

Memories of Patrick Gallagher

The following essay, submitted by Patrick Gallagher on 21 March 2003,, begins with his experiences as a Junior in Esopus, then continues with his recollections of work as a student brother and teaching brother on the Poughkeepsie Projects. The entire essay is included because his Poughkeepsie memories will strike a resonant chord in many of the readers who experienced the same or similar events. Gallagher cites experiences with Brother John Berchmans, who spent many years on the Esopus property and for whom a building is named.

The Marists' Tradition of Hard Work

When I entered the Juniorate at Esopus on September 2, 1950 as a 14 year old high school sophomore, I learned early that not only did the Brothers take studies seriously but they treated work the same way. During the first year there, it was mostly the ordinary maintenance work: cleaning out the gutters, raking leaves, cleaning the various buildings, and waxing floors. There was a little work on the trees, particularly the huge pines that had died.

But in the second year there, something changed. The Juniorate in Poughkeepsie closed down and those who had completed their sophomore year over there were moved to Esopus to complete their junior year with us, before leaving for Tyngsboro and our postulant year.

The faculty remained pretty much the same except that the master of Juniors was now B. Joseph Damianus, who had had the position in the now defunct Poughkeepsie Juniorate. "Joe Dynamite" was a great man, and he it was who first got me working on trees. With the Dutch elm disease sweeping through the country, hundreds of elms on the property had to be cut down. There was always the question of clearing out certain sections and downing the 60' pines. I loved the work. I embraced the principle of "laborare est orare," to "work is to pray" maybe because I, as a kid from the streets of NYC, just didn't relate that easily to the mysteries of prayer, despite the later efforts of B. Pius Victor.

So at 15 a regular group of us went out to cut down and cut up trees. With the long cross-cut saws, wedges, and a sledge hammer we could bring down any tree, some close to 3' in diameter. We could trim them, and cut them into the prescribed lengths for all this wood went to B. Felician's furnace to keep the greenhouses warm. He had this measure for the logs; God help you if the wood was longer than the required 36' or so. How he, as "frail" as he was, got these logs into the furnace, stoking that beast day and night, was beyond me.

But it wasn't all trees. On occasion, B. Francis Xavier who was supervising the building of the new gym and expanded dorms over on the north side of the property, would ask for juniors to help with a cement pour or to bring up bricks for the insatiable appetites of the professional masons. It was a major accomplishment if he told you, you did a good job in balancing a full load of sloppy, wet concrete over the radiant heating pipes on the floors of the new building.

During the summers, the project du jour for the Brothers became the expansion of the facilities. They lived in the old Holy Rosary building, which tradition had it was a hunting lodge for John Jacob Astor . So from our infancy in the order, we saw what the Brothers could create, and how hard they could work. It was natural for us to look forward to our turn, and that came when we got to the college.

On to Tyngsboro

Finishing two years there, with a certain trepidation we boarded the bus for the novitiate, glad to move on to the next step, happy to be reunited with the "oldtimers," the class before us who were now novices, but still wondering what the rigors of that place would be like. Of course it was stricter; you'd almost think that somehow we had been dropped off at a Trappist house of formation. The number of minutes a day that you could talk and relax a bit was really limited especially when you were in the scullery, i.e. assigned to washing dishes and resetting tables after each meal. B. Pius Victor ran a tight ship, but as difficult as he was, our salvation was B. John Berchmans, who was the kindest, most understanding person you could ever want to meet.

Somehow by the luck of the draw, I was assigned (not by name, but by number, #60) to work with B. Leo Richard, one of the novices, in helping the farmer clear huge stones out of the fields. With an ancient compressor and the slow method of drilling holes and then tapping wedges in until the boulder split, B. Kevin O'Neil and Don Schmidt would get the boulders cut into manageable pieces. Then we would eventually lever the stones out of the ground, tip them with many grunts (Leo Richard taught us how) despite the prohibitions on silence onto a stone boat, and using the tractor either drag them into the woods, or over to the outside of the kitchen where we manhandled them into a wall about 6' high.

But as the routine of the novice year started to set in, John Berchmans devised a major project which took the rest of that year: it was the draining of the old swimming hole, the quarry, cleaning it up, and building walls or docks along the sides. The quarry had a cliff which the daredevil divers would throw themselves off of; less daring ones would merely jump.

