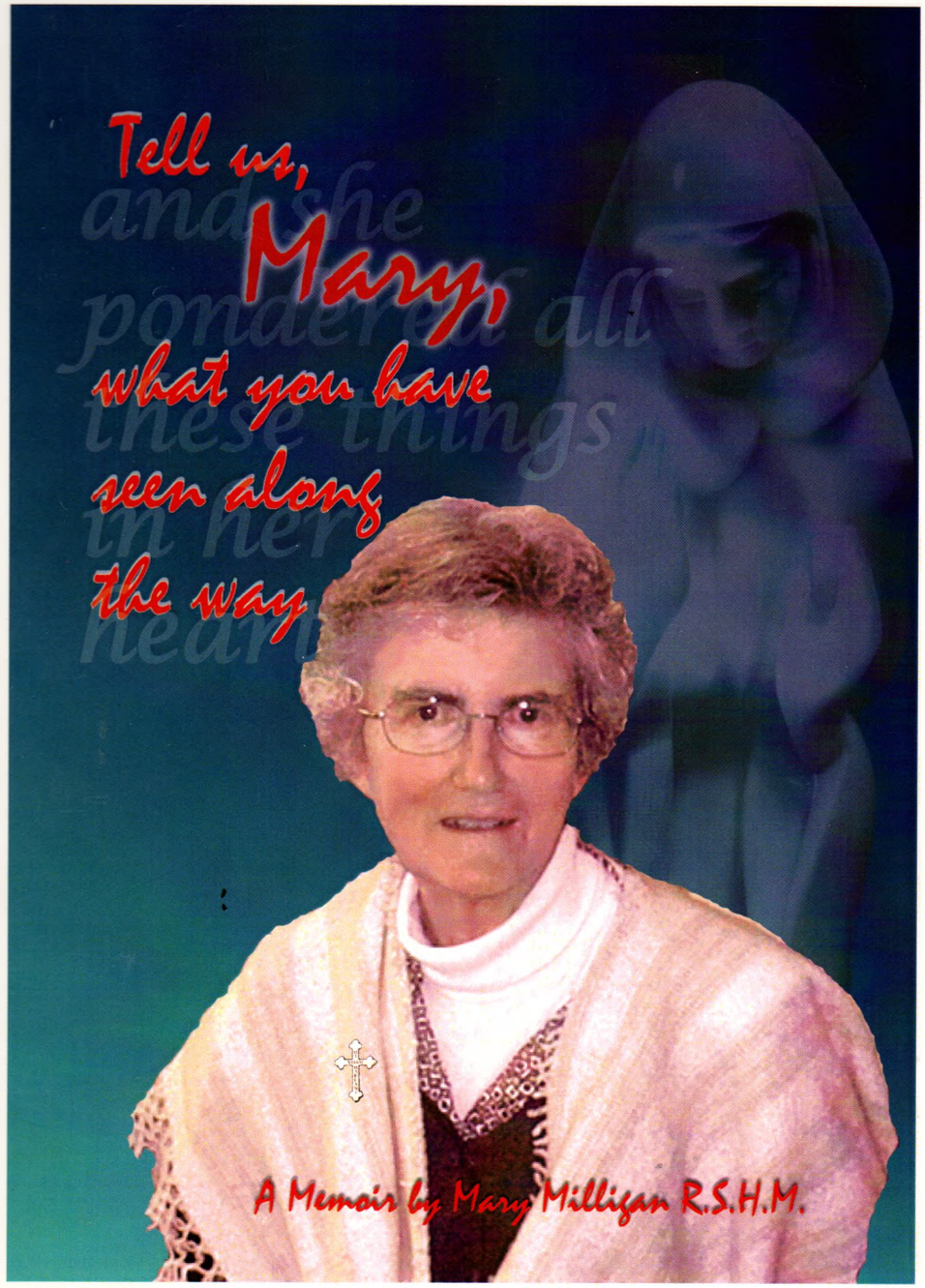
Tell us, Mary, what you have seen along the way



A Memoir by Mary Milligan R.S.H.M.

CONTENTS

Foreword

by Pat Marlowe

It is my great privilege and honor to have been asked to write the Foreword to my sister Mary Milligan's Memoir.

I have finished reading and re-reading the Memoir and I found it deeply moving. I know it has involved many, many hours of thought, reflection writing, editing and organizing. I believe the Memoir gives deep insights into Mary's knowledge and love of Scripture. It clearly shows how Scripture and prayer have been the guiding and sustaining forces in my sister's life and in all her accomplishments.

Because I visit my sister regularly, I know that the Memoir project made a difference in her life. I could see Mary's struggle with the reality of her illness and her fears of forgetting. I regularly saw evidence of how the project helped to keep her focused. She would often share how it was progressing with me, my sister, Jeri, and brother, Mike.

Touching my heart deeply was my sister's honest disclosure of her feelings related to her illness. The "unexpected intrusion" of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease… or worse …has clearly altered life as Mary knew it. She speaks of a sense of exile and the temptation to "hang up one's harp", but then counters it with an incredible sense of Hope and Faith. As we age and when illness strikes, we have the sense that others' lives are proceeding in a "normal" fashion while ours seems to grinding to a halt. Mary addresses that reality with honesty and faith.

In many parts of the Memoir, I found myself learning so much about why Mary would fly off to meetings in the United States or overseas! After reading her Memoir, it became evident to me what an integral part she played in attempting to make the life of her religious community and other religious communities more relevant in today's world. Mary's chapter on Leadership and the Roman Years provides real insights into the role of a General

Superior for an internationally based religious community like the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Mary's love for her community, her passion for her teaching mission and her love of her former students is reflected clearly in her Memoir.

The chapter on HOPE is my favorite and left me and other readers of Mary's Memoir with an incredible sense of optimism despite the loss of friends; the reality of the aging process; illness in our lives; and the fears and terror in our world.

The tapestry of my sister's life, told through her Memoir, is a gift, a treasure to read and keep close to one's heart. It clearly accomplishes what Mary set out to do. It is a moving account of her personal and spiritual journey.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?
Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day"

A Memoir

Chapter I

It is 2009, and I am attempting to write my Memoir. Writing is a little difficult for me now, though my memories are very real. In the past, I was a rather prolific writer and have in my "library" letters I have written, speeches I have given, translations I have done, and lectures I have presented. There are books of my words, my exhortations, my instructions, and my beliefs, my hopes and my dreams. While it is now somewhat difficult for me to weave language into the pattern I desire in writing my reflections, I want to write my words to the next generation and preserve what I don't want to lose. I hope to leave a legacy or validation of my life, the story of my soul's journey in faith and hope and love.

In beginning this journey, the image of weaving is one that comes to mind. In 1956, when I was still learning about my newly adopted country, France, I visited the Gobelin factory in Paris where beautiful tapestries or wall hangings are made. Several weavers were working on the same piece of cloth; all the weavers worked from the reverse side of the tapestry. They never saw their work in progress directly. Only at the end of the construction of the hanging were they able to get an overview of their work.

It is this visit, this Gobelin memory, that I hope will assist me as I weave in and out the thoughts and experiences that have made me who I became over time and who I am today.

I am also influenced in this Memoir venture by a passage from the poet Rilke's **Book of Hours, 1, 17**.

She who reconciles the ill-matched threads
Of her life, and weaves them gratefully
Into a single cloth -
It's she who drives the loudmouths from the hall
And clears it for a different celebration

Where the one guest is you.
In the softness of evening
It's you she receives.

You are the partner of her loneliness,
The unspeaking center of her monologues.
With each disclosure you encompass more
And she stretches beyond what limits her
To hold you.

As I try to express "the ill-matched threads of my life and weave them into a single cloth", writing may help me to see my own life "from the reverse" so to speak. This writing is yet another path on my journey, my relationship with God and those who have "partnered" with me as I have lived my life.

I have chosen a scriptural reference from the gospel of John as the title of my remembrances. Following the Resurrection when Mary Magdalene met the Apostles and proclaimed that Jesus had risen and was no longer at the tomb, the Apostles responded: "Tell us Mary what you have seen along the way." Mary Magdalene is, according to many, the "Apostle to the Apostles".

The title of my Memoir is meant to be an echo, perhaps a response, to that apostolic mission which Mary Magdalene was called upon to fulfill and which, through the "calls" I have received, I have tried throughout my life to respond to and to live my apostolic mission to the fullest extent possible.

I expect to learn something about MY life and I hope that you will learn something about your own. So take my hand as we dance on the journey of "Mary's Memoir".

I invite you to join me.

I long, as does every human being,
to be at home
Wherever I find myself.
Maya Angelou

Home

Chapter II

I have traveled a lot as an adult. It used to be that people would ask, "Where are you from?" I wish I had said I have been on a journey all my life, constant movement, constant learning, constant growing, never quite "arriving or settling down" for good. For me "home" has always been movement, always a journey to somewhere else. I often wonder how I found rootedness and stability and yet I did. A deep belief that God is with us wherever we are has provided me firm foundation of *"abiding in Jesus Christ"*. (Jn.14:1)

"Home" was originally North Hollywood or the San Fernando Valley in Southern California. I was born to parents of Irish and German extraction. My mother, Carolyn Krebs, was a quiet woman but gutsy as well. I'm told that when she was young, she and her girl friends drove from Cincinnati, Ohio to Los Angeles, California. It was the middle of the Depression. While in the Los Angeles area a friend introduced her to my Dad who coincidently was also from Cincinnati. He was a gregarious man who had come west to find work to help feed his mother, two brothers and two sisters in Ohio. Mom and Dad eventually married and ultimately settled in California. I grew up with my two sisters, Pat, the firstborn, Jeri who followed me in age, and my brother, Mike, the youngest. My family has always called me "Mickey". I am quite sure it was my father who originally gave me that name. Three daughters with nicknames Pat, Jeri, and Mickey were certainly paving the way for a "hoped for son" who eventually made it into the

family picture! Our dog, "Arno", was also with us a good part of our early life.

I was, perhaps closest to Pat because of our ages. Her friends were also my friends. When we were young, I remember sitting with her for hours in the trees on our property where we would sing, play games, and generally amuse ourselves. We found comfort in those trees which interestingly enough continue to bear fruit to this day, perhaps a testament to our own lives. Pat was a dedicated teacher for twenty-six years and dearly loved her students and was loved by them. Because I also became a teacher, we had much to share over the years.

I find that the older I and my siblings get, the more our relationships deepen. I share in the stories of their families and the achievement of their children. They have always kept me as part of their lives even during years of physical distance.

Some of the most welcome and peaceful times I now have are on visits to Jeri's lovely home in San Clemente. It is beautiful there on a hill near the Pacific Ocean. I can garden, read, and sleep to my heart's content. It is a lovely and warm place to be and it rejuvenates my spirit. Jeri is well known in our family as the one to count on for a family gathering and the wonderful cooking that goes with bringing us together.

