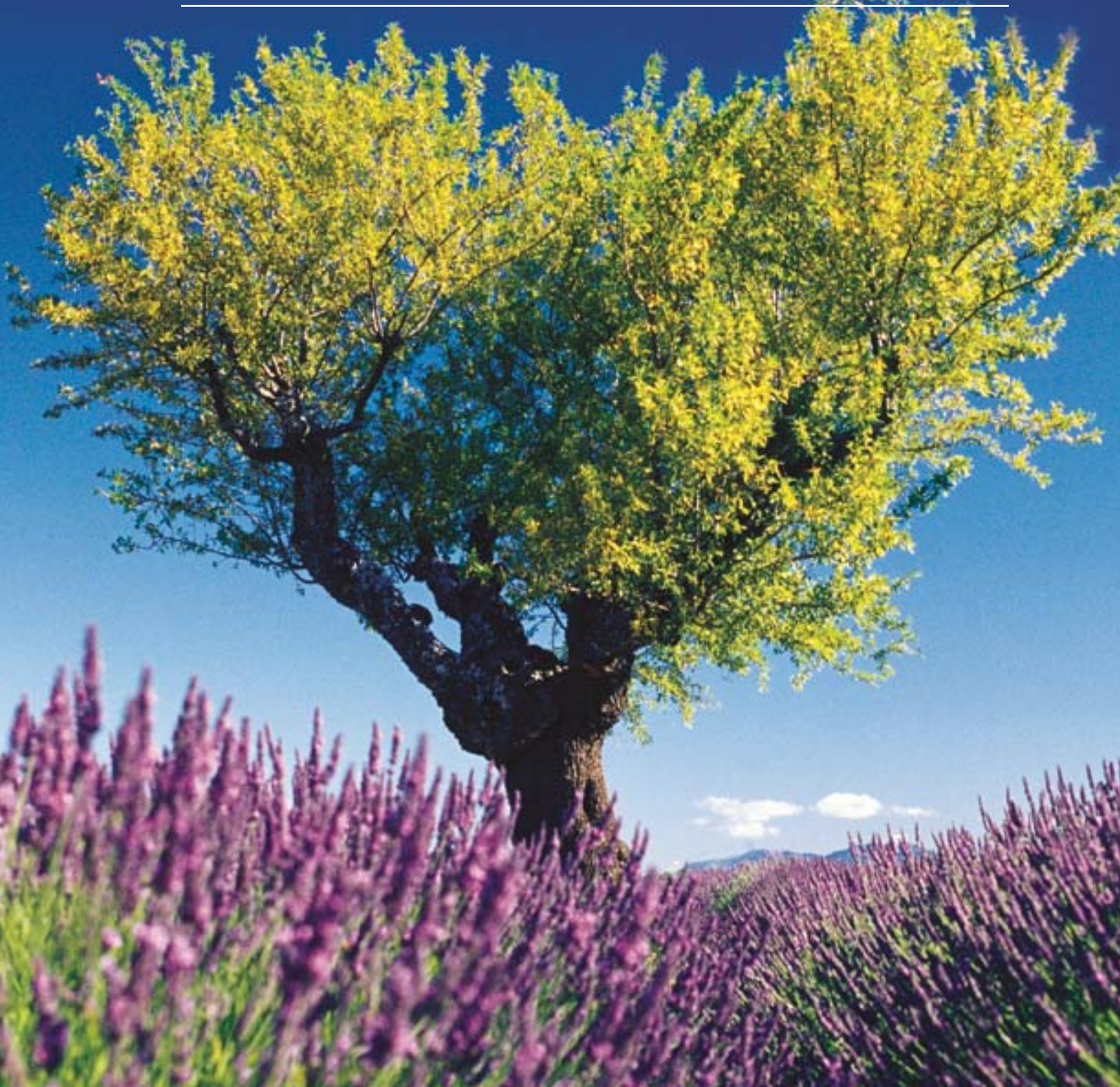




Heart

Summer 2004

A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province



...to Heart

Reparation

*"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."
Prevailing wisdom works unless
The fissures are invisible to darting eyes
That pay no heed while
Wisdom seeps through cracks betraying
Certitudes. "If it ain't broke...?"*

It is broken.

*Our world, our wars,
Our church, our ritual jihad,
Our families, our gatherings
"Bowling Alone," for or against
Columbine, or Baghdad.
The common global ground has fault lines
And Richter scales ready to record
"The Big One."*

*A broken heart
Knows brokenness, and yearns for new creation
That will trump the expiration of a warranty
Which dated yesterday no longer brings a fix.*

*Weeping reparation's gift of tears
Yet may wash the world, the church,
the wars and rituals. Do not bypass
The heart.*

There we were, nearly one hundred Religious of the Sacred Heart from all over the world, gathered in a General Chapter in the year 2000 – gathered in Amiens, the birth place of the Society in its bicentennial year, and faced with a reality virtually without precedent in the Society's history: We admitted we could not find the right words to give fresh expression to our spirituality.

General Chapters have a rhythm of their own: first the talking, then the listening, the naming of new intuitions, the writing and the polishing. Chapter 2000 was no exception.

Among insights, we named the needs of our world today: the thirst for God, the hunger for justice, the desire for equality, the longing for meaning, and the ache to belong – the very needs we as individuals experience and for which the spirituality of the pierced Heart of Christ is an urgently needed response. Yet we found we did not yet have the right words to address these ageless hungers of the human heart in this new age.

I've been pondering this dilemma for some time. Recently I had a new thought. Maybe it's not new words we need at all, but a way of re-conceiving traditional words. That's when I started to think about "reparation," a concept and an attitude of heart that I have long associated with the nineteenth-century spirituality of the Sacred Heart. Reparation was based on a theology of humankind's fall from grace and restoration to God's friendship through the passion and death of Christ. According to this theology, God continues to suffer outrages from human actions yet, because we are members of the mystical body, we too can atone for sins, our own and the sins of others.

The Society's Constitutions, written in 1815, enjoined upon novices the practice of reparation: "They must do all in their power by the purity of their homage, the fervor of their love, and the fullness of their oblation, to make reparation to Him for the outrages He everywhere receives."

We don't use the word "reparation" much anymore, in part because contemporary theology no longer emphasizes God's wrath, but rather God's limitless love. At the same time, much of our world seems in need of repair. We know brokenness everywhere. Relationships languish for lack of a healing word; wars scar psyches and souls; poverty, famine and disease ravage nations and peoples. We see it on our front pages – the bloated child, the fleeing family, the eyes suffused with sadness. Brokenness is everywhere. So where is God's limitless love revealed?

Maybe in reparation. Maybe in the work of repair each of us can do in our own small corner of this broken world by being God's love, by revealing God's heart, by letting the world's brokenness touch us in that deep place where compassion is born and deeds of love follow. ✦



Kathleen Hughes RSCJ

Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ
Provincial

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ON THE COVER:

Photo: © Bryan F. Peterson/CORBIS

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HEART is published three times a year by the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province. Please send address changes and requests for additional copies to Editor, HEART, at the address below or to editor@rscj.org. Article ideas, letters and unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for materials that are to be returned. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submitted materials.

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UPI Photo/Terry Schmitt

Province co-sponsors appearance by Cokie Roberts in St. Louis

Cokie Roberts, political commentator for ABC News and senior political analyst for National Public Radio, will speak about her new book, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*, in a public event December 13 co-sponsored by Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province; Associated Alumnae/i of the Sacred Heart, and the Missouri Historical Society.

Roberts, an alumna of Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, Bethesda, Maryland, dedicated her book to “my own founding mothers: the women in my family, particularly my mother, who told the stories we call history and, especially, to the religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the RSCJ’s, who take girls seriously – a radical notion in the 1950s.”

The event will be held in the historical society’s Grand Hall in Forest Park. St. Louis alumnae/i will be invited to an afternoon reception for Roberts at the Society’s national archives in the Central West End. ❖

News around the Province

Sisters Mary Blish, Muriel Cameron, Jane McKinlay and Carmela Parisi marked the tenth anniversary in May of Sophie Barat House in New Orleans, where RSCJ live and conduct spiritual growth programs.

In late May, Sister Ana Ospina welcomed a busload of friends from Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Manhattan to Kenwood Convent, the Society’s retirement center in Albany, New York. Sister Ospina worked in pastoral ministry at the parish in the city’s Midtown West from 1973 to 2002.

Sister Agnes Hoormann, archivist at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, Missouri, has been appointed to the Society’s secretariat in Rome. Sister Hoormann previously served the Society in Rome in the 1980s.

Sister Annette Schmeling has been named associate vice president of student affairs at Creighton University.

Sister Marcia O’Dea was among teachers at Forest Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Seattle honored this spring for service to the educational mission of the school. Also in spring, Sister Margherita Cappelli received a teaching award for the University of Massachusetts in Boston, and Sister Marina Mapa retired from the University of San Diego after teaching Spanish there for thirty-four years.

The SWEEP program, Southwest Detroit Women’s Educational Empowerment Project, recently celebrated its first college graduates, ten women who received bachelor of social work degrees from Madonna University, Livonia, Michigan. Sister Annette Zipple has been deeply involved in the program since its inception in 1998 as a partnership between Felician Sisters of Madonna University and RSCJ in Detroit. SWEEP is among thirty-one programs that received a total of \$85,000 in Fund for Ministry grants from the U.S. Province this year and among nine programs receiving a total of \$50,000 in grants from the Philippine Duchesne Fund.