To drain it Berchie got a pump and it ran almost day and night; I was assigned the task of going down there, about a ten minute walk at different times during the day to feed the pump and keep it going. Gradually the bottom emerged: the jagged rocks pointing up right in the diving area. How we didn't have someone get impaled we would never know.

Berchie also decided that we needed a crane, so we cut down a large oak tree about 20-25' in length for the upright, and then another about 18-20' for the boom. A blacksmith fashioned some braces; we placed a differential on the end of the boom, and we could use this to lift stones, or at least to drag them.

There was a problem: Berchie, given the choice of getting free steel cable or copper wire, chose the latter, thinking that we could sell it later for scrap. One day with a huge load on the boom, the crane situated near the top of the cliff collapsed since the guy wires running to the top of it from various points on the compass and supporting the upright, broke. Their tensile strength was not equal to the load. We almost had someone killed when the whole contraption went over. I think that Berchie swore us all to our first vow, one of secrecy about what really happened, figuring that Pius, if he found out, would have canned the project.

In a little while it was back up, this time with steel cables supporting it, and the job moved closer to completion. Once the ice froze as the water gradually came back in, we were able to slid stones from one side to the other on the ice. With our experience in building the walls near the kitchen, we

constructed walls on either side of the quarry and then filled in behind them with dirt. There were some last stones that we weren't able to get out before the water froze. So despite the bitter cold of the water even in the summer, Berchie got a couple of us to don swimming suits and go down in May once the ice had melted, tie chains around some of the last stones in the way, and pull them up. I relished all the work; it gave me a project for that long, tough novice year, and I owed enduring thanks to Berchie.

Of course there were other projects and heavy work: we on occasion would help the farmer get the hay in the old fashioned way: loose not baled. The hay fork on the side of the revolutionary war era barn brought huge piles of it up to the loft where it was dumped and then pushed into the sides. Once, the thud of the hay was enough to have some of the massive oak beams separate from the uprights. Everybody out of the barn! Bs. Peter Anthony and Paul Acyndinus, the resident engineers even in their 70s, said that the barn had to be partially unloaded and turnbuckles placed at each beam, tightened up, and thus reinforced all the hay could go back.

Well, there were thoughts of the barn collapsing, but the work had to be done. The decision had to be made about who would do the work; it was considered dangerous enough that they (Pius and B. Henry Charles, the director) decided that postulants would not be allowed to go into the barn, only novices since the order had some type of commitment to them, and they had come closer to making a commitment to the order. So we clambered around in there for a couple of days, drilled holes, put the turnbuckles in, and got the barn stabilized.

Henry Charles would always have a couple of brothers assigned to him. Everybody was totally terrorized by him, for he would gather the group, move from one project to another explaining the various tasks. However, he mumbled in a tight-lipped whisper the detailed instructions. One time taking his ten workers, he slowly assigned them all, — he thought — only to find that no one had really heard the instructions and they were too afraid to ask him to repeat, and they all merely kept on following him around. Thinking he had assigned the whole ten, he found them all still trailing behind him.

No question about it. Henry Charles even in his 70s was along with Peter Anthony and Paul Acyndinus examples of how much you could do at that age. Henry decided to paint the chapel. B. Mary Aloysius' masterpiece with its gingerbread altar backdrop needed it. Henry bought and set up in the chapel an aluminum scaffolding that reached almost to the ceiling. While Pius had fits, Henry would paint during the novices' office and rosary. It wasn't just the distraction of having Henry up on the third or fourth level that disturbed Pius, or Henry standing on a box on the fourth level to get the highest part of the ceiling, but it was Henry with the scaffolding in the vaulted sections rocking it back and forth, while standing right on the edge, and with each swing he was able to get deeper into the sides of the vaulting with his paint brush.

Between them Paul and Peter decided to buy a huge truck with a tripod on the back. It could be used, they thought, to lift rocks from the fields and for some other jobs. The fifteen foot tripod had a winch on the back, but while that worked they couldn't get the truck to move. The solution was to tow it into Chelmsford for repairs. So with Paul driving one truck, and Peter, who was almost blind, the truck with the tripod, they drove into Chelmsford. One error: the phone lines going from pole to pole across the streets and roads were at

14' and the tripod was 15'. They arrived with a number of them draped around the tripod, and one end of the town without phone service.

