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CUSAN

CHRISTMAS, 2024



CUSA

**An Apostolate of Persons with
Chronic Illness and/or Disability**

What Is CUSA?

CUSA is an active apostolate which unites its members in the Cross of Christ so that they "FIND GOD'S WILL OR PURPOSE IN THEIR SUFFERING." Physical or mental illness, or disability or chronic pain is the sole requirement for membership.

CUSANS are united through email group-letters which regularly bring news of the other members of the group, and a message from the group's Spiritual Advisor.

By uniting in CUSA and collectively offering their crosses of suffering to Christ for the benefit of mankind, CUSANS help themselves and each other, spiritually and fraternally.

Members able to do so are asked to make an annual contribution of **\$20.00**. Those unable to assist CUSA financially are still welcome and invited to join CUSA.

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The CUSAN

Christmas, 2024

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In This Issue

As I write this, it is still Advent, and soon Christmas will be here. Welcome to this Christmas issue—which we hope will reach you during this beautiful season of hope and joy. But as one member of CUSA assured me, even if it arrives later than planned, God’s blessings for the readers aren’t bound by time.

Many thanks to Joan Donnelly, Father Jerry, Father Lawrence, Anna Marie Sopko, and Shirley Bowling for their contributions to this issue. I learned that in the earlier years of CUSA, there were many members who were writers, and no dearth of material for the magazine. For this issue I was grateful to be able to draw upon some of these valuable resources: from Father Hopkins, Sister Marie Carmel, Betty O’Brien, Jerry Filan, and even from CUSA’s foundress, Mrs. Laure Brunner.

But what about possible next issues of *The CUSAN*? Would you be able to send me a few words about you, your challenges, how God is helping you? Or about favorite saints, stories, verses from Scripture, memories, jokes, photos. Shall we try to revive the “Meet the CUSANS” series? Or maybe you have some other ideas for new articles. Whatever you can send to me is needed, and will be most welcome. Thank you in advance!

With best wishes and prayers for a holy Christmas and New Year,



Dolores Steinberg, editor

2024 Christmas Letter



Dear CUSANs and Friends of CUSA,

It has been a year since I have assumed responsibility for the administration of CUSA. When I assumed the position, past issues of *The CUSAN* were forwarded to me. Father Jagdfeld suggested I forward them to his brother who would digitize them and ultimately add them to the CUSA website. It was a fabulous offer which I could not refuse.

I had an opportunity to peruse the Christmas 1959 issue and want to share part of a column, “What is CUSA?” with you.

The Catholic Union of the Sick [as CUSA was called then] is an organization of . . . [persons] whose state of health is an occasion for sacrifice. This does not mean that members must be bed-ridden; [anyone] . . . with a chronic illness is eligible. Men and women, young and old, lay people and religious, rich and poor, all are welcome to be

united in the common bond of love and suffering.

CUSA is a wonderful opportunity for sick people to help themselves both spiritually and materially and to feel that the cross of sickness that the good Lord has sent them can be used for His greater honor and glory.

CUSA has been in existence for 77 years. It has been faithful to its mission as stated above and the goals of Mrs. Laure Brunner. Letter-writing has become a skill of the past, even though CUSA added electronic group letters as an option. I have spent the last year trying to identify a comparable ministry to provide a new home for CUSA. My experience has been somewhat challenging. Normal attrition may continue to reduce CUSA's membership. Before our membership drops to zero, I want to find an opportunity for the ministry that is more appropriate to modern times and technology.

I thank CUSANs and Friends of CUSA for their dedication in supporting the CUSA ministry. With God's help, let us be blessed with a solution to this dilemma.

I wish you all a Blessed Christmas.

Joan Donnelly

**Glory to God in the Highest
and on earth peace**

A LETTER
TO
CUSANS



Rev. Jerry Bracken, C.P.
CUSA National Chaplain



Dear CUSANS,

Considering that this is the Christmas issue of *The CUSAN*, may I share with you something of the homily I gave for the third Sunday of Advent in preparation for Christmas. It's the Sunday when the priest can wear rose colored vestments and a when the rose-colored candle on the Advent wreath is lit. Why? Because it's *Gaudete* or "Rejoice" Sunday. Rejoice because we are halfway through Advent, halfway through preparing for the coming of the Lord on the feast of Christmas.

And so the Mass readings that the Church selected tell two things. One, we have reason to rejoice at the coming of the Lord. Two, we need to prepare for His coming.

So in the first reading, we have the prophet Zephaniah telling us to rejoice and giving us two reasons for doing so. Of joy, he says, "Shout for joy, O

daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!”

