

Juniorate Memories

I recall with affection the hearty laugh of Brother Legontianus (for whom the Leo House was named). He was a man of science and had perfected his remote-control boat that he liked to operate in our swimming pool. He could control the boat from his office in the main building nearby and would make its flag wave or shoot smoke out of its small cannon. He would enjoy the comic movies that he showed us with such a hearty laugh that we all couldn't help but laugh right along with him.

Back then when the Hudson froze over, we were able to skate right across, something that we cannot do now because of the ice-breakers that keep the river opened for tugs and barges. We also used to have two metal bridges to cross the railroad tracks so that we could go to the river without danger from the trains. They had to remove those long ago, which obliges us now to use the underpass. I still remember an incident from our Master of Juniors, Bro. Paul Stratonic. One day one of the boys split his head in a fall down by the river rocks, and when he came to the Master of Juniors I helped him along. At the sight of the blood, the director became white as a sheet and asked me to take the boy to the infirmary. He then promptly fainted. So I took the Junior over to the infirmary and stayed with him as he was treated and bandaged to stop the bleeding. This was a valuable experience for me as I was to be in charge of the young Brothers at the Scholasticate later on, serving for some fifteen years as the Master of Scholastics.

We Juniors were delighted and anxious to move on to the Novitiate in August 1929. We were a small group of Postulants who went to the Novitiate that year and there was plenty of work to be done. One of my first assignments was to play the organ for some of our ceremonies, and later I was appointed as cook, but I found the time to give lessons to the Postulants and Novices who asked me. Since we were a small group of twelve, we were all required to participate in sports. I was never very good in sports of any kind. For instance, I could not see very well and in baseball could never get a hit. I was always a sure out for my team. I had trouble with my eyes and wore eyeglasses but they were not much help. I do recall being hit by the pitcher once. The ball hit me in the genital area and left me screaming with pain. Later, in another one of our games, I was hit in the head and broke my eyeglasses. Only then did the Prefect agree to keep me off the team for my own safety, thus ending my career as a baseball player. He did, however, want me to be with my peers, so he made me learn how to keep score, and I became the official scorekeeper.

Once our Master of Novices, Bro. Adolph Leon, called me to his office and told me that when we were at prayers I seemed to be reading the prayer but was not answering them with the others. He asked me to pray more publicly and loudly. That gave me a real scare that I may be sent home, and I believe I never missed a prayer after that, and made sure that he heard me. I completed my English IV exams as a Postulant, and after the Novitiate I was kept there to be the cook for the community, which meant for fifty-six people including the Novices, Postulants, and faculty. It was a challenge that I enjoyed, and I used to write to Mother to ask her for the menus and recipes that I remembered her making for us as children. That year I managed to pass the State Regents exam in American history. During the Novitiate year I had grown quite tall and slim and was often put in charge of a group. We were being prepared to take charge and assume responsibility.

I will never forget when we were given our new names. We were told that our names would be sent from headquarters in France. No one had a clue as to what his name would be for the rest of his life. When it was my turn to kneel before the Provincial for the reception of the cassock as a religious Marist Brother, I was asked, "What do you desire?" I had to answer that I was requesting the privilege of becoming a Marist Brother and to give my life to God. The Provincial then said, "Leonard Fontaine, you are now dead to the world! Arise now as Brother Paul Ambrose and come to serve the Lord in our religious family." It is a moment that I will never forget, and I have been grateful for those two names. I have a first-class relic of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and also have been most of my life a great traveler to our Marist missions, much like St. Paul, my patron.

As a Novice, I played the organ for the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and later I gave lessons to those who were interested in learning how to play. Of the twelve boys who received the holy habit, six of us took the

perpetual vows. Our group had no one from New York, which was a rare thing. There were three from New England and three from Georgia who took the vows for the perpetual profession. Since then, one from Georgia left the congregation, and one from New England died as a Marist Brother. There were only four of us for the vow of stability, but one from Georgia died a few years ago, and there are now three remaining in our group. One is from Georgia and the other is my buddy, Bro. Norbert Cote, who started with me in Tyngsboro in 1926. He is now in a nursing home, and I try to visit him at least once each year.