But after two years, having survived the call to the kitchens since that year the powers-that-be decided to select future chefs from the ranks of the college's graduating classes rather than those just taking the vows, we were glad to head to Poughkeepsie and Marist College.

Marist College Memories

Attending Marist (originally Marian) College in the early to mid-50s, was a rather unique experience. All of the students were Marist Brothers, some freshly minted ones who had only arrived there in late August from the Novitiate in Tyngsboro, MA. and maybe about 20-25 who were from foreign countries. To us, and probably to them, this environment was a world of freedom after the constraints of the novitiate.

Especially for those of us who had every move watched over by Pius Victor, undoubtedly a saint but really tough to live with or under. As the first group (we were "groups" coming out of the novitiate, not "classes" and to this day we will refer to people as being in "my group," or "two groups behind me.") that had Pius for two years, being able to swing our tassels on the new cords, signifying the taking of the first vows, and to walk with a certain swagger that we had seen with the older monks, this was really deliverance. (All we were missing now was the cross signifying perpetual or final vows, a step that would come later, when I made those vows right there in the college chapel in 1959.) In an economy of effort and resources, the bus that brought us down from the novitiate, then went across the Hudson to Esopus and brought the new postulants up.

In retrospect it is hard to say how elated we were to reach the college; because of canonical restrictions we were anchored to the actual grounds of the novitiate for that "canonical year" except for the one week in early June when tradition required us to go to Camp Marist to work and prepare the camp grounds for the coming of the campers. That was another pre-taste of freedom. We could remember that if a novice were sick and left the property for a couple of days for a hospital, these days had to be subtracted from the number of days he could spend at Camp Marist. To be off the grounds for more than 7 or 8 days would disqualify a novice from taking his vows with his group.

St. Anne's Hermitage

I realized years later though I had actually finished high school in January of my postulant year, 1953, I had graduated from St. Anne's Hermitage High School since Tyngsboro's Novitiate had no charter to conduct a high school. So we were on the extension campus. The Hermitage was an architectural monstrosity, and at one time it had been the Brothers' Provincial House.

B. Paul Fontaine had it turned into a dormitory for all the student Brothers on campus at that time, whose number ran to about 125. There were rooms everywhere, and there was no way you could ever give someone directions for all the turnings and staircases.

It didn't take long for anyone to realize the fire hazards in the place since it was entirely made of wood. Just around that time, if I remember correctly there was a disastrous fire in a Catholic grammar school in Chicago. Anyway Paul had difficulty getting a company to insure that place, and eventually I think it was Lloyd's of London that agreed to cover us and Betty Grable's legs! One of the conditions was that we had to have a night watchman, prowling the corridors at night. So for a couple of years up to the time of my graduation in 1957 that was the case. And then it just happened to burn down after the Brothers moved out. Of course there are plenty of stories about the cause of the fire.

On the ground floor of the Hermitage was the dining room, a long rather narrow room with tables for eight down each side. It was a hectic place during meal times, but no one starved. One feature of the job assignments was if you were to work in the kitchen helping the Brothers who were assigned full-time to cooking, you would tend to the "knights of the road" who would congregate outside the back door on the north side for a meal. I think we had a pile of tin pie plates and they received generous portions of whatever we had and what was left over, unless through some type of legerdemain the cooks were to transform some of the leftovers into a dish for another meal.

The knights or hoboes as we still called them, occasionally did some work for their meals, and it was thought that they lived in the "hobo jungle" a collection of shacks down by the railroad tracks at the south end of the property, a location which I would guess is now south of the ballfield. We always avoided that area and really we had little chance or reason to go any where near it.

The Barn, Pigs, and Chickens

Northwest of the Hermitage there were the barns and pig pens, and later a long, narrow chicken coop that we constructed running north and south over by the cliff going down towards the river.

Of course, it was Paul's intention to save some money and raise the pigs, which occasionally would either get loose, or had to be loaded on a truck and taken to market. Then a posse of Brothers gathered to muscle this reluctant 500 lb. sow into the truck or back into the pen. The eggs came in regularly in huge numbers and were trucked down to the Brothers' schools in the city. I really wonder if given a cost-benefit analysis we made money on that, but we thought we were. There was that vow of poverty and in the monastic tradition we tried to support ourselves.