And what is the first reason to rejoice? Zephaniah says, “The LORD has removed the judgment against you. He has turned away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear.” For these reasons we can rejoice.

But there is another reason to rejoice. The prophet Zephaniah continues: “The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, he will sing joyfully because of you.”

That is, not only can we be happy that the Lord is not coming to condemn us, but that the Lord himself loves us. That he actually rejoices over us with gladness—so much so that He will sing joyfully because of us. Why? Because we are good, made in His image and likeness, and we can do good things.

In seeking God’s help in writing this homily, I thought of two stories that might illustrate what would be reason for rejoicing, but in a most unusual way.

The first thing that came to mind about rejoicing involved my mother—but as I said, about joy in a most unusual way. In the hospital, my mother was having difficulty in swallowing, so to prevent her from starving, they were going to insert a feeding tube in her nose. This was too upsetting to my Mom, so instead they inserted one into her stomach, called a “PEG” tube. But when Mom returned to the nursing home, the nutritionist prepared a diet that would best help, but

discovered it was not being digested. It would be only a matter of time when Mom would die. Frank, my brother, was in California, but my three sisters, Ann, Maureen, and Therésè, and I were able to be there with Mom. I remember saying, “Mom, I’m going to Maureen’s for lunch and I will be back afterwards.” Therésè stayed with Mom. She decided to sing some kind of religious song for Mom, and as she was doing this, Mom died. It was as if Mom had been sung into heaven, a place of everlasting joy.

The other story about joy concerns my Dad—but as I said, in a most unusual way. Dad, ten years later, at 97, was in the same nursing home our Mom had been. All five of us were there. I thought it would be good for us to all be together and give Dad the Anointing of the Sick.

That evening I was alone with Dad. I didn’t know what to do. Then I saw a box of candy that one of my siblings had bought for Dad. I asked if he wanted some candy and he said yes. Although the nursing home was not a Catholic one, I noticed there was a rosary hanging from a hook on the wall. So I asked Dad if he would like to say a decade of the rosary and he said yes. I did the first half, he the second. Then we were quiet. Some time later I asked Dad if he would like to say another decade of the Rosary and he said, “No, that’s enough.” Then he looked at me and said, “You have been a good son.” As I think of that now, I realize just what my Dad was doing. He was telling me he loved me. It is when we are loved that there is reason for rejoicing.

And indeed the Lord rejoices in us, because we are made in his image and likeness and because we can do good.

So the Church uses the Gospel of Luke and the words of John the Baptist to tell us how to prepare for the Lord. First we hear how we can be generous to others. If we have two cloaks, give one to the person who needs it. If we have food, give some to the person who needs it. In both these ways we can keep the second commandment of love: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Then the Gospel tells us what John the Baptist says to tax collectors and soldiers on how they can prepare for the coming of the Lord. They need to do nothing extraordinary. So to the tax collectors, John says, “Do not cheat, collect only what is allowed by law.” To the soldiers, John says words to this effect: you have power, do not use it for extortion. You are to enforce the law, do not bear false witness. You are getting paid for your job, be satisfied with your wages.

Being generous when we can be and doing our job the way we should are two excellent ways to prepare for the coming of the Lord on Christ’s Day—but also to do it in a joyful way, because the Lord is with us and because the Lord rejoices over us, when we do such good things.

Now there are times when a chronic illness or some disability can so incapacitate us that we can do little to be of help to others. But may I tell you what I heard from a woman right after the homily I gave above. She was a short gray-haired lady with a cane. She was a

regular Sunday Mass goer. I said, “It’s good you’re here and you have a cane. How do you get home?” She said, “Oh, I can walk there.” And then, gesturing towards a woman, she said, “She will drive me home. I can do it myself, but she insists. So I let her.” So I said, “Even though Paul says it is more blessed to give than to receive, sometimes it is better when we receive a favor graciously.”

So may the Christ Child come to you, this Christmas, and bring you His joy.

Sincerely,



Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again I will say, rejoice!

...

The Lord is near.

Philippians 4: 4-5





Jesus, our Savior

He taught us to love him
by first loving us,
“even to death on the cross.”

By loving us
and holding us so dear,
he stirred us to love him
who had first loved us to the end.