Carol Ochs, author, professor and Jewish spiritual guide, has dedicated her new book to three RSCJ who have served her as spiritual guides: Sisters Sheila Hammond and Dorothy Murray of the U.S. Province, and Theresa Brophy of the Australia-New Zealand Province. Ochs is director of graduate studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. Her book is called *Reaching Godward: Voices from Jewish Spiritual Guidance*. ❖



Sister Ana Ospina, left, with a visitor from New York City.



Sisters Annette Zipple (left) of SWEEP with Agnes Hoormann, new member of secretariat.



Sister Marina Mapa, retired from teaching.

RSCJ fights AIDS in Africa with Education

Helen O'Regan, RSCJ, is a patient woman. She is fighting AIDS, the disease that is wasting a continent, with education, and she has become accustomed to small gains.

Sister O'Regan, a graduate of Manhattanville College, began working in Africa in 1975, two years after earning a bachelor of nursing degree from Cornell University in New York. She worked in a mobile health clinic in northern Uganda, and then in a dispensary and mobile clinic in western Kenya, but realized before long that she needed more education. A paucity of physicians in East Africa meant her responsibilities as a nurse were far greater than those of nurses in the United States.

She returned home in the late 1970s to earn certification as a family nurse practitioner. Then it was back to Kenya. By the time she arrived in 1980, AIDS was already taking its toll, though the disease would not receive a name until 1982.

Today, when more than two-thirds of the world's cases of AIDS occur in sub-Saharan Africa, Sister O'Regan is among those who see education as perhaps the most pressing need. Though antiretroviral drugs, which slow the progress of the disease, are increasingly available in Africa, those who receive them must be able to pay for the drugs themselves, she said. So the key is to halt the spread of the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

For the past five years, Sister O'Regan has been involved in an educational program for secondary school students, Education for Life. It is based on a group counseling approach to raise awareness of the HIV threat. The program is beginning to move, she said, to primary schools.

“When people begin going to funerals every month, or every week, they begin to realize how devastating the disease is.”

The group approach helps to overcome one of the major obstacles to education: the stigma attached to AIDS. For years even African governments denied knowledge of the disease, with disastrous effects. “We ask people to share their story in our groups if they are HIV-positive,” she said. “And some do.”

In workshops, students are invited to reflect on key life-related questions: What is life like now? What is causing pressure for me, and who is the source? On a continent where millions of children have been orphaned because of AIDS, “you can imagine what kinds of answers you come up with in a secondary school,” she said. Students are then asked to reflect on how they spend their free time, and finally, what their sexual behavior is like.



Helen O'Regan, RSCJ, during a visit to St. Louis in late May.

Workshop facilitators help students connect the dots. If they are using alcohol or drugs – and many are – they need to understand how that puts them at risk for AIDS,” Sister O'Regan said. “Gradually, the realization sets in for many that this is a part of our lives and we have to work together to stop the spread of the disease.”

If students' responses to the questions signify that they are at risk, they are helped to understand what changes they need to make if they want to reduce the threat, the goal being “to help them realize that they have a choice.”

Students in the workshop are invited to evaluate the program. One question asked is: After this workshop would you like to receive testing for the HIV virus? At least 80 percent respond affirmatively.

continued

“Gradually, the realization sets in for many that this is a part of our lives and we have to work together to stop the spread of the disease.”

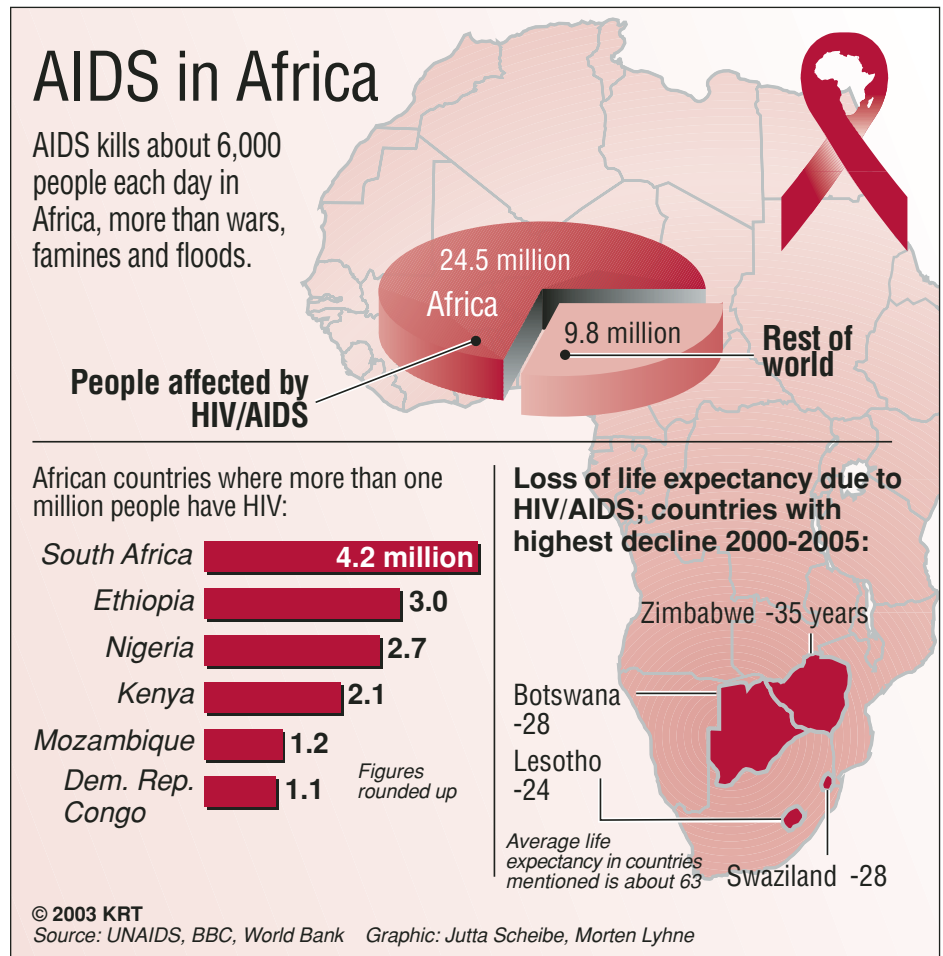
The final phase encourages students to avoid risky behaviors. That critical piece is the hardest part. “We’re weak on follow-up,” Sister O’Regan said. “There aren’t enough counseling centers or people to work in them.”

Adults take the workshops too. Women are helped to understand that they have a right to refuse sexual contact if they have reason to believe a spouse is infected. “That is a big step,” Sister O’Regan said. “Traditionally, a wife who refuses may be beaten, sent away or divorced.”

The Education for Life program, developed by Medical Missionary Sister Kay Lawler from principles in Gerard Egan’s *The Skilled Helper*, and strengthened by Franciscan Sister Miriam Duggan, who augmented the program’s spiritual direction, is being adopted in other parts of Africa.

Meanwhile, a need to make educational programs available to more people has forced Sister O’Regan into development work, writing funding proposals that will help direct international funds into programs that are effective at the grassroots.

In Kenya, where 2.5 million people are infected with HIV, the highest rate of infection occurs in women ages 15 to 24, she said, so education has to



Illustrations compare HIV/AIDS in African nations.

begin at a young age. Right now boys and girls between 5 and 14 are the target group for education, but traditionally “even parents don’t discuss sexual issues with their children,” Sister O’Regan said. “It is reserved to aunts, uncles and grandparents.” Teachers, too, are inhibited by the taboo, even though the government has provided textbooks for students from primary school through college.

But gradually that is changing, Sister O’Regan said. “People infected

10 to 12 years ago are dying. When people begin going to funerals every month, or every week, they begin to realize how devastating the disease is. So the key is prevention: helping each person understand that he or she has a choice to make, and then supporting them in their good choices.

“It’s extremely important too, to collaborate with others in the work and with the government,” she added. “It takes faith and strength from God to make this commitment.” ✚

*New website
reflects Society's
internationality*

Lolín Menéndez, RSCJ, a member of the Society's U.S. Province, is web weaver for the international website of the Society of the Sacred Heart, www.rscjinternational.org, which went public April 1 with contents in three languages. Articles and documents reflect the breadth of the Society's ministries as members carry out its mission in 45 countries.

"As a congregation we seek to reflect through www.rscjinternational.org who we are as Society of the Sacred Heart, what we are about, what gives us life, and how our commitment takes flesh in mission," Sister Menéndez said.

"We also want to make known our history, our current commitments, something about the deep faith and social values integral to our life. We seek to engage and to link people across all kinds of boundaries, and thus aim to provide a space where connections and exchanges can take place."

Sister Menéndez, who previously worked for Jesuit Refugee Service in East Africa, is fluent in the website's three languages: English, French and Spanish. Appointed to her new post by the Society's General Council, she is based in Rome.