My brother, Mike, is a published writer and has encouraged me to write as well. Recording his experiences and events in his life as a grandfather, he has completed a book called Grandpa Rules which is both thoughtful and amusing. He also worked with his wife, Jill, and produced a sequel, Grandma Rules, which is equally amusing. Mike expressed his talent in writing for television sitcoms as well, such as the "The Jeffersons" and "Dear John". Bill Cosby wrote the foreword to Mike's Grandpa Rules so there is a celebrity connection in our family!

Young as I was when I left home and was eventually sent to France where I celebrated my 21st birthday in Neuilly, I have strong memories of my family being very proud of me, particularly my father, whose name Bernard, I later took in my religious life. I would not say that I am gregari-

ous like my Dad who was pretty well known in the Los Angeles area. He was certainly recognized by his peers throughout his newspaper career as a columnist and sports writer for the *Herald Examiner*. From my mother I gathered to my heart not only her willingness to try new things, but to always maintain a constant, balanced, faithful and quiet presence with our family and with her friends. I felt privileged to deliver her eulogy at her funeral in 1996.

Never having been a parent, I don't fully understand what mothers and fathers experience in raising children. I suspect it is, in a simple way, something akin to gardening which I love. As much as the gardener sows seeds or sets out plants hoping to give them a good start at life, plants themselves, not unlike children, have their own timetable for growth. It is often the plants that teach us lessons. I've learned from experience that you can't rush them and like children, they "expect" that we be faithful to them, that we feed and water them. Absent that nourishment, they won't live, or at best they languish, neither growing nor dying.

While I believe no families are perfect, my memories and experiences were such that I took the good early values given me and incorporated them into my life and the choices I would make in the future. They were my first foundation, the earliest threads in my life's tapestry.

I had begun writing this Memoir in Montebello, California where I lived from December 2006 until early September 2009 at a place called "Casa Guadalupe". "Casa" is a lovely house with a very welcoming Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) community of retired sisters and a capable and caring staff. It was a safe place for me. It was quiet, and I was often silent, too silent some might say. I was cared for when it was necessary and there was companionship if and when I chose it.

While Montebello, as a city, does not compare to the beauty of the places I have been in my life, there was beauty and comfort inside the walls of "Casa", and I had chosen to be there. Because I had been plagued by spells of dizziness for some time, I had hoped that "retirement" might help alleviate the situation. While at Casa Guadalupe I tried to build a healthy lifestyle into my days, with exercise, reading, writing, praying and learning.

Perhaps I had finally arrived ...home? It was the place I went back to when I had been away, but in my heart, I had memories of far off places, events, challenges, opportunities, and relationships that made me who I am. It is mostly from those things that I have formed my values and affections and in those I have made my home. I really believe that "home" is the place

inside our hearts where we place the treasures of the life we have lived. That is my CASA.

It is now later in 2009, and I know I am not well. I have made another choice, along with the support of my superiors and my family, to move to yet another "home" where I will receive additional support, both physical and intellectual. I visited Regina Residence, operated by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange, not long ago, as well as some of our RSHM sisters who live there, and was surprised to find quite a few other sisters whom I also know and who are living meaningful lives with their limitations. I have recently joined the sisters there.

And so, I am looking forward…to another phase, and to another place in my life.

> "The wind blows where it chooses
> And you hear the sound of it,
> But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."
> (Jn.3:8)

I will listen to the wind…

Unexpected, taken by surprise
I was not expecting it. I didn't know.
God always surprises, always meets us at the crossroads
Meets us in sunrise and sunset and all in between.
Mary Milligan

The Unexpected Intrusion

Chapter III

There were little tugs on my body: some unexplained dizziness, even an early episode when I actually lost consciousness while driving (an unexplainable assault into my otherwise rather healthy life); some listing to the left when I walked. I even joked with my friends about that. There were visits to doctors, various tests and then a calming period. I had begun teaching diocesan seminarians part time while I was provincial superior in California. After I completed my term as provincial superior, I taught Scripture to the seminarian students full time and did that for nearly three years. I loved my time with the seminarians, but eventually the "tugs" came back. Confusion…what was this all about?

Trips to the University of Southern California (USC) medical facilities, more doctors, and more tests. It had become too difficult to keep traveling back and forth from Camarillo, California where the seminary is located, and where I was living in a little house on the seminary grounds, to Los Angeles to meet with my doctors. And so I did not continue my work at the seminary. It was a painful loss to give up the teaching, but it was time to pay attention to the tugs. There was something pulling me in a different and unknown direction. I really didn't want to go there.

That is how I felt when my illness took hold of me. I had always been able to maintain my independence and with special grace from God, control my life, execute my choices and decisions, and live successfully my chosen vocation as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary with the freedom that comes from loving the people and things on which we rely.

Things are different now.

been treating me for it for about two years. Perhaps that is true, though there has also been mention of the dreaded word "Alzheimer's". I know that there are parts of me that are different now, and try as I might, I cannot embark alone anymore, even with God at my side, on the journey that has been my blessed life and move toward the plans and hopes I still have for myself. It is a humbling experience, sometimes even terrifying, but more than that, it is an unwelcome intrusion, unexpected and even unfair, I sometimes feel.

I know I have been blessed with a keen intellect, real insights into life, and a deep spirituality that has fed my soul. My physical health has always been generally good, but Parkinson's or Alzheimer's? This wasn't supposed to happen to me. Not I, or anyone else, would have expected this for me. This disease has been an intrusion into my life and I am learning each day how to live with it, fearing its unknown paths and even hiding it somewhat from myself, my doctors and others in my life. It is a lonely place to be....

Like a leaf falling in freedom to find itself caught, trapped in icy water
Months until thaw releases it again. A tug at the heart.
Pay attention to the unexpected tug.

I have learned to expect that my disease is "unpredictable". The paths it takes are various. For the most part, the tremors most often associated with the illness come and go with me and seem not to have progressed very much or they are controlled by the miracles of the medicines prescribed. But medicines have their own side effects and for me, it seems, they bring my own version of "morning sickness". Mornings are definitely a challenge for me to the point where I am often not well enough to participate in the Eucharistic celebration with my sisters. This is a real loss in the routine of my life. It is hard not to be able to count on how I am going to feel from one day to the next.

There are other losses generated, I believe, by my experience with my disease. It sometimes appears as if my opinions are no longer valued, no longer asked for anymore, particularly with regard to the "missions or calls" of my Institute. I still have opinions and a history of having helped my sisters achieve the spirit of the community that exists today. I wish to share these thoughts but hesitate for fear they may be "lost in translation", so to speak, as I attempt to bring the threads of my thoughts into words.

My illness definitely requires patience on my part and on the part of those who interact with me. I try to work on the patience I need with myself

and am grateful to those who take the time or give me time to bring my sometimes mismatched threads to full expression. I feel, in many ways, this dilemma is the reverse side of my life's tapestry.

Perhaps my illness is a kind of exile or exodus. Recently, in rereading a talk I gave in Béziers, France in 1999 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the founding of my Institute, I was struck by the parallel I had used about the first Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) community, led by our foundress M. St. Jean, and the experiences the Israelites had in exile or captivity. Focusing mostly on M. St. Jean's life, I realized that the pattern of her life's events was one of love, crisis of loss, choice, and a call to new life resulting ultimately in the growth of my Institute.

The Israelites, having been brought unwillingly into exile...expressed their pain in a liturgical context: "*By the rivers of Babylon-there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"* (Ps. 137:1-4)

The temptation in crisis is always "to hang up one's harp", to be paralyzed by one's loss.

M. St. Jean's life has even greater meaning for me now than when I wrote those words in 1999. I have realized even more as I deal with the "unexpected intrusion" of my illness that each human transition, personal or communal, carries a crisis (often of loss), a choice and a call to new life. Every exodus, be it geographical or relational, psychological or spiritual, means both gain and loss. One must leave the familiar which one knows and loves in order to move to a new place.

I do not want to write only about the negative aspects in relation to my experience of Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. I know and honestly feel that God is in the experience. I find myself more frequently engaged in an attitude of prayer. In responding to this "test" I am faced with and the challenge of acceptance, I realize more and more that God does love me and is with me at all of the crossroads in my life. God does indeed invite me to participate in the mystery of life and death.

I recall writing to my sisters in the Institute in my very first letter (December, 1980) as general superior, about the Incarnation and its relationship to hope and faith:

> *"Somehow, the Incarnation of the Son of God teaches us that...*
> *'desperate' situations are precisely the ones in which hope is born.*

To recognize our own powerlessness and radical poverty and to believe that that is where God's power is made manifest - that is true hope. Christmas reminds us that the glory of God is made manifest in poverty, in simplicity, in powerlessness. While there is certain romanticism in the crib scenes..., there is very little romanticism in the situations of poverty around us and in our own lives. Faith, though, calls us to believe that in our flesh too the glory of the Lord is manifest. Faith calls us to believe - even in the "face of the impossible" - that the glory of God is among us, that in our own weakness is God's strength, that in our "deaths" is God's life."

I would like to think that my attitude toward the illness that I live with daily does now and will in the future help to make God's power manifest. I pray I can be an instrument of hope for others in their "desperate" situations of illnesses or life, whatever they may be. Perhaps that is my mission now.

Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts. And we are never, ever the same.

Author Unknown

Relationships

Chapter IV

A good friend said not long ago that "you don't share yourself easily; it is difficult to talk about yourself". How can that be true? I feel that I have left a piece of myself with nearly everyone I have met, lived with or loved in my life. I believe I have approached my encounters with openness to the person in front of me and have advanced the relationship by sharing pieces of who I am as the relationship develops. It is that sharing, and being shared with, that deepened my relationships and has brought me a myriad of friends over my life's journey. Each is a special and vibrant thread in my tapestry. Thoughts of the real friends I have made, to this day, brighten my world, make me smile and make me whole. They are the treasured golden threads in my life's tapestry.

There is something about the French language that, perhaps unconsciously, has given me the sudden realization in a relationship that my involvement with a person is more than just casual or formal. In French, the word "you" has two forms: *vous* and *tu*, each having a unique meaning. *"Vous"* is the more formal and *"tu"*, the familiar. In speaking French, it is only after some time of growth in a relationship that one presumes to address another as *"tu"*. It can be a breakthrough moment. I have been blessed with many *"tus"* in my life, starting with God. I distinctly remember the moment I understood something about God. It was a flash of insight, an "Aha" or peak experience, an introduction to the presence and face of God I had not seen or felt before. It occurred when I was studying theology at St. Mary's College in Indiana. One day, when I had been sitting for quite a while in the chapel at St. Mary's, I felt the presence of God very strongly and knew that I was entering a new relationship with God. It was a moment of joy and peace and a recognition that I was being called to see God's face through my study of Scripture. *"Cherchez Dieu!"* In that moment I knew I had found

God.

How can I speak about my friends by name? I fear I would leave someone out. Yet to "generalize" my friendships might diminish the uniqueness of each individual. Friends are indeed a gift and one cannot or should not categorize them.

My deep friendships developed at all the stages in my life and in some ways delivered the grace of intimacy. With each challenge, new experience, unexpected assignment, or even foreign country, I always seemed to have someone close with whom I could share my values, frustrations, unknowns, insights, and joys.