William of Saint Thierry

Office of Readings
Monday of the Third Week of Advent





From the Spiritual Apothecary of Friar Lawrence

Father Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.
CUSA Administrator from 2007
through 2021

Homily for the Solemnity of the Epiphany

The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek word meaning a sudden moment of insight or revelation. When we apply that word to the mystery of the Incarnation, we are referring to the revelation of Jesus. There are actually three different epiphanies in the Gospels. The first of those is the epiphany that we celebrate today: the revelation of Jesus to the Magi who represent the Gentile nations. This particular revelation is recorded only in the Gospel of St. Matthew. The second epiphany or manifestation took place at the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan when a voice declared from heaven that Jesus was the beloved son in whom God was well pleased. This epiphany is recorded in the three synoptic Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The third and final epiphany takes place at the wedding feast of Cana when Jesus revealed himself through his first miracle or sign. This particular epiphany is recorded only in the Gospel of St. John.

Returning to our consideration of the first of the epiphanies, we know that St. Matthew’s purpose in

writing the Gospel was to portray Jesus as the new Moses. As Moses was the mediator of the Sinai covenant made between God and the children of Israel, so Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant made between God and all people. While the Gospel of Saint Luke tells us that Jesus was revealed to shepherds, St. Matthew reveals the birth of Jesus through the Magi who follow a star which comes to rest over the stable in Bethlehem.

The men who visit the stable of Bethlehem are called Magi which identifies them as astrologers. Like many before them, they believed that the stars that populate the heavens were responsible for the conduct of human history. To be sure, astrology is both a science and sometimes a superstitious conduct. Because these Gentile wise men followed the path of the star, they were probably more scientists than superstitious men.

We also know that St. Matthew depended upon the Hebrew Scriptures to reveal who Jesus was as a man and as an incarnation of God. The Star of Bethlehem is traditionally linked to the Star Prophecy in the Book of Numbers (Numbers 24:17) which reads:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult.

The journey of the Magi who follow that star comes to us from the prophecy of Isaiah which we proclaim in the first reading at Mass on this solemnity:

Caravans of camels shall fill you,
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;
all from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense,
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

(Isaiah 60:6)

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet had foretold that the entire world would come to Israel and would worship the God of Israel. St. Matthew's Gospel takes that prophecy and includes it in his version of the infancy narrative of Jesus where the Magi represent the other nations of the world.

In the few verses that we read from the Letter to the Ephesians, we hear St. Paul as he proclaims that Isaiah's prophecy has come to fruition through his ministry to the Gentiles. He identifies the peoples of the Gentile nations as co-heirs and members of the Body of Christ and co-partners in the promise of Jesus Christ that is revealed in the Gospel.

Isaiah's prophecy was made to the citizens of Jerusalem who had recently returned from the years of exile and slavery in Babylon. He speaks of the great light and of the glory of the Lord which will dispel the darkness of sin that has enveloped the whole world. Through the mysterious star, it is clear that St. Matthew regards Jesus as the great light and the glory of the Lord shining in the darkness of the children of Israel who live under the oppression of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, the elders and the scribes of Israel failed to recognize the light that is Jesus.

The text of St. Matthew's Gospel is enshrined in our Scriptures and in our liturgy, not to tell us something about the Jews but to suggest something about ourselves. The members of the household are inclined to miss the splendor of a revelation that takes place close by, while strangers may well catch the radiance of it. The story should challenge all of us to reflect whether we have become so familiar with the mysteries of the Church Year that we miss the splendor and the revelatory impact and return to our lives quite unchanged by the celebration.

The Gospel tells us of a story in which the Magi came from a great distance to witness the birth of a king. The very last line of the Gospel text tells us that the Magi went home by a different route. Does this mean that they returned to their homes using a different highway? Or does it reflect the fact that they return home having been changed by the revelation of God's light to the nations? There is a metaphysical sense in which we are all called to make a journey from afar and to go home changed by that journey. We have seen the light and the glory of God as it shines forth from the humble stable of Bethlehem. If we truly place our faith in that light, we must accept it. However, like the people of Israel who rejected one of their own, we might also reject him because it means that we must change. We must go home if not by a different route, at least in a different frame of mind.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Fr. Lawrence". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

BABY JESUS

Sleep on, sweet Infant, while You may,
In Your manger, cold, with hay,
While Mother Mary, Virgin mild
Tenderly watches her little Child.

While Joseph is looking for some wood
(To keep You warm, as he knows he should)
And as all Heaven rejoices today,
Sleep on, sweet Child, now, while You may.

For soon there'll be a job to do;
A job for no one else but You.
You'll be our Master, Guide, and Way,
So, sleep, dear Jesus, while you may.

The Cross will be a heavy load,
For thirty pieces You'll be sold;
But, 'til there comes that dreadful day,
Sleep, sweetest Baby, while You may.

Anna Marie Sopko

Christmas 1948 Letter to CUSA

Mrs. Laure Brunner
Foundress of CUSA in America

As Christmas 2024 approaches, we read again the beautiful letter from CUSA's foundress, written so long ago, but expressing the love, wise counsel, and care that she undoubtedly would offer also to each one of you today.

