



Monastery Grounds in Spring

Cloister Echoes

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A Newsletter For All Our Friends
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Fifty Golden Years of Prayer in Watertown

Mark your calendars....the Golden Jubilee of our Sisters' arrival in Watertown will be celebrated on November 17, 2013 at 2:00 PM at our parish, St. Patrick's church. Bishop Terry LaValley will be the celebrant. It will be a glorious occasion on which to thank God for His many Blessings throughout this past half-century. Our grateful thoughts turn naturally to our Father Founder, Msgr. R.J. McCarthy, at whose invitation our community was first invited to the Ogdensburg Diocese. Monsignor's faith and zeal to say nothing of his deep devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus spurred on our seven Foundresses that memorable day when they left their large, newly built home in Manchester, New Hampshire. Those who were left behind had mixed emotions as our Sisters slowly processed down the main aisle of the monastery chapel, the huge exterior bell tolling all the while. November 19th was the actual date. How well we remember Monsignor's comment: "I felt like an undertaker....." Indeed, our Foundresses were embarking on an enormous challenge but nothing was too much to sacrifice for the glory of the Precious Blood. We feel their presence with us still and we know they are continuing to pray with us for the needs of the whole world, but most especially, those of our own Diocese. We hope many of you will be able to attend the celebration. For those who cannot be with us, we hope to share the details of the Jubilee in our next Echoes.



Our Father Founder and Foundresses

Seated: Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart, Msgr. R. J. McCarthy, Mother Mary Reparatrice
Sr. Mary Grace, Sr. Gabriel, Sr. M. Ignatia, Sr. Marie Cecilia & Sr. Mary Raymond



Out of Vietnam, I have called My servant.....

I was born in 1966 in South Vietnam. My parents were born in North Vietnam. When the Communists took over the North in 1954, they had joined the huge exodus which fled South for fear of persecution. My father had held a responsible position in the So. Vietnam government and my Mom was a seamstress. I am one of nine children – five boys and four girls. We lived close to a military installation and so when Saigon fell, the war seemed indeed very close.....explosions of bombs and the firing of guns are vivid memories even though I was only 9 at the time. However, as children will, I played with neighboring children after school and, not understanding politics, only knew that most of my young friends' Fathers were being taken to concentration camps. I soon understood from hearing conversations of the adults around me, that communists were bad people.

As a child of a civil servant of the South Vietnamese government, I was frequently asked at school if my parents had been born in the North and whether or not I was Catholic. Children of the South's military could not go on to higher education. That was my Mom's worst nightmare – that my brothers, who were close to college age, should have to be deprived of an education – or worse still, renounce their faith! Despite the fact that neither of my parents had gone beyond grammar school, both were dedicated to insuring that their children would receive a good education. Communist rule meant that the people were much poorer and food was scarce. Eventually, my Dad had to work as a dyer and my Mom had to work even harder at her trade.

My Uncle offered to take us children out of Vietnam by boat. Knowing it would be the only way we could escape living under communism, my parents accepted his offer. It was an agonizing decision for them as it seemed likely that they would never see us again. They had heard of many tragic stories at sea. My Uncle's eldest son had died at sea two years earlier in his flight. My Uncle and my parents warned us not to discuss the planned escape with anyone. We were even cautioned not to speak of it with each other and so, for fear of landing my parents and my uncle in jail, I kept strict silence. We were among those later known as the "boat people" who escaped communism in the 1980's.

The morning we left home, my Mother took my sister and myself to the bus station. Both my brothers had gone on separate buses to avoid suspicion by the police. When my sister and I had settled in our seats, Mom gave each of us a French roll for our trip. She whispered to us to be good and to be obedient to our older brothers. Mom then turned her back and walked abruptly away from us. My sister leaned close to me and whispered that Mom did not want us to see her cry. As is customary in our culture, we bottled up our emotions but I recall keenly the physical pain I felt as I watched my Mom disappear into the crowd. Tears were out of the question since we could risk going to jail were we to draw attention to ourselves or our mission.

That evening, we met our brothers at the appointed place near the river where we got into two small fishing boats. They were about nine yards long and three yards wide. Their engines sounded like lawnmowers. Their top speed was about five miles an hour. My uncle took me to his boat and my siblings went to his friend's larger one. There were 54 of us escaping. Seventeen boarded the smaller boat and the remainder of the adults were cramped like sardines in the small enclosed cabin of the other boat in order to avoid being seen. The journey took one day and two nights on the river before we reached the open sea. I remember how my uncle and his captain periodically tasted the river water to gauge how close we were to the sea. The closer the river water is to the sea, the saltier the water.

I shall never forget that moment in the early morning when I saw the open sea for the first time. Endlessly vast - lonely and eerie! The land and the trees along the banks of the river could not confine us any longer. I looked back. Everything was slowly disappearing behind me. I choked up with tears, realizing I had left my parents, my other siblings, my friends, my birthplace and my country. I wondered if I would ever see them again.