The website, two years in the making, was proposed at the Society's General Chapter 2000 in Amiens, France, where delegates expressed a strong desire to put technology at the service of the Society's mission. ❖



Home page of the international website of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Ministry Update

An RSCJ presence in LaBelle, Florida, highlighted in the spring 2004 issue of *Heart*, has come to an end after twenty-five years. In recent weeks, Sister Madeleine Desloge, 88, has moved to Regis Community in St. Charles, Missouri. Sister Bienvenida Velez has moved to Lehigh, Florida, to care for a family member. Sister Marie-Louise Wolfington, assured that the Habitat for Humanity program she established will continue under county auspices, will undergo knee surgery and explore new ministries.

The departing sisters noted that the graves of two RSCJ, buried in LaBelle following a highway accident there, will remain as "a faithful remembrance" of the Society's work.

A link to an article in the region's diocesan newspaper is available at www.rscj.org. "News from the Province," July 2004. ❖

In Memoriam

*Please see www.rscj.org
for biographical information
on RSCJ who have died.*

**May they live in the fullness
of God's love.**

*Elizabeth O'Connor
April 22, 2004*

*Julia Ellis
April 24, 2004*

*Margaret Mary Hannon
June 27, 2004*

*Katherine McDonnell
June 29, 2004*

*Clara A. McClatchy
July 24, 2004*

Lab Report: Professor Blends Science and Values

Alternative leukemia cure on the horizon

By Pamela Schaeffer

Ask Patricia M. Shaffer, RSCJ, to talk about her passion and her brain would most likely begin to whirl like a computer processor. It's hard to guess what would come up first.

It might well be her role in a new treatment for childhood leukemia, looming on the horizon after decades of research. Or it could be the University of San Diego Founders Club, which she established: an alliance of alums and University of

San Diego students who want to deepen their connections with the school's Sacred Heart tradition and values. Or perhaps it would be the new \$47-million Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology at the University of San Diego and the promising future it offers young scientists.

Her mind would have to hover for a moment, too, over the subject of athletics: those she participates in directly and those she vicariously enjoys as spectator and chaplain.

She plays basketball in a senior women's league, bicycles around San Diego, serves as chaplain for the

These days, though, it may be the scientist in Sister Shaffer that looms largest in her own mind, simply because, after so many years of work, she is so close to success.

She has worked for years to clone two genes and so achieve a dramatic result: an alternative source of L-asparaginase, a protein used to treat childhood leukemia. (The protein starves leukemia cells by cutting off the nitrogen source they need to divide and multiply.) Because three L-asparaginases currently in use are sometimes inhibited by the patient's immune system, rendering the therapy useless, an alternative form could extend the treatment to children who might otherwise die.

By the end of this year, Sister Shaffer expects her research to be complete: ready for a pharmaceutical firm to incorporate her cloning process into production of a new drug. At least one company has expressed interest, she said.

Interim rewards

If her research over the past thirty-three years has been slow and painstaking, there have been interim rewards, including the opportunity to invite budding young scientists, both graduate and undergraduate students, to work alongside her and learn research techniques firsthand. Even high school students have assisted her in the lab as a result of her participation in Project SEED (Summer Educational Experience for the Disadvantaged), and many have gone on to careers in science.

She acknowledges that her young protégés have slowed the progress of her work at times. Sometimes they make mistakes that cost her time. But they have also helped her, she said, by running and maintaining sophisticated lab machines.

Meanwhile, she has been a well-liked and highly respected teacher, more at ease with new technology than many people half her age. Five years ago, the University of San Diego magazine described Sister Shaffer's use of a hand-held computer for keeping track of students' responses as she quizzed them; her use of a digital camera for developing computerized seating charts; her method for keeping students interested as she unraveled the mysteries of DNA – linking her lectures to the recent investigations of high-profile crimes.

At a ceremony in September 2000 honoring Sister Shaffer as the recipient of the San Diego de Alcala Award for "extraordinary and enduring contributions" to furthering the



Patricia M. Shaffer, RSCJ, stands beside a plaque commemorating RSCJ who have taught science at USD.

university's women's basketball team and, according to those who marvel at her energy, attends every home game. She prays with the team and joins their huddles during time outs.

"She's like an apostle: totally Gospel-driven," said Barbara Quinn, RSCJ, who heads the Center for Spirituality at the University of San Diego and agreed to be co-chaplain for the basketball team. "I can't say no to Pat Shaffer."



Photo from the early 1990s shows Sister Shaffer talking with her chemistry students.

mission and goals of the University of San Diego, she was described as “a virtual icon of science and liberal education.” Among her accomplishments, she has been awarded twenty grants from sources outside the university for her teaching and research. Two of those were from the National Science Foundation: a Visiting Professorship for Women in 1987, which put her at the University of Georgia for a year, and a \$200,000 grant in the early 1990s for her research. She is listed in *American Men and Women of Science* and in *Who’s Who in the West*. She is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and has served as national president of Sigma Delta Epsilon, Graduate Women in Science. In addition to her extensive publishing in scientific journals, thirty of her students have made presentations at scientific meetings.

The ceremony honoring Sister Shaffer in September 2000 marked her decision to retire from teaching after forty years in classrooms at the University of San Diego and its predecessor, San Diego College for Women. (Now, at 76, she is Professor Emerita of Chemistry.) That decision freed her to spend more time in a laboratory assigned to her by a school in another part of town: San Diego State University, where, in 1975, she became the first woman awarded a Ph.D. in chemistry by that school. She had already earned a master’s degree in chemistry at Stanford.

“I was working in a little corner of a laboratory at the University of California San Diego, but a visiting professor needed the space, so I called my old friends at San Diego State. They weren’t able to hire another professor because of funding cuts. As a result, they had a lab available,” she said.

Legendary connections

Retirement, though, meant missing the chance to teach in the University of San Diego’s Shiley Center, dedicated in June

2003. Described by the *San Diego Union Tribune* as “breeding ground for next wave for biotechnology workers,” the center is a high-tech powerhouse with seventy-eight laboratories and classrooms designed to foster interdisciplinary work among four scientific fields: chemistry, biology, physics, and marine and environmental sciences. As Sister Shaffer conducted a visitor through the building in May, her excitement was contagious.

She noted the nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometer for analyzing chemical compounds; the special laboratory for mapping San Diego’s ecosystems; the greenhouse on the roof. Hanging over a balcony, she pointed out the garden walkways below in the shape of a double helix.

She is particularly proud of a Sacred Heart wing on the second floor of the four-story building, where a large plaque honors seven RSCJ, including herself, who taught science on the campus. Many Sacred Heart alums contributed to the building fund, she said.

Although Sister Shaffer was not involved in soliciting those funds, her connections with alums are legendary. She follows the careers and family lives of many of her former students. Members of her Founders Club, in words and deeds – including feast-day celebrations and works of service – keep alive the spirit of the Religious of the Sacred Heart who established the San Diego College for Women in 1952 and oversaw its merger with a diocesan men’s college in 1972. The club’s many service projects have included house-building in Tijuana in cooperation with Habitat for Humanity and, with funding support from the U.S. Province Fund for Ministry – \$10,800 over a period of five years – working with a parish youth group in the economically depressed town of Mecca, California. Membership in Founders Club also serves as a gateway to membership in the national Associated Alumnae/i of the Sacred Heart.

Suzanne O’Connor, a former student who graduated in 1999, and a former president of the Founders Club, sees in Sister Shaffer’s varied pursuits a total integration of her gifts and values. “She is one of those people who never give up,” O’Connor said – whether it’s her own research, her commitment to the values of the university’s founders, her concern about her students and former students. “She makes things happen. ... She’s one of the most brilliant – and the most energetic – women I’ve ever met.” ❖

Front and center in Miami

Barnyard breeds collaboration, anxiety, hope

By Pamela Schaeffer



Principals of the Cast:

Sylvia Jordan - Miami social worker; founder and program director of the Barnyard Community Center.

Rosemary Bearss, RSCJ - financial director of Coconut Grove Cares; former Provincial of the U.S. Province.

Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ - head of Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart in Miami.

Von Beebe - retired public school principal in Miami; director of community learning for Carrollton and the Barnyard.

The Setting:

Coconut Grove, Miami's oldest settlement, home to both Carrollton and the Barnyard. The Barnyard is in the West Grove, a poverty-stricken area with many needs.

The Action:

Carrollton School and Coconut Grove Cares team up in support of the Barnyard, which provides a daily after-school program and all-day summer programs for underprivileged children. Solid funding by Miami government agencies, supplemented by grants from a variety of sources, including area businesses, the United Way and the Society of the Sacred Heart, and combined with income from a monthly antique show, have kept programs running well until recently, when dramatic cuts in government funding have put the program under siege.

It started in the early 1980s with a derelict warehouse in Miami's West Coconut Grove, an attractive nuisance that drew kids like ants to honey.

Before long, the warehouse developed into the Barnyard Community Center, a place whose story is deeply interwoven with Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart and Religious of the Sacred Heart in Miami.

Sylvia Jordan, a social worker in Coconut Grove, acquired the warehouse with the help of Miami activist Elizabeth Virrick when a job-training program for ex-offenders was about to be phased out. At least, Jordan thought, with the building, she could teach the at-risk young men basic construction skills and provide resources to help them acquire a GED.