There have been women in my life, both within my own community and outside, who helped me evolve professionally as a leader locally and internationally. Some have been mentors to me as well as friends. Some helped me develop my insights in theology and scripture, respecting my opinions and encouraging me to write and teach. Frequently their thoughts and mine would complement each other so that together a greater "whole" would be created to be shared with others. The women I have known and loved, in many ways were, and are, catalysts for change in religious communities and in the Church itself, particularly as the role of women in the Church struggles to fully evolve to its rightful place in the Church and in society. I have always drawn great courage from strength of the women I have been blessed to call my friends.

There have been men in my life as well, some who were, in fact, confidantes or kindred souls at various stages in my life's journey. Religious life does not alter the longing for human interaction and intimacy. I learned in my friendships with men that certain safeguards were healthy. It was important to involve the community, to present a public awareness, to introduce them to the community so that they might become friends of the community as well. My friendships with men were neither stifled nor stifling. On the contrary, the relationships became an impetus for growth in each encounter. I believe they made me and my friends deeper persons. In many ways these experiences were a kind of mentoring through friendship. Mentors often see qualities or talents in us long before we recognize them in ourselves.

Most often, I collaborated with men on an equal footing. This, however, was not always the case, especially in giving retreats, which were often deep spiritual experiences for those making such retreats. If there were a mixture of male and female retreat directors, I would need to make special arrangements to take care of the sacramental needs of *my* retreatants.

I remember one retreat in particular where I and an ordained member had worked well together in preparation for the retreat and had shared in presenting the Scripture and reflected together on the readings. But when the Mass moved to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, I took my place with the non-ordained retreatants. I remember my feelings of rejection at having to move. It was as if I had been ignored or overlooked. This occurrence has often supplied the context for me to reflect on this situation that continues to this day in the Church that I love.

Sometimes life has a way of changing relationships with friends and loved ones. Changes in our own lives such as careers, locale, education, maturation, spiritual or political perspectives and distance often challenge relationships and growth in love or intimacy.

One painful example of a changed relationship within my family took place early in my formative years in France. My family knew that I could not receive phone calls unless it was a feast day or important holiday. The family was gathered for a card game at home and realized that it was a national holiday in honor of Columbus. Stretching their definition of a national celebration enabled them to make a phone call to Béziers, they thought! And so they reached me by phone on this occasion. After my parents had spoken to me, they put my brother, Mike, on the phone, no doubt waking him from a deep sleep. I told him or asked him for something he did not understand. Instead of responding with a "huh?" which would have been normal for a six or seven year old, he said, "Pardon me"! It felt like a knife had entered me. I realized that he had no idea who "Mickey" was. Absence had not "made the heart grow fonder". On the contrary, it seemed it would test this relationship made fragile by distance.

There are times when, because of my illness, I find myself wondering how my deceased friends might advise me today. The depth of my friendships, particularly those whom I also consider my mentors, comforts me even now. There were and are friends whose "presence" I feel to this day, despite distance or even death. They have indeed left "footprints on my heart".

"We are called to live beyond boundaries...to be like Mary, followers of Jesus, open to the unexpected ways of the Spirit. Internationality is a gift from our origins..."

Excerpts from "Like a River"
RSHM Publication

Internationality

Chapter V

Having decided at age nineteen to enter the convent, I left the San Fernando Valley in 1953, following my high school years at Corvallis and a year at Mount Saint Mary's college in Los Angeles, and arrived in Tarrytown, New York to begin my novitiate with the goal of becoming a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM). As a novice, I was chosen, along with one other novice, to go to the international novitiate in Béziers, France. Of course, I was not consulted by the major superiors about whether or not I would like to go there. These were the 1950s and consultation within the Institute was not common then. I often wonder how my life has been affected by seemingly small decisions made by other people.

Some time before leaving Tarrytown for France, I recall being on a walk with other novices near the grotto on the novitiate grounds and meditating on a little card I had been given, a *pensée* or thought for the day: *Dieu le veut ainsi*, God wishes it so! Over time, the call to go to France was made clear to me as I meditated on that little phrase.

And so, my early years in religious life were spent in France along with two novices from each of the Institute's provinces -English/Irish, Brazilian, Portuguese, French, and Eastern/Western American. There began my many future experiences in the internationality of the Institute. The various provinces became not just names to me. Indeed, each of the provinces began to take shape and form in my understanding. If someone spoke of Brazil, for example, I could call to mind a face, an expression of another culture, a different way of doing things. Not only was the internationality of the Institute taking place for me, but the French language was an indispensible entrée into that reality. What an extraordinary opportunity I had been blessed with! It would serve me very well later in life as well as in my formative years.

I remember fondly, M. Jeanne d'Arc Lefebvre, a French woman, who

was in charge of the novitiate in Béziers. She spoke to us only in French and the underlying message she conveyed is one that has guided my life and my journey: **"Cherchez Dieu"** (Seek God). God was to be found in all things, in the Church as well as in Scripture, the Eucharist, the community and in the Cross. It was there in Béziers that the "ill-matched threads of my life" began to take shape.

Sincere, trusting, and deeply happy in my formative years, I was blessed to spend time in Béziers in the round chapel where Father Gailhac, our Founder, and M. St. Jean, our Foundress, are buried. I experienced peace, grew in prayer and mastered the French language, as well. Little did I know, at the time, how this foundation would propel me into positions of leadership in my religious communities where I would later live and work.

I took these memories with me on my journey into life, and I "pondered them in my heart".

One of the lasting memories I have took place during an eight day retreat before profession of vows. I remember sitting for hours in the park attached to our large house. From that point I could see the multicolor of the countryside, its rather sparse population, and the Orb River below. I sensed somehow that my life was connected with the people who lived in the Béziers region and whose daily lives I could imagine. I believe I received a deep realization that this "community" of people, even broader than my own religious community, was indeed a vital dimension of "church", a church I was called to be part of.

In 1955, I made my first vows in the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary Motherhouse in Béziers. I promised publicly that my whole life would be given to God even though I did not know how that would be done. Like all life commitments, there was a sense of "come what may". When I made my public profession, the center of that life long commitment was not teaching. I never focused on what I would do as a religious. No, I was giving myself to God, to "being a nun". The rest was merely detail.

Having completed my novitiate, I was sent on my first mission to Neuilly (Paris) where I would teach in the American, Irish and French schools. There began my love for teaching, a love I cherish to this day. I was indeed a rookie teacher whose exposure to teaching was recalling the methods of the fine teachers that I had in high school and college. I learned through working day in and day out with our boarding school students that teaching was more than academia. My time and energy were used constantly with the students. They were young, eager, challenging, and open to the possibilities of life. I

learned from them, as they learned from me.

Much later in my life, while Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, I had occasion to interview and hire a professor from the Sudan. He was asked during the interview how he would manage the great gap between his own teaching and cultural richness and that of his students. He hardly blinked an eye before responding: **"I will love them."** That was my goal years earlier when first teaching in Paris. I am still in touch with a number of those students from those early years and I do still love them.

While engaged in my first teaching ventures in Paris, I also applied for and was accepted for admission to the Sorbonne as a candidate for the *doctorat de l'universite* degree. Serious study, writing and defending a thesis, along with teaching and guiding young students were tasks that could only be undertaken because I was young and full of energy. With the support of my sisters in the local community of Neuilly I could have taken on the world, I think, in those years in Paris.

In the summer of 1959, full of the fervor of my spiritual and academic training, I left my home in France and returned to the United States to begin teaching at Marymount College in Los Angeles. It was there I was to make yet another new home, and my final profession as an RSHM.

California, the Western American Province of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, was definitely my "home base", though for the rest of my life I was to find myself on a journey through international airports and the RSHM provinces with a substantial amount of time actually spent in Rome.

Because I had been deeply involved in the rewriting of the RSHM constitutions, had served on the general council, and later became general superior, I had the opportunity and responsibility to travel to all the provinces of the RSHM Institute. My travels to the provinces were determined by the needs of the sisters there. The general council recognized that the best way of being with the provinces was through "constitution retreats". And so we organized these groupings which helped us to integrate our fundamental rule of life with the lives of the sisters in their own cultural surroundings and also fostered collaboration within the Institute. This proved to be an invaluable and unifying experience for me personally and for the Institute as a whole. To see and feel the Spirit at work in each of the provinces enriched my life and that of the general counsel.

> *"Prophets and Kings have desired to see what you see and have not seen it; to hear what you hear but have not heard it." (Luke 10:24)*

In 1980 and many years thereafter, I had the opportunity to participate on an RSHM committee devoted to the gathering, translating and disseminating of the writings and history of our Founder, Father Gailhac our Foundress, M. St. Jean and the first community of sisters.

Many of us knew that the fundamental texts contained great riches of spirituality and apostolic dynamism just waiting to be reflected upon in personal prayer and community dialogue. The committee was aptly named "Sources". Some work had begun prior to our General Chapter in 1980. However, heightened appeals of our sisters throughout the Institute to gain access to source documents in the language of the province in which they lived were heard at the general chapter. The chapter members, therefore, set objectives for the Sources Committee:

- To put at the disposition of the sisters and other interested persons documents and studies concerning the origin and development of the Institute
- To organize primary source material in such a way as to ensure that future research is based on reliable and complete documentation.

Sister Marjorie Keenan, from the Eastern American Province, was asked to coordinate the Sources Committee. The general council stayed close to the project as well. Because I spoke French and Portuguese as well as my native language, I was actively involved in the work of the committee. It is only recently that the original committee completed its work and held its last meeting. I wish I had been at that meeting, but my illness precluded that...another painful loss.

I have been deeply influenced by the life and writings of our Founder and Foundress and the zeal of their work with *"les vaincus de la vie"*, those overwhelmed by life. In 1999, I wrote a poem about our Founder, Foundress, and the first community. It is one of my personal treasures and I wish to make it

part of my Memoir story.

Beginnings

A seed was planted, not a large one but a small one
just about the size of a mustard seed.
It was planted in Béziers,
In a needy people who did not know the seed was there.
It fell into a faithful heart and was carefully tended.

Women tended the seed.
It was watered by the tears of a weeping widow,
By the work of her good companions.

Like all seeds, this one needed to fall into the ground and die.

And so it brought forth good fruit.
Blown by the wind of the Spirit to distant nations,
off shoots sprouted.
The women did not proclaim themselves but
The One who sent them.
They lived in harmony,
they loved in freedom,
they walked in joy.