My very dear friends of CUSA,

A year ago we were a little family of eight people; the first group of CUSA just beginning to know one another. We have now become really intimate and attached to each other and many new brothers and sisters have joined us. . . .

For us members of the Union of the Sick, Christmas has a special significance: Our dear little Jesus is born today in poverty, simplicity, silence. There He is, a helpless babe suffering cold in the manger, whimpering like any other infant

The spirit of the members of CUSA should also be one of simplicity, humility, silent offering. Be our surroundings miserable and poor, or comfortable and rich, we sick people are always poor in some way: poor in strength, or worldly pleasure or even joys, miserable very often by the monotony, the helplessness, the continual pain, the isolation and solitude. How many hours the sick have to struggle through in mental and physical anguish! Have you not all experienced this?

But there is something marvelous hidden behind these sad appearances, and it is one of the blessings of CUSA to make us conscious of the possible beauty of our seemingly poor lives: “We suffer for a purpose,” and if we sow with tears in our eyes, other souls will reap the fruits of salvation and sanctification.

During our years in this world we shall never know how much good we have accomplished through our offerings. So much the better! Human nature is prone to lose all benefit of good actions through vanity and self-love, but happily the role of the sick or infirm person is one of hidden, humble virtue.

As so it is for us individually, so it should be also for our dear Union as a whole! We must not wish for honor and fame. Let CUSA always be the humble little violet hidden in the garden of Mother Church.

Happy Christmas, beloved friends! May dear little Jesus teach us His divine simplicity, His humble acceptance of discomfort and suffering. Let us pray for one another that our little Jesus bring to all of us His sweet peace and joy.

Laure Brunner



Blanket of Peace

Shirley Bowling
EGL 4

Stillness of a blanket of peace
lying gently in white splendor,
reminding us
that God's language is silence.
"Be still and know that I am God"
slips gently into our hearts.

Barren trees clothed in white lace,
bushes adorned in white flaky clumps,
like clumps that clog
our hearts and minds
with bands of negativity,
clumps we hope will dissolve
into empathy
and small acts of kindness.

In the stillness
of the falling snow
may our hearts melt
into praise and gratitude
for this silent blanket of peace.

The Herodian and Bethlehem: A Study of Contrasts

Father Richard J. Hopkins

Among the writings Father Hopkins left for us is this reflection, written after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the 1970s or thereabouts. Father Hopkins (1919–2017) was a CUSA group spiritual advisor for many years.

Just a few miles south of Jerusalem lies the ruins of the fortress-palace of Herod the Great, built on a peak, the shape of a volcano, between 24 and 15 B.C. The Herodian, as it is called, overlooks the Judean desert and the town of Bethlehem. The excavations indicate an elaborate structure: water reservoir, terraced gardens, spacious living quarters, baths, servants' quarters, etc. This is the Herod that could not tolerate a rival to the throne and ordered the slaughter of the Innocents when he heard about our Savior's birth. It is believed that Herod died in his Jericho palace and was buried here.

Just four or five miles away we visited the Shepherds' Field where the first proclamation of the birth of the Messiah took place. On the outskirts of Bethlehem, the Shepherds' Field serves as a pasture land suitable for sheep—with plenty of caves in case of inclement weather. On the grounds we visited the grotto where Mass is celebrated, and also the church with its glass dome that captures the light of the stars in the evening.

Surely one of the highlights of our trip was our pilgrimage to Bethlehem (the "house of bread"), the city of David. David's great-grandmother, Ruth, returned

here with her mother-in-law, Naomi, from the country of Moab, married Boaz, and settled here. Bethlehem is an Arab town—one half Muslim and one half Christian. The Church of the Nativity occupies the center of Manger Square surrounded as it is by many shops selling articles made out of olive wood, which is so prevalent in this area.

The first Basilica of the Nativity was built by Constantine in the 4th century. It was later destroyed, and Justinian built a new church in the 6th century which still stands today. One has to stoop down to enter the narrow door of the church, reminding us that Our

And living in the fields there were shepherds,
watching over their flock by night.



An angel of the Lord appeared to them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Luke 2:8

Lord had to stoop down, humble Himself, in order to share in our humanity. We prayed at the grotto underneath the main altar which is venerated by pilgrims as the birthplace of Christ.

Adjoining the Church of the Nativity, which is Greek Orthodox, stands the Franciscan Church of St. Catherine, built in 1881. Through the efforts of St. Jerome, Bethlehem became a monastic center in 384, and here Jerome translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate. I will always remember his famous words: “Ignorance of the Bible is ignorance of Christ.”

