

Marie Hart (1911-2007)

My mother, as I am sure many of you will agree, was a truly remarkable woman. I intend in this short tribute to recall a few highlights that are very personal to me but which help to illuminate certain features of her life and career.

One of the earliest memories of my mother was as an avid story teller. As a very young child, I can recall my mother recounting long epic poems to us at bed-times, and it was at this stage, I got the first glimmer of the fact that my mother had a strong literary streak which extended to the names of our family pets - an Alsation dog, for example, being named 'Cass' - (short for Cassius) because, if you remember your Shakespeare, 'Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look'

I have two abiding memories of my early childhood. One was of running to the end of the garden to wave to my mother as she went on the train each week to Leeds where she attended a college first to acquire Local Government qualifications and later, having acquired a zest for learning, to obtain a clutch of GCE O-levels.

Another abiding memory is of my mother transforming herself from a local government officer into 'Akela' as she ran the St. Robert's Cub pack for one evening a week. Here, the highlight of our evening was when a group of naturally boisterous 8-10 year olds sat transfixed as 'Akela' recounted the stories from Rudyard Kipling's 'Jungle Book'

In the mid 1950's my mother took the decision, not being a cradle Catholic, to convert formally to Catholicism - she had become convinced from her reading of history that Catholicism was the only one true repository of faith. She had developed a burning ambition to become a teacher (and, in particular, a Catholic teacher) - a huge challenge. She gained admission to Fenham Teacher Training College in Newcastle - then regarded as one of the premier teacher training colleges in the country ('Oh, she was *Fenham* trained!') To do this at the age of 45 was quite remarkable because it was then a very rare event in the 1950's for mature students to train as teachers. During her college years, I boarded at Thornleigh Salesian College, Bolton in Lancashire from which I still have many happy memories. In order for my West Riding County Council scholarship to be transferred out of the county, my mother enlisted the help of Bishop John Heenan (later Archbishop and ultimately Cardinal Heenan) and I am given to believe that my scholarship was the first ever to be transferred out of the county. Anne went daily to the prestigious Bar Convent in York whilst helping to keep the home fires burning with our Granny who died in 1960. My mother,

now a qualified teacher, used to energise her pupils when the school regularly collected money for a fund called 'the Bishops' Babies' (In those innocent days, we all understood the metaphor as it was evident that we were not collecting money for the Bishop's *own* babies!) She told the story of a little boy she knew who would walk a mile (up to the top of Harlow Hill) to save an (old) penny on the bus fare to donate to the Bishops' babies - only later did I discover that the little boy in the story was me!

The family moved from Harrogate to Leeds in 1963 and the street where we lived (Parklands Drive) was about 5 minutes away from John Bosco School (now Cardinal Heenan High School) Here although her college specialisms were in History and Art, she actually taught Religious Studies and English in the earlier years, Craft and Design in the later years. She taught there for 16 years from 1963-1979 and many, perhaps some here today, will have fond memories of that.

She told me as I left home at 18 that she knew I would never return but she also knew, in her heart, it was the right thing to do. I know she was proud of me when I acquired my own qualifications. However, she was convinced that she could do as well and enrolled, enthusiastically, as an Open University student, as one of the OU's first students, in 1972. She graduated with an Honours degree in 1976 when she was in her mid 60's - and I know she was justifiably proud of her achievement. This life-long devotion to education meant that she took a particularly keen interest in the progress of Hilary, Martin, Graeme, Mark and Kate as all achieved, through different routes, their own qualifications. I have an abiding memory of my mother upon her own graduation day striding purposefully through the streets of Sheffield, her gown flying out behind her, proclaiming to the world by her body language that '*I have done it!*'

In her later years and particularly when in care, her grand-daughter Kate remarked to me that her granny was a little like a 'caged bird' (I agree, but in many ways a 'caged lion' might have been a better metaphor). I remember vividly a letter in which my mother had written and underlined that in her relating to staff in the nursing home '*I SHALL bend them to my will!*') This was indeed a testimony to her fiercely independent and indomitable spirit that stayed with her to the end.

And so - a very remarkable woman indeed. Many hundreds of people, mainly her ex-pupils, as well as her immediate family will remember her with admiration and affection. It must be true that in some senses Marie Hart will never die - but will live in our hearts for ever.