Soon construction equipment and materials were brought to the site – hammers and saws, screwdrivers and levels, piles of sand. The young men got to work restoring the building, and before long Jordan found herself with an unexpected bonus. Along with the older youth seeking job skills came younger children who just wanted to play.

“You can't imagine,” Jordan said. “There was this big room filled with all kinds of interesting things, and children came from all over the neighborhood. They wanted to hammer, and I let them. Then their friends would come and ask, ‘Can I hammer too?’”

As the children played at remodeling, they noticed that some of the older youth involved in construction were sometimes engaged in a second activity: studying for the GED. Soon the younger children wanted to mimic the older boys in that effort too.

“They started bringing in their homework and asking for help,” Jordan said. “So we started a homework club. We got books from the library and started reading to them. Before long,” she said laughing, “I was running an underground after-school program. Then one day we had a surprise visit from the director of the county's juvenile justice program, and I got caught.”

Although the visit preceded legislation preventing ex-offenders from mingling with children, the site visitor was concerned – and intrigued. “He told me to write up a formal proposal for a children's program, and they would fund it.



At left, children in the Barnyard program gather around Sister Rosemary Bears. Above, Sister Suzanne Cooke confers with Von Beebe at Carrollton. Below, a “Fun Run” sponsored by Carrollton to raise money for the Barnyard.



Our first project was a summer camp in 1983. The whole neighborhood wanted to come.”

The children’s program was very well financed by government agencies in Miami, Jordan said, and it soon became the Barnyard’s focus. The ex-offender’s program was phased out.

Today the Barnyard, so named because it once housed horses that pulled milk wagons, and later city trucks, serves about 300 children a year in a daily after-school and an all-day summer program, along with their parents, who are required to participate in parenting classes. The program also serves as a gateway for West Grove families to other service agencies.

Sister Bearss is among several RSCJ who have been involved in the Barnyard over its twenty-two year history. She went to Miami in 1994, following a five-year term as Provincial of the United States Province. Her title, financial director of Coconut Grove Cares, the Barnyard’s sponsor, doesn’t mean much, she said, “because I do a million things.”

“Our main objective is to keep these kids in school. Without the help we give them, many of them would be dropouts and into the drug culture.” As it is, she said, some are lost. “These are at-risk kids.”



The children, ages 5 to 12, all from the immediate neighborhood, are divided into age groups when they come each day, and the first priority is making sure they get their homework done. After homework, until the Barnyard closes around 5 or 6 p.m., come snacks, specialized tutoring, arts and crafts, music and drama, and outdoor play. Conflict resolution, computer training, cultural enrichment and field trips are part of the comprehensive curriculum, and recently a grant provided funds for a program on nutrition. Career mentoring has been offered to older children at different times. The facility is packed with equipment and supplies for encouraging learning and creativity. Walls are covered with murals and paintings; mobiles dangle from the soaring ceiling.

When Sister Bearss arrived in Miami a decade ago, the relationship between the Barnyard and RSCJ in Miami was well established. It formally dates to 1968, when Coconut Grove Cares sponsored at summer camp at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, also situated in Coconut Grove. But it wasn’t until the 1980s that the relationship really took off, evolving into the multi-faceted form it takes today.

The synergy developed when Georgie Blaeser, RSCJ, became campus minister and director of social justice programs at Carrollton in 1987 and met Jordan at a networking meeting for people connected with service agencies in the Grove. At the time, Sister Blaeser was seeking places where high school students from Carrollton could volunteer. Before long, Carrollton students were volunteering at the Barnyard, and the relationship grew.



Around 1990, Jordan said, “we had our first Network program at the Barnyard” – one of the many service projects around the country sponsored by the Network of Sacred Heart Schools.

continued



Other RSCJ became involved. Ellen Collesano, now a member of the Provincial Team in St. Louis, Sister Dee Copeland and Sister Maureen Glavin have worked at or with the Barnyard at various times. Then, four years ago, Suzanne Cooke, head of Carrollton, took the relationship to another level: Carrollton and the Barnyard teamed up to hire a director of community learning. It was an easy decision to hire Von Beebe, a principal in Miami public schools for thirty years noted for his philosophy of community education. "Education doesn't end at the school walls," said Beebe, a Miami native who holds a doctorate from Columbia University. "To be an educator and not take advantage of the experience in the community is, to me, negligent."

In a variety of creative ways, Beebe has strengthened connections between Carrollton and the Barnyard and with the community at large. Among numerous creative efforts, he developed a summer program "Growing Up in Multicultural Miami," involving Barnyard children and Carrollton students and aimed at bridging cultural gaps in a city renowned for its diversity. Beebe also assists the Barnyard by overseeing volunteers and writing grants.

"It has been wonderful for me to come to a situation with leadership but no politics, with no financial games; just people doing the right things for the right reasons," he said.

Although Sister Bearss has spent many enjoyable days at the Barnyard with the children, she spends most of her time a few blocks away, in the office of Coconut Grove Cares. It is filled with photographs of Barnyard people and events and art work made for her by the children.

These days, though, her pleasure in all the program has achieved is tinged with worry. Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami, the program's bedrock funders, have severely cut back on annual allotments. "It's like night and day since I've been here," Sister Bearss said. "Until recently, we got as much as \$275,000 from the city and county governments. This year we got \$20,000 from the city and \$35,000 from the county. That's just killing us."

Supplemental funding from a variety of sources – United Way of Greater Miami, corporate donations, and grants of various kinds, including grants from the Society of the Sacred Heart – falls well short of the



Rosemary Bearss, RSCJ

Top, Sylvia Jordan
Below, Kenyan Wilson paints in a Barnyard activity program.

\$340,000 a year it takes to run the Barnyard's programs. Still, Jordan said, many times the Society's grants had saved the day.

Since 1995, two ministry funds of the Society's U.S. Province, Fund for Ministry and the Philippine Duchesne Fund, have provided \$130,400 in annual grants to the Barnyard and to nearby Virrick Park for renovation and programs. The two funds support projects involving RSCJ or their collaborators and promoting systemic change for social justice and human development. (For more information, see www.rscj.org, "Sharing the Resources.")

Another source of funds, proceeds from a monthly antique and jewelry sale sponsored by Coconut Grove Cares and overseen by staff member Glinda Walls, has also been dramatically reduced in recent uncertain economic times.

Carrollton has done its part to help close the gap in recent years. Sister Cooke has earmarked funds from an annual dinner sponsored by the school at a local restaurant, whose owner donates the space and food. That provided \$15,000 for the Barnyard this year. A "Fun Run" involving Carrollton students, parents, alumnae, faculty and staff brought in \$8,500 in January.

"Carrollton needs the Barnyard," Sister Cooke said. "It needs the Barnyard to be alive and well," because of the mission of the Society to serve the underserved. "Miami is a young city, still in process of self-identification. A culture, a value system is still being sorted out here. We are clear about our identity, our values and goals. That's the gift we bring."

But with the dramatic drop in government funding, combined with a slow economy that affects other sources of funds, the program is hoping for saviors. A five-year-old program for Hispanic children housed in a school in a Hispanic neighborhood and overseen by Carrollton's Beebe was forced to close last year for lack of funds. "It broke our hearts," Sister Bearss said.

Jordan is worried about Barnyard's survival, given the recent funding cuts. Somehow, though, the program has managed to hang on before through tough times. "We have to believe that something will happen," she said.

Sister Bearss acknowledges that she has spent sleepless nights over the years worrying about the program's future. "It would be okay if it went under if there were another place for these kids to go," she said. ❖



LEAPS *of* FAITH

Bridging a Historic Divide

In 1975, just a few years after “The Troubles” began in Northern Ireland – the bloody religious conflict that has only recently submitted to a fragile truce – Seamus Hodgkinson got a call from Meg Canty, RSCJ, about a teaching job at Doane Stuart in Albany, New York. He recalls that his response was a bit unusual for a job-seeker.

“When she told me about the school, I got the shivers,” he said.

Sister Canty was an administrator at the then-new Doane Stuart, formed in a union of a Sacred Heart and an Episcopal school – Kenwood Academy and St. Agnes – and describing itself as the first merged Protestant-Catholic school in the United States. Hodgkinson had recently emigrated from Northern Ireland, where the violence between Catholics and Protestants was at its height.

Hodgkinson has now logged in nearly three decades as a teacher and administrator at Doane Stuart. Yet far from representing “more of the same” to him, the 2003-2004 academic year marked the realization of a

*The Belfast boys,
Sam Morrow (left)
and Tony McGabaran.*

longtime dream. In a launch of a new annual program, two students from Northern Ireland, Tony McGabaran, a Catholic, and Sam Morrow, a Protestant, lived with host families in Albany from September through May while enrolled in Doane Stuart’s junior class.