The Apple Season

One day every fall, the Brothers were allowed to pick up all the apples that had fallen to the ground after the regular orchards were stripped. That entailed a massive undertaking, where the 125 Brothers were detailed to picking, transporting, coring and packaging and then transporting the finished product packed in plastic bags and metal cans to a freezer. The benefit was that we had all sorts of apple products all winter long. It was really a day off from the studies, and in the fall it was a marvelous break. Occasionally Nilus would bargain for a crew to continue on the project despite the compulsory nature of apple day. While encouraging us to eat some of the apples, Paul's

constant reminder on apple day was: "Wipe today so that you don't have to wipe tomorrow."

Dr. John Schroeder

I, like every other student at the college then, was taught by Dr. Schroeder, the only layman on the campus for my first two years. He was a marvelous man, a perfect gentleman, and a good teacher. Once he invited all the Brothers to take a hike up to his house, and despite giving us directions, he had stopped his car at key intersections and turnings to write "JMJ" in large letters with arrows to make sure that we got there.

In speech classes, when he handed out assignments, if you happened to look at his notes, you could see a list of other Brothers dating back a number of years, who on that day had gotten the same assignment, and whose name was crossed out to include yours for that year.

Trees

Aside from the classes and the project work, I undertook as my own project working with the trees on the property. I got a couple of thousand trees from the government and planted the seedlings on the south end of the property probably where the ball field is now. Then I got some scrap paneling from the dining room, and placed names on a whole batch of trees: green tags with white lettering. Close to thirty-five years later there were still some of those on the trees, though most were quite a ways up higher. I have to confess to taking one for a souvenir, and then the college came along and did a better and more thorough job of it. I've retained the love of trees to this day, and continue to work on them, plant them and take care of them.

The Campus Center

In the latter half of the 50s, the center of the campus was the old Marian building, situated about 30' west of the Greystone building. It contained two labs, and two classrooms, showers, and a changing area. After dinner we congregated in the main room just outside of two of the administrative offices which were there. One was Paul's, later Kieran Thomas', and the other was the college dean's office.

That big room was the hub of the campus for us, for in 1954 there was a television set there, for the mandatory viewing of Bishop Fulton Sheen and maybe a World Series. Then there was the phonograph which guys would rush to in order to exert some control over what was played. We had the strictest prohibition against playing any record with "words" so it was obvious that we didn't keep up with the "Top Ten."

The showers were toward the back and up a few steps, and there was always a rush after work to grab a towel, affectionately called the "threadbares" for their non-absorbency. The narrow stairs leading to the second floor off the main room brought one to another level where there was a typing room for sophomores and juniors. Then up a couple of more steps to another classroom with the seniors' typewriting stations. Going down some steps brought you into one of the classrooms where the sophomores had their

study room. Recalling the situation and the layout of the rooms with no fire doors, getting out of that room in an emergency would have entailed having everyone file by the lab desk at the front, go up some steps, across another room, down some steps into the other typing room, down some more steps with a sharp left turn in it.

Level with the main room, was another large classroom, and below were the changing areas (no lockers, just hooks) and a chemistry lab. Life went on in a regular cycle of the chapel, the dorms, the dining room, the classrooms, the main campus room, and the project.

Greystone

I used to love to spend time reading and even studying in the old library (Greystone). On that first floor, you could view the magazines that came in, and I can't remember how wide the selection was. It was great to get upstairs where the president's office is now, and find a corner, smell the old books, and read for hours in the main stack room.. Many pleasant memories of that place. In senior year I spent more time in the basement which mostly had all the bound books and periodicals, and a tiny space set aside for a classroom. In my senior year, as an English major B. Kieran Brennan and Mr. George Sommers entranced us with Shakespeare and American Lit respectively for the ten or so English majors.

Marist Life

Our life revolved around the chapel, the Marian building with its classrooms/study halls, the dining room and the dorms. And then work all over the place. The chapel has had quite a history, At one time there were in the seven windows something that might be likened to huge 6' x 20' slides or transparencies depicting the Blessed Mother and the apostles. (Linus Foy in the March 2003 Marists All mentioned Rita Hunt who posed for the photos in the clerestories of the chapel.)