Truly the Herodian and the grotto in the Church of the Nativity provide a striking contrast to the pilgrim. Though close geographically, they are really miles apart: the mount of Herod and the cave of Jesus; the mighty fortress-palace of a man in the vigor of manhood and the weakness, poverty, and simplicity of a babe; a man wrapped in riches and power and a child in swaddling clothes; a man who felt the need to dominate others and Jesus who came only to serve.

We have the freedom to follow one or the other. Regardless of our own personal decision, it seemed from all appearances that there were many more pilgrims descending into the cave of the Nativity than there were tourists ascending the mount of Herod. Herod’s day has passed and he lives now only as an historical memory. Christ lives on yesterday, today, and forever—and especially in the minds and hearts of those who know, love, and follow Him.

Christ in Every Moment

Sister Marie Carmel Fisk, O.S.C.

We pray with gratitude for Sister Marie Carmel (1929–2019), who served God as a Poor Clare Sister and a member of CUSA following almost three decades of service in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). This is a chapter from her unpublished manuscript, Notes from a Sardine Can, which she gave us to use. May we all be blessed by her down-to-earth wisdom.

It takes a lot of practice, years of it, to try to bring Christ into every moment of our lives. We are programmed like computers to be busy about many things, like Martha, the sister of Lazarus, concerned about many things. But we must keep trying to choose the better part by bringing into each moment of our lives the living Presence of Jesus—whether it is the present moment, one of the past, or a moment in the potential future that may or may not come to be.

As to the past, with your will invite Jesus to enter into that moment, and you will find Him there. It will enable you to gain a different view of the incident, and grow in awareness of His presence in your life always.

We have but to be honest, speak openly to Jesus Himself, and want Him to share our daily life. Talk your day over with Him. If you offended someone, find a way to show you are sorry, whether you use words or actions—or, as with the past, tell Jesus about it, mentally place Him in the scene, and let Him change it as He sees it, not as we do. Like a child tells things to a

mother or daddy, or big sister or brother, speak freely to your God. He is always willing to listen. His understanding, like His love, is without limit.

God does not have to judge us; we are quite good at judging ourselves. Try to remember the scripture that says God does not see things as we do. It helps.

God does not demand success in our trials and tribulations, but He does ask us to try. On this side of the curtain, we may never become holy as He is holy, perfect as He is perfect, but we can become what He created us to be—a normal human being aware of how dependent we are on our Creator.

In my protestant youth, one of the neighbors was a plumber during the week and a preacher on the weekend. His son was a month older than me, so we were in the same Sunday school class. One of the lessons was to learn how to pray. We took turns. Praise God for something, thank Him for something, and ask Him for something. Richard and I, as is usual for nine-year-olds, ended up in a dispute when my turn came to ask for something, because I said I didn't know anything to ask for because God gives me all that I need. Richard promptly said, "No He don't. Your Mom and Dad give you things you need." "Well," said I, "God gives it to them to give to me." His aunt was teaching the class, and had to agree with me, and skillfully moved on.

After church was over, we had forgotten the incident, but Richard's father was informed, and he spoke with his son after they arrived home.

My Dad was not a preacher in the same sense of the word, but he raised nine kids, and in our early years bible stories were a part of our life. We never tired of them. When the older siblings outgrew the asking for bible stories, they would put me up to asking for them. Dad was always patient with my endless questions, explaining on my level what the stories meant that he had brought to life for me and the listening eight others. It was a good foundation our parents laid. Each of us built on it as we were led to build.

“Let the children come to me . . .



**for to such belongs
the kingdom of heaven.”**

Mt. 19:14

How I often wish today that my thinking was still that pure and simple. “Unless you become like a child”—not childish, but uncomplicated and trusting the Lord who looks after us. Faith on the grassroots level is not so complicated as we adults are prone to think it is.

So Much to Give

By Betty O'Brien

The following excerpts from Chapter II of Betty's book continue the account of her visit to Ireland in 1956 with her parents and priest brother.

My acceptance into Ireland grew without any effort. It seemed I had always known the relatives we knew now. I was sure that Daddy would agree with me. His habit of usually remaining in the background made him popular here among Mama's relatives. They were quick to notice that he was unlike the men in Ireland. Their nickname for my father became "Poor John." At first, it was used when Mama and I asked him to do anything. After a while, we heard "Poor John" because it amused Daddy to be distinguished from John Casey like this.

