

New York, N.Y. 1937-1941

I enjoyed Lowell and my seventh grade, and since I had been there just one year, I really expected to return when the call of obedience to the Provincial seemed to say Come up higher, Friend. I was assigned to our greatest school in the Province, St. Ann's Academy in New York City, which was a boarding school that took up one full block. Classes were offered from kindergarten through high school. It was a time when people were working hard to make a living and had to place their children in boarding schools. My assignment was to teach two classes in high-school English and one class of Latin. I was to be free for the afternoon so I would have time to take care of the library full-time. I had three years of experience in teaching under my belt and felt ready for the demands of the high school.

Teaching English was always my most enjoyable subject and as I had hopes of getting my degree in English literature, I was stimulated and helped by my teaching experience at St. Ann's Academy High School. The high school was an old building but had a new gym, and there always seemed to be activities going on. My classes in English were easy except for the tremendous amount of corrections involved with the writing assignments I handed out. I felt that writing was essential for all courses. In fact, I used to enjoy listening to the radio and TV to check on some of the announcers who occasionally made mistakes. I always asked the students in the morning if they had caught any mistakes in English the night before by any of the announcers, for the broadcast medium was mostly radio in those days. The Latin that I had taken myself and greatly enjoyed formed a base for English and especially the romance languages like French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. I loved to dabble in these languages and would occasionally choose a phrase and try to get the translation in each of the five languages. I never did learn the fundamentals of German, which would have been my next selection. As teacher and librarian, I found myself staying with mostly the same class for the next four years. It created many wonderful and lasting contacts that have continued even to the present.

St. Ann's Academy occupied a good portion of the block between 76th and 77th streets on Lexington Avenue. The statue of St. Ann appeared on the corner pedestal of 77th and Lexington Avenue. Across the avenue was a general hospital that was also helpful. The Marist Brothers came to Lewiston, Maine, in 1886, and then went to take schools in various cities of New England. St. Ann's was the initial school that we took in New York shortly after starting in Lewiston. There was always a strong sense of community with the boarding students from the early days that made for a very friendly spirit. With the discipline of our unique physical education teacher with his German background, the parents came to our annual physical education demonstration and were pleased with the discipline of the academy. We let the parents and students know that this was not just a school, but also an academy where the boarding students were part of a larger family.

Our community was a good mixture of older Brothers who were in charge of high school or the grammar school and a core of fine teachers who were middle-aged and always available to help one of the new young Brothers. The classes were all filled, but not overburdened, and the athletic and sports programs created competition and a great school spirit. I always loved St. Ann's Academy and the parish Church of the Blessed Sacrament across the street. It was great to see the small students just arriving gather around the fine old French Brothers who became grandfather figures as well as their teachers. When we first came to St. Ann's Academy, it became the headquarters of the Superiors of the Marist Brothers until we bought land to start our training houses. The location was central for the religious, many of whom came from Europe or Latin American countries. Those from Latin America could come to New York and then cross the Atlantic. We were helpful to a number of religious congregations needing help for lodging and a starting point in the United States. Another thing which was quite unique at the time, and which has also carried over to many Marist schools, was the famous spirit that one could always find at St. Ann's. The graduates were "St. Ann's" for life.

From 1937 to 1941 I worked at St. Ann's Academy and attended Fordham University for evening classes and weekend classes. Those of us who went to Fordham used to get thirty-five cents from the treasurer each time we went for courses. That was five cents each way for the subway and twenty-five cents for our lunch or supper. During the summers I went with the other Brothers who were librarians to continue our library science studies at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. I very much enjoyed those summer studies with several of our librarians.

Among them was Bro. Cyril Robert, a very dear friend and Marist Brother. He was responsible for a unique collection on the Blessed Virgin, and when the Marianist Brothers started their college in the Midwest, they asked Brother Cyril for his books, which he gladly contributed to their new Marian Library.

I am happy to say that a number of friends made in those early days remained faithful to Marist and to each other all through these many years. Many are still contributing and giving to the present academy, which was changed to Archbishop Molloy High School. In those days, I knew that a change was proposed as I was on the Provincial Council and attended the meetings when Archbishop Molloy agreed to give us the land as long as we pledged that it would always be used for education. Because I was on the council and concerned that we might not be granted our petition, I suggested a novena to the Founder. A novena was made and, before the end of the novena, we were notified that the Archbishop had agreed. At the next visit, I picked up the relic that I had hidden in what would now be the playing field. The school has always been renowned for its scholarship and to this very day a number of its graduates continue their studies at Marist College.

