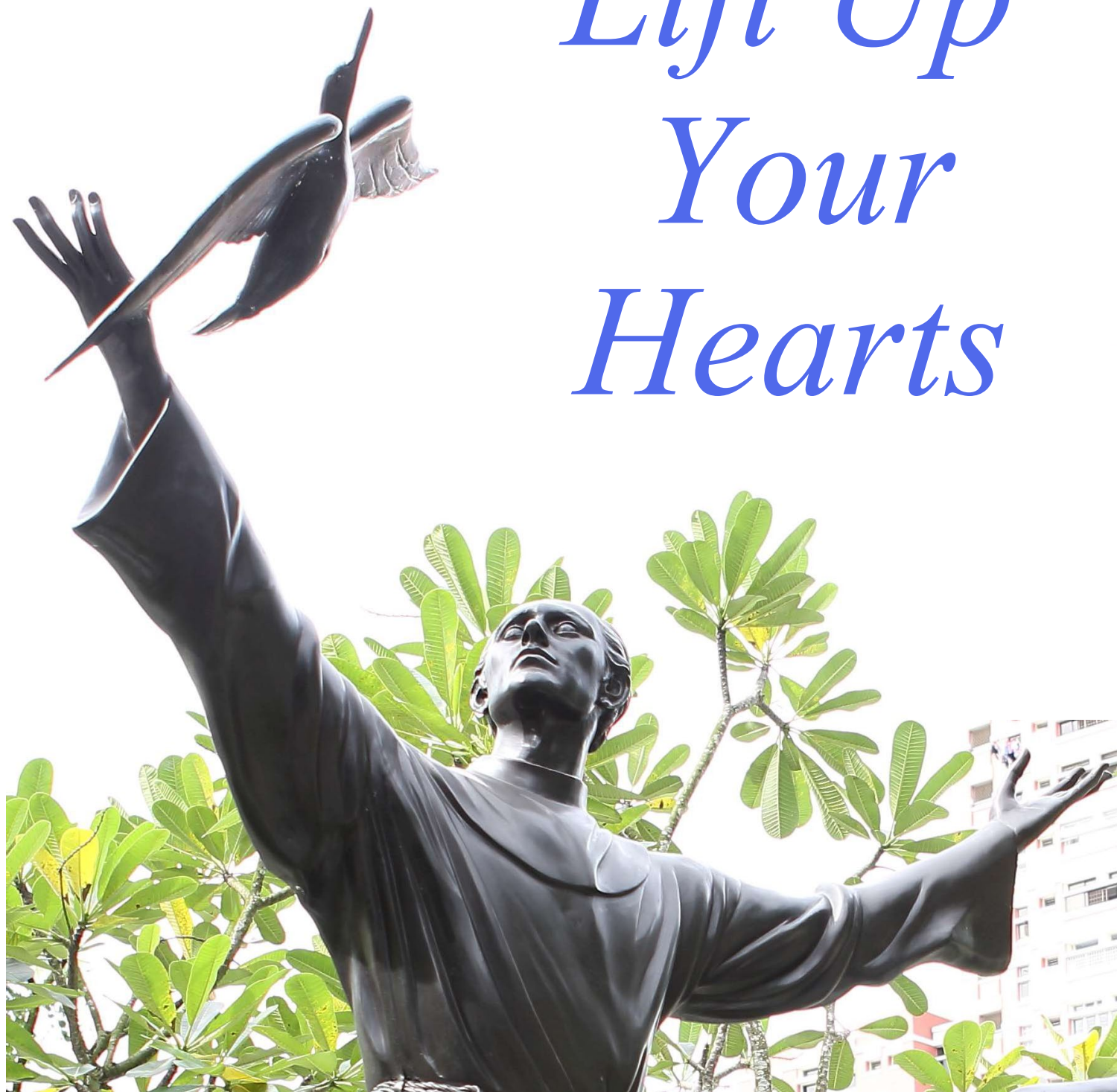


Lift Up Your Hearts



An Autobiography

Carl Schafer OFM

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Part One

LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

An Autobiography

Friar Carl Schafer OFM

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LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

CHAPTER ONE: MY EARLY YEARS 1937 – 1943

That lovely young Irish-Australian lady, sharing her seat with Doctor Eichhorn and his basket of snakes in the Cobb & Co service from Mount Horeb, was Theresa Brady. Tess from St Kilda, twenty-five years of age, was on her way to assume her appointment as a schoolteacher in Adelong, in New South Wales. As they entered the town, the funeral cortege of old Mrs Schafer, who died on 13 February 1921, held them up.

Tess boarded with Isabella Brown, the Aunty Izzy of Les Schafer, the grandson of the deceased old Mrs Schafer. Les was also a schoolteacher who had taken advantage of a teacher's scholarship after his discharge from the Army. Les and Tess were married in 1923.

Tess's sister Kathleen gave the newlyweds a gift of a statuette of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From my earliest years, I prayed before them in my parents' bedroom. After a hundred years, these gifts have been handed down to me and have pride of place in my own bedroom today.

Paddington 1937

In 1937, The Royal Hospital for Women was in Paddington, where almost every baby in Sydney was born.

On Sunday 14 February, Tess was concerned. The baby was overdue. Five births had been successful, but two were stillborn. Not another one? The doctor comforted her, "We'll give him a nudge." After much coaxing, baby ventured out, perfectly formed except for a slight spinal curvature. But there was nothing wrong with his lungs. He weighed eight pounds and four ounces.

1937 was the Year of the Ox by another reckoning. "Strong ox born in the morning. Lazy ox in the evening", said the Chinese sages. Baby arrived at 1.35 p.m., but after that, there was no sign of laziness.

Proud father Les had his own good news for Tess. He had just heard the result of his advancement as a schoolteacher.

Eastlakes 1937 - 1938

Home to Eastlakes in Sydney's south and to five inquisitive children, three girls and two boys, tidily complemented by the new arrival. Early in life, baby contracted gastroenteritis after a distraught neighbour fled to the Schafers for help to save her own baby. Another neighbour's boy lobbed a rock on baby's forehead during a skirmish with John, the baby's brother. Baby thrived, nevertheless.

Our parents called themselves Dad and Mum at home, and Mr and Mrs Schafer in

public. It was a standard Victorian arrangement, Mum herself being from Melbourne. There was a touch of lace curtain Irish about Mum. Her father was born in Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan, a desk policeman in Melbourne and father of one son and ten daughters. Theresa was the sixth child, born in Bendigo in 1896.

Dad was a country lad from Adelong, born there in 1899. He succeeded in enlisting as a teenager in the Army after his distraught mother had thwarted his enlistment twice. Dad's paternal grandfather, Heinrich, was born in Hessen Kassel, Germany. When he heard of his favourite grandson's enlistment, he told Les sadly, "You will be killing your cousins." On a lighter note, Les enjoyed his Grandad's outburst: "Doze blutta chooks (fowls), dey scratch me in de unyan patch."

When Dad enlisted in 1918, he spelt his name as "Shafer", in an attempt to hide its German origin. People of German descent in Adelong and elsewhere were given a tough time during the First World War.

But in Eastlakes, Mum was eager to have her baby baptized. Her Parish Priest wasn't "doing baptisms" just then, so she got herself and baby over to St Michael's, Daceyville. Years later, "baby" met the priest who had baptized him, "as a Roman Catholic, to be sure."

Mum wanted to name the baby after Leslie, his father, but Dad foresaw complications with that, so they settled for Leonard, still not avoiding the confusion over the initial L. Mum had no problem over the baby's second Christian name. Her own father's second name was Francis, and so was her adored brother's. Their patron was St Francis of Assisi.

So, St Francis entered my life when the priest baptized me, "Leonard Francis."

"Leonard Francis" was shortened to "Len". The family were quick to note every development. Len's toys were the pots and pans on the kitchen floor that he delighted in organizing in a straight row. Outside on the sloping veranda, all the baby needed was a marble to throw to the top of the veranda and watch it return straight back to him. What to make of that? We Schafer children had very few toys. My favourite at five was an aeroplane that spat sparks.

Gilgai 1938 - 1944

Eighteen months after Les's advancement, he was promoted as Headmaster of a two-teacher school in Gilgai, between Inverell and Tingha. Mum was the other teacher. In school hours, she left the baby in the care of Wilma, his eldest sister, eleven years older. Wilma suffered from a weakened heart, resulting from Scarlet Fever as a child. Poor health damaged Wilma's attendance at school, but she was a very bright girl, mainly self-taught, and the baby's devoted guardian.

When the Second World War broke out, the Headmaster dug his school's air raid shelter, in case the Japanese dared to bomb Gilgai! The shelter soon attracted spiders and snakes and filled with water when it rained. None of the kids would dare to play in it.

Dad was a proud son of the British Empire. He organized the collection of metal, "Scrap to Beat the Jap", and pinned up mug shots of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo as targets for shooting practice.

Despite the pervading fear of Invasion, the family spent the war years, 1939 to 1944,

as the happiest years of their life together, in Gilgai.

Even before I could read, a picture of St Francis attracted me very much. I found it in Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia*, which provided staple reading during my primary school days. The picture is vividly impressed on my memory.

Mum attended faithfully to the Catholic upbringing of her children. She prepared us for First Confession and Communion, and for Confirmation. We prayed the Family Rosary "sometimes," but we never missed Mass on Sunday, when Dad packed us all into his little green 1937 Chev, for Sunday Mass in Inverell.

I didn't like Mass. As soon as the organ sounded, I screamed. Mum would take me out and scold me, but the old Dean caught her once hitting my legs with a leafy twig and consoled both of us, with a penny for me. Years later, I understood why I screamed. The reverberation of the low organ notes invaded my nervous system, and it still does. It goes right through me and makes me shudder, although not as severely now.

Dad had been the first of his family to convert to the Catholic faith but his two sisters and two brothers and his mother, and Grandpa on his deathbed, followed him. Dad converted before he knew Mum, so his decision wasn't in view of their marriage. In Dad's early days, when a churchman turned up rarely in Adelong, he married all the unmarried and baptized all their little pagans, so their Christian denomination could be anything. Later, Dad had a young Catholic diocesan priest in Adelong as a friend.

Dad had a favourite prayer that he shared at the daily assemblies of all his schools. It was Mahatma Gandhi's prayer, but Gandhi had added to the original prayer "or any kindness that I can show to any human being." Dad's prayer was:

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

CHAPTER TWO: MY SCHOOL DAYS

Primary School 1943 – 1948

Gilgai Primary School 1943

Gilgai State Primary School had two rooms. Mrs Schafer taught First, Second, and Third Class, about ten children. Mr Schafer taught Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Class, about the same number.

Mr Rush, coming out from Inverell, taught the top classes sometimes. Before I started attending school, I used to perch on a fence stump right outside the window of the top classroom and listened, enthralled. When Mr Rush couldn't manage to draw out a response from the pupils, he would come over to the window and beg for an answer. I was not shy to reply, which delighted the pupils.

Mum taught me in First Class, at six years of age in 1943, and set about changing my left handedness to writing with my right. I ended up in later years being left-handed at tennis and football, right-handed at cricket and shooting, and ambidextrous generally!

Closer contact with other children presaged a serious illness of bronchitis and whooping cough, which left me prone to bronchial ailments. I still remember the hallucinations while my devoted sister Wilma watched over me at the foot of the bed.

