

Mary Genevieve Smyth

Born in June 30, 1929 in St Louis, MO, of Dr. Joseph Henry Smyth (who was also an Anglican Priest), and Lillian Adelaide West who was a teacher. My father was just finishing St Louis University and worked as an intern for a physician. He was sent by U.S. Indian Service, to Laguna, New Mexico, then Chinle, Arizona to minister to the Indians. This where I spent the first eight years of my life.

In 1931 my brother was born in Albuquerque and also my sister in 1934. In 1937 when I was eight, we moved to San Francisco. It was the base of our life as we had a good Anglican Church there and my father would help out with Services. Every place we lived in, we also had a chapel and my father said Mass every day. We also lived in Ukiah, CA where my father had a clinic and treated the Indians there and other places in Northern California.

My father had the life long dream of being a missionary serving as a priest, and with his clinic during the week. When I was 14, he was sent to the Bahamas, (Andros and Inagua Islands), then later went to Liberia working for the clinic and the Anglican Church there. Later we moved to Stockton, Ca. I graduated from High School in 1946 and worked in the Public Library. Later in 1946 we moved to Seattle and I continued to work in the Library and then went to Seattle University, a Jesuit College. Spiritually we did not find an Anglican Church in Seattle, so we started going to St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. My sister was going to a Catholic school. It was at that time that we decided to become Roman Catholic. We met Fr McGarrigle, SJ and he gave us some instruction. My father brought us up on the Baltimore Catechism, so we only had two questions concerning Catholicism: the infallibility of the Pope and the indulgences. On May 7, 1949, my mother, brother and sister and I became a Catholic. It was that summer, my father came home to Seattle from Liberia for a furlough. "What made us cross the Tiber?" "You have taken a lower degree of sanctity" "No sense living here anymore..." My father was thinking of going back to the Monastery which he left to get married. It was the Order of the Holy Cross in New York State. So he did.

As I was going to Seattle University, I was told to visit Convents and Roman Catholics. My godmother was a graduate of Duchesne College in Omaha, and my girl friend graduated from Broadway in San Francisco, so I had ample time to visit Convents and get acquainted with Roman Catholics. They took me to Forest Ridge run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart. My good friend was Sr Catherine Henry and also Rev Mother Agnes Reagan. I had permission to enter the Convent, so two years later I packed my trunk at Forest Ridge in case my father was around. I wrote him a good-bye letter. I had received a very affirming letter from him saying Religious Life was the best life and he was very happy about that.

Then I entered Kenwood Novitiate in Albany, NY on May 31, 1951 which was the Feast of the Sacred Heart. My father visited me where ever I was, even at the Mother House in Rome. We had become good friends and I also visited him in Santa Barbara where he was living then. He died in Santa Barbara, California, on November 1976. My mother died in February 1979, in Portland, Oregon.

My teaching life began with the third grade at Forest Ridge in Seattle. In 1959 I went to Rome for my Profession which was on February 8, 1960. Then I went back to Seattle, and then Broadway in San Francisco, where I had the joy of teaching 6th grade boys in Stuart Hall, and then teaching in Menlo. I worked in the Business Office in the College for Women (Lone Mountain) in San Francisco, then to San Diego College for Women in the Treasury and Depensier, then at El Cajon, Ca. in the Treasury.

In 1971, I asked to spend 6 months at the Trappistine Monastery in Whitethorn, Ca. This helped my spiritual life and I learned about a House of Prayer. Sister Libby Hoye was seeking people for the House of Prayer in Albany, NY. This is what I wanted to do. So on September 1971, I went to Albany and spent 31 years of a very fruitful life with both prayer and activity. We made our community in the West Wing of Kenwood. Five of us were there and we stayed for two years then moved to a house on Western Avenue. We became incorporated and the Board of Abba House of Prayer bought this house from the Society.

We had a ministry to sisters, priests and laity and also had several people seeking a life of prayer. We had Sisters seeking renewal and just quiet time. We had programs, groups, and we taught Bible Classes. We went to Churches to give programs and prayer experiences. We had a good community life with various Sisters of different Orders which we learned from one another. We even had an Anglican Sister living with us. I had the opportunity to go to the Catholic Theological Union program for three months in 1986, studying the Bible lands in Israel. In 1990 I also had a two week program studying Paul and John in Greece and in Turkey. The study and pictures helped the Bible Classes immensely.

It was a great time in my life for 31 years. In those years I worked with the Uptown Churches which was a group of various Christian Churches who shared programs and had discussions. I was on the Roman Catholic Interreligious Council which had programs, and also worked with the Muslim-Christian Dialogue. I was also on the Board of the Capital Area Council of Churches, and worked with the Baptismal Witness Program which witnessed Baptisms in various churches. In 1998 I got the Baptismal Award for my work with the Capital Area Council of Churches.

In 2001, Sister Libby Hoye went to live at Kenwood, and a group of us searched for a replacement for Abba House. Sister Rosemary Sgroi, RSM worked for Abba House until November 2006 when it closed. The Board of Abba House of Prayer, gave the House to the Society, which is now called Abba House. In 2002, I went to live at Soboba Reservation in San Jacinto, CA where I worked as Secretary and Sacristan for St Joseph Mission Church and many other volunteer jobs. Now I am working on a scrap book for the 100 years of St Joseph when the Mission was founded in 1910. (Earthquake took the first foundation in 1888.)

My brother and sister live in Portland, Oregon and it is my joy to visit them frequently. I love the desert and the rural countryside and the Indians which are very friendly, and the life of prayer we have here. There are four of us living here and two Sisters of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart nearby. Our priest is also a Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Now at the age of 80, I am very happy and healthy. I walk for 1/2 hour a day and loved to see the sunrise over the mountains and the beautiful contour of mountains around us. I am very happy. I do a lot of e-mail to my friends in Albany. May God be blessed at our lives of prayer and activity.