

Glen Oak School, Gates Mills OH 1969 (opened)

Glen Oak was born from several influences. Isabel Cogan, an rscj at the time, was studying for her doctorate at the University of Chicago and her dissertation was on a new model of holistic education. The school was to be open-spaced, so that disciplines physically could not be separate. It would be ecumenical and multi-racial, so that a community would be formed and we would inform each other. The curriculum would be pursued through themes threaded through every discipline, the humanities, sciences, PE, Home Ec. Foreign languages, etc. This was the Plan of Studies viewed through a new lens.

At the same time, alums from Sacred Heart schools, mostly from the East, had begun to ask the Provincial of the Chicago Province to allow them to build a school in Cleveland so their daughters could have the education they had had. They were determined to raise the money, buy the land and build the school if the Society would come and educate.

And, at the same time, the Religious of the Sacred Heart were closing schools (Maplehurst, Noroton...not sure which and what years). Reverend Mother Helen Sheahan,(Chicago Province) and Edith McShane, Director of Studies for the Province had been approached by the alums (Coakleys, Watts, Housemans...), and with Sr. McShane advocating Sr. Cogan's model school, they began to negotiate: would the alums want this kind of school, which took the best of the Plan of Studies and diminished some of the elitism? Would they not only buy the land, build the school, but assure monies for students of different racial and economic backgrounds so that the school would be welcoming for students of all faiths, races, economic backgrounds? The alums wanted Sacred Heart and trusted us with the mission.

Property was found and bought from Gilmour Academy, a Holy Cross Brother's school and the building of this open-spaced school was begun. Helen Sheahan spoke with the other four provincials and asked that this be an interprovincial venture. She found them interested, but not necessarily committed. Isabel completed her degree, set in motion the curriculum plans, began thinking about possible personnel to staff the school, and left the Society leaving Edith McShane to be the interim person for planning, interviewing families, staff, etc. Srs. Marie Owen (CA), Hilda Carey(NY), Pam Hickey, Rosemary Dewey, Bonnie Kearney (CH) were sent to the foundation, but along the way the Central Team through Mary Beth Tobin (W), decided that we would receive Isabel d'Epalza (sp) Sp, though really Basque, who would teach Spanish.

The summer before the school opened the first Stuart Conference was held at Barat College. Religious by that time had changed to modified habits and experimental dress. So the five American rscj decided it would be better to arrive in this new place and new school in regular dress rather than complicate life by a series of change, so we met with H. Sheahan in suits that we had rented from a uniform company, with Bonnie wearing a suit she had sewn, and we proposed that we not wear habits from the very beginning of the foundation. Our shapes and sizes were not made for our rented outfits, and perhaps that absurdity, plus the logic of too much continuous change, made Helen Sheahan agree we could wear secular dress that was simple.

So, Glen Oak began, without Isabel Cogan, who had conceived it and left the order, with promises made to families about which only Edith McShane knew, with the upper floor living space not completed so the nuns doubled up to live in the space above Glimour's green house where we spent weeks combing through the books sent from schools which had close (St. Joseph MO....)and beating back the bugs that were being displaced from the storage boxes. Marie Owen, who had been slated to teach Math was named the Principal, Hilda Carey the person in charge of studies, Pamela Hickey the counselor, Rosemary Dewey the Dean of Students, and Bonnie and Isabel teachers of religion/ English and Spanish. The faculty was very mixed racially, religiously. We were building something together. The first year the themes for the three trimesters were: Systems, Structures, and??? The teachers had to reimagine each discipline and its content in new ways and then work together so that everyone was coming at the educational experience from this thematic perspective. Most classes took place in the large open space, divided by moveable panels that were white boards on both sides. Home Ec., Typing and Science were in an open, but divided space, and foreign language took place in our only two classrooms. The whole school revolved around the open-space resource center (not library). Students had some chairs and tables, but often sat on hassocks or the floor. There were times when students would crawl around a white board from one class to comment on something overheard from the class on the other side and then crawl back to her own class. The Home Ec. class smells would waft through the open space and eventually provide gouter that could not be held back. The first Halloween everyone appeared in costumes with one African American appearing as an envelope addressed to the NAACP. We had students with disabilities. We had students who believed what the school had told them when they applied: You will be creative, heard, and cherished. Many had never met a nun. The school developed project learning that ranged from one student becoming a pilot to another filming a horror movie in a graveyard to others pursuing medical, literary, scientific dreams. There was individualized learning packets, group learning, even learning in silence through writing on the white boards and passing the markers to another to further the thought process. We had a project term where students and faculty did non-book learning: camping and white water rafting; visiting and learning the world of thoroughbred horse-raising, doing art with the art museums, service learning working with people with disabilities, etc. We were set loose to learn from seeing and doing.

Eventually there was a co-ed component with Gilmour with arts, activities (chorus, cheerleading, drama) and there was the challenge of a formal, "staid" treatment of content running up against the more creative, free form project oriented learning. The faculty challenged each other and the students and created a world of experience in learning. Everyone was stretched, mixed and yet allowed to be who each one was even as one learned new things.

The school grew and became known for its openness and sense of community. Two rscj from Japan, Srs. Takai and Yoda, came to study the school to see how the school, so traditional, in Japan might learn to evolve. The mix, racially, economically and politically, made for explorations into how a community could be pluralistic and yet one. We learned from each other, Catholic, Jew, Jehovah's Witness, Christian of other denominations, Hindu -faculty and students and staff – each one him or herself sharing from a different perspective. We challenged each other to grow and become more open. We laughed and struggled and helped each other to become more than we were. For all we were asked to

not only create but be creative. We ran a summer program for inner-city students, which included cooking, fixing a broken down car, writing one's own novel. We not only had an open spaced school but open-minded and community bent school. Isabel Cogan's theoretical work had taken on flesh, yet the alums of the Sacred Heart could recognize the same marks of Sacred Heart education and appreciate how the core elements were deepened and expanded in this new place.

..... About five years in (?) Marie Owens returned to California and the school hired Canon Gessner, a Canadian educator. He never really understood the core of what the school stood for and there were tension because for faculty and students alike it felt like the openness was closing. At the same time, there was more educational exchange between Gilmour, the boys' school, and Glen Oak. During this time the original willingness to have personnel from the different provinces continued and then dwindled. The school continued for ten years until a decision was made to merge it with Gilmour, using the Glen Oak campus for an elementary (feeder) school. This school still continues under the Holy Cross Brothers.