I have a vivid memory of the landing of the Allies on Sicily because of the map published in the newspaper in July 1943. I added a clipping of the map to my scrap box.

Dudley Primary School 1944 - 1947

Dad was due for another promotion in 1943, so off we went to Dudley, south of Newcastle, between the Whitebridge and John Darling Collieries. An explosion in 1898 had destroyed Dudley Colliery.

Dudley by the Sea was paradise for a primary-school boy. I loved wandering through the bush, enjoying the birdlife and wildflowers, scaring an occasional kangaroo, careful not to step on snakes. Bush lore taught us not to walk over a log but to step on it first and look at the other side before stepping over it.

A wonderful life, complete with the company of Puss, my little black cat. Someone had abandoned her in our backyard even before she opened her eyes. Puss knew no other mother but me. We understood each other perfectly. Without a feline mother to teach her, Puss was an extraordinary hunter. Wherever I was, she would find me and present her latest trophy at my feet. She learnt quickly that I didn't approve of her catching birds.

Puss loved to chase after a length of string that I trailed behind me while we raced together around the house. If she caught it, I would wind it round and round her, but she would effortlessly walk out of it as though to say, "That was too easy!"

On a memorable occasion, I was sitting in the dining room and spied a mouse scurrying along the skirting board into a hole. I raced outside and hollered for Puss, who came bounding out of the bush and into my arms. I carried her inside and settled her near the hole. In no time, she snatched the hapless mouse and proceeded wickedly to play with it before relishing the snack.

It was a hot summer day, drenched in the heady perfume of eucalyptus and I was seven, with the weighty responsibility of locking the doors of the school's toilets. Dad, as the Headmaster, had entrusted me with this important task. Puss often accompanied me but this time she was warily attentive. On this particular day I was extremely fortunate that Puss followed at my heels.

Absentmindedly, I wandered past the toilets and into high grass, towards the heavily laden but strictly forbidden blackberry bushes. Puss suddenly began pouncing wildly, ferociously battling with a full grown, red-bellied black snake. Suddenly aware of the deadly struggle, I picked up a heavy rock and poised it over the snake at my feet, but Puss was in the way. The snake writhed and coiled around little Puss's frantic body. A long-fought mighty contest ended in Puss's release from the vanquished snake, which she proceeded to devour with a ferocity that I had never imagined.

Well, thank God for that. I was immensely proud of Puss who had saved me, but then I panicked that I had lost the keys to the toilets! I sheepishly reported the incident to Dad,

who was far from happy with me. Dad didn't abide a butterfly-chasing son who was just as likely to forget what he was sent to do.

We returned to the scene where I had disgracefully lost the keys, which Dad eventually found. This was an early incident in my life where my reaction (to the snake) was rational in picking up a rock. But my reaction to losing the keys was panic, and shame when having to tell Dad.

Percy and Ida Curley owned and ran one of the two hotels in Main Street, Dudley. They had an only son, Terry, who was a friend of my brother Terry and me. We roamed everywhere together, like three brothers, attracted by danger rather than afraid of it. The failed Dudley Colliery close by was a favourite haunt and a very dangerous one. We enjoyed throwing a rock into the gaping hole of a shaft and counting the seconds till we heard the splash a long way down. The Dudley swamps were near the colliery, where we went looking for an alleged two-up school but didn't find it. When walking along train tracks near Redhead, we had a narrow escape from a colliery train that hurtled down on us around a blind corner.

At eight years of age, I learned to swim with Instructors at Newcastle Ocean Baths, after I nearly drowned, not noticed by anyone, when we kids were swimming in a stagnant backwater near Redhead beach.

Katoomba Primary School 1948

Sadly, I had to leave Puss when the NSW Education Department promoted Dad to Katoomba Public School in 1947. Dad had taught me in Fifth Class and now in Sixth Class. An excellent teacher, Dad set me up with phonetic spelling and reading, mental arithmetic, and grammatical, literate writing, well equipped for the study of foreign languages later. Dad taught me also the Do-Re-Mi while singing all the musical scales. He shared his love of art, of drawing and watercolour painting. He gave me my own small set of paints. I entered all the colouring-in competitions in the newspaper. Dad claimed that I would never win a competition for children because the judges would not accept my effort as that of a kid. Regardless, I just enjoyed colouring-in.

The Government schools examined all ten-year-old pupils on their IQ, Intelligence Quotient. Dad was pleased with my result, but it didn't mean anything to me. In Sixth Class with Dad, I wrote to pen friends including one in Germany and another in Japan, and two Pueblo Indian girls in Arizona. But it was the girls' teacher, Miss Riggs, who wrote for them. I regaled them on Australian anomalies such as the black swan and the platypus. Years later, when I was a Franciscan student at Box Hill, a much-readdressed letter from Miss Riggs reached me and wanted to know what had happened to me since I left primary school.

Soon after we moved to Katoomba, Terry Curley missed us so much that his parents sent him to board at Clairvaux Junior College, to be near us.

Katoomba and the Blue Mountains in all four seasons were another paradise for a boy who loved the variety of nature's gifts and kept a scrap box of colourful pictures. I set up my own "museum", inspired by Mel Ward's museum at Medlow Bath, with my collection of

insects and another of pressed bush flowers. My stamp collection illustrated all these interests as well as the history and geography of the countries that issued the stamps. A girlfriend of Wilma gave me her deceased father's fabulous coin collection that included a Birmingham penny that weighed an ounce and a Birmingham thrippence that weighed three ounces, and pieces that I was sure were pirate treasure.

Years later, a pair of nuns knocked on our door at North Parramatta, questing for donations. Dad and Mum were in Port Macquarie, enjoying their first holiday since they were married. I was the only one at home and had no money to offer. But wait! My coin collection! Spontaneously, I ran after them and gave them a small but very heavy tin of coins. I was incredibly happy, but the poor nuns! They had to carry that weight around for the rest of the day. I realized later that they were Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, from Buckingham Street, Surry Hills.

Secondary School 1949 – 1953

St Bernard's College, Katoomba 1949 - 1951

The De La Salle Brothers conducted St Bernard's College, Katoomba, in Merriwa Street, a mile from Dad's school residence in Parkes Street. My sister Gwen and brother Terry attended Katoomba High School, over the road in Parkes Street, but Mum wanted to send me to the Brothers.

Brother Leo discovered my athletic and swimming potential as well as a good left hand at tennis, especially when partnered with Terry Curley who then boarded at St Bernard's College.

Henson Park, Marrickville, was the site of my athletic prowess, where I won the Sub Junior Pennant of the De La Salle Schools of Sydney. However, I scotched my athletic career soon after, by a serious accident when an upright platform fell on my right ankle at school. Not waiting for supervision, we had attempted to clear the floor for dancing lessons.

This accident marked the end of competitive sports and the beginning of my more serious application to study. It happened just before my parents successfully applied for my entrance to St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, conducted by the Marist Brothers.

To help and thank Mum and Dad, I worked in the school holidays as a waiter in Katoomba's Hotel Metropole that attracted a clientele of English people. The choice of the menu was "um" or "lum" (ham or lamb). I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, kept them guessing about my age, and fitted myself out with new clothes for boarding school.

St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill 1952 - 1953

Mum's brother, James Brady, my Uncle Jack, had attended St Joseph's in 1910, far from his family in Melbourne. He had distinguished himself as an athlete and Brother Henry remembered him. Brother Henry was the famous coach of the rugby union First Fifteen teams who won public acclaim in the Greater Public Schools (GPS) competitions. I wouldn't be playing rugby union, but I had the privilege of concelebrating the funeral of Brother Henry in

the College Chapel, years later.

Despite having to settle into a new school and boarding away from home, I had a very successful year in 1952. I came fourth in the first term, third in the second term and second in the third term, which was topped by John Hartigan who later became a renowned Professor of Mathematics at Princeton and Yale Universities, in the United States.

In that year, I also ventured into debating and acting. I was Amelia in the one-act play, "The Dear Departed," adapted by Mr Radford, our Master of Elocution. Mr Radford wasn't at his best on the evening of the performance and left us to dress ourselves. I had stuffed my bust unevenly and wore it too low. Mum and Dad were eager to see their son's performance but arrived on the evening after the show, regretfully.

The College Chaplain, Monsignor Duffy, quietly fostered diocesan priestly vocations among a group of us who enjoyed his hospitality and made up the crew of his VS yacht. We used to sail from Tarban Creek, Hunters Hill, as far as Bennelong Point, where the Opera House now stands. On one memorable occasion, we capsized near Shark Island and the Water Police scurried out to rescue us.

Terry Curley came to St Joseph's College, better known as Joeys, a year after me. Terry had not been a big boy in Katoomba, but I was amazed to see how he grew so quickly and powerfully as he did. He developed into an internationally famous rugby league player.

Dad received his final promotion, from Katoomba to North Parramatta Public School, during my Fourth Year at St Joseph's. Mum assumed teaching in the same school, intent on seeing me through St Joseph's to University.

In Fifth Year, I had to drop a subject to present only six subjects for the Leaving Certificate. I dropped Latin as I had no interest in pursuing Medicine or the priesthood.

My dearest sister Wilma, who had accompanied me with great love from my birth, died in 1953, just before my Leaving Certificate exams. Wilma had volunteered for open heart surgery at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, as it was her only chance of recovering a healthy heart. Heart surgery was at a primitive, experimental stage. Wilma died on the operating table.

Before Wilma's Requiem Mass, I spent a Holy Hour with her casket before the Blessed Sacrament in St Patrick's Church, Parramatta. We had spent Holy Hours together in the Blessed Sacrament Church, Haymarket.

In the Leaving exams, I won six A passes and Honours in Maths I (2nd Class), plus Orals in French, and the French Embassy's Prize. I should have done better in the Honours exams for Maths and Chemistry, but the loss of Wilma weighed too heavily on my mind. I came fifth at St Joseph's in 1953.

I had great respect for the Brothers, both those in Katoomba and those at Hunters Hill. Their religious dedication and manliness inspired my Catholic faith and my practice of it. They provided me with excellent role models, but I wasn't moved to join them. They did no favour to their splendid vocation by stressing that they were "not priests." They did not press me to become a Brother or a priest but they must have left the Lord to sort that out with me.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDING MY VOCATION

Pharmacy Apprentice 1954 - 1955

I spent my year after school living at home with my parents in Harold Street, North Parramatta, and as an Apprentice in Seagrave's Pharmacy, opposite Parramatta Station, and later in Mitchell's Pharmacy, next door but one to our home in Harold Street.

I loved Parramatta with its colonial history, the original Parliament House in Parramatta Park, Elizabeth Farm, Ruse Cottage, the convicts' nefarious flogging field beside St Patrick's Church. The school residence was a stately two storied Victorian mansion with a mezzanine floor. My bedroom had splendid bay windows, and my "study" housed my desk and collections in an ample spare room.

It was also my "studio"! A monthly newspaper for stamp collectors, called "Stamp News," had just come hot off the press in Dubbo and featured a stamp-designing competition to stir up criticism of dull Australian stamp designs. I designed four stamps featuring native birds and flowers in splendid colour: 3d (thrippence), Crimson Chat and Fringed Violet; 3d-ha'penny, Blue Wren and Christmas Bells; 7d-ha'penny, Pied Spider Flower and Regent Bower Bird; 2s (shillings), Crimson Parrot and Currawong. I entered them in the competition. They won first prize in the adult section of the competition and "Stamp News" featured them in their next issue in splendid colour.

