

PATRICIA BENNETT, SNDdeN
(Formerly Sister Rose Therese)

February 21, 1934 – February 22, 2019



Pat Bennett seems to have enjoyed being a “daredevil” (her self-chosen moniker). Her Golden Jubilee write-up begins: “Someone once described me as ‘a woman who had taken life by the horns and had dared to live it to the fullest.’” Finding substantiating evidence doesn’t take much detective work! Pat herself testifies how in 1950, at the young age of 16, “defying all odds and objections,” she entered Notre Dame before completing high school at Notre Dame Academy, Washington, DC. She completed high school requirements during her novitiate, making first vows and earning her diploma in one and the same year – 1953.

Most of Pat’s first 18 years in the classroom were spent teaching first grade – the level at which teachers *really* had to know *how to teach*. She met that high pedagogical standard in a series of parish schools, spending four and a half years at Little Flower (Southern Maryland), seven at St. Ursula (Baltimore), three at St. Martin of Tours (Washington, DC), and four at Our Lady of Victory (Baltimore).

Then, it seems, Pat decided to “take a breather.” In 1970, she asked to be approved for full-time study in Art Education at Towson State University. By 1973, she had her M.Ed. degree – partly funded by a graduate assistantship awarded to her by Towson. The university’s course in Art Research required each student to design implement and draw conclusions from an original research project. Pat designed a questionnaire, sent it to teachers in SND schools of the Baltimore/Washington area, and was rewarded with solid evidence that warmed her heart. “It was gratifying to see,” she concluded, “that the majority of teachers realize the great need for art in the curriculum. in short, the teachers are pleading for help; and in helping teachers, more children can be reached.”

Degree in hand, Pat *longed* to help! Knowing, however, that school budgets were tight, and subjects like art, music and physical education were especially vulnerable to cuts, she came up with a characteristically daredevil solution: to serve two or more schools at the same time – even three -- so that her salary and the cost of materials could be shared. During the year 1972-73, Pat taught art at Holy Trinity (Glen Burnie) and the Catholic-Community School of South Baltimore. The following year, she began full-time teaching at St. Mark’s High School in the Diocese of Wilmington. Her eleven years there offered excellent opportunities to develop a wide spectrum of courses, including Fundamentals of Drawing; Drawing and Composition I & II; Ceramics; Calligraphy; and General Crafts.

Meanwhile, the former Maryland Province was in the throes of a painful reorganization. Pat found herself re-assessing her life commitment as an SND. Was God perhaps calling her to transfer to a new, diocesan community under the

auspices of Cardinal James Hickey, Archbishop of Washington? Part of her discernment may have been St. Julie's adage, "Better mistakes than paralysis." In any event, in 1984, Pat decided to request exlaustration from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and joined the Sisters of St. Mary of Washington on a trial basis. In the end, she came to realize that St. Julie's charism and Notre Dame spirituality had put down deep roots in her heart. To our great joy, Pat returned to Notre Dame, renewing her vows as an SND on the Feast of Epiphany, 1986.

The timing was perhaps prophetic, given Epiphany's resonance with St. Julie's vision that her Sisters would go all over the world, and her prayer that our hearts would be equally wide. Pat returned to art education at Paul VI Institute and LaReine High School, but a star was about to dawn in her sky – one that would guide her to Notre Dame in Nigeria.

In 1989, Pat volunteered to teach in a summer program for young SNDs there. "As a child," she wrote in January 1990, "I dreamed of being a missionary, but never had any experience fostering the desire until the past year." She wrote of wanting "to work [again] with our young Nigerian Sisters as I did this summer – in Art, Sewing, and any other area where my service could be useful." She also proposed using her experience in photography and video "to enrich communication between units in the Congregation." A big part of her attraction to Nigeria was the simplicity of life she had found among our Sisters there. Her application to the congregation's Office of Mission Coordinator was approved, and the complexities of obtaining a Visa were resolved. Pat spent five happy, productive years as a member of SND Nigeria's Formation Team, and ever after followed the progress of our Sisters there.