*I have given My Angels charge over you to
guard you in all your ways.....*



A half day into the journey on the ocean, my uncle considered changing the plan and placing everyone in the larger boat. He soon abandoned it, though, because it simply could not hold 54 people. It was a river boat and did not take kindly to the waves like the smaller one did. It waddled like humpty dumpty causing everyone to be very ill. The darkness was such that you could not identify anyone from one end of the boat to the other. Suddenly, I heard a loud call from the other boat: "dung lai" meaning "Stop!". That was followed by multiple gun shots aimed at our little boat. I could not see my brothers' vessel as we sped away at the command of our captain. I felt our boat was almost human in response to the danger....it ran and ran until the engine choked off and then, exhausted, it floated aimlessly as the young engineer tried to fix the motor. I overheard my uncle say: "We will look for them in the morning...." I feared the worst had happened to my siblings as my eyes tried to pierce the darkness, searching for them but everything in sight was simply water – and more water. I repeated over and over again: "God, please save my brothers, please save my sister..." When I could no longer sit up straight looking for them, I passed out with exhaustion.

In the morning, my uncle decided to let our boat anchor on that vast and lonely ocean with the hope of being reunited with our dear Ones, but around noon, he told the captain to continue our course toward Thailand. It was March when we had set out for sea. That time was chosen to avoid storms and high waves because our boat was so small but who can predict the power of Mother Nature?

Some days, the waves were so high I was sure they would swallow us alive. Water and food were rationed but it mattered little because everyone was too tired and sick to want either. Every day we were on the watch for our friends in the big vessel. We tried desperately to look closer as debris floated by, hoping against hope that we would not recognize a person or any portion of their boat. Each day seemed longer than the one before as we looked in vain for a horizon. We were desperate for land! Lying on the open deck, I would think to myself: "My brothers and sister....where are they now?" I recalled the times our Mom had taken me to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Saigon to pray for a safe journey. I determined to live so that I could tell my parents I was alive. I pulled myself up from despair and prayed with all my heart.

At last, after five days and four nights at sea, we finally found land. It was a small fishing village south of Thailand. The local Thai government transferred us to one of their main refugee camps. One month later, I heard a public announcement of the names of my siblings who were looking for me. The night we had been separated at sea, their boat had been captured by the Vietnamese Communist Coast Guard. Someone among them gave their captives money to release them. The bribe accepted, they headed for the northern shore of Thailand and were taken to a nearby refugee camp.

Five long months later, my brothers, my sister and I were reunited in Bangkok as we together began our journey to a third refugee camp in Indonesia. That was the designated camp for those intending to go to the United States. Our Aunt lived in the United States and our parents wanted us to be close to her. Other countries, such as Australia and Canada, accepted refugees without having had residence in a third camp.

After another seven months, we arrived in California in April 1981, thirteen months after having left our homeland. It took eleven years for my parents and the rest of my siblings to immigrate to the United States. That happy reunion occurred the year I graduated from college. It was 1992. Many have asked if I would have consented to leaving Vietnam had I known the peril involved. Who knows? One thing I do know: I would not have the joy of being where I am – or being who I am, today, had I not endured the past.

~ Sister Mary Pham

Had been keeping it under my hat, but it's time you knew.....



Ordinarily, I don't discuss my acquaintances, but I decided to let you know that I do have a *special* friend across town. His name is Able. He doesn't really look like a thug. It's the hat that does that. When I borrow it, I put it on more genteely and well ~ you can see the difference. Able and I go way back. We keep in touch mostly thru the mail. I have to admit that I'm kinda smitten with his gifts of home-made dog biscuits. He's far more

generous than most dogs would be but I think it has a lot to do with Able's Mom. She taught him to be generous. I hope you are lucky enough to have a pal who'd give you the biscuits off his doggie plate! Have a great summer, my friends!

LOVE HEARING FROM YOU,

YOUR FAVORITE LAB, *MOLLIE*



*When the power of love is stronger than the love of power,
the world will know peace. (author unknown)*

July ~ Month devoted to the Precious Blood of Jesus

July 1st is a very special Feast for us, reserved to our Institute by Indult of the Holy See. We are privileged to offer the Liturgy of the Hours for the Solemnity of the Precious Blood on that day. Our community Mass will be that of the Solemnity, also. This Feast ushers in a whole month when so many of you join us in giving particular attention to Precious Blood devotion. We are always so pleased when you ask for articles such as the Stamp, the Heart, the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. Each of these fosters remembrance of what Jesus did for us that memorable day on Calvary when He poured out the last Drop of His Precious Blood. Volumes could be written (and have been!) on what His Sacrifice means....on what it SHOULD mean in these times when life itself is held in such little regard. Jesus Himself made no distinction.....every single person in the whole of creation was—and is—"worth it" in His eyes. His Life-Blood was the cost and He paid it with such love.

Thank you, dear Friends, for helping us spread this devotion to so many far-away places. Here at the monastery, each morning as Sister rings the rising bell, she prays aloud: "Eternal Father, I offer You the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in atonement for my sins, in supplication for the souls in purgatory and for the needs of holy Church. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." We all join her in offering the first prayer of the new day. You and your loved Ones are always gratefully remembered. Please pray with us for vocations for our entire church.