

Sr. Mary's Story

A Franciscan Priest, when speaking to Poor Clares, described the ideal Poor Clare as being "mellow and grateful". This would be a very good description of our much loved Sr. Mary of the Angels Neville who died on 5th September 2015. The feast day of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, whose love she shared for the Lord's poorest little ones!

On 30th of January 1944, their first child was born to Elizabeth (Betty) and Timothy Neville. She was baptised Sheila Philomena Brigid but called Phyllis! The eldest of six, she was

followed by Richard, Eileen, Jim, Liz, and Colman. She went to National School in Macroom, the above photo is of her Confirmation. Later they moved to Midelton, where her father started the first of the Neville's Bakeries. One day while still very young her father decided to bring Phyllis for the first time to High Mass in the local parish church. It was all in Latin with beautiful Plain Chant. As they happily strolled



hand in hand up to the door her father suddenly stopped, struck by some thought, he squatted down and said solemnly, "*now we are going into Holy God's house and when we go into someone's house we don't talk to each other we talk to them*". He said no more but little Phyllis understood. "*I simply accepted that and I was quite happy just to sit quietly beside him, I found it very soothing and peaceful*" she recalled some 60 years later. After Secondary school in Laurel Hill, Limerick, as a boarder, she studied Commerce in U.C.C. Always a brilliant storyteller, she told us about how

one day she and her friend were offered a spin up the avenue by two classmates with new motorbikes. Wearing a miniskirt she sat side saddle, and as they rounded into the Quad the two lads "revved" up and nearly tipped off their precious cargo! While in college her father got seriously ill. One day while sitting at his bedside shortly before he died, he seemed to be asleep when suddenly he opened his eyes and said "*Phyllis you're a fool!*" She wondered at it, but didn't understand at the time. Before he died he asked her to help her mother to rear the family. She was a great support to her Mam who was trying to come to terms with the sudden loss of



her husband, while learning the ropes of the family business, and rearing a young family.

After college she got a teaching job in Mullingar. She liked to get up early for Mass before school and did some voluntary work teaching a settled traveler, who was eager to learn how to read and write. She came to greatly admire this lady whom she learned so much from in return. The young Phyllis loved to keep up to date with the latest fashions. She would browse over the clothes catalogue and was one of the first to be seen in Midelton wearing a cape!

As time went on she experienced a growing hunger for something more to life and became restless. In 1967 as the summer holidays approached she decided that a holiday in Greece might do the trick and take away her malaise and listlessness. Her friend Judith travelled with her for company. She loved visiting historic sites and seeing new places and cultures. It was enjoyable but it failed to satisfy, and the gnawing feeling remained.

The summer progressed and one day it all came to a head. After a restless night she got up and went down stairs, her mother heard her and said "*Phyllis are you going to Mass?*", "*no Mam, not today*", she was too tired. Later that evening, Colman her

youngest brother and his friend, settled down to watch a cowboy film. Phyllis reasoned, *"I'll watch this and it will distract me"* - but no joy! As she sat there she



prayed *"Lord what's wrong with me?"*, and then in her heart she heard *"you are called to be a contemplative"*. That night in bed she cried tears of recognition and acceptance, and her peace returned.

She entered this community on 2nd of August 1968 to begin as a postulant, it was the feast of Our Lady of the Angels! On the 3rd August 1969 she received the Poor

Clare habit and her new name, Sr. Mary of the Angels. This ceremony was in the Church and she was dressed as a bride. Sr. Mary was the last sister of this community to dress as a bride and go outside of the enclosure for the ceremony. Now the focus is on the Solemn Profession when the sister makes her final commitment and receives a ring, symbol of her union with Christ the Divine Bridegroom. It was a joyous occasion tinged with sadness as Phyllis was a great loss to her mother and all the family. But her family retained a special place in her heart and prayers. She was deeply interested in their lives and joyfully welcomed the new generations. Mrs. Neville never stood in her way of following the Lord's



call. She professed her first vows (Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Enclosure) on 2nd August 1970 and her Solemn Vows on 2nd August 1973. The photo shows Sr. Mary as a novice up the ladder picking apples, - her height came in handy!

Sr. Mary's first service to the community was, as cook. In 1976 she was appointed Infirmarian that position meant caring for



the sick and elderly sister she fulfilled with great love and affection. Sr. Mary was just 35 years old when she herself was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, her acceptance and faith were an inspiration to all. Later she was involved in formation giving talks on Scripture and the Vatican documents to those in the novitiate and was made responsible for the junior professed sisters in 1997 to 2005.

As time progressed the rheumatoid spread to her lung and affected her breathing. In her later years she also developed macular degeneration she which meant she could no longer read, a very big loss for her. But thankfully her good memory meant she could continue to chant the



Liturgy of the hours as she knew the psalms almost off by heart. At the prayers of intercession she had her own part to recite as we say the same prayer to Our Lady at Lauds and Vespers. This was the prayer we choose to put on her memorial card.

For the last few years of her life Sr. Mary moved into the infirmary and it became



a part of the monastery that was very much the centre of our community. Sisters would often pop down to read to her, or fill her in on prayer requests, offer a helping hand with post, to ask her advice, or help her with some little jobs that she was unable to do for herself or simply for a chat. Sr. Mary had a little radio to get the news and other programmes of interest. Sometimes she would entertain us taking off the ads! The true-to-life stories that she heard fed her prayer life. She referred to the refugees and migrants as our brothers and sisters.



She would pray the Three O' clock Prayer with us if we were with her *"O Blood and Water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us I trust in You. Jesus I trust in You and I ask your mercy on all those for whom we have been asked to pray, in memory of your Sacred*

Passion which you suffered so lovingly in coldest abandonment and inscrutable loneliness.

On Monday 31st Aug. 2015 Sr. Mary was obviously very tired at our Community meeting. The next day, Tuesday 1st Sept. the doctor came and we were sure that she would be going to hospital, nothing unusual for her. Instead he decided to keep a close eye on her at home, she was very grateful to him for that. The doctor came early on Friday morning, and said she would have to go into hospital. We all went down to say goodbye to her never thinking it would be her last time leaving us, neither did she! As

she sat in the wheelchair she said to Sr. Anthony Mary "tell Sr. Clare I can walk over"! The hospital is just next door. Like St. Clare, she had lived with illness for over 30 years so these hospital trips were a



norm. However that afternoon she began to deteriorate quickly.



Mother Colette Marie stayed with her that night and she died peacefully the next day surrounded by some of her sisters, family, and the hospital staff. Over the next few days many people remarked on her beautiful smile and youthful look. As one man put it "it was the smile of someone who had

seen the face of God". The Bishop and 14 priests concelebrated her Requiem Mass which deeply touched and amazed her family.

Perhaps her greatest legacy to us was the gift of her contemplative vocation and presence. Sr. Mary had a particular love for the Holy Face of Jesus. "*It is Your face O Lord that I seek, hide not Your face*" (Psalm 26). It could be said that her whole life was like a commentary on the "Song of songs". Her early unconscious search for the Beloved, a search we all share in our deepest hearts ... her dissatisfaction with life ..., leading to her particular path as a Poor Clare.... the ongoing search in her "night" of sickness and suffering, even leading her "out into the streets and squares" (Song of songs 3:2) on her numerous medical appointments where all who



met her felt somehow consoled, and lightened. Then finally, the quick and almost unexpected meeting in the end.

"I have found him whom my heart loves"

(Song of songs 3,4).

Her stunningly beautiful smile said it all!