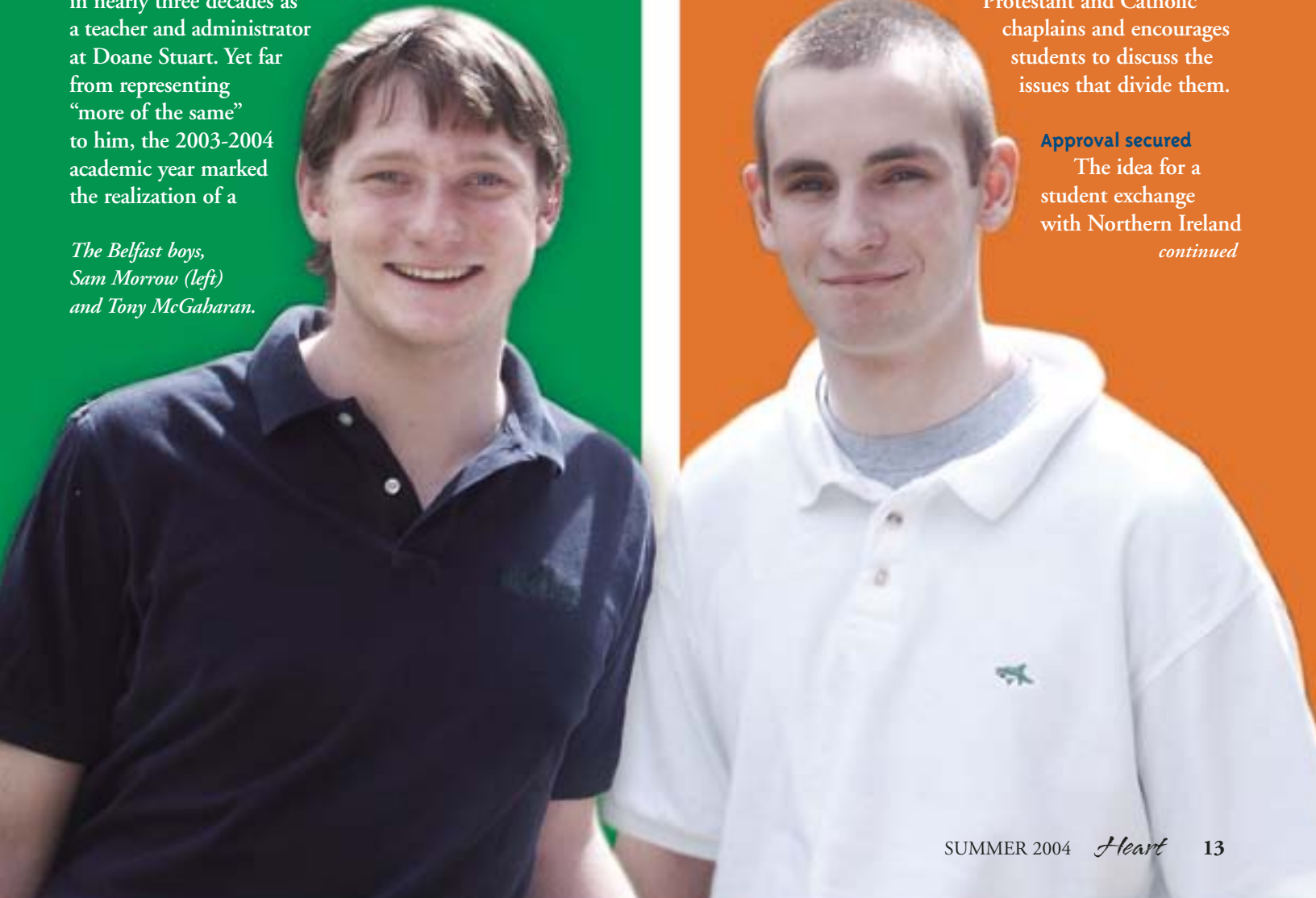
Tony and Sam came from Lagan College, an integrated high school in Belfast and Doane Stuart’s partner for the exchange. Lagan was founded in 1981 as the first religiously-mixed school in a context of near-total religious segregation in Northern Ireland’s schools.

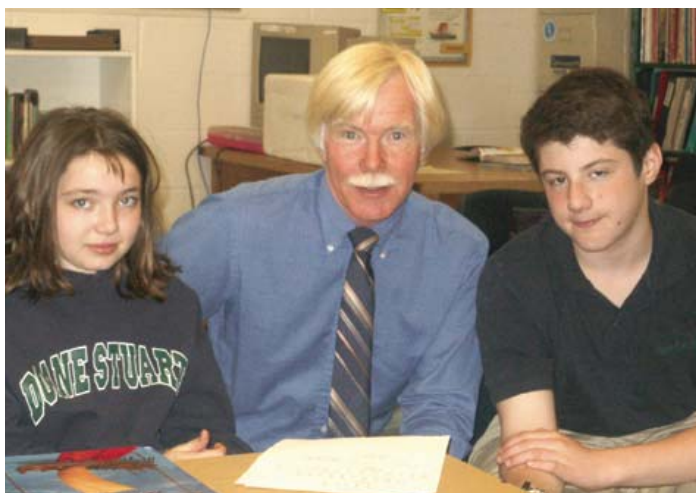
“Most Catholic children in Northern Ireland attend Catholic schools, meaning that public schools are de facto Protestant,” Hodgkinson said. “There are now fifty integrated schools in Northern Ireland, but they are attended by only five percent of the student population.” Of those

fifty schools, Lagan alone retains Protestant and Catholic chaplains and encourages students to discuss the issues that divide them.

Approval secured

The idea for a student exchange with Northern Ireland
continued





Seamus Hodgkinson works on a project with two of his middle school students, Hanna Cadman (left) and Andrew Kauffman.



Left to right: Bertie Ahern, Ireland's prime minister, Richard Enemark, head of Doane Stuart, Tony McGaharan, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sam Morrow.

formed in Hodgkinson's mind nearly two decades ago. In 1992, Hodgkinson's mother-in-law, Katherine Hauser of Slingerlands, New York, put up \$2,000 in seed money to move the dream along. The money lay dormant for several years, while Hodgkinson's hopes grew stronger.

"The longer I worked at Doane Stuart, the more I thought that we could somehow become a model for Northern Ireland," he said.

The Troubles were often on Hodgkinson's mind. He was just entering adulthood when violence broke out in Belfast in 1969, as Catholics, long a target of discrimination, began to agitate for equal rights. He vividly recalls those days.

"In 1969 the British moved the army in. So one day I was living in a reasonably normal urban city. Then, practically overnight, it became a divided city with soldiers in full battle gear and bayonets. ... The army put up walls to separate Protestants and Catholics. Anyone who grew up in Belfast in those years suffered with personal family losses or was impacted in some significant way. It was a horrible place to try to survive.

"The walls were very crude at first – corrugated iron topped with barbed wire," he recalled. "Later they were reinforced and landscaped. Most people don't realize that as the Berlin Wall was coming down, walls were still going up in Northern Ireland."

Hodgkinson has visited Northern Ireland nearly every summer since 1975, watching the situation deteriorate and then, in recent years, gradually improve. Meanwhile, the educational experiment at Doane Stuart flourished and matured. Recently, under the leadership of Richard Enemark, the present head, the school has changed its description from "ecumenical" to "interfaith," reflecting increasing diversity in the student body – annually at least ten percent of the

students are Jewish, and Jewish holidays are observed in chapel services – as well as the presence of a Buddhist temple in a room on campus. Enemark offered the Buddhists a space after learning about their problems finding a home.

Three years ago, four years after becoming head, Enemark determined to put Hauser's money to work. With a nod to two historic figures who face each other in a hall outside his office – Right Reverend William Croswell Doane, first Episcopal bishop of Albany, and Mother Janet Stuart, RSCJ educator – he arranged a trip to Northern Ireland, persisting despite his inability to secure an appointment with the political figure he most wanted to see. His leap of faith was rewarded. On a visit to the capitol in Belfast "as a tourist," he struck up a conversation with a stranger whom he had overheard talking about "integrated education," and before long, he found himself in a meeting with his target: Michael Wardlow, chief executive of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. "By the time I left," Enemark said, "I had his official approval to go ahead with an exchange."

A further boost to the incipient program, both financial and symbolic, came when two alumna, one of Kenwood, one of St. Agnes, independently offered funding for the program's first year.

Belfast, Albany compared

When the time came to decide which Lagan students would go to Albany, Tony and Sam, the first to secure parental permission before the deadline, won by default. Like Enemark, they have seen a leap of faith pay off. Both said the experience at Doane Stuart has opened their minds and hearts in unexpected ways.

"Life changing? Definitely," Tony said. "No argument on that. In Belfast, you think religious conflict is the norm. From

outside, you can see things from a different perspective.” Yet Northern Ireland and the United States are similar in one ironic way, he said.

“We don’t have such a diverse population ethnic-wise. Here there is huge diversity – Jewish, African-American, Asian – but there are also troublesome racial issues. White people look down on black people. That’s how it is for Catholics in Belfast. I find it really interesting to be able to compare.”

Neither Tony nor Sam has known the bloodshed that was daily fare for their parents’ generation. Both were small children when a cease-fire went into effect in 1992, and young boys when the Belfast Agreement, signed on Good Friday, 1998, laid out a political agenda for peace. Still, sporadic carnage keeps tensions high as paramilitary groups spar over terms for surrendering arms, and deep polarization remains. On July 4, barely a month after the boys had returned to Northern Ireland, British soldiers erected barriers to prevent Protestant Orangemen from entering Catholic areas during the annual Drumcree Parade. In the past, the parade has been notorious for precipitating riots.

