

Memories of the times with the Daughters of Mary & Joseph

The coming year will mark two hundred years since the Order of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph was founded by Constant van Crombrughe, and we were invited to write about memories of the Sisters that were special to us.

I look back over some 77 years with love and gratitude to the "special nuns" who touched my life. It was the beginning of my education, which continued through Secondary school and ended with my appointment to Coloma College.



My first memory was of Sr. Mary Damien, who was my first teacher in Kindergarten at St. Elphege's Preparatory School in Wallington. She was the first nun I had seen, but far from being afraid of someone in a strange habit, I felt happy and secure as she guided me through the beginnings of my school life. It was happy because my sister Anne, now Sr. Mary Goretti, and my sister Mary were also at school with me during the years of 1939 - 45. We were evacuated to York for part of this time.



The Head Mistress was Mother Mary Michael. She seemed large and I was very small. She used to sit in the Dining Room below the classrooms cleaning the cutlery with methylated spirits. She was the only nun I was frightened of and I feel sorry about this now because she was always kind to us and would ask for news of Daddy, who was away in the Royal Navy 1939 - 45, whenever we had to go through the kitchen to the main part of the school. When I broke my collar bone Mother Mary Michael allowed me to go to school in a little button-through green dress instead of my uniform as I could not wear my blouse; I remember her kindness to me then.

In September 1945 I started at Coloma Convent Grammar School in Tavistock Road, Croydon, and spent my secondary education there for seven years. At eleven years old I was put into Form 1B. The Headmistress was Mother Marie Winefride. My sister Anne, Sr. Mary Goretti, was already there, and two years later my sister Mary joined us. The size of the school compared to St. Elphege's was such a contrast and it was comforting to know at least one person in those early days.



Mother Mary Cuthbert became our new Head Mistress in my second year. I have memories of both her and, in particular, Mother Augustine (Eileen Whitehead), who was one of my form mistresses and who later prepared me for the Religious Examination for students wishing to go to a Catholic University or College of Education. I had by this time been offered a place at La Sainte Union College of Education in Southampton.

The exam was taken at the Catholic Education Centre, Tooting Bec, and we all gathered at school in order to travel to the Centre together. Mother Augustine was praying for us and she thought I should have spent more time on revision and less on P.E.! I still remember her parting words to me: "If you fail this exam I will wipe the floor with you"! Fortunately I passed and gained my certificate, which I have just re-discovered whilst sorting through my old school reports!! It is dated 10th November 1951. My best friend was Maria Palmer who also wanted to be a teacher, but she eventually went to work in London and is still in touch.



I taught briefly at Regina Caeli in Pampisford Road, Croydon, and there met Sr. Marie Paula again as Headmistress. I will recall just one happy and amusing memory of her and the children there: We were preparing for a P.E. display in the playground and the children, in rows of six from a central point, had to walk round in a circle. Sr. Marie Paula came out to see it, but the lines began to get wavy. In order to encourage them to improve she said to them "Even horses can do it". This has caused so much laughter between us all ever since, and still now, each time we are trying to do something that is going wrong, someone will repeat the words "Even horses can do it."!

In 1959 I became a lecturer in the Institute of London University and was appointed to the P.E. Department at Coloma College of Education, West Wickham, where I lectured for 19 years. Sr. Mary Benignus was the Principal and later Sr. Mary More. I worked with the following Sisters:

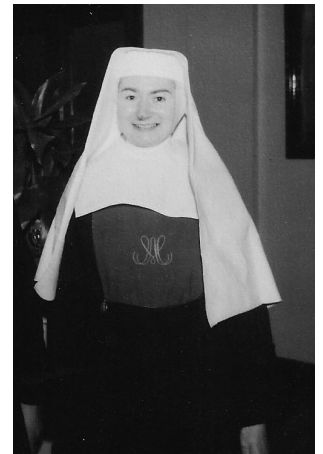
Sr. Mary Baptist	Geography
Sr. Mary Joseph	French
Sr. Mary de Sales	History



Sr. Marie Elise	English
Sr. Marie Louis	Art
Sr. Mary Gregory	History
Sr. Teresa Clements -	first

a student of mine and later a friend on my visits to the Convent

Sr. Maria Kostka



The following Reverend Mothers worked on a Committee for the re-organization of the College before it was closed. I knew them all at different times:

Rev. Mother Mary Anthony
 Rev. Mother Mary Joachim
 Rev. Mother Mary Columba
 Sr. Marie Victoire

I also worked for Sr. Patricia at Rydes Hill Convent, Guildford, to help them prepare for netball tournaments and P.E. This was only for several sessions during term time. I spent many happy hours with her and her staff.

I was the youngest member of staff in the College and was helped enormously by both nuns and lay staff.



I will record special memories of just two of them: Sr. Mary Joseph, who lectured in French. This Department and the P.E. Department shared the top floor over Founders Hall so we met most days. She always had a lovely smile and encouraging word for me when we met, and would give me helpful advice. It grieves me, having kept in touch over all these years, to see how much she has suffered, and still is suffering. I record my memories of her with love and gratitude.

