

Patricia Morton: Memories (2002–2014)

I'm Patricia Morton, an Associate of the House of Bread. You heard about the early days of the BRC during the time when Sister Jill was the director, now I'd like to share a few memories with you of the time Sr. Mary Ann was director.

It was the fall of 2004. I had recently returned from a five month stay as a volunteer at a Benedictine House in the north of Scotland, and I intended to return there. However, after a liturgical service in the Bethlehem Retreat Centre's chapel, I met Sr. May Ann who somehow persuaded me that Vancouver Island was just as beautiful as the Highlands! As a result of that meeting, I became a live-in at the Centre from 2004-2009.

There were two of us who lived and shared duties starting at 4 pm daily. We welcomed retreatants and before directing them to their rooms, pointed out significant places, such as the library, dining rooms and meeting rooms.

The groups varied in size, some were large and occupied all three buildings and some were small, occupying only a room or two. Some groups returned yearly, including Faith and Sharing, the Men's Group, the Women's Group, Vipassana, and Health Touch. I enjoyed the 'return' groups because as time went on, it felt like welcoming back old friends.

Retreatants and group participants were always impressed by the beautiful surroundings and the atmosphere of quiet. The grounds of the Centre were carefully looked after.

Volunteers picked berries and fruit in season, which often showed up for breakfast and delightful desserts in the evening.

Time passed quickly and days took on a certain rhythm and routine. Mary Ann, I learned, was both director of the Centre and prioress of the House of Bread. Despite carrying both roles, her presence at the Centre, as well as the presence of the other Sisters, helped foster an atmosphere of peace and quiet. I knew that when I knocked on Mary Ann's office door to ask for help (or to complain!), I would be met with an attitude of, "This problem can

be solved. You just need to stay calm.” It was an attitude that helped me during my time at the Centre and later on.

Also while I was a live-in, Lucia Gamroth often came to the Centre to visit and work with Mary Ann. She was always friendly and available to help but never imposing. She and Mary Ann were good friends, and their friendship was a support to the Centre as well.

Of course, there was also the occasional challenge. Once when we were attending the weekly Eucharistic celebration, a young server came rushing in and motioned for me to come quickly. She said the oven was on fire and the kitchen was full of smoke. It turned out that the new cook had put the oven on cleaning mode and left a potato in it. Fortunately, the potato burned itself out and the oven eventually cooled and remained functional.

On another occasion, a guest was given a monetary gift by a friend to spend three days of rest and retreat at the Centre. She was disappointed when she realized that the envelope that contained the money would only cover two days and so she prepared to leave a day early. Another retreatant, whom she did not know, came forward and paid for the rest of her stay. The spirit of sharing was prevalent at the Centre!

I enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, my benedictine journey as an Oblate and an Associate of the House of Bread Monastery and I greatly appreciate the good people with whom I lived and worked.