The Irish children were not afraid of my father. One day, Ted Browne ran into the house and announced, "Uncle John, your cousins are outside." Thinking that Mary O'Brien and Jane Thompson had returned, Daddy followed Joan and Niall's son to the street. There, he saw a caravan of tinkers—a tribe of men and women who travel like gypsies and beg for their living. Staring at them, Dad realized that Ted had heard a question on our way from Cobh. My father had inquired, "Niall, point out any tinker that we may pass." He wanted to see the people who had once made Mama remark, "How will I ever write my parents that I'm going to marry an O'Brien? Most of the O'Briens in Castleisland are tinkers."

. . . .

Enjoyment ran like a thread through one of our weekends in Castleisland. Mama's niece, who wears the habit of the Poor Servants of God, came to Ireland because we could not go to England. Soon after we met, Sister Helena's spirit reached out from a generous heart. Everyone received a token which had been made by her own hands. She was humble about all the lovely gifts except one. The Mother General of Sister's Order had given her a first-class relic of Pope Pius X for me. When my cousin handed it to me, she actually glowed with pride. . . . For three whole days joy sang everywhere we went. The entire atmosphere really seemed to sing, "Sister Helena, this is a holiday in your native land."

Those happy days did not pass without singing and dancing. One song touched me deeply. It was called, "Do the Roses Bloom in Heaven?" The first time I heard it, I was told; "Betty, I have sung these lyrics since your mother visited Ireland forty-three years ago. She brought them to my mother then." These words were spoken by a cousin of Mama's in her convent at Cariggtwohill, Cork; the convent where a nun whispered, "Rich Betty. She has so much to give Our Lord."

. . . .

In a cottage at the side of the road which leads to Mom's birthplace, Lisheenbawn, I saw Sister Philip and Sister Helena dance across a stone floor. Hearing the concertina that was being pushed together by the eighty-six year old woman who lived under that roof, I thought about Katie Lenihan [the lady of the house]. Doing so, I could have said, "Here is a person who seldom, if ever,

went far beyond Castleisland. Throughout the years, men, women, and children have come and gone from her door. Yet, life did not pass her by; it came to her with its heartaches and blessings. And, she still has a great deal of herself to give to others.”

During childhood, on the miles of travel between school and Lisheenbawn, Mama knew that a ‘penny’ of cool water always awaited her at this cottage. Two decades later, as a youngster, Sister Helena had also quenched her thirst here. The thoughtfulness of Katie Lenihan became visible for me the afternoon she was asked, “Do you still play your concertina?” Her daughter quickly replied, “Not since my sister died last autumn.” But, smiling gently at the nuns and Mama, the white-haired lady declared, “For your homecoming, I will bring my music box down from the shelf.” She did, and her little foot was soon tapping to the tunes that set my heart advancing on the way to Lisheenbawn.

Lisheenbawn means “Little White Fort.” To me, it always meant that my mother had spent her childhood there. As a tot, my favourite bedtime story was of her young days. Before I could recite the alphabet, I knew the names of her ten brothers and sisters as well as the cows and horses which seemed to be a part of the Shanahan family. Whenever, Mama spoke about the fields she loved, I pictured her among the animals on the farm. Being full of mischief, her tales were usually funny. She seldom concluded without quoting my grandmother, who always told her, “There will be books read about you yet.” And, from the way this expression

sounded to me, I don't believe Mom's mother was thinking of a book like *So Much to Give*.

All preparations for special occasions brought a glimpse of Mama's birthplace, too. A Christmas never passed that I did not hear how a friend, Nell Mangan, used to cover a turnip with coloured paper, moss, and holly. It was used for the lighted candle that was placed in each window in the long house which sheltered eleven children. Every spring, when Mama white-washed the fence and bricks in our small garden on Tichenor Street, she never failed to say, "Now the yard looks just like the stations in Ireland." This remark taught me that "stations" is the word which tells of the yearly Mass that is celebrated in a different Irish house until the neighbors of a certain area gather at the first station again. From Mom's praise of her annual work around the bit of land we own in New Jersey, I learned that a paint brush often made Lisheenbawn a little white fort for the coming of Our Lord.

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I grew to realize it was the example of my grandparents which kept the souls of their children "little white forts." Not only does the faith of Johanna and Edmund Shana live in my mother, it also is alive in my uncles and aunts who look upon Lisheenbawn as the playground of their childhood. Always conscious of the scenes that united Mom's brothers and sisters, I had no trouble in bringing them into focus through these verses shortly after the old homestead crumbled to ashes in 1949:

The fire burned much, but it left these;
The embers of our memories
The roof of thatch, the walls of stone;
It was our house, and ours alone.

This was the house that knew our joys;
We lived in it as girls and boys.
We loved the rooms, we loved each door,
It's hard to think, "It stands no more."