A number of Brothers were selected to pose for the pictures and garbed in robes and beards they traveled from the college to the studio for the pictures. Would you believe that they had a flat tire somewhere in Poughkeepsie and the "apostles" had to get out and fix the flat. Also, in the earlier versions of the pictures, one of the apostles had forgotten to take off his watch and that showed in the pictures until airbrushed out.

The Cemetery

It was something of a tradition that in the short breaks after meals and before study periods especially in the evenings that we in groups of three would walk down to the cemetery where the older Brothers were buried, a number of whom were my grammar school teachers. You would pause, maybe walk around the rows, and then walk back. (Of all the wonderful decisions that the college has made over the years, the treatment of the cemetery is the one that I didn't agree with. As I was told they just built on top of it, and then put up a plaque. It shouldn't have been that way. I think that they should have done everything to move the remains to Esopus.)

When the Brothers opened the Esopus cemetery in 1956, I think, I was a pall-bearer that winter for the first two or three Brothers buried there. Now close to 50 years later, I walk the rows now and think of those who taught me, whom I taught with, who were in "my group," and who were part of that Marist tradition. I cannot come away not moved to quiet tears for I felt so close to so many of those wonderful guys.

Along with the walk to the cemetery, there was the tradition of saying the Rosary walking the roads. This long line of 145 Brothers would say and answer the rosary. In really hot weather we would sit in the grove to the east of Greystone and say the Rosary and occasionally the office there. One of Nilus' earliest works was the two-tiered table in the grove, used for our picnics in the grove. It's still there and I guess a lot of people wonder why.

Foundations

While the Brothers did most of the work excavating the sites for the new buildings like the chapel, study hall/dining room (old Fontaine), the old dormitory building in between the old Marian building and the old Fontaine, and then the Donnelly building, we never did the dynamiting, --except on a few occasions.

There was a man, Mr. Sam Casetta, who worked for the railroad, and we heard, or he said, he did dynamite work for it. So, Nilus asked him to come by when we were ready to blast. One of my jobs pretty regularly was to work with the compressor and do the drilling preparatory to the dynamiting.. We would go down six or eight feet or further, gradually changing drills and hoping that they would never get stuck down there, which happened when a small stone was dislodged and fell on top of the very tip of the bit. Bye-bye-bit.

One day working on the small dormitory in between Marian and Fontaine, we were ready to blast, and no Mr. Casetta. Things were being held up and Nilus, as usual in a hurry, got tired of waiting. He came over to where we were still drilling, and asked us the procedure that Casetta used: "How did he put in the blasting cap? How did he lower it? How many sticks would he use?" So we told him, having watched Mr. C. many times.

Nilus following our instructions, put in the cap and dropped it down the eight-foot hole. Realizing that this was dynamite, as it went on its way, I stood there, and could see he was a little concerned about his first time, so he had turned his head away from the hole, although he was still kneeling almost on top of it. Some basic instinct for survival, as if that would have helped if a five stick hole went up prematurely.

While clearing out the rock ledge near Marian (and to my memory there is still a set of steps going up the slope with drill marks in it (which I remember drilling), I guess about 100 feet east of the Greystone building it became a little bit more dicey. As we got closer to the old wooden Marian building, we had to be more careful for fear that too much might destroy its north wall.

Well, there came the day when we were to break through into the basement of the Marian building for the bottom floor of this new dormitory building. Just a stick or so too much, and the first and second floors of Marian on the north wall looked like a ski slope, something that you could easily see going up from the first to the second floors and passing through the typing rooms.

The work with the compressor was not always constructive; at times it was destructive. On a couple of occasions we would overlook something in pouring the concrete. Like a double door at the north side of Fontaine which was forgotten. We spent a couple of weeks drilling holes every two inches until it was completely freed from the concrete and it only remained for Nilus to come by and burn the reinforcing rods loose, hoping that it fell out and not into the building. Then with chains it was pulled into one of the dumps by the bulldozer.

