

Murial Hanman: Memories (2002–2014)

I'm Murial Hanman, an Associate of the House of Bread Monastery. Speaking of Associates, I'll start by saying that during these years, 2002-2014, many Oblates and Associates became part of the larger community of the House of Bread, sharing in prayer, retreats and celebrations.

Patricia has just shared her experience as a live-in at the Bethlehem Retreat Centre with us. Although BRC was a major ministry of the Benedictine sisters, it was not the only ministry. A great deal more was happening over those years with members of the Benedictine community.

For instance, 2001 saw a leadership change when Sr. Jean Ann's term of office ended, and Sr. Mary Ann was elected prioress. Both Sisters continued their ministries in counselling and spiritual direction. Jean Ann also enjoyed gardening (a weed dared not raise its head when Jean Ann was in sight) and winemaking, as well as bringing communion to various home-bound people.

Sr. Mary Ann was re-elected prioress in 2005 and was appointed Director of the Retreat Centre by the community, a role she held until 2014. She trained as a social worker and engaged in counselling and spiritual direction. She also organized an ecumenical pastoral group in Nanaimo. Having earned a certificate as a healing Touch practitioner, she participated in and led health touch workshops. In addition, Mary Ann contributed to the music ministry at Eucharistic celebrations.

Sr. Barbara was elected prioress in 2009 and re-elected in 2013. Before being elected prioress, Barbara worked as a counsellor in downtown Nanaimo and at the Bethlehem Retreat Centre, as well as offering a number of workshops at both the Centre and what was then Malaspina College.

In 2009, under Sr. Barbara's leadership, the community began the process of long-range planning, wrestling with the topic of how to age in place. During those years, the Sisters also became aware of the need to renovate the monastery, as it was becoming increasingly difficult to move between the two houses, especially in the winter months

when conditions were icy. Renovations began in 2013 and were completed nine months later in 2014.

By 2002, Sr. Claudia had retired from the Retreat Centre where she had helped with the finances and many of the practical needs of the centre. She had also retired from her various childcare positions but continued with an active telephone ministry. She baked the Eucharistic bread for the Eucharistic celebrations of the faith community. When she was no longer able to manage in the monastery because of poor health, she was admitted to the Wexford Creek extended care and entered into the fullness of life in 2010.

In 2005, Sr. Jill retired from the position of Director at the BRC and in 2003, moved to the Monastery where she was involved in cooking, continued offering spiritual direction and wrote and published her autobiography, "A Stranger in My Skin"/ In 2008, for health reasons, Sister Jill transferred her stability from House of Bread Monastery to Queen of Angels Monastery, where she lived in the Health Care Centre for the next few years and entered into the fullness of life in 2017.

Sr. Rose Mary was treasurer at both the Centre and the Monastery. However, Rose Mary was and is an artist, exercising her skill as a potter for many years and specializing in raku pottery. During these years, she trained as a chartered herbalist, aromatherapist and registered Bach Flower practitioner and she used her knowledge to ease people's pain and stress naturally. These products, along with artwork, were available in gift shops both at the Monastery and at the Bethlehem Retreat Centre. Rose Mary also contributed to the music ministry at Eucharistic celebrations.

Sr. Phyllis Mayer was a Benedictine Sister for only a few short years. When in good health, she volunteered in a variety of roles at the BRC. Phyllis was diagnosed with cancer in 2004 and despite the treatments that she underwent, she entered into the fullness of life in 2005.

Sr. Germaine was a live-in volunteer at the BRC, as well as working at Trillium Lodge in Parksville. Retiring after forty years in the nursing profession, she published her autobiography, "Big Andrew's Daughter", in 2009. An avid gardener, Germaine brought an

abundance of produce to the Monastery table, as well as distributing produce to friends and neighbours. When the Monastery has llamas, Germaine would invite participants from Faith and Sharing to come to the Monastery to feed them. She took up where Claudia left off in baking the bread for our Eucharistic celebrations.

Sr. Pat was also a live-in volunteer at the BRC. Having earned a PhD in Theology, she shared her considerable knowledge through scripture classes help at the BRC and various venues around the Island, as well as offering spiritual direction. For several years, Pat was part of the Canadian Religious Theological Commission. She was also chief organizer of the Eucharistic celebrations held at the BRC and kept the priests in line!

Sr. Val specialized in Psychiatric Nursing and retired from NRGH in 2010. She later returned to work part time and retired again in 2015 after forty-three years of listening to and caring for people with mental health issues. She remained active at the monastery, being responsible for mowing the fields, watering the lawns and shopping. Val accompanied many of the sisters to medical appointments, stopping afterwards for coffee that she claimed healed all ills. She was, and continues to be, active in the prayer ministry.

During the years that the Sisters owned and operated the Centre, many people believed that all the sisters lived and worked there as well. Many were not aware that a monastery was a short distance away from where most of the sisters lived. As you have heard from what I've shared, while several of the sisters were active at the Centre, several more were engaged in a variety of other ministries. The income derived from these other ministries made it possible for the Sisters not only to support themselves in the Monastery, but also to continue to support, with the support of many friends and volunteers, the operation of the Bethlehem Retreat Centre as a major ministry until it was sold in 2015.