I had signed my effort as that of Master Leonard Schafer. "Stamp News" commented that "he could be seven or seventeen." Another paper stated that I had won third prize and that first prize went to a professional designer. The Post Office claimed that the Government printers were not yet equipped to print stamps in colour. So, I would have to be satisfied with the colourful jam-tin wraparounds in my scrap box. My prize was a packet of uninspiring foreign stamps, many from drab Eastern Europe, for a boy's collection.

I was seventeen and beginning to wonder whether the Lord was calling me to be a priest. I joined the Legion of Mary Praesidium at St Patrick's, with the idea that if I couldn't cope with visiting lapsed Catholics and poor people, God was not calling me to be a priest. Fr John McSweeney was the fine priest who guided the Legionaries. I enjoyed their company and their apostolate and adopted St Grignon de Montfort's "True Devotion to Mary" as my spiritual guide. Finally, before the Blessed Sacrament, I accepted the prospect of a priestly vocation. My only regret on leaving the church was that I would have to wear black for the rest of my life! Not a thought about celibacy crossed my mind.

Despite the excellent model priests, such as Monsignor Duffy at St Joseph's College and Mons McGovern and Fr McSweeney in Parramatta, the diocesan or secular priesthood did not attract me, but I could think of no alternative. Mons Duffy had kept religious priests away from St Joseph's and fostered vocations to the Springwood and Manly Seminaries, and to Propaganda Fide College in Rome, to which promising diocesan seminarians were sent. Many of them became bishops.

University of Sydney 1955

St Francis didn't feature much in my life after my baptism until after I left school and was attending the University of Sydney in 1955. I had won a Scholarship to University and attended from home.

I had no interest in being a doctor or a lawyer. I really wanted to be a research scientist and inquired with CSIRO and BHP, but they couldn't offer anything to a lad just out of school. My choice of Pharmacy was influenced by Mum, whose youngest sister Wilma was single and owned her own Pharmacy in Footscray, Melbourne. I didn't know it at that time, but they had a tidy arrangement stitched up for me. I opted for Pharmacy, but Divine Providence chose otherwise.

I was wandering around in a lunch break past an auditorium at the University. Out of idle curiosity, I read the notice board: "Lunch-Hour Mission conducted by the Franciscan Fathers." It gave the date of two days, and the time, 12.30. This was the first day of the mission and I was a little late for 12.30.

I walked in, still munching my sandwich, and found a Franciscan friar on the stage battling smart questions from undergraduates. I knew about Franciscans but did not know that they were present in Australia. I was very impressed by the friar's respectful approach to the students and his competent answers. I returned on the second day, on time, and found another friar just as impressive, respectful, and competent. I returned to the laboratory and told my friend, Russel, that I had come across two Franciscans and how unflappable they were. "Cool" wasn't the in-word in 1955.

Russel knew the Franciscans and had recently made a weekend retreat with them in Wahroonga. He had to explain what a retreat was, but when I returned home to North Parramatta, I rang Mount Alverna Retreat House and asked if I could make a weekend retreat. They booked me in with a parish group, no problem.

The retreat masters were the two friars, Kevin Halpin and John Capistran McRae, whom I had heard in the lunch-hour retreat at the University. It wasn't their intellectual prowess or anything that they had said in rebutting the undergraduates that affected me. It was all a matter of the heart, not of affection for the two men, but of what they conveyed by the grace of God. This was what I wanted, what I was looking for. I was smitten with it. I decided there and then that I would join the Franciscans. Yes, I could be first of all a Franciscan friar and with that I could be a priest.

Home again, I promptly told my parents that I wanted to join the Franciscans. Mum and Dad were eminently sensible people and calmly recommended that I finish my Pharmacy studies and at twenty-one I could do what I liked. But I couldn't bear waiting so long, and so began a painful conflict with my dear parents.

I couldn't explain my sudden change of direction from having the world at my feet to ending up with nothing of worldly consequence. I didn't talk about it to anyone, not even to my brothers and sisters and dearest friends from schooldays.

I had asked the friars where to find the Franciscans. They told me that the main house was in Waverley, where I could call on the Promoter of Vocations if I was interested. So, off I went to Waverley. Fr Kieran O'Connell OFM was another sensible person and a tower of

strength during that troubled year at University. I needed help, and often made the long trip from home, from North Parramatta to Waverley, seeking his sensible advice and his compassionate understanding of me as well as of my parents. Mum came with me once. Eventually, I wore my poor parents down and won their sad permission to join the Franciscans.

When the University results were published, they listed my Distinction in Botany and a High Distinction in Chemistry. Dad called in at the chemist shop and asked hopefully whether I would continue with Pharmacy. I said, “No, Dad.” He left the shop, a sad man.

From March 1955 till February 1956 was a very painful time for my parents and me, until I joined the Franciscan Noviciate in Campbelltown, two weeks before my nineteenth birthday.

It wasn't easy to explain my religious vocation to my family and friends. In fact, I didn't try. It involved joining a religious community of likeminded men that left sparse time for family and friends, as one became immersed in a radically new way of life with “my God and my all.”

CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING A FRANCISCAN 1956 – 1963

Noviciate 1956

I left home in January 1956, for the Franciscan Noviciate at Maryfields, Campbelltown. I said goodbye with unbounded joy to Mum and Dad who tried to suppress their grief. I could never thank them enough for the wonderful life that they had given me, but this was not the sentiment that my joy was conveying. I joined three other young enthusiasts at Central Station, with their parents, who waved us on our fateful journey. “A kiss for luck, and we're on our way!” Desmond, John, and Christopher would be my companions through all our formative years, till our Ordination as Franciscan friar priests.

First step, to Maryfields. The property was donated to the Franciscans by the Rudd-Keane family and embraced 67 acres of farmland. The friars continued to run it as a mixed farm to support the community. Lemon-scented eucalyptus gums and old monkey puzzle trees fronted Rudd's original colonial homestead. The Brothers' Building Team was extending the original Noviciate building of 1935.

The Puffing Billy from Campbelltown to Camden dropped us off at Maryfields siding. The Assistant Novice Master, Fr Joachim, drove us up the hill to the Noviciate, where we met the Novice Master, Fr Peter. Five others, from Melbourne, Brisbane, and New Zealand joined us four from Sydney. The friars were rather disappointed by our group of nine, after the usual intakes of twenty or more. We joined the newly-arrived older men in our temporary accommodation in a creaky wooden shed named Rivo Torto after the first flea-infested accommodation of St Francis and his original friars in Assisi.

The fourteen novices of 1955, still in residence, were keen to teach us their tricks, including how to pray the complicated Divine Office in Latin. It was no easy task. We would move into the Noviciate after they professed their Simple Vows and left for Melbourne.

Five Franciscan friar priests and thirty Brothers formed the Community of Maryfields. St Francis called the friar in charge of a local community, not the Superior, but the Guardian. We came to know the Guardian, Irish Father Daniel, but we didn't relate to the other priests, except to another Irishman, Fr Celestine, our Confessor, who delighted wickedly in making us laugh when we were supposed to be serious.

"The Minister" was St Francis's name for a higher Superior. The Provincial Minister, Fr Joseph, visited us and delivered his customary spiel that there were five exits to this place and they were wide open to disaffected novices. We found his bogan approach amusing.

We were not supposed to mix with the Brothers, not even with the four new novice Brothers, as though they lived in a community separate from us "clerics". That's how it was in those days. The Australian Franciscan Province was like a clone of the Irish mother Province with its book of customs, but it was all soon going to change from a clerical monastic way to a fraternal way of life.

The Noviciate was a practical school of prayer. Before the Noviciate, I had established the practice of attending daily Mass since the age of twelve, when I decided to become an altar boy at St Canice's Church, Katoomba. My morning offering of the day was also habitual, and I had collected my favourite prayers into a devotional "Prayer Book."

In the Noviciate, we had to find our way through the complicated breviary of the Divine Office, the Church's official daily prayer. It was in Latin, which was a major challenge for me even with four years of Latin behind me. We had to learn to read the text successfully and with understanding before we had any chance of praying with it.

My devotional "Prayer Book" had to give way to scriptural and liturgical prayers, which took years to master and pray with. But the Mass remained a haven of prayer despite the overlay of rubrics, and my morning offering remained the same: "Dear Lord, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of today, for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart and in union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Reception into the Noviciate

After we had received from Fr Guardian the ancient tonsure of the head, on 17 February, our Provincial Minister clothed us in the Franciscan habit and gave us the religious name of a patron Saint. We had been asked to suggest three names and the Novice Master would choose one of them. We could not have a name already owned by a friar living in the Province. My own third suggestion was "Carl". I received the religious name, Brother Carl, after St Charles Borromeo, Carolus in Latin. Desmond was Brother Leopold, John was Brother Frederick, and Christopher was Brother Andrew.

Dad and Mum were present with the parents of the Sydney boys. Mum and the mothers were sobbing, which reduced me to tears, painfully aware of Mum's grief. The Novice Master ticked me off about that afterwards. Mum begged Fr Joachim, the Assistant Novice Master, to "look after my son", and was tersely answered, "Mrs Schafer, the Order has taken care of boys for 800 years. Your son will be no exception." Mum was not impressed by Fr Joachim.

We were the eleventh and last group of novices mastered by Fr Peter Waters OFM. He was a kind man but firm when he needed to be. We lost one cleric novice from Melbourne, then there were eight of us. We settled down to daily Mass and praying the Divine Office, daily lectures in religious and Franciscan life, and the study of Latin.

Early in the year, Fr Peter once called me to answer the phone. Sydney University was inquiring because I hadn't enrolled for the second year of Pharmacy. I told the registrar that I had joined the Franciscans. The poor man begged me in tears to reconsider, as I would lose my University Scholarship. I assured him that I understood. I had no qualms about it and applied myself wholeheartedly to my noviciate year.

Maryfields property was renowned for its set of fourteen Stations of the Way of the Cross, representing the way that Jesus took from his agony in Gethsemane garden to his crucifixion on the hill of Calvary and the deposition of his body in a tomb before his Resurrection. The friars held the first Way of the Cross on Good Friday 1936 and continued to host the spectacle until 1988. Crowds of over 10,000 and up to 37,000 attended. Factors that conspired in the demise of the celebration, were the end of Puffing Billy's service in 1963, the move of the Noviciate to Victoria in 1983, and a run of washed-out Good Fridays after 1988.

On Good Friday in 1956, we celebrated the Solemn Liturgy at the altar of the Twelfth Station before a huge congregation of thousands. Fr Peter appointed me to sing in Latin the First Reading, from Hosea 6:1-6.

I found peace in the Noviciate and thoroughly enjoyed my noviciate year. There was a healthy balance of manual labour on the farm, strenuous exercise in the handball court, rhubarb with lashes of cream for breakfast, and wholesome meals for building stamina. I have never been more healthy in body, mind, and spirit. For me, it was paradise.

We proceeded to Simple Profession, when we pronounced the three traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, for three years only. We moved to Melbourne with the Assistant Novice Master, Fr Joachim, who was to be our Student Master for the next three years, during our study of Philosophy.

