

# Sister Mary Fitzgerald, SSND -60 Year Jubilee!

## *It was a powerful and blessed experience!*



**I entered** the School Sisters of Notre Dame after 8th grade.

The high school formation program, known as The Aspiranture, at the time, was located at Holy Angels Academy in Fort Lee, NJ. My first trip up there was with other girls who were Aspirants. We traveled on a train out of Baltimore; took a subway to the George Washington Bridge, and a bus across the bridge, to arrive at Holy Angels. It was both exciting and a little scary.

*First day at the Aspiranture. L-R: S. Mary, Loretta Strasbaugh & Judy Myers .*

We had to pack up our clothes ahead of time and send things in a footlocker through the "Railroad Express."

My family thought I was too young to be away from home, but Sister Venarda Spiegelmeir convinced my parents by saying, "She may lose her vocation if she goes to high school here."

My years at Fort Lee were happy. I made many great friends, the best of whom was Eileen Gallagher. Today, she is known as Sister Marie Vianney, SSND, and is a patient at Ozanam. I try to visit her there every chance I get. I have lovely pictures (one featured on pg. 3) from our 25th Jubilee when Eileen's brother, Father Tom, said a special Mass for all of us and we had a nice dinner following at Villa Notre Dame.

I chose SSND because I knew the Sisters from grade school. They obviously enjoyed being together.

As children, we would play in the school yard on summer nights. One of the Sisters would sometimes come out from behind the hedge between the playground and the convent and send us to get snowballs for the Sisters.

(Snowballs are what Baltimoreans call shaved ice in cups with flavors added - fruit, chocolate, egg custard, mint, etc. There were a lot of choices. One could also ask for marshmallow or ice cream on top!)

When the Sisters were together in their yard, they were always laughing and enjoying each other.

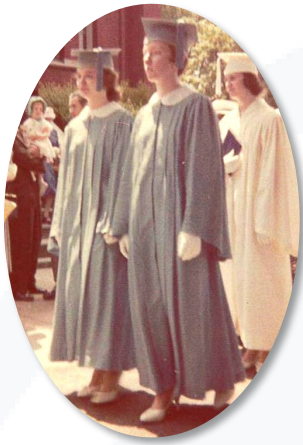
In high school, I began thinking about whether I should really join Maryknoll and go to the missions. I had read a good book about them. As a typical teenager, I think I had a really romantic image of it all in my head.

My decision to stay with SSND was finalized, though, when Sister Joannette Goebel, SSND, my high school Latin teacher, became ill. She sent for me and told me she needed me to teach her freshman class. I was still a senior in high school. I told her I didn't know anything about teaching so I didn't think I could do it. She simply said, "I am going to teach you how to do it."

We sat down together and she prepared the lesson with me. I taught it the next day and went back to her.

*(Cont'd)*

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When she asked me how I did, I told her, “You’re going to fire me: I didn’t finish the whole lesson.” She said, “That happens to teachers all the time. Now, here is how you finish the last part and bridge to the new learning.”

*Graduation procession for Aspirants in 1960. (Sisters Mary and Marie Vianney Gallagher were partners as Juniors).*

I taught the class all week. Today, this would never be allowed. But it was the best thing that could have happened to me. The students were learning and I was loving teaching. So, that was the end of Maryknoll. I have been a teacher or administrator for most of my life and have always looked forward to going to my ministry.

Much of my growth in life has been attributable to the example and challenge of SSNDs who were my mentors and friends.

As I have learned more about Blessed Theresa, Mother Caroline, and You Are Sent, contemplation has become an integral part of my life, making my prayer and ministry an integral whole. That was true in educational ministry and is definitely true in ministry on the Council.

I was very aware of the power of my SSND identity when I was in New Orleans with NCEA, shortly after Katrina. I realized that our schools could be a powerhouse of help for the people of New Orleans.

For four summers, SSND-connected schools and Notre Dame of Maryland University got together and sent delegates to New Orleans to work on rebuilding.

The students were remarkable. After working from 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., we would come back to the house, feed the students, and then sit and pray over our experiences of the day. The student responses were so moving! They recognized their ministry of “making one,” the need to address the poverty they witnessed, and were indefatigable in the service they rendered in New Orleans. It was a powerful and blessed experience!

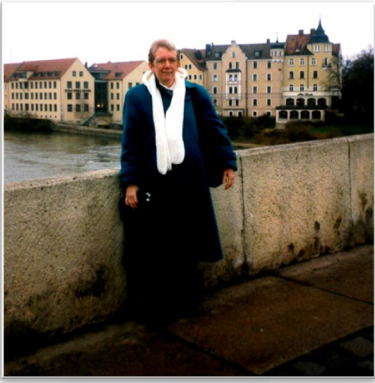
I suppose the real stand-out memory has to be the trip to Germany for the new millennium. Each province could send a certain number of delegates. Baltimore could send four. We were asked to explain why we would like to go, if we had not done an international experience yet. I had not and was blessed to be chosen.

I wanted to learn the language, so was able to take a Berlitz course. My teacher was our SSND Associate, Gabriele Link. When the course ended, I met weekly with Sr. Benedicta Viebeck, SSND, and then took classes at Zion Lutheran. (Cont'd)



*S. Benedicta Viebeck (L) came to the US from Germany in 1939 right before Hitler closed all the borders.*

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In Germany, we were at Haus Werdenfels, the diocesan retreat center. We were 82 Sisters from 24 countries, speaking 17 different languages. The miracle was: we really were able to understand each other!

We were in Germany from December 27 until January 10.

*S. Mary on the old stone bridge which connects Stadtamhof with Regensburg. The bridge was built between 1135 and 1146.*

We had wonderful presentations by Rev. John Fuellenbach, SVD, Sister Beatrix Mayrhofer, SSND, and Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, SSND from the then Dallas Province as well as the General Council at that time (Rosemary Howarth, M. Adelgarda Riess, Patricia Frost, M. Pietra Hagenberger, M. Darija Krhin, Libera Mezzari, Mary Francine Perez, and Laura Jean Spaeth).

We toured heritage sites and saw the Valhalla. I loved meeting so many new people, experiencing the joy and exuberance of our Brazilians, and hearing the stories of the Sisters who had lived behind the Iron Curtain. It is a lasting memory!

*Back row, L-R: S. Mary, S. Aline Gelson (Directress of Aspiranture when she was there), Cathy Forbeck (Sister Eugenia Forbeck), "who was the class ahead of me in Aspiranture". Seated – Sister Joannette Goebel, "my wonderful Latin teacher, who taught me to love teaching."*



*25th Jubilee at VND. Eileen Gallagher (Marie Vianney, SSND) is #4 from the left in the top row. Her brother, Tom, is at the far right on the top row.*