“Violence can rather easily be avoided these days,” Sam said, but “random events” still occur. He recalls, for example, coming upon a “big riot ... just 300 to 400 yards away” at the intersection of a Protestant and a Catholic areas, near where he had gone to meet a friend.

Like Tony, Sam finds it ironic that many Americans are perplexed over religious conflict in Northern Ireland when racism pervades the United States. He noted that he had been cautioned about walking alone in certain areas in Albany. Yet, he said, “in Northern Ireland, I pretty much go where I please.”

He acknowledges, though, that he keeps his guard up when passing through Catholic areas back home.

A ploy sometimes used to elicit information about a person’s religious persuasion is to ask which soccer team

they support, he said. “If I were in a Catholic conclave, and someone asked me that, I’d definitely say I support the Celtics” – the Catholic team.

“Northern Ireland is still an incredibly divided society,” Hodgkinson said. “It will take a generation to overcome the mistrust and ignorance, and that’s where education comes in. It has to happen at the level of the schools.”

Perfect ambassadors

Both Enemark and Hodgkinson are elated over the achievements of the program’s first year. Sam and Tony are “perfect ambassadors,” Hodgkinson said. Just as he had hoped, the program brought to Doane Stuart “students who could become leaders back in Northern Ireland; students who, when they become persons of influence, will be able to make a difference.”

“They will go home with a sense of mission. They will realize that integrated education is the only way to go.”

Hodgkinson wants to eventually see ten students from Northern Ireland, five from each side, attend Doane Stuart each year. And he especially hopes that a lasting peace in Northern Ireland will allow the program to become a true exchange. Concerns about security prevented Doane Stuart students from enrolling at Lagan last year.

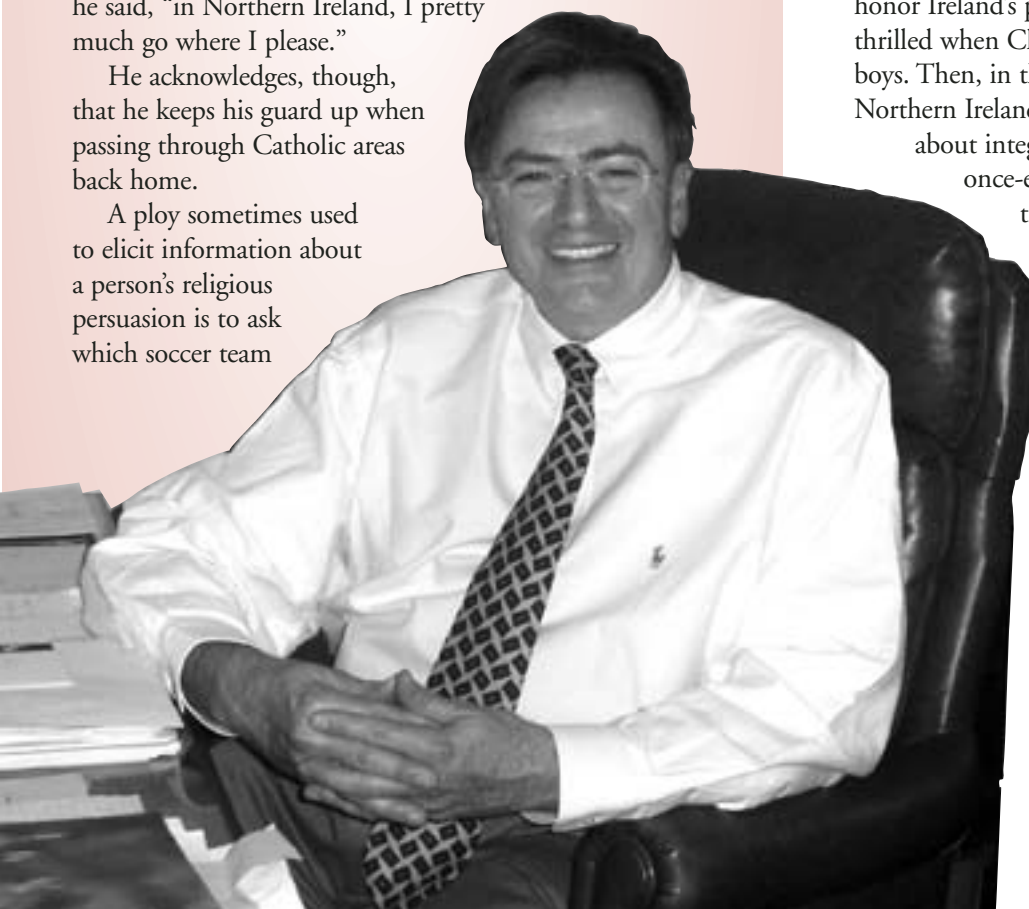
Enemark, too, has had reasons to rejoice, even beyond his obvious pleasure in hosting Tony and Sam and shepherding the program through a promising start.

Among highlights, he, Tony and Sam were invited last fall to a reception hosted by Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton to honor Ireland’s prime minister, Bertie Ahern. Enemark was thrilled when Clinton spent a full ten minutes talking to the boys. Then, in the spring, sixteen educational leaders from Northern Ireland came to Doane Stuart for three days to talk about integrated education, and Michael Wardlow, the once-elusive chief of integrated education, arranged the event.

Reflecting over the year’s events, Enemark said, “These boys have taught us a great lesson: how easily the bond between Catholics and Protestants can turn to hate ... how friendship takes work, good will and grace.”

He harbors high hopes for the future of a program that could have a significant impact on events in another part of the world. “If anything speaks to the heart of what makes us special as a school, it is this,” he said. ❖

Richard Enemark in his office at Doane Stuart.



Finding the way with God

By Rosemary Bearss, RSCJ

As a child I first encountered the complexity of choice when I saw that in choosing one thing I necessarily eliminated other possibilities without consciously setting out to do so. As an adult I realized there was more to learn about decision making – that the act of choosing is central to being human, and that it is both an art and a skill.

It was in the late 1960s that I encountered the word “discernment” in the way we use it today: a process of making the best choice among two or more good options. At that time a number of theologians and spiritual directors began articulating methods of discernment. I was living with a community of RSCJ at Barat College, and we decided to use the “directions for discernment” we had received from some Jesuit friends.* I can still see us following those pages like a cookbook in an effort to make a difficult decision that faced us.

In those first years we did the best we could to make decisions that were “discerned.” Soon, though, we understood that putting a methodology in practice did not necessarily result in decisions that left us filled with peace and grace. So much depended on our interior spirit and our trust in God, as well as on our trust in those with whom we were discerning. But those early efforts led me eventually to understand that the deepest call I experience from God is to live a discerned life.

*Living a
discerned
life is my
spirituality.*

Living a discerned life *is* my spirituality. It is based on my relationship with God that began when, as a child, I first understood that God was real. Today I experience God in a variety of ways, but what is always true is that I experience a communication with God that is very real. For me, it has to do with interior movements that I have come to trust.

Rooted in relationship

God’s relationship with each of us is uniquely personal. I have been in awe over the years as I realized through conversations with all sorts of people that God relates so differently and personally with each one. Discernment is not just about major decisions; it is a way of life. It is about being in touch with the God who is truly available to us as we live our lives, who loves us more than we can dream or imagine, and who pushes us gently in the best direction for us at a given time. When we need to make a decision of some magnitude, we simply do it out of the way we have been living, though taking more time to weigh options and gather the evidence that is helpful to us at the time.

The point is to keep in mind that the whole of creation is not focused on this one decision. Rather, what we seek is the best choice at this moment in the course of a life that is lived in a discerning stance before a loving God.

James and Evelyn Whitehead in *Method in Ministry* articulate a model that has been a helpful touchstone for me. This model sets in tension three perspectives of reality: experience, cultural information, and tradition. These are important aspects of any discernment.

Remembering this model helps me to avoid some dangers. For instance, if I look simply at my own experience in the light of what I value from my tradition, there is a danger of a “fundamentalist” approach to a decision: a sort of “Jesus and me” theology. Or, if I take into account only what I value

*John Futrell SJ and Jules Toner SJ were the Jesuits who sent us their articulation of “Rules for Communal Discernment” based upon the “Rules for Discernment of Spirits” that St. Ignatius devised in the *Spiritual Exercises*. These steps include: (1) a clear statement of what needs to be decided, (2) prayer for freedom about the outcome of the decision, (3) prayer for enlightenment about the outcome most pleasing to God, (4) weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the various sides of the proposed decision, (5) a consideration of which alternative seems most reasonable, trying to set aside personal selfishness, and (6) having come to a decision, turning to God again in prayer for confirmation.



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from my tradition in light of cultural information, there is a danger of making a “theoretical” decision. In doing so I leave out my own experience, all I have learned through living my life until now. And finally, if I consider only my own experience and what I value from cultural information, the danger is a “secular” decision, leaving out what is important to me from my tradition.

In short, it takes all three realities to inform discernment. Paying attention to each is what is meant by the “evidence gathering” stage of discernment: what St. Ignatius called “the various sides of the proposed decision” in his “Rules for Discernment of Spirits,” cited in *Spiritual Exercises*.