Philosophy 1957 - 1959

Greyfriars was located at Mornington, Victoria, on the peninsular above Port Phillip Bay. We joined about thirty young friars in their second or third year. In our Franciscan student houses, our teachers or lecturers were called Lectors. The Lectors were friar priests who held degrees from Europe, Canada, and the United States.

We studied subjects that prepared us for Scholastic Philosophy, such as the History of Philosophy, Biology, Logic to reason correctly, and Epistemology to tell when knowledge is valid and to be able to discern the difference between belief and opinion. The philosophical subjects were Ethics, which is morality based on reason; Metaphysics, which is the study of existence; Psychology, both Philosophical and Scientific; also Philosophical and Scientific Cosmology. What I enjoyed most was an evaluation of the scientific method that beautifully complemented my previous study of science.

Above all, I enjoyed our introduction to Bible studies that included such questions as Inspiration and Inerrancy and was followed by an introduction to each book of the Old Testament within the three groups of The Law, The Prophets, and The Books of Edification. The Psalms that we chanted in the Divine Office received special attention. While improving our Latin, we were introduced to Greek and Hebrew, which I was keen to learn.

We studied other subjects in private, such as French and Italian, Literature, and Music. Some formed their own orchestral band. We contributed to our bi-annual publication, *The Troubadour*, that exercised the creative abilities of both writers and artists. I was the Editor at some stage and contributed articles and artwork.

Fr Joachim may have thought that I was too much Mother's Boy, when he kept me for three years looking after the pigsty, but I enjoyed caring for the pig that we kept till "this little piggy went to market," and replaced him with another. Pig and I had animated conversations, especially when I arrived late with the scraps!

The years that young religious men and women spent in Formation met criticism as isolating us too much from normal life and preparing us poorly for mature adulthood. But our houses of formation were full of a wide variety of personalities, albeit all men. Our opportunities for growth physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually, were ample, healthy, and challenging. Our vocation required much of us in study, manual labour, sports, and recreation, and in relating to one another as brothers in Christ. We had good relations with our "formators," but I preferred to have their spiritual accompaniment instead of spiritual direction by them.

Everything at Greyfriars was fine for me, except that I wasn't satisfied with philosophy and looked forward to studying theology.

All eight of our "Nov" (Noviciate) made Solemn Profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Franciscan poverty was no problem to me money-wise. As children, we received no allowance of money. As a working apprentice, I gave one dollar out of \$1.50 to Mum for keep. Mum and Dad lived through the Depression between two world wars and raised six children with little to save. I felt no pinch of poverty but learnt the value of money. I had to cope rather with my habit of collecting things.

Chastity was no problem apart from the need to practise self-control in puberty and young adulthood. By the grace of God, I had healthy friendships with young and old, both men and women, and have avoided lapses. For me, it was about being a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12).

I had to learn obedience from my earliest years. Dad came down hard on my wayward will and temperamental outbursts. As a little boy, I didn't understand what Dad meant by calling me "temperamental". I thought that Dad was calling me mental, but I carried on, dauntless.

Theology 1960 - 1963

We moved on to St Paschal's College, Box Hill, where we studied theology for four years. The main courses were Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Canon Law, and the New Testament. Also important were The History of the Church, and Spiritual Theology that integrated most of our theological studies.

“Spiritual Theology” and “spirituality” may spook some people, so I’ll add a word about it, and will try to explain what motivates Franciscans in living in the way we do. It won’t be a scholarly exercise and I won’t quote sources, except a dictionary, once.

The Oxford Dictionary describes “spirituality” as, “of the spirit as opposed to matter; what is of the soul, especially as acted on by God (spiritual life).” “Spirituality” is our human state of being “spiritual” or coming into relationship with a spirit; in our case, with God through Jesus Christ. So, we can speak of “Christian spirituality.”

Christian spirituality is a serious response that a person makes when God reveals his great love for us in Jesus Christ. We see this in the life of St Francis of Assisi. Once he fully realized that God loved him, his way of acting changed radically. This realization is shown by the way that Francis increased his seeking to know more about God, and by his loving and serving God and Jesus in his fellow men and women.

Francis was aware of the unique experience of God that each person has, and of his own Christian spirituality. The standard of life for himself and for his friars was the Gospel, expressed in a practical following of Christ. The basis of his spiritual life was complete poverty of spirit and the sense that one could not own property, either material or immaterial. Francis’s spirituality was based on his experience of God and his style of living the Gospel, which continues to shape Franciscan spirituality and our lives as Franciscans.

Franciscan spirituality can be described as the spiritual journey sketched by St Francis and St Clare of Assisi and made by their followers through eight hundred years. The journey leads men and women to a living, conscious, and progressive conformity with Christ the Lord. That simply means that we follow the example of both Francis and Clare in conforming our lives to Christ.

Franciscan spirituality thrives on sharing our story, just as the Gospel does. Francis and the early friars used to come together in Assisi on the feast of Pentecost. They had been on the road, and they would come back and tell their story of what had happened to them. The friars’ Rule of 1221 was simply “tips for the road” and how to live “on the road” as mendicants. These stories were passed on from generation to generation.

Saint Francis was inspired to name his religious brothers “friars minor” (little brothers), which came from his desire to make Jesus Christ and the Gospel the foundation of his life. It came primarily from a contemplation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who “though he was rich, made himself poor.” St Francis lived the logic of “self-emptying” literally, when he stripped himself completely of all earthly goods, in order to give himself entirely to God.

The life of Saint Francis was marked by this meeting with God who, as Jesus, had made himself poor. God was a humble and hidden presence who the Little Poor Man of Assisi adored and contemplated in the Incarnation, in the Cross, and in the Eucharist.

This typically Franciscan “littleness” serves for meeting and communing with God; with our religious brothers and sisters, and with all men and women, and with all of creation that is included “in Christ.”

Minor courses in Theology were Liturgy, Archeology, Sacred Art and Architecture, the History of the Franciscan Order, Gregorian Chant, and Patrology, which is the study of

the writings of the early Church Fathers.

Practical subjects, aimed at preaching, were Spoken English, Sacred Eloquence, and Homiletics. We gained facility in writing by contributing to our own publication, *The Paraclete*, which is another name for the Holy Spirit, the Patron of our Australian Franciscan Province of the Holy Spirit.

Fr Christopher was my Student Master in First Year and again in Fourth Year. Fr Joachim, coming up from Greyfriars, was my Student Master in Second and Third Year. Our Lectors were another faculty of friars who earned their degrees in Rome, Louvain, Munich, or Washington DC. I enjoyed most of all studying the New Testament, accompanied by Greek and Hebrew.

In our First Year, we received the clerical tonsure, but not like the full tonsure that we had as novices, which made us look as though we had had a serious operation on the brain. In Third Year, we received the four Minor Orders: acolyte, exorcist, lector, and porter. The porter had the duty of opening and closing the church, and of watching over the sacred vessels and vestments. I embraced the Minor Orders wholeheartedly, but they are no longer conferred on clerics. They were subsumed under lay Ministries after Vatican II. The Minor Orders were preparations for the major Holy Orders of Subdiaconate, and of Diaconate early in Fourth Year, and Ordination in mid-Fourth Year.

1960 to 1963 inclusive spanned the four years of our theological studies and coincided with some of the years of the Second Vatican Council, from 1962 to 1965, so I had the good fortune to have known the pre-Vatican II Church, to have studied in the years of the Council, and to live in the Church after Vatican II. My experience of these bridging years proved to be an advantage in coping with the seismic changes in the Catholic Church of the 1960s and beyond.

We found healthy ways to relieve the tension of intense study. Each year, we staged a play for the Ordination class. I was in my element, acting in “Twelve Angry Men”, “Home of the Brave”, and “Murder in the Cathedral.” We played Aussie Rules against teams of the other religious houses. We cultivated a vegetable garden and maintained the beautiful Grotto and the splendid front garden.

We had been allowed to choose our Confessor and Spiritual Director apart from the Student Master. At least, I was under that impression. I had chosen Fr John Vianney, who was named after Saint John Vianney (1786-1859), a French Catholic priest, canonized in 1925. My choice was not appreciated by my Student Master in my fourth year of Theology. I had not confided enough in him, and that was an insensitive error on my naïve part. On the eve of my leaving for Ordination, he declared, “I have nothing to say against you, and nothing to say for you.” I couldn't believe that jealousy inspired his attitude although one fellow student thought it possible. Negative attitudes about me didn't hurt me greatly. Perhaps, they should have dented my insensitivity. After that humbling confrontation, I left for Ordination in Waverley.

Ordination and First Masses

Ordination to the Priesthood is a tremendous occasion. A priest is ordained to stand between God and people in offering sacrifice on behalf of all. He receives the spiritual power to bring Jesus Christ into their lives and to consolidate God's active presence in the world. Not only the young priest himself but also his parents, relatives, and friends, have waited for this great day, and have prayed over the past eight years that the young man would be as prepared as he could be for this immense privilege.

On 13 July 1963, a freezing mid-winter day, in the Church of Mary Immaculate, Waverley, Bishop Doggett OFM ordained Desmond, Christopher, and me, who had first met on Central Station eight years previously. Our fourth companion, John, had decided before Diaconate not to take that step with us.

My parents, brothers and sisters and their families, attended my Ordination, together with old friends of the family from Gilgai, Dudley, Katoomba, and Parramatta.

How overjoyed I was when I gave my First Blessing to Mum and Dad. Their grief when I left them for the Noviciate had long since vanished, as my letters home traced my progress through the years, even though in all that time I saw Mum only once at Greyfriars, Mornington, and once at St Paschal's, Box Hil, and had not seen Dad at all.

First Mass

I offered my First Masses on the three days after Ordination. I celebrated the first in Mum and Dad's parish, at St Monica's Church, North Parramatta; the second in St Joseph's College Chapel; and the third at Maryfields, Campbelltown. Mum's brother, James, came up from Echuca to attend the Mass at St Joseph's College, where he had been a student in 1910. After these Masses, I gave my Blessing to the Brothers who had taught me and to the friars and friends whom I hadn't seen since I joined the Noviciate or left for Melbourne. These were glory days.

For the rest of the year 1964, we returned to St Paschal's, Box Hill, to complete our Fourth Year of Theology and to sit for the Universal Examination that covered all subjects. I did well enough for one of the examiners to hint about study overseas. I didn't like that idea then because I felt that I needed time to settle into the Province. My doubts were confirmed by the loss of two of my fellow friars who were sent soon after Ordination to study in Europe but who left the Order and married.

First supply

Victoria's parishes were asking for priests to supply Masses over Advent and Christmas and New Year. We newly ordained friars were eager to help, so I was sent to Numurkah, on the Murray River. Introducing myself to the Parish Priest, I mentioned that my Uncle James Brady lived at Echuca. Without a word to me, Fr Kilmartin immediately phoned Jim's daughter, Betty Mahney, who was living in Numurkah. Betty turned up at once.

I had not known about Betty Brady. What a fabulous time I had, with Betty and her husband Bill and the Mahney family and their many friends; memorable, also, for my first arduous effort at hearing confessions while hordes of mosquitoes attacked the lineup of long-

suffering penitents. Christmas of 1963, in a heatwave in Numurkah, is indelibly impressed on my memory. It made up for all the years of cloistered separation.