"Let us write the vision down", they said
"For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
It will surely come, it will not delay." (Hab. 2: 2:3)

Has the time come? Has the seed grown? Is the vision clear?
Is their faith strong?
Another wind arises. Where will it take them?
"The wind blows where it chooses,
And you hear the sound of it
But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."
(John 3:8)

Listen to the wind…

He who would be a leader must be a bridge.
Welsh Proverb

Leadership: The Roman Years

Chapter VI

Not long ago, I shared my résumé, or in my parlance "Curriculum Vitae", with a friend. While the résumé is chronological and full of my academic credentials, experiences, publications and achievements, my friend zeroed in on the section titled "Additional Experience". In eight simple listings contained in a tiny section of the five pages of my résumé, I reference my positions of leadership within my religious community, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Those few listings encompass nearly thirty years of my life! My friend was aghast at the minimal attention in terms of space I had given to the positions of leadership within my own community or religious family. I was asked if I could talk or write about my experiences in leadership...*would humility get in the way?* I replied that I would not abandon truth for humility. Truth requires recognizing the gifts that God has given us and expects that we activate and live them.

What is it like to be a leader? What makes a leader? What is it like to be recognized as such? Is it a burden or a blessing? I don't fully know the answers to those questions though we can most often recognize true leadership in others when we see it. Some might say of others, "he or she is a born leader". I don't think that is necessarily the case. Circumstances, i.e. time, place, situations, people, education, training, personal drive, vision and perhaps heredity, all contribute to leadership.

In my case, I know in my heart that the Holy Spirit was at work in my evolution as a leader and in the charism I brought to the RSHMs during my times of leadership. I truly believe I never sought it, but it "came upon me" none the less, like being baptized again or drenched with a power not of my own making. In the tapestry of my life and my journey with God, surely the color red marks the times when I have experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Coincidently, red is a favorite color of mine. It brightens our landscapes; it highlights sometimes drab clothing ensembles; it demands that we pay attention to what we underscore in our writings; it makes us "stop" and take notice of dangerous situations; it is the color of love. It is the flame of the Spirit within us. Or as Father Gailhac, our Founder, would have said, zeal is the flame of love.

If I could have chosen the era in which I would have wanted to be in leadership within a religious congregation, it would certainly be precisely the time when I was in fact general superior. That was a time when both past and future were seen as sources of renewal.

I had spent several years in teaching and administration at Marymount College and Loyola Marymount University in the Los Angeles area and had directed young sisters, been a local superior, a provincial councilor, and a general councilor. Much of this occurred during and just after Vatican II. During this time, religious congregations were asked to begin a process of renewal. The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary had already begun this process. A key element of this renewal was to include the cooperation/participation of all the members of the Institute. In our case this was to be an international dialogue building to consensus for any proposed changes.

A special "chapter" was held in 1968. We were expected to revise our constitutions in the light of:

- A continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community.
- An adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times.

It was a big job, but we were poised, hopeful and ready to take it on.

I know I played a significant role within the Institute during this time. I had been elected as a general councilor in 1969 and spent much of the next five years in Rome working on the renewal process. In 1975, I was named Coordinator of the International Commission for Revision of the Constitutions. This collaborative task would take me to all the provinces in the Institute. There

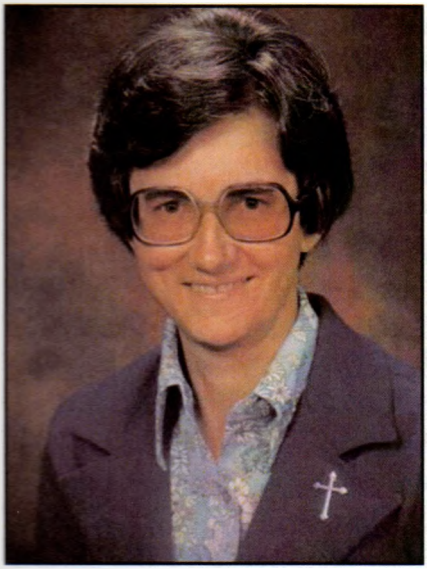
was deep prayer, little sleep and much travel! There were many meetings, visitations, translations, research into our Founder's and Foundress' writings, and frequent communication with the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in Rome.

It was during that time that I also studied Portuguese so that I might communicate better with our sisters worldwide. I quickly learned that my job was to help the various provinces think about the charism of the Institute and then to help distill this charism so that it would integrate with the various cultures and situations of each province. Our revised constitutions actually speak of the "grace of internationality". While our provinces "speak in their own tongues", it is the grace of fruitful dialogue that opens our hearts and minds to one another, makes us whole as an Institute, and gives life to our various missions.

The revised constitutions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary were approved at a general chapter of the Institute in August of 1980 and submitted to, and ultimately approved by, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

If I were to highlight any of the achievements of my life as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, I would definitely focus on the role I played in the rewriting of our constitutions. All of my skills as a leader, coordinator, motivator, "bridge", and beacon of hope were brought to bear during this process. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, I truly gave my all to this life giving task.

It has been over twenty-five years since the revised constitutions were adopted. While I don't collect many concrete "treasures", I have in my possession a medal struck by the Portuguese province acknowledging the 25th anniversary of the constitutions rewrite. To touch it reminds me that God was at work in me and my partnering sisters internationally.



On August 3, 1980, I was elected to serve as general superior of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary from 1980 to 1985. I was the tenth general superior of the RSHM and was also the first general superior born in the United States. Our Institute is international and whenever we gather as a whole body, it is important to us that sisters be represented from all of our provinces, regions, and other administrative structures. Our leadership teams at the general level are chosen by a direct vote of the delegates, that is, of sisters who have themselves been elected or selected as delegates to the international meeting called a "chapter". The chapter which met in 1980 was the sixteenth chapter of RSHM history.

I am quite sure that my international training in France and my work learning of the spirit in all the provinces during the constitutions revision contributed to my selection as general superior. I was both proud and humbled by my selection to continue as a leader of the entire Institute. I vividly remember saying "YES" to this new mission I was given.

It was while I watched my sisters receiving Communion during the Eucharistic Celebration on my election day that I remember an overwhelming impression that came over me that I could love every sister in the Institute. My heart was large enough, and my zeal was active enough to do so.

Some have asked what an RSHM general superior does besides reside in Rome! I should clarify that a general superior does not act alone, except in certain legal and clearly defined roles. Most often she acts as part of a team, a "council" which also has certain defined roles. There is always a "we" behind what a general superior does.

For five years I worked with a very dedicated group of RSHM sisters representing the whole Institute. My general councilors were Sister Maria Lucia from Portugal and Sister Brid McGrath from the English Irish province. These two women gave me wise counsel and much support. We had our ups and downs as is normal in any group desiring to live closely in pursuit of a common goal.

This question of just what a general superior does is a difficult one to answer because, while there is a common role description, each leader at the general level meets the challenges of her own times, and she meets them with the unique talents and abilities that are hers. Each chapter member participates in decisions with a view to greater fidelity to our apostolic vocation. Together all the chapter members set goals and establish priorities for the future. Let me give you an example of how each leadership team brings its own vision and talents to the task.

In the early 1980s we were concerned about Africa. We felt that our structures on that continent did not favor the desired autonomy of our sisters there.

We had a number of sisters in Mozambique, in Zambia, in Zimbabwe and in Mali. We noted that the sisters in those countries had minimal contact with each other across national boundaries and we felt the need to revise our structure on the African continent in order to facilitate communication. We appointed a Coordinator for our African Mission. Her responsibility was to encourage interchange among the four countries where we were; to promote more frequent contacts in those countries and among them, and to make sure that the needs of the various areas were met. It was during this time that Mozambique became a region, that is, a structure which had a high degree of independence.

No doubt in other times and other places we might have acted differently. But we needed to respond to the needs of OUR times.

I remember several issues which called on my energies and talents and those of my council. These issues were:

- Call to Justice
- Constitutions
- Co-responsibility and Collaboration
- Church
- "Sources"

The issues were interwoven, and set against a backdrop of Vatican II which had occurred nearly twenty years earlier producing several documents that opened the windows of the Church to the world and the windows of the world to the Church. Prior to serving as general superior, I had the privilege to have served as a general councilor from 1969-1975 during the term of Sister Margarida Maria Goncalves, our eighth general superior, a woman who was steeped in the knowledge and documents of Vatican II. Sister Margarida Marie was a true mentor to me during those times and is still a

mentor to me today. I was also frequently in Rome when Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado was general superior, 1975-1980, as I was coordinating the rewriting of the RSHM constitutions. I had the benefit of participating with them and learning so much from their work and the renewal of our Institute that was occurring in major part because of Vatican II.

Under their leadership the Institute and its leaders were guided, in many ways by three documents which came from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* which provided a theological reflection on the nature of the Church; *Perfectae Caritatis* addressed specifically to religious men and women; and *Gaudium et Spes*, the final document of the Vatican Council which had not been foreseen from the beginning. Every aspect of church life was examined during Vatican II. The fundamental question which needed to be decided was the Church's relationship with the world.

Those who are religious know that we used to speak of "leaving" the world, leaving it as if there were somewhere else to go! But wariness of the world extended throughout the Church and even today there is no one "image" of the church commonly accepted by all believers.

While all of the documents of Vatican II had a major impact on religious life, on my life personally and as a leader, and on the expected future of the Church, perhaps it was *Gaudium et Spes* that most opened our hearts and minds to the world. Many of us can still cite the opening words of this document: *"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."*

From *Gaudium et Spes* the seeds of justice were implanted deep in our hearts. In revising our own constitutions we went back to our "sources", our Founder Father Gailhac and foundress M. St. Jean, and the first community, their writings and works of mercy. We pledged to "serve from the perspective of the poor".

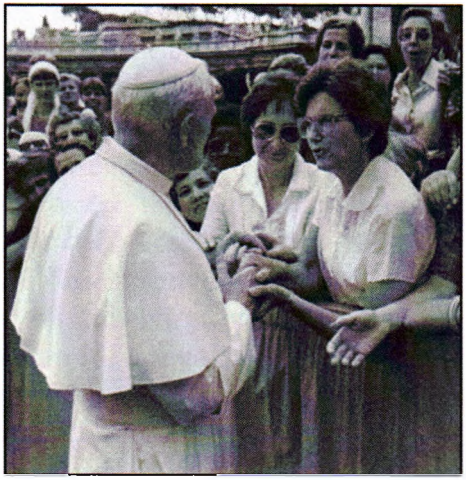
We would collaborate more fully among our provinces, within our provinces and with the laity of the Church in each of the cultures in which we found ourselves. Our revised constitutions state: *"We share the deep love of Jean Gailhac for the poor. Faithful to our heritage, attentive to the signs of the times and the call of the Church, we are committed to the service of evangelical justice, wherever we are and whatever our ministry."* These statements reflect a concern for all things human, a commitment to God's temple which is humanity. Our ministries were changing in many of our communities as we entered the world in new ways and in greater fulfillment

of our apostolic mission.

Through the letters I wrote regularly from Rome to the Institute, through visitations to the provinces, through friendship, and through actively participating in discussions on religious life held with the Pope himself and other groups in Rome, I believe I fulfilled the charge I was given when elected general superior. I am grateful to have walked alongside our sisters and, through them, of contributing in some way to the creation of a world of peace, justice and love. When I was elected general superior in 1980 many sisters told me that I was "the right person at the right time". I believe that was true.