Peace amid pain

The *essence* of discernment is to understand the two spirits: the “spirit of God,” which fills us with grace, light and peace, even in the midst of pain; and the “spirit of darkness,” which breeds fear, anxiety and turmoil. For me, the most important distinction is that between pain and turmoil. Jesus walked to the Cross and the scriptures record his pain. But he was not in turmoil. Deep within was peace, rooted in the assurance that he was responding to his Father.

The difference between pain and turmoil became clear to me in the process of the most difficult decision I have ever been party to: closing Duchesne College in Omaha. I was business manager of that institution, my “alma mater,” and I cried myself to sleep every night while the decision was being made. Through all the pain, though, I experienced not turmoil, but peace. For many reasons, I knew it was a good decision to close the school.

I suggest to people, when they find themselves stuck between pain and turmoil in discernment, that they reach deeply into their experience and come up

with their own example of the difference. This helps them develop a clarifying touchstone for living a discerned life.

The *goal* of discernment is to be in touch with the spirit of God bearing witness within us as we seek the best act of love we can choose, using the touchstones of peace, rationality, and love.

The *process* is to find God, who will lead us to the best of all the good options. Discernment is not about choosing between good and evil. That is a matter of conscience, not discernment. And even though discernment is about choosing only among good options, it is important to keep in mind that just because an option is good, it may not be good for me.

Piet Penning de Vries uses the analogy of food in his *Discernment of Spirits* to make just this point. He reminds us that certain foods, though good in themselves, may not be good for me. I may not feel well after eating a particular kind of food even though I like it. Here Penning de Vries is touching upon the concept that can be called “the fruit” of a particular action or choice. How does it make me feel after I make that sort of decision? What am I feeling and understanding about a similar option that I may be considering now? What might make it different at this time?

Communal discernment refers to decisions made with others, such as a community, a family, or people we work with. The key is that we trust the group with whom we are discerning and listen attentively to each one, as each voice matters to the corporate wisdom that we seek. It has been my experience that

Sometimes an important insight comes from the quietest, most reticent person in the group.

continued

sometimes an important insight comes from the “wee small voice,” possibly that of the quietest, most reticent person in the group.

A venerable history

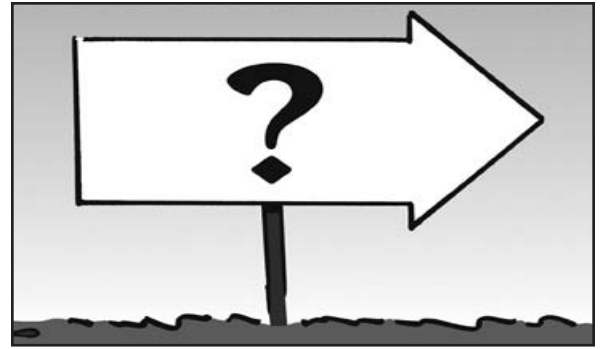
Etymologically, the word “discernment” means “to sift apart.” My grandparents farmed, and I have a memory of watching the harvest and seeing the chaff of the oats separate from the seed. So the process of “sifting apart” our feelings, our reasons, and our options has profound meaning for me.

Theologically, discernment has a venerable history, reaching back long before the second century, when rules for discernment were written down by

the Desert Fathers. The faith view of the biblical person was, and is, that God is Yahweh, the Lord of history, who speaks in every event of our lives. The need for discernment is rooted in the ambiguity inherent in these events.* The Old Testament presents us with varied incidents of this ambiguity and choice: Adam’s choice (Genesis 2:17), Cain’s

(4:7-8), Abraham’s (12:4), that of the people of Israel (Exodus 19:8, 24:3) and (Joshua 24:15), and Elijah (1 Kings 19), to name only a few.

And then there is Jesus in the New Testament. Think of all the choices he made in his own movement from Nazareth to the wilderness of Judea, and from his apostolic life in Galilee to Jerusalem. We can observe how he made his decision at Cana, or how he changed directions when the Syro-Phoenician woman conversed with him, and how he talked with the Samaritan woman at the well.



Finally, consider the discernment involved in the Emmaus story. A group of disappointed disciples were walking along after the recent events in Jerusalem, when a “stranger” joined them. This man simply asked them some questions and, in responding, they articulated their experience. They even put him down a bit for not knowing the things that had happened. But they kept talking. They needed to say these things out loud, to admit their disbelief, anxiety and turmoil. In the process they began to incorporate this person into their community, and slowly, as a matter of course, they began to think differently. They reached out to him and invited him to stay. Then, as they were breaking bread, they recognized him – and he was gone. Their energy returned, a sure sign of the good spirit, and they ran back to Jerusalem to tell their friends.

Has it ever been your experience that a stranger, a teacher or a friend becomes the instrument God uses to give insight that leads you to experience a deep peace and clarity about something with which you have been struggling? If so, is not such an experience very much like that described in the Emmaus story?

When this happens to me, I know that I am living my spirituality; that I am in touch with discernment as a way of life. ❖

The goal of discernment is to be in touch with the spirit of God bearing witness within us.

*In a book entitled *Paying Attention to God*, William Barry SJ writes about discernment in prayer and as a way of life. First published in 1990 by Ave Maria Press, and reprinted many times, this book is a classic. Barry emphasizes the mysterious ways in which we encounter God, who truly wants a personal relationship with each of us. It is this relationship that informs our life and our decisions.



Sister Bears is financial director for Coconut Groves Cares, Inc./ The Barnyard, an educational project in Miami. She is a former provincial of the U.S. Province and a former teacher and administrator at Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois. She holds a master of divinity degree from the Jesuit School of Theology.



Spirituality and New Fiction

By Trudy Patch, RSCJ

In this twenty-first century, as perhaps throughout time, the more we interact with others, whether in literature or life, the more we become aware of the deep human longing for self-transcendence and integration: for human spirituality. And one of the fascinations of the contemporary novel is its many ways of reflecting this longing in lives that are often quite different from our own. More than any other form of literature, the novel exposes us to the ways in which others seek and live their spirituality. Often a novel's characters come from cultures and/or backgrounds that are largely unfamiliar to us, their experiences unlike any we have had. Through the various techniques of the authors, we are able to observe not only the actions of the characters, but also their thoughts or motivations.

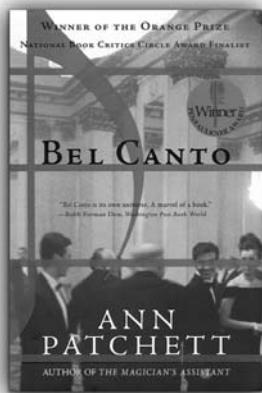
Here I survey the spirituality of characters in three recent novels. But first I would like to review observations made by Elizabeth Johnson in her book *The Search for the Living God*. On page seven, she writes:

continued

The compass of postmodern spirituality points not to rampant individualism and its violent outcroppings but to the importance of community and tradition, prizing human solidarity and peace. It prizes not human supremacy over earth but affective kinship with the whole community of the cosmos. In a word, postmodern spiritual experience prizes not isolation but essential connectedness; not body-mind dualism but the holistic, embodied person; not patriarchy but inclusive feminism; not militarism but expenditure for the enhancement of life; not tribal nationalism but global justice.

These observations about postmodern Christian spirituality capture so well the very human qualities found in good people (and even in not so good) in the contemporary world. The beauty of the world around us, found in human beings as well as in the amazing loveliness of nature or expressions in art, helps us as beholders and beneficiaries of our surroundings to develop our own unique spirituality.

The contemporary novels I have chosen to illustrate the connections I find between spirituality and fiction are *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett, *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, and *Carry Me Across the Water* by Ethan Canin.



The plot of *Bel Canto* centers on the effects of a hostage situation on both captives and captors. In an unnamed country in South America, a comparatively large group of people, representative of wealth and/or prestige, and coming from a variety of countries, is assembled at the home of the country's vice president. The individuals have been invited to a dinner in

honor of the birthday of Mr. Hosokawa, founder and chairman of the largest electronic firm in Japan. Hosokawa is considered a potential benefactor of this poor country, and because he loves opera above almost anything else, a world-famous American soprano, Roxane Cross, has been invited to sing at the event.

When the lights go out as Roxane is singing, "no one was frightened by the darkness," so caught up were they in the beauty of the music. Suddenly armed rebels burst into the room from every window and doorway, and the guests become their hostages. We learn that the leaders of these intruders are motivated by a hope that political prisoners

would be freed. Their plan had been to take only one hostage, the country's president, and quickly leave, but the president had failed to attend.

After meeting with a mediator, the rebels – most of them young, uneducated and poor – agree to release the women, the banquet staff, clergy, and anyone who is sick. However three in those categories remain: Roxane, whom the rebels kept as a means of obtaining their demands; the ill accompanist who refuses to leave Roxane; and a young priest, Father Arguedas, who assumes spiritual responsibility for the group and chooses to stay.

The one thing that seems to bring out the best in all the characters is music, in particular Roxane's singing. Later two other musical expressions – the piano playing of Tetsuya Kato and the untrained voice of the smallest of the rebels, Cesar – draw the group even more closely together and profoundly affect the two individuals from whom the music came.

As the story progresses, we become aware of how the group of fifty-eight international hostages, most of them formerly strangers to one another, coalesce into the beginnings of a real community. Several of the hostages serve to bring out the best in others. Father Arguedas "did not seem to be a hostage, but someone hired to make the hostages feel better." Gen Watanabe, the translator employed by Mr. Hosokawa, knows many languages and responds generously to requests for help, making him indispensable to the group.