There were three diocesan priests in the Brady family. Fr Joe Flannery was Aunt Mary's son, Fr Jim Brasier's was Aunt Winny's son, and Fr Jack Brady was the grandson of our grandfather's brother. A newly-ordained Franciscan priest was a novelty in the Brady family.

After my return to St Paschal's and farewells soon afterwards from the other students and the Lectors, there still remained the Pastoral Year to complete our Franciscan and priestly formation.

Pastoral Year 1964

Our Ordination group moved to Waverley. The two eldest, Fr Arnold (Paul) Fitzgerald and Fr Matthias (Frank) Conway, set off immediately for our Franciscan Mission in Aitape, Papua New Guinea. Fr Macarten (Tony) Stott joined them soon afterwards.

We three from Sydney enjoyed a valuable year of catechetical training with the Sisters of St Joseph at North Sydney. We resolved moral cases with the Vincentians, prepared and practised homilies, and supplied Sunday Masses in parishes. Fr Kevin, who was the first friar I ever saw, at the University of Sydney, commented on our homilies, gave useful advice, and sometimes snuck in on our Sunday Mass in a parish somewhere in Sydney. We had to prepare a homily once a month for five years after Ordination. I was happy with that.

So, we completed our initial formation as Franciscan religious and priests. We were truly fortunate to have had such competent Lectors who kept us up to date with the Second Vatican Council's documents and who applied them while teaching their subjects.

At the end of the year, our "Nov," the Noviciate group of 1956, said a heart-felt "Goodbye" to one another. We went on our separate ways to our first appointments.

My first flight by plane was to provide a Mass supply in regional NSW. Through the window of the DC3, I viewed the countryside in all its colour. Later flights in larger planes were never so enthralling.

CHAPTER FIVE: MY FIRST APPOINTMENTS

Teacher 1965 - 1966

In 1965, Christopher - Fr Andrew then - and I moved to Kedron in Brisbane, Christopher to the Parish of St Therese, and I to Padua College. The Principal appointed me to teach Basic Sciences and Latin to 13-year-olds in Year Eight, relying on my own schooling in science and Latin. I was not keen on teaching, much less without teacher training. My parents and my brother, John, and sister, Gwen, had all graduated from Government Teachers' Colleges and I felt let down by the Franciscans who put unqualified friars into teaching. Australians expect that teachers be qualified.

Fortunately, it didn't last long. The friars found a more appropriate use for me. I moved to our house of Philosophy at St Anthony's College, Robertson in NSW, and was appointed to teach English, Greek and Hebrew to our students. Again, I could do it comfortably on the strength of my schooling. For "English", I taught the History of the English Novel and analyzed the novel as a form of literature. The subjects, "Greek" and "Hebrew", required of the students a mastery of the alphabet of the respective language, to be able to read it, and a basic knowledge of the grammar, and some vocabulary in view of later scriptural studies.

My enjoyable time at Robertson ended with the sudden collapse of the Editor of our two publications in Waverley. Fr Aloysius O'Donovan contracted cancer and soon died. He had asked that I take over *Sursum Corda*, meaning *Lift Up Your Hearts*, a review for religious, and the *Franciscan Newsletter*, our public relations tabloid. I juggled both teaching and editing till the end of the year, then moved to Waverley Friary, with an office in the Provincial Office next door, for the publications. This move scotched the possibility of my being sent to study overseas.

Editor 1965 - 1971

In 1965, the Provincial Minister appointed me permanently to Waverley as Editor of *Sursum Corda*, and of the *Franciscan Newsletter*, composed of four pages, one of which was reserved for the Franciscan Third Order's local Fraternities.

Spurred by the Second Vatican Council, the Third Order in France set out to update Pope Leo XIII's Rule of the Third Order, of 1883. Some of Waverley's Christus Rex Tertiaries keenly followed the French leaders. They were helped greatly by their Spiritual Director, Fr Leonard Gleeson OFM, who had studied in Louvain and translated the letters hot off the French press.

As the Editor of the *Franciscan Newsletter*, I followed the developments closely and published the remarkable results. I was providentially placed to report on the great efforts of the Tertiaries to forge a post-Vatican II Rule.

I couldn't have distributed the *Franciscan Newsletter* without the invaluable help and dedication of a group of ten Tertiaries of Mary Immaculate Fraternity, headed by Nancy Treacy. These middle-aged people, mostly women and a few men, made a profound impression on me, a recently ordained friar priest. Franciscans to the core, they convinced me forever of the value of the Franciscan laity. Every second month, for years, we met in the Third Order library under the church and folded, wrapped, and glue-sealed hundreds of copies of the *Franciscan Newsletter*, and prepared them for posting. What fabulous people they were!

Jack Tier, the Editor of *The Sun*, and Roger Murphy, the Chief Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, had helped Fr Aloysius and generously offered to help me. Our two publications alternated in their distribution every second month. Jack and Kit Tier practically adopted me into their family of five and invited me to work at their home on the layout of the *Franciscan Newsletter*. In the course of five years, I finished an unofficial apprenticeship with Jack in journalism, and learnt from Roger at his home to proof-read *Sursum Corda*.

Religious Sisters, Brothers and priests in Australia and overseas subscribed to *Sursum Corda*. Qualified writers among them contributed the articles that fostered religious life after Vatican II. After a while, from 1970, I felt equipped to give the annual spiritual retreat to communities of Sisters in remote places of Australia.

One retreat incident was frightening. I boarded a small plane in Melbourne with two other passengers for the hop to Griffith, to give the Retreat to the Sisters of Mercy. Soon, we struck a strong wind that turned the plane into a frenzied kite. My head hit the roof and I gripped the seat in front of me, where a young mother held onto her screaming baby. Upon landing, the deathly-white passenger who had sat with the pilot confided that the pilot had almost lost control of the plane. I proceeded to the convent and entered into the Retreat, apparently serene.

In 1969, the Province allowed, even encouraged, the friars to drop their religious names that they received in the Noviciate, and to resume their baptismal names. Vatican II had stressed the importance of baptism and of the Christian name received then, when the “old man” gave way to the “new man” at baptism. I chose to remain “Carl” not to add to the confusion, because there were already three Leonards in the Waverley community, either with the surname or with the religious name that they chose not to drop.

On two occasions, I stood in for Fr Cornelius McCormick OFM at the Apostolic Delegation in North Sydney. When Pope Paul VI visited Australia in 1970, the Apostolic Delegate invited those friars who had served at the Delegation to meet the Pope and to receive a commemorative medal. I gave my medal to Mum, but I never saw it again.

As the Editor of the *Franciscan Newsletter* and a quasi-public-relations man, I was photographed raising the papal flag at the Apostolic Delegation, for distribution to the media.

EAPI Course 1971 - 1972

I was better equipped to edit a review for religious such as *Sursum Corda* by attending the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila, the Philippines, for nine months, spanning 1971 and 1972. The EAPI was part of the Ateneo de Manila, a prestigious University conducted by the Jesuits.

About ninety priests, Brothers, and Sisters - fifty men and forty women - represented thirty nations. It's impossible to describe the experience of living in such a diverse community. Ages ranged from 30 to 60. Hard to imagine a richer combination of backgrounds, languages, types of work, past experiences, and talent in all kinds of art forms, music, singing, and dancing. Australia had a large representation: seven from Australia, and six others who were missionaries.

We had five hours of lectures: from 9 a.m. till 12 noon, and from 3 p.m. till 5 p.m. Each month, we submitted three to five papers in specified areas, which still left room to choose topics that interested us personally. To complete the course successfully depended on our grades in these papers. We had to do reading and research outside lecture hours, so from 7 p.m. till retiring. I gained a Diploma of Religious Education and made friends with priests

and religious from all over Asia as well as from New Zealand and Australia. Many of them were already subscribing to *Sursum Corda*.

On Wednesday evenings, we gathered for a Family Night. One or other national group provided the main entertainment. We built the Australasian (Australia and New Zealand) Night on an evening Mass, special arrangements for the evening meal, and a concert. Seven Aussie priests concelebrated Mass under the stars on a broad open patio with an unlimited view of the Ateneo campus. We wanted to create the atmosphere of wide-open spaces. The Southern Cross decorated the backdrop of the altar. We based our Mass text on the Bi-Centenary Mass celebrated by Pope Paul VI in Sydney. The Aussie and Kiwi Sisters gave a hearty rendition of “Creation sings a new song to the Lord.” I gave the homily and meant to convey an impression of the Church in Australia and New Zealand from the beginning to the present.

After Mass, we all gathered around a campfire and hoed into meat pies and tomato sauce, mashed potatoes and peas, billy tea, and later, ice cream. We performed our concert around the fire, starting with “Botany Bay”, with Brother Montfort as convict, and “Tie me kangaroo down,” with wobbleboard and a hide hanging on a shed. Next, “Tangmalangaloo,” with Bernard as overweight bishop and grossly overgrown schoolboy, Peter. The three Kiwi Sisters taught us “Pokarekare Ana” which we sang in parts accompanied by Sr Corrie on the guitar. Then, was the most embarrassing moment of my stage career, in “Dave’s Proposal to Mabel.” Sr Assumpta gave an excellent impersonation of Mabel, and all I had to do was act as Dave, the country bumpkin, with incidental music, “My Mabel Waits for Me,” and “Gundagai.” Everyone knew “Click go the shears” and “Waltzing Matilda” well enough to join in the choruses. We acted out “Matilda,” complete with moaning ghost. Finale to a chaotic concert was the Māori Farewell. The time was coming too soon when we would sing it together for the last time.

On the Japanese Family Night, the few Sisters present demonstrated the Japanese Tea Ceremony with exquisite grace, and provided a memorable meal of sashimi and sukiyaki, and other delicacies. Their music and dancing entranced us who were of Western culture, but they were keen also to offer us something humorous. They dressed three of us hefty men – an American, a Samoan, and an Australian – in sumptuous kimonos while we danced coyly geisha-like with fans and sang, “Three Little Maids from School,” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s, *The Mikado*. We brought the house down.

Friday nights were reserved for a movie. I landed the job of editing the EAPI Newsletter, *The Bridge*, published in December and April. I was also assigned to teach four days a week at Loyola High School of the Ateneo de Manila. It was a rare privilege. Eight of us were asked to teach catechetics and only two, an American Capuchin and I, were not teachers in the Philippines.

The interrelational aspect of the course was far more important and demanding than the scholastic requirements of updating our theology. Our formation as young religious did not prepare us for unrestricted mixing with the opposite sex. We cemented close friendships, and our priestly and religious vocations were challenged. I enjoyed the freedom of friendship with an American Columban priest and a Scottish Columban Sister, both missionaries in the Philippines. Our trio was open, and we invited others to share our company when we went out socially. I benefitted immensely from the opening of minds and hearts. The hard part for

me was having to realize that it would not be the reality of my priestly and religious life in Australia.

Naval Reserve Chaplain from 1967

While working as an Editor in Waverley, since 1967 I had developed another major interest. Our Fr Cornelius McCormick OFM – Fr Pat after 1969 – suffered a heart attack.. He was a Naval Officer during World War II and entered the Franciscan Order soon after the War. After Ordination, he joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR) as a Roman Catholic Chaplain. But with the threat to his life, he asked whether I would take over his RANR Chaplaincy.

