

# "Reaching Out to Those on the Margin"

*an interview with Pat Andrews, CSJ*



**W**e all develop a sense of self from many different factors. People, events, and places contribute to who we are, and who we will become. Patricia (Pat) Andrews' parents had a strong sense of family, religion and neighborhood involvement.

She grew up in a loving home with them and four siblings, Pat being the oldest girl. "We were always a close family, all different, independent in our thoughts, but doing a lot of things together, vacations, weekend trips, visiting grandparents," she said. "I grew up in Brockton, MA, a city of roll-up your sleeves, hardworking people, in a neighborhood with many faiths and populated with different ethnic groups. In a sense, growing up there influenced my feelings, my outlook on life." For Pat, this meant a life dedicated to teaching and reaching out to those on the margin.

Pat attended Brockton public schools and was introduced to the Sisters of St. Joseph during CCD classes at St. Colman's Church. "My third grade CCD teacher was Sister Melrita. Thinking back, knowing her, I realized then we are all different people. It's great when you see spirit come out of a person, which is what I saw in her. This is probably when I realized these people (sisters) are real." Pat's exposure to the sisters was expanded when she enrolled in Cardinal Spellman High School, Brockton. Here, Pat met women filled with spirit, joy, and a sense of humor. "The sisters challenged all of us, this first class of 1962. We had all their attention. That, and the joy and outlook on life that the sisters had and the encouragement they gave to nurture whatever was percolating in us, helped mold us for the future."

Pat discovered inclusivity at Spellman. Students came from five different towns and things were new to all of them. The students began emerging from their little cocoons, expanding their friendships beyond their neighborhood friends. "That was the first time for me to say, 'ever-widening circles'. I look back now and realize my friends were from Randolph,

Rockland, etc., and as a result, I had a little wider world view. Spellman was a big part of my life, and that was all centered around the Sisters of St. Joseph. I fell in love with them."

Though Pat had a strong pull towards the sisters, her mother wanted her to go to college. Following her mother's wishes, Pat attended Bridgewater State College. "I figured I would do this for a year," Pat said. "I liked college life, it was fun - meeting new people. I opted to stay for a second year." But, after Pat's sophomore year she said to her mother, "I listened, I went to school, but the gnawing, the call that said 'come and see' is still there."

Pat entered the Sisters of St. Joseph on September 15, 1964. "When I entered, the spirit of the sisters seeped in, much the same way as when I entered into high school and college. You begin to realize the gifts that each person has, and we all come at it with our own personality."

Pat's first mission was teaching at St. Theresa of Avila School, West Roxbury. Then, in 1971, Pat applied to teach at Cathedral High School, Boston. Pat remembered, "We had some of the hardest times in the city of Boston. It was a time of segregation and desegregation, a time of anger and riots, disturbances. And yet, we were this oasis in the South End with black, white, Hispanic, and Asian students. They were great. We were growing in race relations, knowledge of cultures, as well as the students. What held us together was the respect, the dignity, the concern for each other - the students for us, and we for the students. We had some fantastic times, but it wasn't without some angst and turmoil. Cathedral was a place that changed me."

While studying for her master's degree in education at Suffolk University, Pat ministered at Regis College, working in the Office of Dean of Students and as a Resident Director in Maria Dormitory. Having obtained her MEd, she then responded to her inner desire to return to the inner city and continue teaching. So, Pat went to Our Lady of Lourdes School, Jamaica Plain to teach the seventh and eighth grades. "The whole richness of the multicultural experience was alive." After a year, an opportunity arose and Pat was chosen as interim principal, which she loved. When the position of principal opened up, Pat applied and spent six more years there. She then went to Gate of Heaven School, South Boston as principal and remained there for nine years. "We did some remarkable things at both schools, Our

Lady of Lourdes and Gate of Heaven. I was blessed to have worked with tremendous faculty in both schools and with supportive parents who loved their kids and were concerned about giving them a good education. There was a great spirit. Then I was elected to the CSJ Leadership Team in 1994.”

The call to Leadership was a big change. Pat became immersed in Congregational internal ministry. She said, “I grew to love the community more than I thought possible. We are awesome, awesome women! As an Area Councilor, I became involved in sisters' lives, in their ministries. It was the end of the 90s, and not an easy time. But, it was also a time when we would be companioning sisters through sickness and through the whole death experience. I found out such extraordinary things about their lives. And still today, when I see a number of these sisters, it's as if twenty years have never passed. I grew in the knowledge and awareness of our charism during that time, and our understanding of who we are in the Church and our contribution to this Archdiocese.”

In 2000, as Pat's term came to an end, she reflected on her next ministry. While Area Councilor, she was connected with a number of Congregation ministries. One ministry that attracted Pat was The Literacy Connection (TLC), which had an opening for a new director. Pat said, “I looked at that position and the teacher in me said, ‘Working with adults - that's new for me’. But, I was so impressed with what I had seen while going to the TLC board meetings and celebrations at the end of the year, I thought, maybe I could do this. So, I applied and was chosen as director of The Literacy Connection. That was fourteen years ago. Each day, I see The Literacy Connection vividly reflecting the Congregation's charism of unity and reconciliation – reaching out to those whose need - for English skills keeps them from full inclusion in society and, in some ways, limits quality of life.”

Yes, Pat's sense of self was born from her many wonderful experiences - from her family, who grew to love the sisters along with her; from Pat's many friendships and acquaintances she has met and nurtured over her lifetime; from her students, whom Pat sees for themselves not their ethnicity; from her home town, where, from the very first, she was exposed to a multi-ethnic and multi-racial community; from her hobbies: singing, reading, cooking, or doing quiet things, and finally, from her Congregation and the presence of Church and God in her life. †



*Pictured: Pat with her parents, Pat teaching at Cardinal Spellman High School, Pat with the CSJ Leadership Team (1994-2000), and Rose Canney, CSJ, and Pat with The Literacy Connection students at an Immigration Rally on Boston Common.*