Donnelly Building

Anywhere on the property where you dropped a shovel, you struck rock. Except for the site of Donnelly. We literally spent two summers digging foundations for the piers that went down and down. I guess the deepest were 10-15 feet and of course we struck water for there had been a well or spring out in the old grove of trees. It was a hellishly hot summer, and we worked five-and-a-half days a week. There was little sense of accomplishment since everything we did was covered up. It was a question of pumping the water out, and as soon as possible backing a cement truck to that hole and pouring in a couple of yards of concrete. The two big projects that particular summer were nicknamed the "Gobi" and "Sahara" deserts. The former was the work in front of Fontaine, and the other was the vast site of Donnelly where without any shade at all, we with pick and shovel, dug and dug and dug.

You could try and slip off to the old bus or the old hearse which had the "bug juice" but T-Mike would be along with some comment that would force us back to the job.

The Projects and College

For a number of years we could truthfully say that we all worked our way through college. Nilus and the particular project in progress at that time, — once the monks left for the school year, sometime a little after the middle of August, — was staffed by ten scholastics a week, taken in alphabetical order. So Nilus would have some who had never worked at construction before, some non-English speaking Brothers, and some who were comparatively experienced. This latter group might be those who were performing some type of regular job, e.g. electricity or plumbing, who worked at it during the regular work periods and in their free time.

The project crew for that week was excused from the regular exercises, didn't have to put the cassock on for lunch, ate by themselves, and were

obviously excused from classes. Needless to say you had to catch up on your own, and for the evening study periods, were probably trying to keep your head off the desk.

During your week on the project, you might end up doing anything. In my time there were a number of jobs that I had in addition to the drilling. In the spring time of one year, we worked on putting the beams into place for Fontaine. The old crane's boom leaned over the north side of the building, lifting the huge beams into place. Somebody had to do it: Nilus would say get out there and guide that beam into place, and start the bolts to tie in it. And there I was, walking out on the eight inch beam, sitting down and guiding the cross beams into place. That experience was enough to last a lifetime.

Then of course, there were the occasions when Nilus desperately needed some particular type of assistance, and he would make his plea to Paul Ambrose. He would descend on you like an old time press gang. Another approach was for Nilus to ask about your "free periods," and then he would impress on you how much he needed you for an hour or two. Of course, having given up the time you were going to study for an exam, or do a paper, you had to follow the community in the regular schedule. That meant carefully watching the time, and then hustling from the project to the old Marian building, throwing your black cassock over your work pants, and getting ready for lunch or Vespers depending on the time of the day. Since I was called out a number of times in this manner to do drilling, I would come in looking like a raccoon from the goggles, and having white powder cascade down onto my black cassock.

Some how it seemed that the Chinese brothers were born with what we would now call a special chip that qualified them to do electrical wiring, and it was conjectured that if something went wrong after they left, no one would be able to figure it out.

It's amazing that so much was built so fast by so few (experienced) workers.

The Summer Project Crew

When the monks were out teaching, there was always the question of what your summer assignment was going to be. It might be teaching summer school at Molloy, or it might be the current college project group nicknamed "Don's Cons" after the Donnelly Construction Co.

We had the most literate work force in the country, since everyone had a minimum of a college degree, some had masters degrees and a few had Ph.Ds.

When assigned to that summer project, it became a separate community, had its own director and a truncated prayer schedule. The project crew came to Mass in the chapel and they were grouped in front of the main entrance; they'd leave when we would start the Hours after Mass, and head back to the south end of the campus, to the old novitiate building and the one story extension behind it where in barracks-like quarters, we had our meals and recreation.

For those five-and-a-half days of work each week in the broiling sun and humidity for a long nine hours we hustled, came back, washed up and then had dinner. A couple of times a week there might be a movie or a softball game against some of the other religious orders or some of our other communities.

If you had pronounced your perpetual or final vows (taken the cross), you probably had made the Easter retreat. If for some reason you hadn't or you didn't have the cross, you made the last retreat affectionately called the "sinners' retreat" for some reason. As in my case in 1959 we were scheduled to go through the long thirty day retreat that summer which was to be held in Esopus. It was for me an ordeal. You went for eight or nine days, had a day off for a picnic somewhere, went another period like that, and then had one final session with a break and you pushed for the end, which included taking our final vows at the chapel on August 15, 1959.