With our OFM Provincial Minister's approval in 1967, I attended the Naval Indoctrination Course, known as the "Knife, Fork, and Spoon Course", at HMAS Cerberus, Crib Point, in Victoria, where I was duly introduced to Naval etiquette and some of its many traditions. I attended HMAS Watson at Watsons Bay in Sydney, from 1968 to 1971, when I took leave to attend the EAPI in Manila. When I transferred *Sursum Corda* to Box Hill, I joined HMAS Lonsdale, at Port Melbourne. For celebrating Mass, Fr Con Sexton, Parish Priest of Dover Heights, gave me the set of sacred vessels that he had used as an Army Chaplain when the Japanese imprisoned him at Changi, in Singapore.

HMAS Sydney

My first trip to sea was in the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney during Exercise Coral Sands, from 22 September to 21 October 1968. The massive sea surges in mid-ocean were awesome. Fifty ships of the Navies of Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and USA performed coastal maneuvers off the Queensland coast and in the Solomon Sea. Before returning to Sydney, the ship made a five-day official visit to Wellington, New Zealand. I accompanied one hundred junior sailors to Blenheim and the Marlborough Sounds on a weekend of shore leave. We were interviewed on radio and were guests in a quiz show, where I won a beautiful Kaiapoi woolen blanket.

P and O Shipping Line (P&O)

A shipmate in the Naval Reserve in Sydney was an Officer in the P&O. He recommended that I apply as Chaplain on the SS Iberia during the Easter Cruise from March to April 1969. It gets to be confusing here. Jack Tier always claimed that he planted me on this Easter Cruise when he and Kit and two of their girls would be sailing with a group of journalists. Perhaps, my P&O shipmate knew about this and was told to tell me to apply for the Chaplaincy.

The Iberia cruised to Noumea in New Caledonia, to Suva in Fiji, to Nuku'alofa in Tonga, and to Auckland in New Zealand, and returned to Sydney. I had known about these places only by reading about them. It struck me when I experienced them that they really did exist!

In Noumea, Jack and Kit had no luck when trying to shop without knowing French. They begged me to accompany them on the second day in port. Madame of the boutique and I chatted like old friends, while Jack fumed at her rebuff of the day before. But a sign in the

street amused him. “Gawd! They’re got an Institute de Beaut, ‘ere, too!” I won the Fancy-Dress Ball, when I wore my Franciscan habit with the hood up and with a cushion on my buttocks and a pillow on my tummy, as Friar Tuck.

HMAS Anzac

My second trip with the Navy was a Training Cruise, from 18 June to 31 July 1969, in HMAS Anzac, the Fleet training ship for the RAN. I conducted a Course in Moral Leadership for junior sailors. We visited all the Catholic mission centres on the north coast of Papua New Guinea – Lae, Madang, and Wewak, from where I visited our Franciscan Mission at Aitape, by plane. We called in on the Navy in Manus Island, then proceeded to Kavieng, Rabaul, Honiara, and Gizo in the Solomon Islands, then home via Brisbane to Sydney. The Bishops in each place proudly showed me around their missions. The Sisters made sure that I visited their treasured lepers, who reflected the loving care that they received. Their gentle acceptance of their affliction affected me.

Before we berthed in Wewak, the Captain offered me the use of the ship’s jeep to drive around, but at the wharf, Australian Fr Brian Barnes OFM, a PNG Police Chaplain, hailed me to move quickly because a plane was waiting to fly me to our mission in Aitape. I apologized to the Captain, who exclaimed, “Strewth! You’re quicker than Speedy Gonzales!” The mission had a spurious reason for their generous welcome. They loaded me with a very heavy gladstone bag to deliver to Sydney.

CHAPTER SIX: SINGAPORE 1975 - 1977

On 1 February 1975, I received a phone call from the Provincial Chapter, asking whether I would like to join our Community in Singapore. I didn’t hesitate, although I knew nothing about the situation or the Community. Our Provincial Minister appointed me, “to coordinate our apostolates, to promote local vocations and to develop a formation program.” It wasn’t clear from this whether he had appointed me as the Superior.

I had difficulty extracting myself from the *Sursum Corda* Office after ten years. Two retreats that I had already organized delayed my departure, but I arrived in Singapore before June.

The Community

We were five friars in the Community of St Anthony’s Friary, at 8 3/4 Milestone, Old Jurong Road, Bukit Timah.

Fr Fulgence Gross OFM was a friar of the Sacred Heart Province of St Louis in USA and was a missionary in China when the Communists took control. Most Americans left in 1949, but Fulgence decided to remain. In 1951, he received the death sentence that the Communists commuted to six years’ imprisonment, mostly in solitary confinement. They released him in 1958.

Some Chinese and other friars expelled from China established a Sociological Institute at St Anthony’s Friary, Singapore. Fulgence joined them in 1960 and translated church teachings into Mandarin to combat the Communist influence in Southeast Asia.

When the Sociological Institute was transferred to Taiwan in 1969, the OFM Minister General entrusted St Anthony's Friary to the Australian Province in 1970, to fill the vacancy left by the Institute. Fulgence remained to assist in the chapel and to continue his regular convent supplies and retreats for religious.

Fr Sylvester Campbell OFM had been Religious Superior of the Aitape Mission from 1950 to 1962. In 1969, Sylvester was appointed to Singapore and fostered the small Mass centre from its beginnings, which grew into a very large parish.

Fr Brendan Rogers OFM joined the Australian Army in 1940 as a Chaplain. The Japanese captured him in Singapore in 1942 and imprisoned him in Changi for a year, then took him to East Malaya to work in Sandakan and Kuching. He returned to Singapore in 1972, to St Anthony's Friary at Bukit Timah, close to where he had worked as a prisoner.

Brother George Boggs OFM arrived also in 1972. We were good friends. He came from Inverell, and we joked about my early years in Gilgai, only seven miles away from Inverell. The Singaporeans loved George and he was a magnet for the kids. He had more success with learning Chinese than I had.

I joined the Community when Fulgence was 72, Sylvester was 58, and Brendan was 61. George and I were 38 years of age.

Promoting vocations

The friars established themselves well in their apostolates and ways of life. George and I were interested in promoting vocations. We set about inviting teenaged Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian boys to recreate together and get to know us at the friary. Towards developing a formation program, I suggested that we explain to them the Third Order of St Francis, which was a way of life for lay people inspired by the Saint and with its Rule approved by a Pope.

Five lads were keen to join the Third Order. In addition to their informal visiting us, we settled on a monthly meeting for instruction. Some adults came to know of our Third Order fraternity and joined us. Within three years, I canonically established the Fraternity of St Elizabeth of Hungary. Two of the boys tried their Franciscan vocation with us. One, Brother Michael Goh OFM, is still with us.

Sylvester, together with Brendan and George, promoted the Cursillo Movement in Singapore. This is a "Short Course of Christianity", founded by a group of laymen in Majorca, Spain, in 1944. The meetings were held in the friary. Immediately, I did a Cursillo and joined the team. I helped Sylvester also with Mass in his church of Our Lady of the Angels, and with St Anthony Devotions on Tuesdays. His Bluffers' Club of men helpers provided me with entertainment. They called themselves the Bluffers because they enjoyed telling poker-faced tall stories about themselves and one another.

Retreats for Religious

I joined Fulgence in his apostolate of retreats for the Sisters. I was already known to those Sisters who had attended the EAPI with me in 1972 and through *Sursum Corda*, the review for Religious. Fulgence reluctantly ceded to me his retreat apostolate.

I gave Retreats and Conferences to various groups of religious Sisters and Brothers in Singapore, East and West Malaysia, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Although there was more than enough to keep me occupied, I did miss my Chaplaincy in the Navy. I had to report my whereabouts to the Naval Office in Canberra once a year and managed to secure one berth as RC Chaplain in HMAS Stuart, which visited Christmas Island. My sister Gwen's son, Peter Gunn, was a sailor in the ship at that time.

Despite the difference in the age of us five friars and the vast variety in our experience, the community held together. Our Minister General in Rome had imposed Singapore on the Australian Province, which did not enthuse our friars. The Aitape Mission viewed it as syphoning off missionaries already needed there.

Fr Sylvester had spent six years as Superior of the Singapore community, and the Province could appoint him for another three. It wasn't perfectly clear whether the Province had appointed me to replace him as Superior, but the community accepted that I had been. All that they had to do was to abide for three years, and all could be back to normal for them.

I thoroughly enjoyed my brief stay in Singapore. It was exciting and colorful. The Church was vibrant, conversions were plentiful, the people were delightful, the food was delicious. I was keen to learn some Chinese but there were five languages to cope with: Mandarin, Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, and Hakka. I picked up a bit of them all, but I didn't always know which one the bit belonged to. After making some embarrassing mistakes, I gave up on Chinese.

Big news arrived on 29 October 1977, when I heard of my transfer to New Zealand.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NEW ZEALAND 1977 - 1983

After the Franciscans opened St Francis Retreat House in Mount Roskill, Auckland, in 1940, a jeepney-load of American GIs on R & R, Rest and Recreation leave, thought they had found a nightclub. They were surprised when they met the friar in Franciscan habit at the main door. They asked him, "Is this a fancy-dress party?" The Brother quipped, "No. It's a Home for Unmarried Fathers!" Their finding us was providential because, after discovering us, groups of American Servicemen filled the House with retreatants.

St Francis Retreat House

In January 1977, I joined the community of friars who were all involved in running the Retreat House. School groups came in on the weekdays, except in school holidays.

With another friar, I conducted weekend retreats for parish groups. We took turns, so that one of us spoke in a parish at all Sunday Masses and collected the names and phone numbers of interested men and women. The other friar gave the talks, showed an instructive

movie on Saturday evening, conducted the Way of the Cross, heard Confessions, and celebrated the Masses.

Two Brothers provided the meals and served at the tables. We built an excellent team of volunteer ladies and some men to clean the house and bedrooms and to make the beds on the two weekdays that were free of retreatants. We had no paid staff. We asked the retreatants to donate whatever they could afford towards the expenses, which enabled even the poorest of parishioners to make an annual retreat. We couldn't cover all expense that way, but two splendid ladies ran an annual very successful Appeal for the Retreat House that covered the gap.

Local phone calls were free in New Zealand. I spent hours phoning those parishioners who had given us their name and phone number. In my six years, we managed to fill the retreat House every scheduled weekend with thirty adult retreatants from all of Auckland's parishes.

When there was no retreat for a parish, I could fit in an occasional Retreat for Religious. But there was no opening in the RNZN, the Royal New Zealand Navy, for an Australian Reserve Chaplain.

Franciscan lay people

I mentioned the Third Order Secular of St Francis when I was Editor of the *Franciscan Newsletter* at Waverley in 1965, also when I established a Third Order local Fraternity in Singapore in 1975. In Auckland in 1978, the friars handed over the local Third Order Fraternity to me as the Spiritual Director. About ten members had the freedom of the Retreat House, were happy with their own company, and wanted no one to join them. They weren't prepared for a seismic upheaval.

When Pope Paul VI approved and confirmed the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order on 24 June 1978, he thereby abrogated the Third Order Rule of Leo XIII, so it was no longer appropriate for the Franciscan formation of the laity.

The Secular Franciscan Order is described in the new Rule as “an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities, the brothers, and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive to perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession, they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this Rule approved by the Church.”