Even after returning to the USA, she continued serving missionary efforts through her work for the Missionary Vehicles Association and the Tri-Province Development Office. She also went out to "the peripheries" in Washington, D.C., joining a team of SND volunteers to help adults earn their GED at the Notre Dame Education Center.

Pat remained an artist throughout her life. Her versatility and talent are reflected in the wide range of artifacts she created over the years: her hand-tooled Stations of the Cross (accompanied by a booklet of reflections on their meaning); the ceramic crosses she designed for Notre Dame Associates in the former Maryland Province (each cross individually cut, engraved and fired); the enameled pins she made for graduates of the Education-for-Parish-Service Program; the lovely enameled Christmas pins she made and sold, with proceeds going to the missions. She had an entrepreneurial streak, for sure!

Even daredevils eager to take life by the horns and live it to the fullest, however, are subject to the realities of aging and poor health. Pat had her share of them. Her last year and a half were especially marked by the Cross. Pat's meditation on the 9th Station – *Jesus Falls the Third Time*—suggests what demons she may have confronted in the final weeks of her last illness:

Depression.
Its weight crushes us.
Others must help us up.
Sometimes we give up.
It's so much easier to stay down
than to rise and begin again,
to face life and accept the graces waiting for us.

Intuitively, in the midst of a kind of weakness she had perhaps never felt before, Pat seemed to know that the grace waiting for her, the gift God was asking her to accept, was the invitation to *live life to the fullest* in a new way. At the end of one of our visits to her in Stella Maris, when we asked what was her favorite prayer, she said: "I love the hymn *Here I Am, Lord*." So, we sang it for her. No doubt, when, just before dawn on February 22, Pat heard God calling her by name, she sang it, too, with all her heart: "I will go, Lord, if you lead me." Surely, she continues to hold God's people – her family, her former students and colleagues here and abroad, and each and every one of us – in her heart!

Rest in peace, Pat!

BIODATA

Born February 21, 1934, Pittsburgh, PA (McKees Rocks)

Parents: Francis M. and Mary Norick Bennett

Two sisters: Mary Bennett McNiff and Gloria Bennett Fusco

Two brothers, both deceased: James and Frank Bennett

Entered Notre Dame August 6, 1950, Ilchester, MD

First Profession: April 5, 1953

Final Vows: July 31, 1958

Education

St. Francis Xavier Parochial School, Washington, DC, 1948

Notre Dame Academy, Washington, DC, 1953

B.S. (Education), Trinity College, Washington, DC, 1967

M.Ed. (Art Education), Towson State University, Towson, MD, 1973

Certificate, Education for Parish Service, Trinity College, Washington, DC, 1986

Certificate, Photography and Video Production, McGraw Hill Continuing Education Center

Ministries

Elementary School Teaching (1953 – 1970):

St. Catherine of Genoa, Brooklyn, NY (3rd grade)

Little Flower, Great Mills, Southern Maryland (1st grade)

Academy of Notre Dame, Villanova, PA (3rd grade)

St. Ursula, Baltimore, MD (1st and 5th grades)

St. Martin of Tours, Washington, DC (1st grade)

Our Lady of Victory, Baltimore, MD (3rd grade)

Art Education (1972 –84; 1987-89):

Holy Trinity School (now Monsignor Arthur Slade Catholic School), Glen Burnie, MD

Catholic Community School of South Baltimore

St. Mark's High School, Wilmington, DE

Paul VI Institute for the Arts, Washington, DC (Director of Art Education; Curator)

LaReine High School, Washington, DC

Parish Service

Director of Religious Education, Nativity Parish, Washington, DC

Adult Education

Notre Dame Education Center, Washington, DC

Missionary Service

Formation Team, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Nigeria (1990-95)

Missionary Vehicle Association, Washington, DC

Tri-Province Development Office, Stevenson, MD (Mission Appeals Coordinator, 2008-10)

Retirement

Villa Julie Residence (2012)

- Mary Ann Cook, SND