

## *jacqueline's jottings as sr. corinne turns 80...*

dear sr. mary rita of the sacred heart and my beloved aunt corinne,

you hold a unique place in my life as the only person I know who lives in a totally different kind of world to the one in which most of us do, and yet are so much at ease when interacting and reaching out in matters relating to it. with an immediate clan numbering 315, it is so amazing how your encounters with each member make us all feel so special and easily understood, whether we share with you our news of joys and sorrows, successes and disappointments, expected family additions, share with you in our times of anxiety and suffering, or just make a request to be remembered in prayer. You are the self appointed keeper of the family chronicle, meticulously recording details of new additions by birth or marriage and devoting a separate page in these precious journals for each member of the clan with a photo attached. These are truly treasured volumes of family history in the p.g. d'souza clan and one we deeply appreciate! It is now time perhaps to take an idea forward to create a small museum of clan memorabilia somewhere in the p.g. d'souza layout...

my own interaction with you dates back to fifty plus years ago when you were a new nun and I a little girl with ringlets, perhaps clutching on to my doll for comfort and to mum tilly too, as I was taken to see this rather mysterious person they told me was mum's sister corinne. clad in a brown and white nun's habit similar to the one of the very human looking nun called sr. alice (who managed the parlour for decades at great carmel convent, ali asker road, bangalore), i could thankfully imagine to recognize you as a person, and hearing your soft tender human voice was comforting, but beyond that the approach was to say the least, petrifying for me. we had to look at you through an iron grill with these pointed spikes attached, that threatened to gouge out our eyes if we tried to peer a bit too closely at your ominously veiled face, which you just about showed along with your upper half, squeezed between two stark black curtains and standing behind the grill. This grill embedded in the wall between rooms separated you from us female visitors (no males were allowed I think, except your father and brothers ). I remember too that occasionally you would turn your head aside to a 'shadowy figure' sitting next to you and share some explanation of the conversation with her and she would reply with a 'mais, oui' or a 'bon, merci'. I had to believe then that this 'ghost' whom we only heard, was your french. rev. mother whose presence was necessary as a chaperone in every visit you had. Later in 1973, this dear 'ghost' rev. mother (i forget her name), so kindly arranged for me to be the house guest of her genteel sister mmille. rochere in paris while I was travelling in europe.

of course, my dear aunt, at that time the lure of these visits was so enormous we'd brave all the mystery and ghostliness attached to them for the 'loot' we'd bring home from you, collected from that exciting capacious drawer that slid through the wall beneath the grill and opened from your side and ours. you would fill it with magical stuff like medals and scapulars, rosaries and holy pictures. we'd fight over them for days on end, being the large family we were and then would begin to barter and exchange, but I must say there was always plenty to go round. and we did revere and respect them and proudly showed

them around at school. you came from one of the largest families ever, so you knew the sanctity of numbers! of course, I have to mention too about the host trimmings that i enjoy to this day. we would all pretend to be priests dishing out communion to one another (sacriligious?!), till swallowing just the tiny bits got a little too much for us and we'd begin to gobble up the contents of the whole big tin.

as I grew into a teenager and then a young working woman, it began to dawn on me the tremendous sacrifice you had made of your life to choose this path of absolute austerity and spend your days behind four walls in mainly contemplative prayer and subsistence living. what on earth prompted you to do so was a question that I often asked myself? you were so attractive and accomplished. i'd seen photographs of you in the fashions of those times, magya sleeves and flared skirts with broad belts. hair swept back and high heels to boot. my sisters tell me you were very lively and had a lot of suitors too, and you gave it all up for god. **who is this god i wondered and how had you found him at the tender age of twenty something?** i at that age was battling with the attractions of growing up and the choices were so many, always confusing and conflicting vis-a-vis the strict family moral and religious values we lived with. during those days I began to alternately admire your guts or disregard you for your foolishness. i sometimes felt that being away from temptation was the easiest path to discipline, but i know now for sure that would not have been so for you. human wants and desires remain the same whatever be the environment and it is only through years of hard work, that self discipline and detachment is developed. and you have stuck it out for over five decades and radiate such a joy that makes me truly feel you have encountered god.

a spiritually contemplative life is another challenge you opted for. to spend hours in prayer and in silence is not easy. to teach a naturally wandering mind to develop the power of concentration with a view to make meditation meaningful and with a deeper spiritual dimension and understanding requires a lot of training and determination. you have surely found a path in all these decades of prayer to make it a powerful tool for the upliftment of suffering souls lost in the confusion of their human lives. to these ends you have devoted most of your eighty years.

your rules are now thankfully relaxed somewhat in keeping with the times. the grill too has no spikes anymore thank goodness, but you continue to be confined behind it. however, now visitors related or unrelated, male and female can visit you and see your pretty and serene face and chat freely. the magic drawer still exists for the stream of little 'pg clan' progeny who still come along on visits. people such as i, who cannot come often, have the pleasure of being able to call you on the telephone and i now understand you are available on email too. from mere gregorian chant you have moved to keyboard etc. accompanied hymns, which has given you a chance to revive your prowess as a pianist when a young girl.

sr. corinne, carmel convent for me is as dear as our beloved oorgaum house, and I have to thank you and all your community for always welcoming us there. it is a timeless place, unchanged and still serene in every aspect once you enter its gate. may it remain blessed for all time.

from you personally, i have learned the example of simplicity in living, of caring for people by just communicating with them, and i now write post cards and recycle greeting cards like you. as I am mostly house bound i phone and email too, to keep in touch.

i enjoy my garden as you do, and this easter proudly showed off the lovely blooms on the lily bulbs you gave me a few years ago. i am learning the power of prayer and the acceptance of god's will as being the best way to be cheerful about suffering and the difficult times in life, just the way you have in your own wisdom discovered so many decades ago.

*today, this message is sent with lots of love and gratitude for your example to our large clan and to all who have been privileged to meet you. as you celebrate your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, we ask god to keep you with us for many more years to come in good health of mind and body.*