The new Rule structured the international Order in national fraternities comprised of regional fraternities, which were comprised of local fraternities. The National Fraternity of Oceania was comprised of six Regional Fraternities in Australia, plus one in New Zealand, and one in Singapore.

In New Zealand, there were already some established OFM-assisted local Franciscan Third Order Fraternities: in Palmerston North, Christchurch, and Dunedin. The Capuchins assisted two local Fraternities, one in Henderson, and the other in Wellington. The new Rule overtook everyone, but the seculars accepted it wholeheartedly. In accord with the Rule, they constituted the Regional Fraternity of New Zealand in the National Fraternity of Oceania.

Franciscan Evenings

While giving the weekend retreats, I found many people who were looking for more than Sunday Mass to nurture their spiritual life. I invited them to join a Franciscan Evening after the retreat on Sunday evening. It was their introduction to the Secular Franciscan Order. I'll refer to it from now on by its acronym: SFO. Many women and men showed interest in the SFO, so groups sprang up in Auckland and five new local Fraternities were eventually established. I spiritually assisted all of them and loved them all. In accordance with their new Rule of 1978, they were no longer directed by a friar priest, but their elected Minister and Council directed the Fraternity.

The Franciscan Education Fund

Our OFM Province covered both New Zealand and Australia and many of our friars were New Zealanders, whom we called Kiwis after the flightless native bird, their national emblem. We were keen to foster more vocations and to cover the costs of their Franciscan formation. Fr Mel Cotter OFM was in charge of the Provincial Franciscan Education and Building Fund and handed over to me his task of collecting donations from the benefactors in New Zealand. I enjoyed driving and flying up and down the emerald-green Shaky Isles and made lifelong friends among the very generous benefactors.

The Serra Club

A group that I pioneered in New Zealand was the Serra Club, composed of Catholic laymen who were dedicated to promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I was determined not to take advantage of these fine men and their wives as a pool of benefactors to the Franciscan Education Fund. I never told them about it. They were splendid friends who supported my Franciscan priesthood and religious life.

I noted a difference between my Australian and New Zealand friends. The New Zealanders were loyal letter writers while I lived overseas, whereas the Australians didn't keep up correspondence, but whenever I met them again, it was as though I'd never been away. But there was a world of difference between Australians and New Zealanders. My Australian forebears hobbled off the ships, carrying their chains, but the forebears of the New Zealanders alighted on the fair shores with their grand pianos.

Call to Rome

When the OFM General Assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order, American Fr Benet Fonck, made his pastoral visit to New Zealand in 1979, he was impressed by what I was doing with the SFO and suggested that I accompany him in Rome as Vice-General Assistant. I assured him that my OFM Province would never agree to that. Fr Benet visited New Zealand a second time and repeated his suggestion, with no more assurance from me that the Province would ever release me. But Benet was not lacking in chutzpah. Without my knowing, he asked again the Australian Minister Provincial and got a stronger rebuff. On his return to Rome, Benet put his case to the OFM Minister General. In March 1983, I received a Letter of Obedience from the Minister General, requiring my attendance in the General Curia.

If only Mum had lived to know about this. I had a sense of foreboding that I would lose either Mum or Dad while I was on holidays in Sydney in January 1983. I celebrated Mum's Requiem Mass on 17 January at Our Lady of Lourdes, their church in Baulkham Hills South. Dad said a prayer that his daughter Margaret had the presence of mind to record: "Thank you, Lord, for relieving my wife from her agonizing pain and suffering. Condition both of us to accept your will in all things. Help us to accept death and take us out of this world of sin and suffering into your loving care, for all eternity."

The Franciscan Family

Before I launch into recording the fourteen years that I spent in Rome, I feel the need to briefly explain the Franciscan Family that I became thoroughly involved in.

I shall make passing references to various Franciscan groups, which may confuse anyone who knows little about the Franciscans. I hope that I don't lose anyone's attention while I attempt to explain the complexity of the Franciscan Family, which includes the Franciscan First, Second and Third Orders.

OFM (The three branches of the First Order of Friars Minor)

I was professed in one branch of the First Order of Friars Minor, simply called the Franciscans or the OFMs.

There are two other branches of the First Order of Friars Minor. The Church's Code of Canon Law in 1983 describes them as religious institutes. A religious institute is a society in which the members pronounce public vows and live a fraternal life in common. The members live according to their own law. Their vows are either perpetual or temporary. Temporary vows are to be renewed when the time elapses. (Canon 607)

I will often mention these two other branches. The friars of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin are referred to as the Capuchins. Those of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual are referred to as the Conventuals. All three branches follow the Rule of St Francis of Assisi, approved by Pope Honorius III in 1223. "The rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of their own, and in chastity." Their complicated history explains their separate development, but I'll not attempt to include that here.

OSC (The Order of St Clare, the Second Franciscan Order)

I will also mention the Poor Clares of the Order of Saint Clare of Assisi (OSC), called the Second Franciscan Order. Pope Innocent IV approved their Rule in 1253: "The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters is this: to observe the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without property and in chastity." I have visited the Sisters in many countries, but those whom I know best are in Bethlehem Monastery, Campbelltown NSW. As contemplatives, they do not have an apostolate outside the monastery. Another Order of Poor Clares, the Sisters of St Clare, combine the contemplative and the apostolic

life. In Australia, they began in Waverley, NSW, in 1883, and moved to North Richmond, NSW, in 2018.

SFO (The Secular Franciscans of the Third Franciscan Order)

I need to explain the Third Order of St Francis at greater length, because there is the Secular Third Order and the Regular (or Religious) Third Order. First, I'll explain the Secular Third Order and the various groups for young people and children whom it fosters.

Generally speaking, associations whose members live in the world but share in the spirit of some religious institute are known as Third Orders. They lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, under the overall direction of the same institute. (Canon 303)

They are associations of the Christian faithful, either of clergy or laity, or of clergy and laity together. They "strive by common effort to promote a more perfect life... and to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit." (Canon 298)

I have been involved with the Secular Third Order of St Francis since 1965. Pope Paul VI renamed it as the Secular Franciscan Order in 1978, when he approved its new Rule after the Second Vatican Council: "they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church." Before 2011, it was called, in English, the SFO, but after 2011 it has used OFS in all languages, because that is the acronym of its official Latin title: *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*.

The new Rule structured the Order in local, regional, and national fraternities, and the international fraternity. The Lord has blessed me as being a Spiritual Assistant to all of these levels of the Secular Franciscan Order, which the reports of my official visits worldwide reflect.

YouFRA, GiFRA, JuFRA (English, Italian, Spanish)

In the accounts of my visits, I will also mention the groups of Franciscan Youth, whom the Secular Franciscan fraternities foster.

The Franciscan Youth is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi. They deepen their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order. (General Constitutions OFS, Art. 96.2)

"The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan family, requests from the competent secular leaders and religious superiors, respectively, fraternal animation and spiritual assistance." (General Constitutions OFS, Art. 96.6)

Araldi, Araldini (Italian)

In the groups of Franciscan Children, also fostered by the Secular Franciscans, children and pre-adolescents are initiated into the Franciscan experience. The SFO encourages them "to aim at the ideal of the perfect man realized in Jesus Christ, the Word made man, and lived by St Francis of Assisi." (SFO National Council, Italy)

"The formation of groups of children should be encouraged. With the help of a pedagogy and an organization suitable to their age, these children should be initiated into a knowledge and love of the Franciscan life." (General Constitutions OFS, Art. 25)

TOR (The Religious Franciscans of the Third Franciscan Order)

Historically, the Regular Third Order developed out of the Secular Third Order, when followers of St Francis formed separate communities of lay men or women who lived by a religious Rule.

"This is the form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St Francis: to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity." (Rule of 1982, approved by Pope John Paul II.)

In 1447, a papal decree united groups of Third Order hermits who dated from the earliest Franciscan years and founded the Franciscan Third Order Regular of friars (TOR). The TOR, together with the three branches of the First Order, is responsible for spiritual and pastoral assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order.

The Franciscan Third Order Regular of women comprises hundreds of religious institutes of Franciscan Sisters. They observe the Regular Third Order Rule and their own Constitutions, and distinguish themselves by their own institute's acronym, such as FMM for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

There are also some Third Order Regular institutes of religious Brothers who are not the same as the friars of the Third Order Regular (TOR) who spiritually assist the Secular Franciscans along with the friars of the Franciscan First Order. Complicated? Yes!

The Franciscan Family also includes Franciscan Secular Institutes: "A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful living in the world strive for the perfection of charity and work for the sanctification of the world especially from within" (Canon 710). One example is the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, of both men and women.

ANGLICAN FRANCISCANS

The Anglicans are not members of the Catholic Franciscan Family, but they form a Franciscan Family of their own, including friars, Poor Clares, Sisters, and laity. The Catholic Franciscans foster mutual fraternal relations with the Anglican Franciscans.

Anglican Franciscans date from the 1920s. The Society of Saint Francis (SSF) is an international Franciscan religious order of men within the Anglican Communion. The SSF is the main recognized Anglican Franciscan Order, but there are also other Franciscan orders in the Anglican Communion.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ROME 1984 – 1997

Vice General Spiritual Assistant SFO 1984

“Set me adrift in a sea of hope -- I’ll set my sail to a new horizon.” I received this card from a well-wisher on my way to Rome. It expressed my sentiments perfectly.

As a parting gift, Betty White in Auckland gave me an enameled tile of St Francis with her message: “Go out from here into the beginning of a new challenge, with ascending joy, radiating love, looking to the future – all the tomorrows, living in Christ – confident of the backup and support of the SFO Family.”

I didn’t manage to get to Rome until January 1984. I left Sydney, perspiring at 42 degrees, and arrived in Rome, freezing at zero. Fr Benet Fonck whisked me off to the OFM General Curia, in Via Santa Maria Mediatrix, 25. Fr John Vaughn OFM, our Minister General, greeted me warmly. The first thing I needed was a key. I should have asked the Porter in Italian, “Vorrei una chiave” (“May I have a key”), but what I said instead was, “Voglio una schiava” (“I want a slave-girl.”). What was the Porter to make of this outlandish Australian newcomer? Fr Benet quickly took me under his wing and showed me to my room and then to the SFO Office.

The first word processors had just been installed in the General Curia and we had to teach ourselves. There was more to them than a typewriter, and the Curia’s two Translators were having problems. Regina, a delightful Spanish-French lady, pleaded with the more composed Swiss translator, “Miriam! Disastro!”. On another day, Regina came to work, distraught, weeping, “Wolfi has died!” I was so sorry. “Who was Wolfi?”, I asked. “Wolfgang Amadeus, my poodle!”

In 1984, I was set on a rollercoaster ride and enjoyed the steep learning curves. Never a dull moment while mastering Mass and Divine Office and conversation in Italian. For a brief time, I excused myself for not speaking the language, but people would have no more of that. “Miracolo!” “It’s a miracle! We can understand you!”, riposted the women.

Working in the Office, organizing files and archives, I spent a lot of time at the computer terminal, learning word processing and testing its capabilities. For a start, I translated the new SFO Ritual from Latin into English.

With Benet, I attended the meeting of CIOFS, the SFO International Presidency in Rome, in November 1984.