But, embers glow and we now share
The memories of childhood there.
The house is burned; yet, fire had brought
Us all together in this thought.

A roof of thatch and four stone walls;
This is the house each heart recalls.
Our home still stands upon its lawn
When embers glow at Lisheenbawn.

The afternoon we went to Lisheenbawn, the embers glowed for Sister Helena, too. She had been born and raised in the same house where Mama entered the world. My cousin's early life unfolded there because the farm had gone to Mom's oldest living brother after my grandfather died. Although this place now belongs to Uncle Tom's son, Sister Helena's father welcomed us into the house which was built [after] the original homestead burned. As strange as the parlor appeared to Mama and her niece, it soon became familiar with stories of the past.

While my mother and her brother talked, Sister Helena and Father Jack went for a walk in the fields. Watching through the window of the room, where

memories raced about on words, I could see the nun and the priest speaking to the little ones who played outside. Those seven rosy cheeked youngsters were Uncle Tom's grandchildren and they represented another generation. The mental picture I always had of Mom's first home faded for the sights I saw and the sounds I heard then. But the old and the new blended in my heart when my brother brought me a raw piece of marble from the quarry; the quarry which was better known on this land than the three white hawthorn-covered forts that had give Lisheenbawn its name: "Little White Fort."

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Another proof that the past was not ashes became evident every time Mama said, "Tom, remember the day" Memories of later years were awakened, too, whenever Sister Helena remarked, "Daddy, I'll never forget" Listening to these leading phrases, I wondered if the younger Shanahans, who were then chasing a yelping dog on the lawn, would use these same words some day.

After Sister Philip and Sister Helena returned to their convents, I remembered Uncle Tom's and his daughter's farewell. It reminded me that at one time Sister Helena had written, "Betty, during my recent illness, my dad's resignation consoled me greatly. When it was believed that I would die, my father wrote, 'I gave you to God once. Now, if He wishes to take you further away, I give you to Him again.'" Uncle Tom's acceptance of God's will for his daughter became my embers of Lisheenbawn because he was the "little white fort" which I had seen at Mom's birthplace.

Mama's memories and my own days in Ireland fitted together nicely each time I relived this thrill:

I'm walking down the street to Mass;
I see no strangers as I pass.
For, on my way to church and God,
I think all persons smile and nod.

Beside Mother on the wide street of Castleisland . . . I often took those personal glimpses of her childhood to Saints Stephen's and John's. . . . Once, during the Holy Sacrifice there, they remained distractions until the priest before me lifted the Host. At that elevation, Christ's message of "This is My Body" strengthened my belief . . . that Mama's faith had trained me to say [about myself], "This is my body."

In the church which had been the scene of my mother's First Communion and Confirmation, I knew that my physical handicap was just a challenge to "serve the Lord with gladness." It had been one of the times I found difficulty in kneeling at the altar rail. Then I told myself, "I will do it." The scotch-taped pages of my daily Missal proved that speaking back to cerebral palsy does not mean without a struggle. My prayer book was mended when it was new because my disobedient hands shouted, "You won't do it! You aren't able to turn to the proper parts of the Mass." But in Saints Stephen's and John's, I was ready to meet victory or defeat; I had Mama for a mother.



DIARY OF JERRY FILAN

The First American CUSAN (1918–1950)
continued from the Winter/Spring 2024 issue.

Still in Paris, hoping for an available ship home to the United States, Jerry and his sister Mary get no good news. They decide that day to visit a church and then go to find Genevieve, a caregiver in Lourdes who had befriended them there.

THURSDAY: October 3, 1946

What a day! All week long we have been looking forward to this day partly with hope and partly with fear. By this after-noon Mary expected to hear at the U.S. Lines whether we can or cannot get the Washington. Right after lunch we started walking down there. We went by a slightly different route that turned out to be shorter . . . even though Mary sort of dawdled along. We were really both afraid to hear the answer. We finally reached the U.S. Lines and Mary left me outside while she went in to see Mr. Wall. She is really afraid to have him see me yet for fear he might change his mind. We had quite a wait and we both spent the time praying. After about 40 minutes, we finally heard “the answer.” The answer turned out to be the usual—“No word from the ship’s doctor yet. Call again tomorrow.” What an anti-climax.

By the way, one funny thing happened while I was sitting outside the office waiting for Mary. I had my right hand resting on my lap with the palm turned upward when all of a sudden something was dropped

into it . . . another coin. This is the third time that happened.