In the life of a religious, at least in more modern times when the concept of personal choice was added to strict obedience or adherence to the will of another, a decision to accept an assignment, seek a new mission, advance a personal interest or talent, there is always a period of discernment. What a wonderful concept that is!

I distinctly remember the "word" that came to me in 1985 when I might have sought a second term as general superior. As some may know, *"a process of discernment precedes the elections of the general council. During this process, I understood very clearly that the reasons given me by the delegates to continue as general superior were a confirmation of the past rather than a mandate for the future. The direction we had set for the future of the Institute required a new vision and different gifts and skills. This understanding on my part was accompanied by a deep peace - and even joy - which is surely the sign of the Spirit's action. The sisters with whom I spoke to verify my freedom in my inclination not to continue as general superior confirmed the truth of my decision. (August, 1985 Circular)*



I came to realize that saying "yes" in the process of leading sometimes means saying "no". Taking time to pray, discern and verify with one's peers before major decisions or choices is healthy and can often open one's own life to new and different experiences. In the tapestry of MY life, so interwoven with the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary's future, saying "no" to reelection was a very significant tying of much needed knots that not only enhanced my life, but that of the

community as well. Sister Patricia Connor, also from the United States, was elected our eleventh general superior.

In my final letter to the Institute, I stated that I was not laying down a burden. My years in general government were rich, happy and graced. I was granted a view of the extraordinary generosity and love of God which is truly the life of our Institute. The life and prayer of our older and sick sisters, their joyful fidelity and loving welcome of God's will have sustained me constantly. They have, I believe, given me the courage to follow the loving kindness of God leading me at present.

Pray without ceasing.
In everything, give thanks.
1 Thessalonians

Prayer and Contemplation

Chapter VII

In another of my circulars to sisters in the Institute, when I was general superior, I remember writing about "prayer and a contemplative attitude".

I have tried to live a contemplative life despite my involvement in various "external" missions as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. While engaged in study, in teaching, in writing, in administrative and spiritual leadership, hearing the "call" in my life to these missions was only possible as I was open to hearing the "Word". Over the years, I have tried to develop a deeply contemplative attitude, an interior silence which grew through my commitment to personal prayer. While some may believe that prayer is a discipline, a duty, a pious practice, for me it has been an encounter, a personal time with the "Word". I gave and give myself freely to it. Someone recently told me that I always seem to exhibit a tranquil or calm presence. I believe that is the fruit of my times of prayer. Without allowing time for the Spirit to "converse" with us; it is often difficult to give meaning to the daily actions of our lives or to give witness to the values religious persons hold dear. It is in the cloister of our minds and hearts that God speaks the "Word". I have always been drawn to that cloister.

One of the blessings of my religious life has surely been the ability to participate in a retreat at least once each year. Retreating from the daily business of life and work and engaging in a welcomed "time out" is certainly one of the "perks" of religious life! It has always been a respite for me, a time to reflect and enrich my spiritual life. While one is actively engaged in "the work of the Lord" day in and day out, there is much joy, but also a draining of one's spirit. Retreats have enabled me to renew myself, to listen quietly to the WORD, to recommit to the promises of my life as a religious and to commune with the wonders of God's creation.

I remember having had the occasion, while living in Rome, to participate in a thirty day retreat while following the "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatius Loyola. I was also preparing myself to give a thirty day retreat to young sisters about to make their final vows as a religious and was told by a dear Jesuit friend that the only way to learn how to do this was, in fact, to experience the retreat oneself. And so I did.

As I think back and review some of my own later writings, I am struck by how much this retreat touched my life. The "Spiritual Exercises" are guided by a spiritual director. They are structured to help one become more aware of what is happening in one's daily experience and to learn and experience finding God in all things. They help one to realize that God is an active God. This retreat brought many new dimensions to my own spirituality and gave me the grace needed to lead others and my Institute during a time of change and growth in our relationship with God's world, recognizing that God's strongest presence is in each individual human being.

Prayer and contemplation have sometimes led me to writing poetry as it is in so many ways akin to prayer. In 2004, while on retreat at Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina, I was moved to write a poem about my early morning experience there.

I never thought of publication when I wrote this poem, though indeed it was published later in *Spirituality* Magazine in 2006. I just needed to express the sounds, colors and feelings of my week at Mepkin Abbey. The Trappist monks who comprise the monastery were very kind and welcoming. Every morning as I walked from my little house to the chapel (about 4:30 a.m.), I heard these lovely sounds.

A Place

Meeting the Presence in this place
In its beauty of sounds and smells and colors,
Chirping, crowing, whistling,
Croaking,
Buzzing, singing, cooing,
All signs of life: Nature's daily
response to the rising and the setting of the sun.
A "prodigal summer" indeed.

Trees and moss, stability, tender presence, loving sign of
The One beauty.
All senses attuned to a glorious symphony each morning and evening,

God trying to get our wandering, wondering attention.

As light returns, color follows:
The red of the cardinal, blue, green, brown, black of dragon flies;
Chartreuse of lizard and frog, rich red of crepe myrtle,
Pure white of lily, here only for today, gone by night.

Scent of new-mown lawn, of
sturdy lavender,
of jasmine in the night, and in
surprise perfumes.

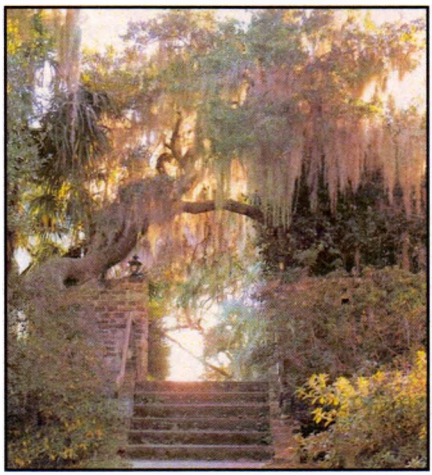
And men given to God who are
shaped by this beauty
And who sing humbly and
faithfully to the Loving Presence,
Sometimes not perceived.
Seasons pass. Bright moon
diminishes, draped in clouds,
Yet lighting my way. The brilliance of lightning.
Fragile, terrible beauty.

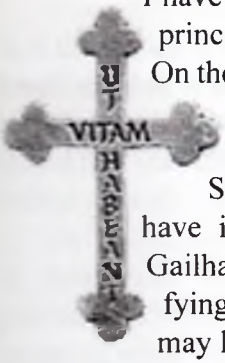
Daily cadence of work and prayer; fidelity to the earth,
rooted in the Place.

A way of loving, a fruitful loneliness: Can the "dancing we"
be partners in solitude? I remove my shoes before this bush
of fire. I AM and YOU ARE.

Give me your hand.

To this day I am moved by my retreat at Mepkin Abbey.





I have not, up to this point in my Memoir, written about a major principle of my life as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. On the Cross that I and my sisters wear each day is part of a Latin quotation from St. John's gospel (10:10) *Ut Vitam Habeant*,"that they may have LIFE". Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, says, "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly". Promoted by our Founder, Father Gailhac, as a guiding principle for the RSHM and used as a unifying motto in our writings, missions, and daily lives, "that they may have life" has guided the development of my Institute. For me personally, it has been the thread that has tied together the tapestry of my life experience as a religious for over fifty years. I have never been at a loss as to what my reason for being an RSHM was, is and forever will be as long as I have been able to contemplate this scriptural reference: "that they may have LIFE". That is why I have come as well: to serve others and be a symbol of Christ's presence in the world.

Another symbol with which I and my sisters in religion have come to be identified is the Sacred Heart of Mary. "R.S.HM." follows our name and is as closely identified with our own person as is our given name. I am Mary Milligan, R.S.H.M. and my family in religion are the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Surely, our founder and foundress recognized the value of the symbol of a "heart" to the women who were to follow in their footsteps.

> *"The image of the heart speaks to us of interiority. It is the heart which receives events and experiences, which holds them, sorts them out, hears God in them. Luke tells us that Mary kept events in her heart, pondering them. Through this "pondering", she allowed God to reveal to her the wisdom of the Kingdom. We learn from her own prayer of praise that she was utterly convinced that God alone saves, that God alone works wonders, that God alone is to be praised."*
>
> *(June, 1982 Circular)*

I have been a member of a community tradition that holds prayer and contemplation through the rich symbol of the Heart of Mary, as the life giving energy to our missions and works in service with God's people. It is with an attitude of interiority that we remain open to God's word as we are guided daily in our work, whatever that may be.

Prayer and contemplation are the creative inspiration to the tapestry of my life.

Hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible,
And achieves the impossible.
Anonymous

Hope

Chapter VIII

Recently, in speaking with a friend of mine at a time when the memory symptoms of my illness seemed to be moving at a faster pace, I recall talking about Hope. Without hesitation, I declared, "I never give up!"

That is one of the traits of my personality of which I am very proud and one which has been a sustaining influence my entire life. I believe that Hope is something that encompasses one's being and emanates to others, particularly during crises or in circumstances of depression, or when there appears to be "no way out". Hope is a God-given grace and I have always been able to summon its strength in my life.

Without pinpointing specific references to Hope in my writings I know that the underlying messages in my circulars, my lectures and speeches and in the retreats I gave, always carried a message of hope no matter the subject of my presentations. Perhaps it was my demeanor rather than actual references to hope, that "quiet calm" one of my friends referred to, that delivered the message of one who was convinced of the confident hope we Christians share.

This is not to say that there have not been times in my life, in my community's life, the Church and in the world when the present or future was cast in shadows.

"Some might tell us it is foolish to be hopeful. Surrounded as we are by 'wars and rumors of war' - wars whose dimensions are beyond human comprehension - we are only too conscious of the disastrous possibilities of human freedom. Fear and violence have become part of our daily lives and our daily expectation. In the Institute also, we are quite aware of our poverty and helplessness. Statistics show our rising median age,

our diminishing numbers. We may be aware at a local level that, in spite of our good will and our fidelity to prayer, the bonds among us are difficult or weak. Personally we may feel plagued by inadequacy, failure or rejection." *(December, 1980 Circular)*

The world situation has grown more grave since I wrote that nearly thirty years ago despite these hopeful signs in the 1980s:

- A conscious and united interprovincial approach to vocation generation and formation
- Churches playing an increasingly central role in the quest for peace
- A dialogue of peace which is sincere, frank, and clear
- Growing movement toward nuclear disarmament with protests worldwide

However, today the unrest in the Mideast with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the terrorism in our own time with 9/11 in New York, bombings in England and Spain, genocide in Africa, poverty and injustice, growing drug cartels, worldwide financial stress, and global warming and abuse of our cosmos continue to gnaw away at the Hope we strive to feel. Is all to be lost? Is the promise of peace merely a dream? Are the leaders of the world strong enough, selfless enough and hopeful enough to bring about meaningful change? To quote our own current president, do we have The Audacity of Hope"? I cannot answer those questions. I have never been accused of being a Pollyanna, I am far to grounded for that, but I have the freedom to choose to be hopeful and steadfastly hold to my belief in God and the promises of Jesus. *"The Lord Jesus Christ is my hope."* (1 Timothy 1:1)

Once when preparing for Sunday Mass and the readings within it, I saw that the gospel of the day was the one of the lineage of Jesus, the "begats" as we used to joke. What could this possibly mean for us? As I meditated, I was suddenly struck by the reading from Matthew's gospel, that **Jesus was indeed one of US!** Surely that is something we can rely on in our search for meaning in life and hope for the future. Jesus, being one of us, understood the human condition and its goodness and sinfulness and even evil in our times. *"Let not your heart be troubled,"* writes St. John. (Jn.14:1). I choose to believe that there is redemption. My faith gives me hope. Faith and hope infused with love can give us comfort and consolation.

