memories they hold. People who influenced you most and why?

Castlecor.

How many of you remember the dances around the octagon room! Mary Ann's recitation of The Trimmings of the Rosary? Margaret Cussen's glorious soprano voice ringing out and raising all our spirits? The walks to the bridge and back?

Many people played a part in my development in Castlecor and I'd like to say a public 'thank you' to them all. M.M. Ciaran, Father Killian, a teacher of Spanish whose name I have forgotten. A number of teachers who started me on my educational O level exams. Thanks to them and others in England I was able to do my General Nurse training. I'd had to leave school at 14 with my primary school certificate.

Mary Moran used to walk with me to the 'bridge' and back telling me about her training as a Home Economics teacher. She showed me cleaning and cooking techniques which I still use in my home today. That lasted until we were accused of being 'special' friends. I'd no idea what we were being accused of until I asked Mary and was enlightened!

Josephine Collins taught us geography and years later when visiting Queensland with our son and family I saw some places she had described and they evoked some very happy memories.

I was one of the Convent drivers with Jo Collins and Mother Mary Francis' niece Siobhán O'Conner. Once, I had to drive Mother Mary Francis to Salthill for a few days break. This was an exciting and demanding challenge.

Forest Hill

What a change that was leaving rural Ireland for the city. We all got along very well and again I found new and lasting friendships. Witness the large group of us who continue to meet and support each other to this day.

Coloma, Croydon

I took my English driving licence, passing first time. I took some O level exams and learned how to prepare and cook food for large numbers of people, thanks to Sister Kevin who was a wizard in the kitchen. From there I started my nursing training at St. Anthony's hospital Cheam. Sadly, I was removed from there with five minutes notice by Sr Mary Joseph RIP. I was transferred to St. Charles Hospital and sent to live in a new Convent in Ladbroke Grove W10. It was a Formation house. To say I hated the move would be an understatement.

My darling mother died RIP during my final year of training and I had to defer my final exams so I lost touch with my group.

Treasured memories

These are too many to mention individually. Best was a cloak Mother Mary Gertrude made for me and which I was persuaded to part with in exchange for a coat just before I left the Order.

Things you learnt that influenced your life

Without the Ladies of Mary I wouldn't be where I find myself today as my education would have stopped. The Good Lord works in strange ways His wonders to perform

Why you left

I really didn't have a eureka moment about this. There were several things that came together; the death of my mother, tired of Ladbroke Grove house, church and Order changes which I didn't understand, great loneliness of heart which I still feel at times.

Without the influence of so many great, wise gentle, lovely people within the Order I'd have been a lost soul.

God bless you all. Much love,
Miriam