But prior to the retreat, a number of us earned our keep by working on the project, and then crossing the river for the "Great Exercises of St. Ignatius," conducted not by a Jesuit as per custom, but for the first time by a Passionist priest.

Looking at the pictures on the Marist Heritage Project web-site, you couldn't but say that we were all in marvelous shape, and that we'd work at any job. Just explain it and we could carry it off. You have to marvel at what was accomplished led by Nilus' creativity and the Marist tradition of doing our own building dating back to the Founder's days. Sure there were some mistakes, but given that we carried out some really tough and demanding tasks that would have required in a more typical situation highly skilled labor, it was an accomplishment. All that cement work, all the blueprint reading, the setup of the forms, the carpentry work, there was always someone who could do it. Better still if he could hit a long ball or field a shortstop position with deftness.

The center piece of most of the construction sites was the old crane that Nilus had procured somewhere. It was there for all the projects, having lifted the beams into place for the chapel, having picked up and swung the cement bucket with one monk riding the little wooden platform when we poured, and having lifted anything really heavy on to trucks. Looking at it, we marveled that it ran.

Once with the crane in the pit between the recently completed Fontaine building and Marian, with a real rush job in place so that we could evacuate everyone from the tinderbox of the old Hermitage, and get the scholastics into new dorms, what could have been disaster struck. Nilus had maneuvered the crane in under the power lines and for some reason the boom buckled, and folded itself back over the cab. If my memory serves me correctly, this brought down the power lines which ended up draped over the cab. The danger in this situation was apparent. As in the past, when something happened, we were lucky. There was no one even injured; without understanding all the electrical principles, the rubber tires somehow insulated the people in it, until they were able to jump clear.

To my recollection the closest we came to a serious accident occurred in building Fontaine. We had the main laminated beams in place and we're installing the cross pieces. One of them fell on the ankle of a Filipino Brother causing serious and lasting problems for him. In many cases we were inexperienced but willing participants in an effort to perform complicated tasks and rather dangerous jobs.

For myself I was pretty regularly involved in drilling for dynamite, and any of the necessary holes in already poured concrete needed for pipes. There was also the many times we used the jackhammer for ditch digging. At another stage in this building, I got the "contract" to install all the glass windows, the huge 3' by 3' panes and the smaller colored windows. Had I ever put in a window before? Never. Had I ever even cut a piece of glass? Never. But it was something that was called the "grace of state," a religious principle that when given an assignment, somehow God would provide you with the strength and ability to carry it out. (This principle also served when as an English major you were assigned to teach Geometry. Or it explained how a nineteen year old, newly vowed Brother could be assigned to cook for a year. The brothers like the army marched on their stomach; good and plentiful food was good for morale, and somehow the grace of state always carried us through.)

In rushing the completion of Fontaine, the glass wall overlooking the Hudson had hundreds of panes of colored glass that had to be placed in a prescribed pattern in addition to the 3' by 3' larger panes. Use a scaffolding? Of course not since we didn't have one. So we stuck 4"x 4"s through the lower levels of the windows which went from the floor to the ceiling, placed railroad rails on the ends of them to steady them, and then placed planks on top of the 4"x 4"s outside the windows, and in some places a step ladder on top of the planks which put us about 25' from the ground. To increase the degree of difficulty and seal up the building quickly we installed some spotlights so that we could work in the dusk and into the early evening, — because B. Francis Xavier was trying to push the completion of the all the tiling on the lower floor. Once the windows were finished we could turn on the heat.

Closing

There are many, many more memories, and each one is for a me a treasure. I feel that the Marist experience as a Brother, at Marian and now Marist provided me with values and a direction that has lasted a lifetime. My work experiences as a Marist have imbued me with the insight that hard work has a value, that it strengthens one's moral fiber, and it gets things done. I've retained so much of the Marist tradition and experience and currently still enjoy building walls gleaned from the generous supply of stone on this property. Not a year goes by when I don't plant about 20 trees, cut down some others, and clear some more ground. Maybe I am affected by Mitchener's saying that if you plant not flowers but trees, you will have every reason to think that you will live forever. Now at 67, I look back with the fondest memories and look ahead with a hope and faith in what is to come.

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