I do not know the author of the introductory quote to this chapter though some believe it was spoken or written by Helen Keller:

"Hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and
And achieves the impossible."

What better time than now to renew our hope in the invisible, our faith in that which can only be felt not touched, and to strive through love to make impossible dreams a reality. The scattered threads of Hope, unique in color and form as the individuals who cling to them, can indeed weave us "into a single cloth" of harmony and justice.

In my own life, at age 73, I wish to be one of those threads that fosters harmony and depth of commitment. My illness has presented me with challenges to my own personal hope, but I choose to carry on each day, meeting the test which sometimes says "surrender" with a confident "yes" to the possibilities of a new day.

Remaining hope-filled is part of my mission now as I write my reflections to share with others. To quote another renowned theologian/scientist, and perhaps cosmic mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, "the future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope". I believe in the future in spite of the shadows of today. I wish you the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ which sustains me.

It is written in the prophets,
They shall all be taught by God
(John 6:45)

Logos, Language, and Learning

Chapter IX

The three words, Logos, Language and Learning, while pleasant to my poetic ear in their alliterative sound, might also call to mind major events in my life and in my spiritual development. I have spent my life, in many ways, around those words and the paths they led me.

LOGOS

Throughout my Memoir I often refer to the "Word" (LOGOS) and its influence on my life, my prayer, and the Church. Because I was predisposed to listen to the Word during my formative years in Béziers and my subsequent study of Scripture, my spirituality became grounded in the Word and in the gospel. The constitutions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary reference that we "are women of the gospel". Indeed, that phrase has in many ways become my persona, I am humbled to say.

LANGUAGE and LEARNING

I couple those words because, in my life, they often occurred together at various times and events in my history.

I began my college study by majoring in French with a minor in English, completing my undergraduate degree through Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York. Proficiency in English, French, and later Portuguese definitely enhanced my communication skills within the Institute in fulfilling my apostolic mission. While living in Paris and attending the Sorbonne, I had also completed a course of study (doctorat de universite degree) that required my writing and defending my first thesis. I chose to write on an English woman, convert to Catholicism, who had died recently, Sheila Kaye-Smith (1887-1955). Her writings are numerous and express her three "loves": the land (Sussex), religion, and writing. To complete my thesis, I

had a chance to meet her husband, Sir Penrose Fry who received me and answered any questions I might have. I defended my thesis on June 20, 1959. I remember that day well since Charles de Gaulle was being received at the Sorbonne the same day, and I thought he had come to see me!

While I was obviously interested in religious studies all my life, I was given the opportunity to study at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana and completed a Master of Arts with a concentration in Sacred Scripture in 1966. My second thesis focused on: Image of God in Man (Gn.1:26-27). I spent several summers at St. Mary's in Indiana in order to complete my degree. During the normal school year I was teaching at Marymount College in Westwood, California, fulfilling my apostolic mission. I remember how many pedagogical mistakes I made by assigning a ten page research paper to beginning students who could barely conjugate a verb!

I learned slowly but surely. Since these early years of college teaching were learning years for me as well during the summers, they also allowed me to assist in the learning process of others. I taught French to beginners and began teaching Theology as well. The Theology classes were based on the excellent courses I was taking at St. Mary's College. This college was the first in the United States to grant theological degrees to women.

While I was part of the RSHM general council, I attended the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy and achieved an S.T.D., Doctorate of Sacred Theology, from the Institute of Spirituality in 1975. My thesis: Charism/Spirit of Father Jean Gailhac, Founder of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, complemented my work as part of my RSHM assignment in Rome.

I make mention of my academic achievements not out of a sense of boasting, though I suppose achievement or completion of a course of study does make one proud, but rather to highlight the discipline and responsibility that comes with the opportunity to study, to learn, to teach and to preach.

Studying Scripture was a grace in my life, in some sense a "call". I love to learn and reflect and I love to share what I have been given. I learned early on that to proclaim the Word you have to know it. Teaching has been both satisfying and humbling for me. I venture to say that I have never entered a classroom, given a speech or written a document where I was unprepared. To face students, a community, or an audience is not something that should ever be merely casual or off hand, particularly when one is attempting to transmit truth, to deliver "a sense of things unseen" or to guide the minds and consciences of people in their encounters with the Word of God and its rele-

vance to their lives.

When I made my vows, I had also made a public commitment to the apostolic mission of teaching albeit not yet realized when I made my vows. I loved all my years of teaching and was happy and fulfilled in that apostolic mission to which I had been called.

I am grateful to my religious community for the extraordinary opportunities it gave me to study, to learn and to teach. I hope, no, I believe, that I have been a good steward of the knowledge imparted to me. I know in my heart I have been *"taught by God"*. (Jn. 6:45)

The Church is the sign and instrument of Christ's saving presence in human history.
Karl Rahner, S.J.

Church

Chapter X

While I was "raised a Catholic", and learned what it really meant to be a Christian somewhere along the way, I have been a daughter of the Church all of my adult life. Being Catholic, or even a religious, does not necessarily describe my full experience with Church.

I was fortunate to have had the experience to study and teach Scripture and become a theologian in my own right. I believe, through this, I was given a special grace and responsibility to translate my experience and insights to give meaning to my own daily life and to help inspire others whom I led or taught or encountered to seek the "WORD" in their own lives. I believe it is the "WORD" that creates "Church" in the world. It is Eucharist that feeds our souls and gives life to all humanity. I believe Eucharist and the celebration of it together in the actions of our daily lives is the primary responsibility of all of us as Church members.

While there is structure, ritual, tradition, hierarchy and concrete physical buildings one might call "church", for me it grew to become much more than that while not discounting any of it. We are the Church. The world I have lived in and the experiences I have had with others is my Church. It is there and in my moments of contemplation that I have found "Church" and I have loved her.

My five years as general superior were certainly shaped by events in the universal Church. The windows open to me were multiple and they showed me a world of great hope as well as of great shadow.

I have many memories that deepened my understanding of Church. One event occurred in 1981 when, as general superior, I had the opportunity to visit our sisters in Mozambique and Zambia on the continent of Africa. It was there I realized that living in a culture where the freedom to openly choose one's belief system is not particularly fostered, and where poverty

and hunger are prevalent, puts a "face" on Church that I had not experienced in my own life.

I wrote to my sisters in the Institute, following this visit to Africa:

"In a land where bread is a precious and often scarce commodity, it occurred to me that this Church was truly centered on the Bread of life. It is a Church:

- *where the Bread of the Word is heard and done,*
- *where the Bread of the Eucharist is broken and eaten,*
- *where the Bread of one's life is given and shared with great simplicity..."*

"To live in a suffering Church calls for deep faith and hope in the Lord's presence in his people... I was struck by the ability of our sisters to adapt to difficult and trying situations with serenity and hope."

(May, 1981 Circular)

That visit to Africa made me realize more deeply that the Church in our world is shaped by the faces, circumstances, and cultures where *"the Lord reveals a particular aspect of His face through the local churches."* I was especially struck by the respect and reverence the African church has for its "ancients" or ancestors. More and more I came to recognize that the Church is much more than an "organization" or "structure". It is a mystery, a blending of all aspects of the human condition.... In all countries, the Church is a Church of bread broken and shared. *"The church, whose daughters we are, is a mystery which will always call us to deep faith." (May, 1981 Circular)*

I also had a unique experience with another dimension of Church in 1983.

The grace and responsibility I had as general superior brought me face to face with the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, as part of a group of ten members of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) in a three meeting series which had been arranged by the Holy Father and the UISG. The meetings were called because of a mutually expressed desire on the part of the Holy Father and the UISG to enter into dialogue.

The themes of the meetings were generally:

- apostolic religious life, formation, and vocations,
- religious women in the local church, with specific attention to our relationship with bishops,
- religious life and culture, focusing especially on the reality of pluralistic forms of religious life.

There I was in Rome, the heart of the Church as many believe, and I was privileged to meet with the pope in his "house" and spend nearly eight hours in dialogue with him and my colleagues in Rome. All three meetings were followed by lunch and it was evident that John Paul II felt at home in his own house, that he was the host and we were his guests. I was certainly living a truly historic moment.

As I reflect on this memory, I am reminded that I had to revise some of my conceptions of John Paul II. Not unlike other relationships, it is in face to face contact that we truly begin to understand another person. We dispense with some preconceived notions and find that there can, in fact, be room for mutual understanding and growth in perspectives.

This was 1983, some twenty years after Vatican II and the definitions of religious life, of women in the church, of the identity and witness of religious women not being derived from their work alone were still struggling to be born in the spirit of Vatican II.

How quickly these concepts and possible structures for dialogue developed over the next twenty years remains to be seen. There is still struggle and in some cases misunderstanding with the "powers that be" in Rome and in some dioceses throughout the world. Perhaps the 2009 "apostolic visitation" or "investigation" of religious life in the United States is evidence of the communication issues that still exist.

However, I came away from my experience in meeting with John Paul II recognizing how important it is to engage in dialogue with the hierarchy or institutional church locally and throughout the world. Working within the structures of the Church should be fostered, embraced, and tried and tried again. When engaged with the hierarchy, it is important to be able to speak their "language", to understand from where they come and how their history has formed their values and opinions. I do not believe that conflict is where we want to put our energies, but rather dialogue and consensus. I fully understand how some may lose heart or patience with the necessary and often tedious processes involved in making changes one believes are right or important to the growth and relevance of the Church in this world. However,

looking forward can often be enriched by looking back to understand the context for existing policies, rules or writings of the Church's leaders. This is not to say that we should ignore the "prophets in our own time" who may at times, like the prophets of the Old Testament, find themselves somewhat unwelcome because of the messages they herald. *"A prophet is not without honor save in his own house."* (Matthew 3:57) It is the prophets in our own time who often give us hope.

Because the Church is situated in history, its message to the world, to be relevant, does indeed need reformation or adjustment in its outward structures from time to time. I have always tried to engage "prophetic" voices, learn from them, and let my vision be guided by the action of the Spirit working through its people, while at the same time, remaining loyal to my own history within the Church. This has not always been easy.

