

## **Memory from Pat Ryan (addiscombe Parish)**

The Ryan family has many long and happy memories of The Daughters of Mary and Joseph. Our association with the sisters began in 1959 and still continues in 2016. Let me explain.

Back in 1959 Marion commenced her training in Coloma Training College, where she was very impressed by "Mother Ben". This was a very happy time in her life, and she still remembers the old days whenever her classmates meet for reunions at Emmaus. She has fond memories of walking with a few of her friends up to West Wickham. The manager of the fish and chip shop considered himself to be a comedian and would greet the students with the words "How is hop-along chastity?"

In the early 70s our expanded family experienced the kindness of Sr Mary Constance DMJ at "The Prep." I guess some people may have found Sr Constance a little formidable; that was not our experience. We loved her. She was truly an Angel sent by Almighty God to help us when times got tough. I do not know how we would have survived without her.

When our eldest child Marie started at the Prep we like all other parents were looking forward to a long and happy relationship with the nuns. Then our world fell apart when Anne, the next member of our family started at Coloma. We were devastated to learn that she was suffering from a brain tumour. This was when we discovered the unbelievable kindness of Sr Mary Constance.

The date was set for the operation on Anne's tumour at The Maudsley hospital. (Across the road from Kings College) Fr Sewell S.J. the chaplain at Kings had agreed that Anne could make her First Holy Communion beforehand. She was six years and three days old. "Kings" had graciously offered us the use of a room so that we could have Holy Mass and be present at Anne's First Communion. Our families found the experience too difficult to attend so it was only Marion and me together with Marie and our faithful friend Sr Mary Constance who were present that day. Anne was the "star of the show" and was impressed when some of the other children on Princess Elizabeth ward on seeing her in her sister's First Communion dress asked her if she was getting married.

Sr Mary Constance sat next to Marion at Anne's bedside in Kings College Hospital when Anne was expected to die within hours. I could not be present because I was taking Marie to Heathrow so that she could stay with my brother during this terrible time. Thank God we all survived that experience.

Anne spent much time in hospital. With practice, we got into a routine. In the morning Marion would take Marie to school when Marion's mother or her Aunt would look after Paul, the new arrival to our family, whilst Marion travelled up to Kings to spend the day with Anne. After lunch she would return to Coloma to collect Marie. At the end of my working day I would take Marion's place at Anne's bedside for the rest of the day.

As you would expect, Anne returned home when her health improved and whenever reasonable would go to "The Prep". On good days Anne would go to school with Marie. The brain operation was not a success which resulted in many "Grand Mals". To cope with this problem Sr Constance introduced an arm chair into the class room to prevent Anne from falling on the ground.

Needless to say, the stress on Marion continued! When Anne was receiving Radio Therapy at Kings Sr Constance made a wonderful suggestion. She asked Marion if she would like to send our three year old son Paul to start at Coloma immediately. Her offer was gratefully accepted.

We never knew how to thank the sisters for their undoubted kindness to us; they had become part of our family so every Christmas Eve our three children would walk around to Fitzjames Avenue to wish the nuns Happy Christmas. Paul was still a young child and had not yet learned diplomacy, so when Sr M Constance offered Marie a box of liquorice allsorts she politely accepted it. This was too much for Paul who pointed out to those assembled that Marie hated Liquorice. That amusing incident was frequently recalled in the family.

A new chapter in our lives opened when Marie moved up to Coloma Convent School. We still kept in close touch with Sr Constance and I think she really enjoyed attending the Christmas Concert at Westminster Cathedral Choir School where Paul had become a dayboy.

Yes! We were blessed to know Sr Mary Constance but we were now doubly blessed to meet Sr Sheila Moloney DMJ. She became a wonderful and much loved member of our family. When we needed help (as we frequently did) we asked Sr Sheila for her assistance. We would have been lost without her.

When Sr Cuthbert DMJ agreed to permit Anne to join Marie at Coloma we originally thought that Marie would be Anne's carer, but we were wrong. Sr Sheila took Anne under her wing and we never looked back. At times Sr Sheila even acted as babysitter for the three children. Of course Anne continued to suffer (in her short life she experienced two brain tumours and also had a cyst on the brain). I think Anne was the youngest patient in the country to have what was then known as an EMI scan in the National Hospital. This was the forerunner to the CT scan. At one stage she needed to go to the Cromwell Hospital to have a tooth extracted where a whole emergency team waited in the next room in case she went into status.

The nuns were always helpful to our family as we grew in wisdom and age.

As I said Sr Sheila became one of the family to such an extent that when Paul was confirmed in Westminster Cathedral by Cardinal Hume, Sr Sheila stood by his side as sponsor. On a couple of occasions Marion went with Sr Sheila for a short break to her parents' home on the Isle of Wight.

One day we had an emergency. Because of her countless Grand Mals, the muscles in Anne's jaw became weak and unfortunately she dislocated her jaw after a severe seizure. This was an experience we had not previously encountered so you can

imagine our gratitude when Sr Felicé ran us to Kings College Hospital. Yes, we needed the Ladies.

When Marie left Coloma to study at UCL Sr Mary Gabriel DMJ invited me to become a Foundation Governor at Coloma; Anne by now had become too ill to attend school so I was the last member of our family to continue our relationship with "The Ladies". Sr Sheila was present when our daughter was carried into the church for the last time in 2006 after which a new chapter in our lives commenced.

In April 2016 Marie invited Sr Sheila as a special guest at Worth Abbey when Marie was inducted as Director of Education for the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton at a celebratory Mass concelebrated by Bishop Richard Moth and over 20 priests.