I have always had positive feelings at St. Ann's Academy, and later at Molloy where my nephew, Bro. Paul Bernard, spent all of his religious life as a Marist teacher and scientist. He is tall and thin, as I am. I remember in one of the yearbooks, around 1941, I was pictured walking across the campus with a tiny youngster of the elementary school and we were both in perfect stride when the camera caught us. It appeared in that year's yearbook with the caption, "The long and short of it."

During the years as librarian, I was able to attend conventions of the Catholic Library Association. These meetings took me to Minneapolis and also to Louisiana and were very profitable.

I feel the need to mention here four special memories. First, Bro. Leo Sylvius, another young Brother just out doing his initial teaching, also taught Latin. He suggested that we might have competitions between our two classes. He felt it would be great to stimulate the students and allow them to win a prize for their class. It was a predated form of "Jeopardy!" where the students would try to beat the other class by getting the higher number of right answers. It made for liveliness in an otherwise dry subject. Brother Leo and I agreed that each class would be given a chance to win sometimes. It was a challenge, and it was a great way to encourage the students to study their Latin.

I approached Brother Leo for another form of competition between our two classes. It was during the month of November, consecrated to the Holy Souls. We had strung lines and lines of October-colored leaves attached to a long string that went across the whole front of the classroom at the height of the blackboard. The long line had colorful dried leaves hanging by the tail attached to a cord. During November, along with our work of helping the missions, we also remembered the deceased. Each leaf represented a deceased in Purgatory waiting to be relieved so that he could get to Heaven. Each nickel brought in for the Marist missions would allow the student to come up and cut one of the leaves with scissors. Thus each leaf allowed to fall was imagined to represent another soul going to Heaven because of a sacrifice made for that intention. We both had the same number of leaves strung up and the class presidents doubly checked that. And there was a special treat for the winning classroom. This encouraged other classes to do the same, which raised a great deal for the missions.

Another memory from the years I was at St. Ann's was when the Province decided that we should be celebrating the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Institute in each school. As the librarian, I was asked to get the celebration organized and to involve all of the classes in the event. We promised to break all records and exhibit some of the many souvenirs of the previous years. There was also a school novena to the Founder to mark the anniversary and a special Mass by the school chaplain, Father Gmur. The celebration required a lot of research through files and archives and for notices to appear in the Province publication. We had a beautiful exhibit in the school library and another giant one in the part of the gymnasium where we had a Mass.

The third memory was a very personal one as well as the fourth. It was of a student of my classes whose name was Edward Kane. He was a quiet boy but usually had a sad face. Eventually that sad face bothered me more than it bothered Edward. He had been doing fairly well in his studies when he seemed to become more and more depressed, and his grades were showing that there was something wrong. I would chat with him a bit after library hours, and he liked to hang around to help out with the shelving of the books. When his grades went

down, I called him and asked if he needed help, and also told him that he seemed grumpy and sad, and it was beginning to show in his schoolwork. I offered help if it was needed. He thanked me and said that he would let me know. That day after school he came around and asked if he could talk to me privately, so I invited him to come around after the library was closed. That afternoon he came, and when we were alone he broke down and started to cry in deep heavy soul spasms. When he finished crying, he told me his story.

He was an only child who lived just a few buildings up on the same avenue as the school. Both his mother and father worked. His father worked days and came home to sleep with other women at night, while his mother worked nights and came home to sleep days. They both told him that they did not want to be bothered. He had a key to the apartment and he could come and go as he pleased and get all his food at the restaurant downstairs. When he finished eating in the restaurant, he was required to go up to his room to study and not disturb anyone.

He had a small shelf near the phone where he could leave notes to his parents to indicate his needs and where they also left him notes. They paid his tuition and left him some spending money regularly each week. It was clear to him that they did not want him around when they had guests and he understood that perfectly well. As he was telling me his story, he broke into tears again. He then told me that I was the first one to whom he told his story and that was because he felt I cared about him. He knew that his grades had fallen and knew what he had to do to correct that, but he did not know what to do at home.

I then assured him that if he wanted me to do so I was willing to plan something positive for him to do, and I would explain it to him the next day. The next day in the library workroom, I explained to Edward that I had asked the Director and had his approval for what I wanted to do. The school was then getting special New Deal help for needy students who were willing to work after school hours. I would give him a job putting the books back on the shelves, and then he would have time to study in the workroom. Better still, I had permission for him to take part in the sports program after school with the regular boarders. Then, when they would go to study, he would go also. He would also go to supper with them whenever he wanted, and when the boarders went up to bed he would go home to his room. This was what he needed, to feel a part of a family, and it made a complete change in his life because someone cared. The following two months his grades were up again, and it was a new young "partial boarder" that we saved.