

Teacher 1934: Manchester, New Hampshire

After several years of schooling and training to become a teacher, I had already taken my vows, received the New York State Regents diploma, and had already spent two years and three summers earning credits towards a bachelor's degree. I was still required to complete the studies for a bachelor's degree during the school years and on Saturdays until completing the degree at Fordham University, St. John's University or Catholic University. It was time to start my apostolic work as a teacher and complete my degree during the weekends or summers. In the meantime, I would finally become a Marist Brother using all that I had learned to become a good teacher, as Champagnat wanted us to.

I did not know where I would be starting, but that did not matter for I was to become a teacher this year and start my life's work. We all gathered together in Poughkeepsie as we did each summer to make our annual retreat. At the end of the retreat the Brother Provincial would address the conference and would officially commission each one of us, giving us our assignments for the coming year. Every Brother came to the annual retreat leaving all his belongings packed and ready to be moved, if necessary, to the next place of apostolic work assigned. On the last day of this retreat I would get my first assignment. One had to listen carefully as communities all over the U.S.A. were listed. I listened and was quite tense and anxious as the Provincial read the various assignments for our schools in New England. He had come to our Marist community that was working for the Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire, in St. Mary's Parish where we had the Ecole Hevey, as it was known. He called out the name of the new director and seven other Marist Brothers, and he ended with "For Grade 5A, it will be Brother Paul Ambrose who will be in charge. Manchester, New Hampshire, here I come!"

It was September 1934 and I was the youngest of a community of eight Marist Brothers and was to be the teacher of the 5A grade. Although I did not know the Brothers in this community, they and their Director were most helpful to a young Brother just beginning his teaching career. I felt at home and was especially happy to offer my assistance to an old retired Brother who was our cook. He was quite happy when I greeted him and let him know that I would be available if he ever needed help for anything. He assured me that he appreciated the sincere offer, but that I would probably be busier than I expected with my 5A class. I had a warm welcome from each of the Brothers and felt very needed and part of the community from the start. Having already lived in a large community in the Scholasticate, I felt that I would be happy here since everyone offered to be of help, even the old Brother Cook who was indeed a chef.

The students were so numerous that each grade was doubled into the A class and the B class. The selection for each class was strictly a matter of numbers and no other reason. I had 55 students in my 5A and was ready to do the best job I could. The Director told me I could rely on him for help if needed, and he repeatedly assured us of his readiness in helping us to get started. I loved the children, and I loved my community of older French and Canadian Marist Brothers, for they all made me feel right at home from the very start. Brother Director came in to visit my class occasionally, and I had been advised to just keep on teaching and to ignore him. On the occasions that he came to address the students, he would always let me know ahead of time so that he would be properly introduced. It did not take the students long to get to know him and respect him for his concern and dedication. I marveled at his sharpness and organization; he introduced me to the daily plan for each day and what was to be covered in for that day. He was an organized person, and I admired that.

The Hevey School was also known for its monthly entertainment, when all the classes would gather in the auditorium. Each class of the A group would be responsible for the entertainment one month and the B classes would be in charge for the next month. The entertainment could be a song by the class, or simply a recitation by a student. Maybe one of the children would do tricks, or dance the quadrille, or perhaps we would have a special recitation or a song by the entire class. I was ready for that first program, which could be quite an ordeal, and all set for it when the Director came to me and told me that the new teacher of Grade 1A was not used to the special bimonthly programs and had asked to be excused. The Director then asked if I could plan something for the little tykes of 1A.

I was surprised to be asked, but soon thrilled to be able to get close to the youngest children and, along with the Director, I was sure that we could do something simple for them. We prepared an action song by the entire 1A class and a poem recitation by two of the cleverest. The program was coming along well, but I felt that something was missing. It occurred to me that the show would be an even greater hit if we had them all dressed in simple tuxedo suits with high hats, each with a cane for them to dance to their song. The parents were asked to make the costume for each student and were only too anxious to help have their darlings succeed. In fact, the Director commended the 1A class, and because they had received the most applause in the entire school, they won first prize. The recitation went well for my 5A class, but 1A got the first prize not so much for their production as for the effort. This made me an overnight success, and I was in charge of the 1A program each time its rotation came up, about every two months. The little men in tuxedos with top hats and canes were a huge success for the rest of the year. They became the adopted class of 5A.

Remained in this school and community for two years, and recall that during that time the older of my two sisters got married on Thanksgiving Day. I had had two very wonderful years at the Hevey School, and I thanked the Lord for it.

On some weekends I worked with Brother Galipeau in the garden or went hunting with him and a few of the other Brothers. At least this is what I told the Brother Provincial when he came to visit us, and I assured him that I felt that everyone was pleased, and that I was quite happy. He then advised me that the two years of experience in New Hampshire had been enough, and that I could expect to be moved to another community where I could also be helpful and that I would have some other responsibilities besides my class. So I already knew that by August 1936 I could expect a move to another assignment. That was it!