For the most part, however, the importance of language and language barriers fades. The relationship among the hostages and their captors becomes such that they communicate affection or romantic love without words. As hostages and captors alike wait to hear the government's proposals for ending the situation, unlikely friendships develop, not only among the hostages but between hostages and captors.

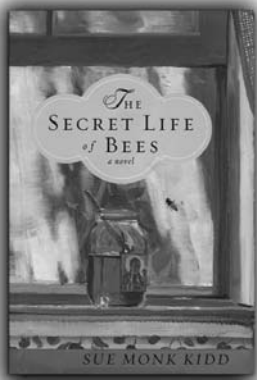
Hosokawa reflects that before these months of captivity there had been hours of "work, negotiations and compromises"; now there were "chess games with a terrorist for whom he felt an unaccountable fondness." Where in his former life "there had been a respectable family that functioned in the highest order, there were now people he loved and could not speak to."

When Gen begins to realize the possible violent consequences of the rebels' failure to surrender, he questions himself: "How had he come to want to save all of them? The people who followed him around with loaded guns. How had he fallen in love with so many people?"

When the government forces do finally make their surprise attack, they shoot all the rebels, as Gen had feared,

and with them the hostage Hosokawa, who loses his life in trying to save one of the rebels: a young woman named Carmen, who had become involved in a romantic relationship with Gen.

Although there is an epilogue to the story, the narrative really ends here – tragically, abruptly. But in the midst of so much pain, we realize that all those brought together for many days, in a situation difficult for both sides, knew a kind of happiness that had been lacking in their lives before. Directly or indirectly, they have come to prize human solidarity. They have learned to appreciate the physical surroundings and those around them, the gifts brought by each one. They illustrate well the last sentence in the excerpt from Elizabeth Johnson’s book cited above. Individually and as a group, they exhibit “essential connectedness... expenditure for the enhancement of life,” a desire for justice and peace.



Very different from *Bel Canto*, Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* is a powerful coming-of-age story set in the South in 1964 amid growing racial unrest. As viewed by Kidd’s editor, the novel reveals “the ability of love to transform our lives, and the often unacknowledged longing for the universal feminine divine.” It addresses “the wounds of loss, betrayal and

the scarcity of love,” and “demonstrates the power of women coming together to heal the wounds, to mother each other and themselves, and to create a sanctuary of true family and home.”

The narrator of the story, the motherless fourteen-year-old, Lily, is often treated cruelly, though not abandoned, by her father, a peach farmer. After her mother’s death, when Lily was four, her father had designated one of the workers on his peach plantation to raise Lily. She was the African-American Rosaleen. Shortly after the novel begins, Rosaleen is attacked by racists and jailed as she attempts to register to vote. Lily manages to help Rosaleen escape from jail, and the two of them set out for Tiburon, North Carolina, a town whose name appears on the back of a picture of a black Madonna. The picture is one of a few treasured items that had belonged to Lily’s mother.

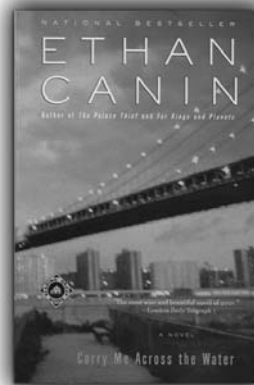
When Lily and Rosaleen reach Tiburon, they visit a store

where they spot a honey jar with a picture of the black Madonna on its label. They are directed to a honey farm owned by three African-American sisters. (In an interview in which the author discussed the research for her book, she noted that in ancient times bees were considered a symbol of the soul, death and rebirth. “I will never forget,” she said, “coming upon medieval references which associated the Virgin Mary with the queen bee.”) Bees and the black Madonna, the symbol of strength and authority, become powerful symbols in the novel.

Both Lily and Rosaleen are taken in as part of the sisters’ household, where they help out in various ways. Though Lily mourned for the family she never really had, she soon realizes she has a family surrounding her. The bee-keeping sisters and a group of other women form a kind of sisterhood united by the black Madonna, who is venerated in the home. For Lily and Rosaleen, this sisterhood provides the kind of community all people need – “a place where one can be heard, supported, helped to transform one’s sorrows.”

The novel’s conclusion comes shortly after a violent confrontation between Lily and her father, a confrontation that calls up the protection and support of the other women. Pained by her inability to resolve differences with her father, but holding out a slight hope for future reconciliation, Lily comes to terms with her life and resolves to follow her early ambition to be a writer – an ambition earlier undermined by her father’s ridicule.

In the search for her own mother, Lily realizes she has found “all these mothers,” about whom she proclaims, “They are moons shining over me.” She continues, “Each day I visit black Mary, who looks at me with her wise face, older than old and ugly in a beautiful way. ... I feel in unexpected moments her Assumption into heaven happening in places inside me. She will suddenly rise and when she does, she doesn’t go up, up into the sky but further and further inside me ... into the holes life has gouged out.”



The third novel, *Carry Me Across the Water*, provides yet another example of the contemporary novel’s reflection of the search for self and eventual self-transcendence. This novel reveals how the principal character, August Kleinman, struggled against his baser instincts and his lack of sensitivity to follow his desire

continued

to “do the right thing.” We find in Kleinman a growing recognition of the importance of community and tradition, human solidarity and peace, human connectedness and global justice.

The novel opens with a description of a love letter from a Japanese man to his wife and infant son. Kleinman had paid a Japanese artisan to translate the letter and write it out in beautiful calligraphy. It was framed, as was the original letter, and placed on display with two large paintings by Francis Bacon and “a dark Morandi.” The reader’s interest is immediately intrigued by this scene, reflected in Kleinman’s mind as he is visiting his younger son and his son’s wife and baby. It is not until the end of the story, though, that we understand the full significance of this opening scene.

Kleinman’s life history, told in flashes from present to past, begins with his escape as a child from Nazi Germany. With his mother, he escaped not only the Nazis but also a father of considerable means who refused to read the signs of the times; a father who seemed to care little for his son or wife. Later we learn that Kleinman’s father was killed in a Nazi purge of the Jewish community in their town.

From childhood, Kleinman’s mother’s words of advice – “take advice from no one” – becomes a force behind what one critic describes as his “life of boldness and originality,” Kleinman and his mother settle in New York and, through a series of prudent judgments, and probably just plain good luck, he rises from poverty to riches.

In school Kleinman, though intelligent, was “always flirting with misbehaviour.” Then, at age eighteen, he awakens to “some powerful surge of violence, utterly new to him” when he bluffs his way into a Fordham University football practice.

Much later, we learn from an aging Kleinman’s reflections over the past, that he “had killed one man and probably a second, grown rich in a business that was abidingly anti-Semitic, beaten all odds, then lost the great love of his life.”

As he thinks about his life, he remembers that the word that defines him for most people is “arrogant.” He reflects on his prosperity and on justice: “Years ago he had become most keenly aware of the inequity of his lucre.” He had “always paid better than the going wage, seen to any man who fell ill... sent surprise checks in the mail and at Thanksgiving ...handed out whole turkeys to his employees.” Charity was easy. All his life “he had feared ruin,” feared it especially for those he loved, and so he had lived simply. Finally, ruin had come, not with loss of money, but with the death of his beloved wife.



Throughout his reflections, alternating with scenes in which he struggles to build a relationship with his son and daughter-in-law, we learn of his declining health and his desire to make up for some of the wrongs of his past. We learn that he has befriended a young West Indian woman, a single mother, and arranged to provide for her and her child financially, in a very sensitive way. This he did before his return to Japan where, as an American GI, he had killed a Japanese soldier in a cave and taken with him the soldier’s books, art work and writings, including the letter Kleinman had arranged to have transcribed and framed. Having been haunted by this killing throughout his life, Kleinman is determined to find the soldier’s wife and return her husband’s belongings.

We see in the unfolding of Kleinman’s life his growth in self-understanding. We witness his transformation from an arrogant, self-sufficient, highly successful businessman to a more humble, concerned, sympathetic man who, in later life, demonstrates his concern for justice as well as his recognition of the importance of community.

In the preface to *The Secret Life of Bees*, Kidd writes about the importance of art and literature to our humanity: “If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams.” The contemporary novels I have chosen to illustrate the connections between spirituality and fiction are only three of many well-written, provocative works awaiting those who are willing to be enriched in their spiritual journeys in ways they may never have considered before.

In our own spiritual searches, what a gift contemporary works of fiction are in their unique expressions of the longing for self-transcendence and integration; in their revelations of the ways human beings overcome obstacles by seeking and deepening relationships – by building communities. ✦



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From the Archives



This three-dimensional model of the headmistress's office at Doane Stuart School, Albany, New York, was presented to Lucie Nordmann, RSCJ, when she left the school in 1993 after serving as headmistress for nine years. Sister Nordmann, patient/ family advocate at St. Luke's Hospital, Chesterfield, Missouri, was the last RSCJ to serve as Doane Stuart's top administrator. Alumna Cathy Cameron, an artist who works in miniatures, created the replica. It is "amazingly accurate – right down to the potted plant," Sister Nordmann said. ❖

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