My special memory and thanks must go to Sr. Mary Benignus. She appointed me to the staff at the age of 28, the youngest lecturer in the Institute at that time, and guided me through the first difficult years. Without that guidance I would not have been able to grow in confidence and build such a large department to B.A. level. I continued to visit her after the closure of the College and know how much she grieved at all that was



happening to Catholic Education at that time. But she accepted it all in her quiet way.

After her death I had the privilege of co-ordinating, with much help from my husband Vincent, Fr. Downey, Elizabeth Smith, both members of staff, and others, her Requiem Mass in the College chapel, and I like to think it was my way of thanking her for so many memories.

Sr. Mary De Sales (Brenda Duncmb)



While she was still Principal she helped me to arrange a holiday in Rome for the students with Sr. Mary de Sales. I remember Mary de Sales as a beautiful woman with great knowledge of History. We visited most of the sites in Rome, Naples and Pompei and also the street urchins in Naples who were cared for by Fr. Borelli. In Florence we witnessed the "*Bursting of the Cart*", a religious ceremony which resulted in our being covered with ash !!

Those of us: family, staff, students and friends who listened to Brian Sanders' homily at the Requiem Mass could not fail to remember all that Sr. Benignus did for her "*Gem of a College*" and had watched it grow from 18 students to 650, and from a couple of rooms to the complex that could be seen from the steps of her 'beloved chapel'. I remember her with love and gratitude. For me also the loss of the chapel meant more than any other of the buildings that formed the College.

These are just some of the memories of my life with the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, perhaps the most important ones, which span the years, and which continue today, amid all the changes in their lives too.

Imelda McLaughlin

1st September, 2016

Conclusion

At the beginning of this year 2017, Sr. Mary Goretti told me that the buildings which formed the teaching block of the college and later became part of the school, were to be demolished.

When all the new buildings were planned, each head of department was asked by the architect to draw up what they required. I was head of the Physical Education Department and was allowed to have built a gym with changing rooms and individual showers. This is now all that remains of it!!



We started with PE 9b groups and Sr. Teresa Clements was one of my first students. Although she did not take PE as a main subject, she did the basic course, which was required for all students who would teach in Primary Schools. She was a great help to me during those early days. Later, of course, she became Provincial of the Order. I remember her with love and gratitude.

After Sr. Mary Benignus retired, she would still visit the students in her chair - known, I think, as Victoria. She was still Principal when we admitted the first male students to the College. The boys were difficult at first, and many wanted to take the main PE course. At first they thought they could arrive late to lectures which started at 9 a.m. We decided from the start not to let them attend our lectures if they arrived late. As they very much wanted to be in the groups, they eventually arrived on time.

It was very stimulating to have mixed groups and the students worked well together.

We covered Gymnastics, Athletics, Tennis, Swimming and Dance. The boys, of course, preferred Gymnastics and most of them gained very high marks in their final exams. The girls also gained much from working with them and in the final exams, before the closure of the College in 1979, their results were outstanding.

New Complex when it was completed

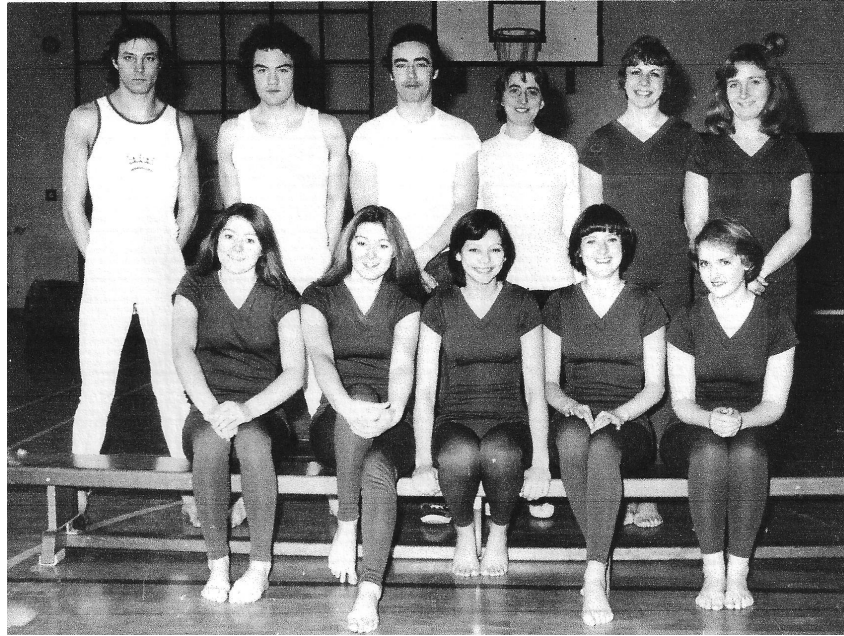


Chapel and Administrative Block

Myself with a group of eight 9b PE Students taken just before they completed their course. They all worked well and happily together.



My last group of 10 students in the main course.



Now the only building left standing is the Emmaus Centre which was previously one of the Student Hostels. It is due to be taken down at the end of this year. I do not know what is planned for that piece of land. All that is known is that houses will be built on the College site which is now almost cleared. The last buildings have now gone. Wickham Court, where all this began, will remain as a Primary School. I have seen the buildings on the site go up, come down and go up again.

It was a privilege to work all these years with the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. This was my life with them all.

Imelda McLaughlin
May 2017