In the fall of 1987, when I was no longer general superior, I received a letter from the office of the Synod of Bishops saying that I had been appointed assistant to the Special Synod on the topic "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church twenty years after the Second Vatican Council". When I asked if I could have some time to think about that possibility, I was told that if I didn't respond right away, the Synod Office would ask someone else. And so I agreed to participate. That refusal to allow some time to those discerning the same invitation should have given me some inkling about the level of true discussion/discernment at the Synod itself. I learned later that a significant number of those called had strong ties with groups such as Opus Dei and Commutione e Liberazione. I saw "behind the scenes" the methodologies used by a number of these groups. They would often suggest that the Special Secretaries, of which I was one, meet once our whole group had finished its work. Each group was 20-25 people who worked tirelessly during the day. Fatigue was a factor and dialogue became difficult as the day went on. Fortunately, Cardinal Hume and Jean Vanier were also participants at the Synod and I could relate to these hopeful voices of the Church.

Each group was assigned a theme that we were to develop and then present. For better or worse, I was in a group which addressed the various "states of life" (i.e. women in ministry; do religious form a third way in the Church along with the clergy? or are there in fact clergy, laity, and religious?) The way we see consecrated religious has consequences in daily life and understanding of our role in the church and in the world.

As we went along the question of women gained strength. At that point one of the Synod members intervened appealing that <u>men</u> not be forgotten.

This was one of the only interventions which drew applause. I was disillusioned by this outburst. There was hardly a danger that men would be forgotten given the composition of the group - two women in the Secretaries group and none in the Assembly. Some women spoke to the total group, but they were few.

At the end of the intervention which provoked applause, discussion effectively came to an end. It was hardly a clarion call to discernment.

Fortunately, during the course of the month long Synod, on October 11th, 1987 there was a celebration Mass acknowledging the 25th anniversary of Vatican II. I took my hope from that Eucharistic celebration rather than the Synod itself.

As I reflect on "Church" in writing my Memoir in 2009, I see a tapestry not nearly complete, but encompassing "ill matched threads" being woven by persons worldwide yearning to sustain "Christ's saving presence in human history".

God calls every Christian to holiness and freedom through following Jesus Christ in whom alone we have access to God.
(Eph. 2:18)

Apostolic Mission

Chapter XI

In writing my Memoir I have often reflected on just what my apostolic mission has been over my life's journey. Clearly teaching Theology to students primarily at the college level was not only an assignment I was given by my superiors, but turned out to be a major passion in my life. However, my apostolic mission was not allowed to stop there. I was "called" time and again to move away from my academic teaching assignments. I was asked to move into leadership positions, either in an educational setting or within my own community or Institute, to be perhaps that echo to Mary Magdalene's role as "apostle to the apostles" as I referenced in my opening chapter to this Memoir. Some of my superiors were also mentors to me in the sense that they, too, saw in me those talents that I did not necessarily see in myself or choose for myself. The RSHM revised constitutions state that our call "is not given once and for all". That was clearly true in my life. And so I often "moved on" in my apostolic mission.

I found my later apostolic mission to be one of general governance or often spiritual direction to my sisters and those I encountered in the various settings and locations where I lived. My role, then, often led me to help my sisters in community and others find *their* true path or true "call" as disciples of Jesus at various times in their lives. I took this mission very seriously.

The "calls" that we receive in our life are driven by a quest for deeper knowledge and love for Jesus Christ and greater service to the world. In truth, God demands a lot of the disciples of Christ. We were clearly not put in this world to simply coast along, but rather to respond to the needs of our times, our world, our families, our Church. However, *"to discover the Lord's call in the concrete situations of our life we must be able to hear that call and to verify it in order to act on it. (February, 1982 Circular)*

In my Memoir I have already spoken of the need for prayer and contem-

plation each day, to have an attitude of interiority in order to hear the Word. I did my best to counsel all who looked to me or expected me to guide them in the ways of prayer and contemplation of scripture in order to hear the calls to discipleship in their lives.

"The verification of what we hear is best done with another or with others. What we hear must be weighed in wisdom, tested in tradition, discerned in dialogue. The Word within us is deep indeed and can be confused with other voices within or without. Verification of the authenticity of the calls that come to us in our life is an important aspect of fidelity to our fundamental call to follow Jesus Christ. Following Jesus leads us often to hidden and humble service or, at times, to public and prophetic stances. Fidelity to our vocation requires that we be able to discern in ourselves and with our sisters appropriate responses to the calls we receive.... In faith, we recognize our religious community as a locus of verification of the Word."

(February, 1982 Circular)

After hearing the Word and verifying it within the context of our religious community or Christian tradition, we then put it into practice in the call to discipleship by remaining faithful and authentic in what we preach to others. Being eloquent for example, about peace, justice and love can only ring true when we are consistent in our own lives with what we preach.

"The call to follow Jesus is always a call to be with others as well. If the disciples were to be companions of the Lord, they were also to be companions of one another...The disciples of Jesus -- today as in the past-are called to break bread and to hear the Word with others in community. No one is a disciple in isolation."

(February, 1982 Circular)

Many years ago I had the opportunity to study moral theology and was deeply influenced by Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R., a theologian whose ideas on being both faithful and free deeply resonated in my heart. Father Haring spoke of conscience and the forming or informing of it. Conscience must always be ultimately decisive - conscience which Father Haring calls "the sanctuary of creative fidelity and liberty". Those words, "fidelity and liberty" remained with me as I guided my sisters and others whom I counseled. Most everyone knows or think they know what it means to be free, but adding fidelity to the concept of freedom presupposes recognition of law,

order and conscience. *"Conscience is the most sacred core and sanctuary of a person. There he is alone with God Whose voice echoes in one's depths." (Gaudium et Spes)*

The goal of every vocation in life is to be with Jesus and to go and bear fruit, to be His companions and to be sent out. Every Christian is called to be a disciple, be it in marriage, in priesthood, religious life or other forms of consecration, as single women or men. All Christians by virtue of their Baptism have been given the call and the grace of an apostolic mission to fulfill in their lives.

The world in which we live, our cosmos, calls out for discipleship. I believe our response to this call will only be heard in the world when we demonstrate authenticity in our own lives.

I am not sure why exactly, but I have not often felt burdened during my lifetime by some of the laws, proscriptions, or recommended practices or procedures of the Church or even my religious community that had over time needed updating.

Was it that I was trained in France, a country perhaps less impacted by "the letter of the law"? Was it that I always tried to listen to the Spirit of God within me, within my heart? More than likely, it was the fact that I was graced to be trained in Béziers, a place vibrant with the spirit of our Founder Jean Gailhac and Foundress Mother St. Jean Pelissier Cure who in their time were open to the *risks of engaging in new ventures to promote and serve the marginalized of their era.* Their zeal gives life to our apostolic missions today and the freedom to reach out in new ways to serve with God's people.

Perhaps from the very beginning of my life as a religious, I was blessed to grasp the essence of what was expected of me: to always seek God, to be open to life, to be as good and faithful as I could be, to love and serve the Church and her people, and to follow the Spirit rather than the letter of the law. I sensed early in my religious life and confirmed later when studying Scripture, that I had made a covenant with God, the Church, and my religious community. With that as an agenda, there was no time in my life to become overly burdened with rules and regulations!

Some of the changes in the Church, because of the proclamations of Vatican II and our own revised constitutions, have surely opened our hearts to our apostolic vocation and discipleship more than any other comprehensive documents in our time. We have clearly been given the opportunity and responsibility to freely respond to our apostolic mission in today's world.

There are still limits. There are still laws. But if *"we act in charity, often*

external law becomes unnecessary. Since our own perceptions of what is required by love and even zeal are limited and at times even false, the law, then stands for us as a pedagogue, a teacher. Ideally, the fruit of collective Christian wisdom makes available to us the experience of those who have gone before us, of those who have learned from the limits of their own love...The law for each of us becomes not a yoke but a reminder. It is only when the dynamism of charity decreases, we feel the prodding of the law."

(Father Haring, as referenced in my February, 1983 Circular)

From the study of the moral theology of Bernard Haring, I internalized more deeply my own convictions of how I am a free and faithful disciple. To be free makes me human and situates me in history. To be faithful makes me more conscious of the law of love of which Jesus spoke: *"The whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Gal.5:14) With that as our Christ given directive, we can, in freedom, choose our apostolic mission each day as persons of the gospel.

My own apostolic mission was perhaps once very *public* and even *prophetic*. Today, in the circumstances of my life and the illness I live with daily, being a disciple, following Jesus, leads me more to *hidden* and *humble service,* but it is none the less apostolic. I have learned that from my sisters who have gone before me.

What have you seen, Mary?
I have seen beauty all around me, a beauty which unveils all things;
I have seen the joy of expectation. I have also lived in Expectation, yet never enough.
Mary Milligan

Joy and Laughter

Chapter XII

My Memoir could never be complete without remembering and recounting some of the joys in my life, laughter that has filled my heart and fun times that kept me grounded in life as I reached in faith for things unseen.

I remember the joys of "sisterhood" beginning first with Pat and Jeri in our youth, middle years and moving forward into the aging process. We almost never gather as a group of three without remembering times past. There is no pretending among us. That is one of the benefits of family ties. And when my brother Mike joins the circle, there is never a time when we are missing a joke or a quip or a "take" on life's more serious chapters that isn't turned into a barrel or at least a spoonful of laughs. I think it was Milton Berle, of all people, who once said that "laughter is an instant vacation." We need those vacations!

I remember visiting the RSHM Corvallis community the summer before I entered the novitiate and I heard the sisters joyfully talking about their upcoming vacations and where they would be going. That happy memory remained with me and reinforced my belief that nuns were real people!

Speaking of vacations, how could I fail to mention the RSHM "beach house"? The generous donation of a cottage in Sunset Beach, California to the RSHM by Ms. Kretzmar, a friend of Loyola Marymount, has given me many days and nights of joy. The beauty of its location on the sand with the ocean inviting walks along the shore, children playing and flying kites, and spectacular sunsets surely uplifts my spirit. It beckons not just me and my sisters in religion but also my family to come and experience the warm sun and cool breezes on the balcony at the beach house. Even meetings or retreat times at the beach house are enriched by its surroundings and the pulse of the ocean's waves.

When I was on the RSHM general council and later general superior, the responsibility to travel to the various provinces to visit and meet with the sisters sometimes afforded me the opportunity to fit in a few days of "holiday" as well. I remember the warmth of southern France, the beauty of the English countryside, the mysteries of the jungle in Brazil, the joys and the tragedy of the faces in Africa, the camaraderie at Sag Harbor, New York and even the frigid climate in Quebec where I visited some historic sites and a dear friend.

In many ways, living in Europe, as I did for several years, framed the tapestry of my life of joy. The lights, art and monuments in Paris, the peace and spirit of the Motherhouse in Béziers and the history, religious roots, rituals, and joyous evening walks on the ancient streets in Rome steeped my psyche in Old World charm and tradition. I surely have been blessed to have experienced many beautiful times and cultures that opened my mind, heart and soul to the wonders of God's world and artistic human achievements.