After we left the U.S. Lines, we decided to try to find Genevieve. Mary wrote to her again the other day; this time she addressed the letter to the home of her friend. In the letter she said that if it was clear she would try to take me as far as the friend's house and also to visit Notre Dame de Victoire which is quite near. However, since it was going to be quite a walk, we stopped in at a tea room near the opera and had hot chocolate first. We didn't get to the friend's house until nearly six o'clock. The concierge came out to see what we wanted and, as soon as she saw me she said, "Vous cherchez Mlle. Genevieve?" She only spoke French, but Mary got quite a bit of what she said. It seems that Genevieve had been there earlier in the day and had told her she was expecting to see us. However, she had left late in the afternoon. Mary also found out that she is living in her own house on the Ave. de la Republique. We have been very worried about Genevieve so we decided to go there to see if we could find her. The reason we were so worried is that she came with so little money she will have to depend on charity to eat. Then, too, she was supposed to have a very serious operation.

Before we started for Genevieve's house, we decided to try to find N. D. de Victoire. We finally did. It is a large and very old church located quite near the Pris Bourse. We arrived just toward the end of Benediction. Fortunately, there were only one or two steps so Mary was able to take me in. It was very dark

inside. Benediction was being held at the side altar dedicated to Our Lady of Victory. Almost all the other altars, including the main altar, were in darkness. The only other thing we noticed particularly was a huge chandelier with the same kind of rose-colored glass cylinders as those on the one donated by Marseilles to the chapel at Paray.

After Benediction, Mary wheeled me up closer to the altar and we said our Rosary and the Memorare. By the time we finished, it was nearly seven and the sexton started telling everybody he was closing the church. On the way out we stopped to say a prayer to St. Therese. Her altar, near the back of the church, was also illuminated. Today is her feast day. Mary has been asking her and St. Jude to help us get home quickly.

By the time we left N. D. de Victoire it was very dark, but we decided to go to Genevieve's anyway. Her house is about as far from the Madeleine as the American hospital is. They are on opposite sides of Paris so it really is a very long walk. However, Mary said that when we got there, we could ask her to help us get a taxi. We hadn't been walking long when we noticed that it was beginning to lightning, but we kept right on. The storm didn't break until we were about a block from Genevieve's house. Mary was having difficulty finding the house numbers so when it started to rain, we ducked into the nearest apartment house entrance and waited there until the rain stopped a bit. Then we continued along until we found the number Genevieve had given Mary. At first we thought we

must be at the wrong place because Genevieve always spoke about her little “house” and this looked like a big apartment building. However, we went in anyway and Mary asked the concierge if Mlle. Genevieve lived there and if she was home. Much to our dismay we found that Genevieve had gone visiting and wasn’t expected home until quite late. However, just to make sure, the concierge went to her apartment and knocked on the door. It is very strange how these apartment houses are built. From the outside they look very pretty—much like our apartment buildings. However, as soon as you enter the front doors, you can see the difference. The “lobby” is really a large, closed passageway leading to a courtyard around which are grouped the “apartments”—each building unit has its own exit into the courtyard. The concierge usually has a room near the front door and opening onto the corridor which leads to the courtyard. In this particular building, the lobby or corridor was very noisome and dingy-looking. The courtyard was paved with cobblestones and the buildings which surrounded it were very shabby-looking. We wondered why Genevieve spoke of her house, but we finally came to the conclusion that people actually buy parts of the building.

Mary wrote a quick note for Genevieve and left it with the concierge. We started toward the door, but that’s as far as we got. Just then the storm really broke. The rain came down in buckets and the lightning flashed more and more quickly. There was nothing we could do but wait. It seemed like a strange dream for us to be sitting huddled in the corner of that

drafty, dingy, smelly hallway watching the rain pour down. It was getting very late and we were miles from the hospital. After a while Mary decided to go out and try to hail a cab, but she knew there wasn't much chance of getting one to take us that distance on a rainy night. After waiting quite a while, she decided to try to get an ambulance. The only place she could phone was in a cafe and nobody there spoke English. She knew she would never be able to explain to any of the ambulance headquarters just what she wanted so she called our own hospital. Fortunately for us that nice nurse from Iceland was on duty so she told Mary not to worry, that she would call an ambulance for us. She seemed very glad to hear Mary's voice. She said she had been worrying about us being out so late in the rain.

We didn't have to wait long after that . . . the municipal ambulance came within a half hour and I was lifted in right in my chair. And so, for the third time I rode through the streets of Paris in an ambulance. When we got back to the hospital, it was about ten-thirty. We felt like a pair of culprits sneaking in so late. It all reminded us of that first night in Paris when we came from Paray. Our nurse was so glad to see us. She began heating our supper up right away. It had been saved for us.



To be continued



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