

Washington, D.C. 1941-1943

The annual retreat of 1941 was of special interest to me, for I had had a tremendous experience in the classroom and in a large community. I had had the privilege of completing my degree in education at Fordham University, along with another degree in library science obtained during the last four summers at Villanova University.

When the Provincial asked me if I had finished my studies, I assured him that I would appreciate being able to complete some graduate work during the years ahead. My years at St. Annâ€™s had given me enjoyable experience as a librarian and a great experience in a large community with a complete school covering kindergarten through high school, not only for day students but also for a large number of boarding students, essentially a huge family. It had been great.

The Provincial assured me that I would be given a chance to complete my graduate education, probably at Catholic University, and in a small community for a change. And this is what I enjoyed for the next two years. It was a unique time, for the country would be at war for most of that time, and at the university itself there was the strong influence of the famous and charismatic lecturer, Msgr. Fulton Sheen, who would later become Bishop and have a weekly radio program for the entire country.

After living with the largest community of the Marist Province, I was to find myself in the quiet intimacy of a community of three Brothers, all at studies. It was a quiet time even if the turmoil of the war afforded many restrictions and extra obligations. Religious Brothers were excused from service in the military but were expected to exercise certain duties of precaution, such as making sure that no large lights were visible to provide targets for the enemy. We were also expected to attend courses in first aid, and to become proficient teachers of first aid. I remember that there were also restrictions and shortages of certain foods, which also made demands on us.

The first aid courses were followed at the Scholasticate of the LaSalle Brothers, who lived close to us and were happy to include the three of us in the course approved of by the government as a substitute for war service. I got to be very friendly with Bro. Charles Henry, who was the Master of Scholastics for the LaSalle Brothers and who would later become Superior General of his congregation at the same time as I was called to serve as Assistant General of the Marist Brothers. The courses required for exemption of service were held mostly evenings, as were the duties of being responsible for a certain area to make sure that there would be no lights that could be seen by the enemy. We took these obligations very much to heart as we worked full-time taking the courses needed for our degrees.

I was advised to go for a masterâ€™s degree in English literature and was happy doing just that. It was a privilege to be attending school at such an honored place, for the chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Catholic University was a national shrine for Catholics, including the Marist Brothers and other religious congregations that had exhibits in this national holy place. We were also close to and worked with the Marist Fathers who had one of their major seminaries located near C.U.

The finger of the Lord was manifested during the training here at C.U. I became quite friendly with the registrar, Dr. Roy J. Deferarri, who would be of tremendous help to us later on, for he was on good terms with the educational authorities in charge of the Graduate School of Education for New York State. His close friend, Dr. J. Hillis Miller, was another person who would be of significant assistance in our eventually obtaining the college charter for Marist College. The contact with the C.U. authorities would later be manifested in a request of the university for the Marist Brothers to serve as monitors for some of the boarding units at the university.

At home in our little residence of the former ambassador to China, life was quiet for the three of us. Days were busy with studies and evenings were filled with duties for the war effort. The only remarkable incident was an unexpected visit from the Assistant General of the Marist Brothers in charge of the Australian Provinces. Brother Clement was a learned son of a farmer who was very knowledgeable in running farms and a first-class disciplinarian. We did not expect the visit but appreciated it very much as he had a lot to offer. Visitor that he was, he was pleased and happy to get away from his stringent duties and to be able to relax in Washington with

three young Brothers pursuing their studies. I would meet him once again later when he made a visit to Poughkeepsie when I was in charge there.

Another effect of the war came to us in the form of a phone call from Bro. Linus William, then in charge of our new foundation in Esopus, New York. The Province had purchased a huge property to be made into a Juniorate, for the Poughkeepsie facilities were getting filled to capacity. But a drawback was that, because of the war and its restrictions, there was a lack of coffee. Brother Linus called to ask me if I could scrounge around Washington to find some coffee. He felt that the larger communities could possibly spare some. The regulations or restrictions called for each house or unit to reduce its use of coffee to a percentage of what it had the previous year. But since Esopus was a new foundation with no way of basing its need on the previous year, I was asked to solicit help for the needed coffee.

Around C.U. there are all kinds of religious houses, and I went around to a number of them, explained our need, and walked off with as many pounds of coffee as they could offer. This took a few days, of course, but eventually I was able to head to our newly founded Juniorate in Esopus, a place I had never seen before, with 750 one-pound bags of coffee in the back seat of our wood-framed station wagon. It was a long trip, alone, which took most of the day but I certainly enjoyed a wonderful aroma all the way.

On Route 9W I was told that I would find the Marist Juniorate shortly after the Protestant monastery on the right side of the road. I passed this landmark and came to the Church of the Ascension and stopped to ask about the Marist Brothers. The fine lady told me that she would ask the reverend, her husband. I knew then that I was in the wrong church, but the pastor told me that the Marist acreage was the very next property on the right-hand side.

The entire community of Esopus was deeply grateful for the coffee ride from Washington. That was my first visit to our new place that we intended to have as our new cemetery, for that of Poughkeepsie was filled up. I hope to rest in peace some day in our Esopus Cemetery.

Courses continued regularly at Catholic University. We had all kinds of visitors who would come for a day or two and had wonderful meetings with the Marist Fathers and also with the LaSalle Brothers. The end of my second year was approaching when I was surprised by a phone call from my Brother Provincial, Bro. Louis Omer. "When in the world will you complete that degree?" he asked. I told him that a letter in the morning mail had just today assured me that I had succeeded and that the diploma would be mailed to me. His answer was, "Good, be on the next train to New York and go to Poughkeepsie."

"You must be kidding," I rejoined. But he was brief and to the point. "Find out when the next train leaves for New York." I told him that I knew of one leaving at noon. He then told me, "Be on it, and come to Poughkeepsie. I'll see you tonight." That was it. That is what obedience is all about. I packed, said goodbye to the two Brothers, and was on the noon train to New York and then on to Poughkeepsie.

I arrived tired and hungry and went to the Provincial. He said that he was glad to see me, told me to get some supper, and that he would meet with me the next morning after Mass.

That was my call to Poughkeepsie in early June 1943. The Lord had told me to come. I knew I was in good hands and no matter what happened, I was 29 and ready for any job the Provincial offered me. I was also grateful for the studies I had and the time to finish.