Recently, I was gathering old pictures of various times in my life. I found some of me going back to September, 1953 when I entered the convent, and realized just how young I was to be taking on so great a challenge. There are other pictures in various stages of my progression through religious life in

the habits we wore, including the modified head gear and garment adopted in the late 1960s. Following that modification we eventually moved to something blue with or without a modified veil. Eventually, we reached the stage of dressing in a way that is "simple and modest, at once poor and appropriate" to the times and the mission or work we engaged in. While I fully believe that our progression in the external form of clothing was right and appropriate for the times in which we once lived and live today, I am aware that there are some in the church who would like to bundle up women religious in many ways in "what used to be". To those I would say the witness we give comes from the Spirit within us and the apostolic vision and work we have engaged in as consecrated daughters of the church.

These pictures of our habit changes call to mind significant events and choices in my life and the joy and grace that infused my soul on those occasions:

Entrance day, a day filled with joy, apprehension, tears of goodbyes to my family, and hope in what was to follow.

Novitiate, the white veil and the garb of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary brought another feeling of purpose and grace to my life: the habit I wore gave proof that I was indeed going "to be a nun".

First vows made in Béziers, France and my first public commitment: profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience was a defining moment of my religious life. Through this profession I became a public person in the Church and expressed my commitment to grow in the understanding and depth of that commitment.

Final profession: I was a mature woman, fully aware of the commitment I was making. Having lived my religious life in a community of sisters, bound in my heart by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and living an apostolic life, I cheerfully, gratefully, and purposefully said "Forever" in 1960.

Celebrating "events" with my community of sisters throughout my life often began with the daily preparation for and celebration of Eucharist, or planning for a special feast day or anniversary of the Institute, or a jubilee of my sisters or myself. My own Golden Jubilee was, in fact, celebrated three times in 2005! The first was with my community and family in Montebello, California, the second in Tarrytown, New York where I began my novitiate with Sister Mildred from high school days, and even a special "fete" with some former students of mine in Neuilly, France who had turned an elementary school graduation into a celebration for me, much to my surprise. I was part of the RSHM Sources Committee and was in France for a meeting when this occurred. I love when I have occasion to meet with alumnae and enjoy the satisfaction that it was all worth the effort. Fifty years of dedicated service to God, the Church, and my community was certainly worth celebrating over and over again! I really felt a closeness to Mary's Canticle of Praise those days: *"My soul magnifies the Lord; My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* (Luke 1:46,47)

In going through my pictures, I also found some of me when I was Provost at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) when I returned from my term as general superior. Because I was Provost, I was later asked to participate in the fashion show fund raiser organized by friends of Marymount at the university. I have included a couple of those pictures because they make me smile! Being Provost at LMU was not the happiest time in my life, but

the memory of the fund raiser event and my participation in it reminds me that there was joy to be had even when other challenges had to be met without much jubilation.

Joys in my life have often taken the form of peaceful contemplation. I love to write poetry and have often been influenced by the works of others. The poet Mary Oliver has touched my life in untold ways. Earlier in this Memoir, I referred to her poem "The Summer Day" which I quote here in full because it so resonates with my own beliefs and attitude of prayer.

The Summer Day
by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean--
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down,
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Joy and laughter, while very personal in nature, are not expressed in isolation. I believe they spill into the lives of others through what we say, what we write, how we live and how we care for others.

Several years ago, while living in Rome, I was asked by a sister in the Daughters of Joseph and Mary community to guide her in a ten day contemplative retreat. She had chosen to go to Assisi in Italy, a medieval town in the Umbria region of Italy about ninety miles from Rome and so I accompanied her. We stayed in a very primitive hostel. Assisi is a holy place where St. Francis was born and later founded the mendicant order of the Franciscan monks. The peace and history of Assisi was the perfect place to contemplate during our retreat. Steeped in the reverence for St. Francis, the area itself emanates a spirit of holiness and the joy of Christianity.

That retreat to the shrine of St. Francis, with its beautiful basilica, generated in my mind an idea for a future contemplative retreat I might plan and develop in Rome. With all the beautiful art in Rome, there are actually only a few mosaics there. I began to gather pictures and post cards of the mosaics I found with the thought of building a retreat around those. This was to be a joyful and prayerful project in my retirement. Unfortunately, because of my illness, I was never able to really work on or complete that project. I still have the file of the material I had gathered. It is a bitter-sweet memory to look at it now, but it is also a reminder of how things of beauty can deepen our encounters with God and the cosmos we are part of through the work of human hands.

While I have recounted some of the joys in my life, there are many not covered here; some are sublime experiences such as encounters with Nature,

beautiful concerts and art that transport me in some way "outside myself". There are others, such as watching and cheering at a Dodger baseball game, a longtime passion of mine, and doing needlepoint which I love because it lets me create in some way.

Early on in this Memoir, I chose tapestry as a theme for my life's Memoir. Seeing my life "from the reverse", I am pleased. I am happy. I recognize that it is human hands, including *MY* hands that participate in the creation of things of beauty in God's world.

Afterword

by Mary Milligan, R.S.H.M.
December 25, 2009

It seems strange to write an "Afterword" by telling "how it all began".

For about ten years many people had told me that they hoped I was writing. Indeed, I had planned to do that. After I moved to Casa Guadalupe in 2006, I thought I might be able to write, and perhaps publish, commentaries on the scriptural readings for daily or Sunday Eucharistic Celebrations. I tried that, but it proved too difficult for me as I struggled to learn about and live with the limitations caused by my disease. My thoughts remained somewhat trapped in my mind.

In 2007, I remember telling a friend I had reunited with after several years that I would like to write. She asked what I would like to write about. I replied that I would like to write my Memoir because I had done some interesting things in my life. Soon after that I received from her a gift, a book entitled **Memoirs of The Soul** by Nan Phifer. With that gift came a note from my friend saying, in part: "Couldn't a team of those who would love to assist you, help you and work with you to write down the memories you have formed, but find difficult to express or put in writing?"

I actually did select a number of people to assist me. Those were Sister Letizia Pappalardo, RSHM in Rome, Cecilia Sandoval, Jane Eggleston, Ann Egan, Jane O'Grady, and my sister Pat Marlowe who all live in Southern California. While my friends and sister never really met as a group, I did receive some early guidance and moral support from each person individually. Phifer's book and suggested exercises also helped to identify certain things about which I might write.

Each of these women offered initial suggestions, such as:

- Just begin to write and at the end you will perhaps find your ultimate goal.

- Try to think about the colors in your life and include those in your writing.
- Try to go inside yourself and talk about the things that hold the most meaning for you.
- Draw on the circulars you have written to the RSHM Institute and other things you have written in the past.
- Write vignettes which can be linked later.
- Try to describe the feeling beneath an event or experience.

And so it began....

I wrote a few pages and selected a tapestry as my theme, having been influenced by Rilke's **Book of Hours 1,17** and the visit I had made to a tapestry factory in France many years ago. I was taken by the parallel between the artisans' work on the reverse side of a tapestry, never seeing its full beauty until it was complete and realizing that it had been created by a number of individuals working together. The theme seemed to fit my purpose in writing my Memoir.

I continued to write a few more draft pages or vignettes, but my illness kept interrupting me or frustrating me as I attempted to work on my computer or use pen and paper and keep myself organized. After some time, I wondered if I had enough psychological strength to do what I had set out to do. I remember a friend saying, "perhaps you are just not ready to write yet". Feeling somewhat overwhelmed, abandoning the "project" seemed an attractive option to me.

It was Jane O'Grady who was the most persistent in keeping me focused and on track. Together we became collaborators on my Memoir and met consistently for nearly two years as we wove in and out of the tapestry of my life. We would create more vignettes together based on a few words I would say, incidents I would describe, feelings I revealed, photographs I shared, and scriptural texts that have guided my life. We would meet to edit or validate what was written in our intervening visits, and together move on to another memory. It was hard work for me but made easier by two minds and hearts working together.

All through this process, my siblings were an invaluable support to me, encouraging me to keep going. They saw the value the Memoir project was bringing to my life. In many ways it had become my job, perhaps my latest mission. And jobs do have a way of keeping us focused.

In October of 2009, I was ready to say "so be it!" It was my best effort. I enlisted the support of four "readers": Sarah Renehan, RSHM, a retired Marymount College English professor and someone who now lives with me at Regina Residence in Orange; Ann Egan, a former community college instructor and currently a financial advisor to the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary; Kecia Watari, a psychologist from the University of Southern California; and my sister Pat Marlowe, a retired public school teacher. In addition to an overall review, I asked my readers three questions:

- Does this Memoir adequately express the "Mary" whom you know?
- Are there aspects of my life (mission, inner life, personality traits) you would highlight?
- Have you learned something about yourself through reading my Memoir?

The input I received was constructive, sincere, positive and helpful in revising some sections of my Memoir and in making my decision to share this Memoir with my family, friends, and sisters in my Institute.

And so, I have told you, as best I can, what I have "seen along the way". I am so grateful to those who in many ways assisted me with my Memoir journey. I have learned some things about my life and I hope that you have learned something about your own as well. Once again, I wish you the hope of the Lord Jesus Christ which sustains me.

Acknowledgments

and References

Interspersed throughout my Memoir are certain quotations, citations or references and support from the work of others. I gratefully acknowledge these here.

Rilke's **Book of Hours: Love Poems to God**, translated from the German by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day", **New and Selected Poems, Volume I**

Nan Phifer , **Memoirs of the Soul**

Passages from the Old and New Testaments

Citations from the Documents of Vatican II

Like A River, excerpts from an RSHM Publication

Various citations from the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary Constitutions

Quotations from the works of Maya Angelou, Karl Rahner S.J., Teilhard de Chardin S.J., Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R.

Margaret McKenna, R.S.H.M., who designed the cover to my Memoir.

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Jane O'Grady who became my "other self" in collaborating with me on my Memoir.

Selected Comments from Readers of
Tell Us, Mary, What You Have Seen Along the Way

"I appreciate what it must have cost you to share so much of your illness and of your spirtual development. It is enriching to read. I found it a humbling experience reading the 'Unexpected Intrusion'. It expresses not only what serious illness does, but what the 'intrusion' of aging does to each one's plans."
- Sara Reneham, *R.S.H.M; Ph.D.*

"I feel 'fed' by what I have read. I want to read it again (and again). It is a meditation in and of itself. It is a gift."
- Ann Egan, *M.S.; CFP*

"I am so thrilled that you decided and followed through with writing. You have an amazing story to tell - an amazing, unique life. Your memoir does sound like the 'Mary' I know...I can almost hear your voice sharing your experiences with me...it is beautifully written, and I can hear your modesty and gentleness throughout."
- Kecia Watari, *Ph.D.*

"Reading your memoir is a treasure I will remember for a long time."
- Carmel Anderson, *ST.J*

"I am deeply touched by your insights and your articulation of your experiences. I felt the sense of the 'woman apostle' as I read...your PRESENCE is your ministry. Your PRESENCE is the tapestry with the color red glowing from every stitch of it. Your calm and peaceful presence, your sharing in conversation, your contemplative spirit, and your words in **Tell Us Mary, What You Have Seen Along the Way**, minister in a way that is out of your control."
- Jeanette Wassinger, *ST.J*