Eurail Pass - 1984

My Provincial Minister generously gave me a Eurail Pass for my first holiday in Italy. I spent twenty-one days, from 19 August to 8 September 1984, and made ample notes. I stopped over in Milan and Florence, Luxemburg, and Aachen, with visits to Cologne and Maastricht, then stopped over in Stommeln and Bad Godesberg, with visits to Bonn and Koblenz, along the Rhine and Mozelle Rivers. I stopped over in Munich and Venice, where my Eurail Pass ended.

Benet was keen to resume his pastoral visits and attendance at national chapters, and left me to manage the Office, but he let me cut my baby teeth in conducting a Pastoral Visit to the SFO National Council of the Philippines.

Mass with the Pope 1985

In Rome in January 1985, snow had frozen into slippery ice in the Piazza of St Peter's Basilica. I set out with my friend, Fr Fred Doll OFM, the Canadian who managed the new computer system, for early morning Mass with Pope John Paul II, in his private chapel. Under my winter habit, I wore my long Uggs woolen-lined boots, gift of the New Zealanders.

This was the first of five occasions when I had a photo taken with the Pope. When he shook hands, he was already looking at the next person. Much as I tried, I never caught his eye, but he became so used to meeting me that he called me "the Orstrarleeen." I noticed that when JP II was off camera, he appeared to be gruff, but rose splendidly to every public occasion.

We celebrated Australia Day in 1985 with a formal evening at the home of the Chargé d'Affaires. One exotic matron asked me what we were celebrating. "Signora, we're celebrating Australia Day." "Oh", she gushed, "I love those young men in their lederhosen!"

In the SFO Office, I was working on my segment of the new SFO General Constitutions, Chapter II. We drew on the material submitted from all over the world and we worked in Italian. It was a "helluva" job that took us ten years to finish!

Publications

The SFO office published the *Letter from Rome to the Assistants*, of sixteen pages. I put much time into producing the *Letter*, which I posted four times a year in English, French, Italian, and Spanish. Two other languages, German and Polish, were added later, when the respective National Spiritual Assistants helped with translation and distribution.

Our office in 1985 on the second level of the General Curia was very cramped. When the Office of the General Assistant for the Poor Clares vacated its location in a spacious parlor near the front door of the General Curia, I swiftly moved in while Benet was away. It took a week to put the office together again.

I had the pleasure of a few distractions. I gave an eight-day Retreat to the community of the Australian Sister Clara Condon MFIC, at Monte Verdi, and I was the Coordinator of the Liturgy at the General Chapter of the German Franciscan Sisters of Salzkotten, in their Motherhouse on Via Aurelia.

Our OFM General Chapter with elections was held in Assisi from 12 May till 22 June 1985. I was one of four Minutes Secretaries in the Plenary Sessions. Each of us wrote the Minutes in his own language, then together we composed one text in Italian, which was translated by others into Latin for the Official Acts of the General Chapter.

On 14 July 1985, the newly elected General Definitory (the counsellors of the Minister General) announced some appointments. The Minister General appointed me as the General Spiritual Assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order. Fr Benet sadly returned to his Province in the United States. I spent my annual holiday of three weeks as a pilgrim in the Holy Land and commended to the Lord all Secular Franciscans and their Spiritual Assistants, together with my family and friends.

I took part in meetings in Rome and elsewhere. In September, the SFO Presidency met at Sankt Pölten in Austria. In their meetings, the Presidency of CIOFS, that is, the International Council of the SFO, used five or more languages. I had to rely on off-the-cuff

translations of the languages that I didn't know.

I made Pastoral Visits to the Philippines, Hong Kong-Macao, Taiwan, and Korea, and attended the National Congress of the SFO of USA at San Diego, California, where 440 delegates participated.

In December 1985, the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants to the SFO elected me as Secretary for three years. We began to draft the Statutes of Assistance to the SFO, as requested by the four Franciscan Ministers General, which would help them and us in our future work.

I had a couple of days' rest in Sorrento, where the friary is in a 13th Century Benedictine cloister on the top of a cliff by the sea. I accompanied the friars to a Requiem Mass at Ravello. We followed the gorgeous Amalfi Coast road and called in at the Provincial House at Salerno. Three other peaceful intervals were provided by a retreat with the Italian friars at Capistrano, where "the swallows come back to", and privately at Bellegra, a retreat centre since the early 1700s, and in St Anthony's Hermitage, Monte Paolo, where Saint Anthony preached famously at an Ordination, without notice or notes.

On December 30, the Conference of General Assistants drew up the Statutes of the General Office of the SFO that affected the financing of the work of the OFM General Spiritual Assistant. It would require the SFO to cover the travel expenses involved in personally visiting the Secular Franciscans, rather than relating to them by a word processor in our office. "Typewriters" were obsolete! I had to balance the two aspects of my work, visiting and office work.

When we were out of our country in the festive season of Christmas and New Year, we realized what a gift our family and friends are. It did me good to hear from them at Christmas time.

A "light year" 1986

One of my star pupils at Padua College, Kedron, Australia, in 1964, thought that "a light year is a year that travels at 186,000 miles a second." 1986 was a light year!

In February, for the second year in succession, snow fell heavily for two days, and disrupted services in Rome for a week. Trees lost branches or fell under the weight of snow. I went out each morning to celebrate Mass with a small community of Italian Sisters who had a *pensione* (boarding house) just down the road from the General Curia. I gave the Sisters a short homily that took me all Saturday to prepare. Italian sermons can go on for half an hour. The Sisters were not accustomed to a homily of seven minutes, but before long they requested visiting Italian priests to follow my example. In my letters home, I added the translation of Italian words for the benefit of my brother Terry, who said I gave him a tough time using foreign words when he read my letters to Dad.

The Pallotine Church in Piazza S.Silvestro accommodated Australia Day Mass and Get-together. I was surprised to find so many Aussies who were living, working, or studying in Rome.

My Canadian friend, Fr Fred OFM, and I had the immense pleasure of a guided tour of the excavations under St Peter's Basilica. We who lived in Rome could accommodate that easily, but tourists had to give a bracket of dates between which they would be free. The

Office of the Excavations would ring them the day before. The Emperor Constantine filled-in the necropolis with earth to build the first basilica over St Peter's grave. The Vatican had excavated a part of that cemetery. We could walk through it just as it was originally, except that Constantine lopped off any high roofs to level the platform for the basilica.

During the Easter Triduum, I took a train to Morlupo for the baptism of baby Francesco in the Easter Vigil. The three-hour liturgy was an Italian happening that involved two vibrant choirs, one of children and the other of teenagers, plus the singing congregation, priests, instrumentalists, commentators, and readings galore, and a live lamb trussed up in a basket in front of the altar. Not a bleat out of the lamb or from Francesco, even though I nearly drowned him at the breath-stopping moment. The huge baroque jug wasn't practical.

To Australia and back 1986

In 1986, I had already spent three years in Rome, so I could take holidays in Australia. I made Pastoral Visits to Singapore and Malaysia on the way to Sydney and, on the way back, to Togo, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso in French-speaking West Africa. My Italian took French Leave, but I swiftly recalled it.

Roman Friends 1987

In 1987, the Irish Franciscans at St Isidore's College, Rome, invited us Aussies to celebrate St Patrick's Day with other guests, including Prince and Princess Orsini, Italian nobility. I regret that I wasn't close enough to pass the pasta to the Princess. All my Princesses, Ambassadors and my 50th Birthday had come at once, and I was back to dunking my crusty bread roll into my bowl of coffee. Man cannot live on caviar alone.

Giuseppe and Rosina: It wasn't easy to make friends outside the Curia in Rome, but I met a couple of my own age who had been married in the Curia's church and had come to find a friar to celebrate their 25th Anniversary Mass. By chance, I came across them in the church. I was away for the Mass and asked another friar to oblige, but the couple invited me later to meet their three grownup children, Giampaolo, Carlo, and Elisabetta. Like their secularized generation, they were taken aback by their parents' invitation of a priest to their home, but soon we became friends. After then, I knew not only Giuseppe (Pepe) and Rosina Saccà and their children, but also five other couples and their families, who invited me to celebrate with them the Pasquetta, the day after Easter Sunday, when families go for a picnic in the country.

Sergio and Rosa: Sergio and Rosa lived in a small flat next to Pepe and Rosina in a densely populated suburb of Rome, but their "weekender" had room for 150 guests. I celebrated Mass on the 25th Anniversary of their wedding in their country home that Sergio had built all by himself. The whole area was full of spacious homes built without the permission of any authority. The owner-builders paid a stiff fine for their "abuse" and ended up with a palazzo at a fraction of the price that it would have cost if they had gone through the endless bureaucratic red tape. That's life in Italy!

Ivana and Raffaella: I knew another dear family through the SFO in Rome. Rafaella and her mother Ivana were dedicated Secular Franciscans. Her father, Ofelo, was cordial. I visited

them at their home nearby and in *Nettuno*, where the sacred (St Maria Goretti's basilica) and the profane (the remains of Nero's sumptuous weekender) shared popular fame.

Rest in Peace 1988

My Dad turned eighty-eight on 2 April 1987 and went to live with his daughter Margaret, whom I had always known as Marge. He had been staying with Margaret at Mount Ousley NSW for nearly a year after Mum died, and he could no longer live in his own home at Baulkham Hills. Terry rang and told me that Dad had not been well. I rang Dad, expecting that it might be my last opportunity, but no one could be sure that it was his last illness. We decided that I would not attempt to rush back then or in the event of his death. Margaret let me know that our father had passed away on Sunday, 21 February 1988, at 2 a.m. Australian time. There was no lack of support for me at such a time. I attended a Day of Recollection on that Sunday with a hundred English-speaking members of the Franciscan Family, friars, and Sisters, many of whom offered Mass for my father and our family.

My greatest consolation was in knowing that Dad was a man of faith. He shared a prayer with me that I will always remember. "Not a day goes by that God doesn't do something special for me." I heard this from a frail old man who was blind and deaf by then, and I thank God that this man was my father.

Brother Quentin Duffy FMS, Superior General of the Marist Brothers at the time, and Principal at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill in my schooldays, invited me in 1988 to the Marist Brothers' Generalate in EUR, Mussolini's impressive New Rome. EUR stands for the Universal Exposition in Rome, that opened in 1942.

Appointment as Chapter Secretary 1989

On 10 March 1989, I found six bagsful of mail waiting after my long absence from Rome. When I sat down at the computer terminal in my office, I had forgotten how to turn it on!! That was the sign of a good holiday. I celebrated the Mass of the Chrism with the Pope and a thousand other priests in St Peter's Basilica. The liturgies there were always grandiose, but I limited my intake to about two a year. Even the Mass at our General Curia with a crowd of concelebrants tended to be starchy. I was more at ease in my daily Mass with the Italian Sisters down the road.

Don't come to Rome in August, when a hellish Sirocco wind blows northward from the Sahara desert. That explains why the Romans abandon Rome and take their "ferragosto" holidays away from there.

In 1989, I received an official word that our Minister General had appointed me as Secretary to the Order's General Chapter, in San Diego, California, from 30 May till 2 July 1991. That gave me eighteen months to organize the Chapter but without relief in the Office of the SFO General Spiritual Assistant.

General Chapter - Proximate Preparations 1990

As the Secretary of the upcoming OFM General Chapter, I attended the meeting of the Presidents of the Conferences of the OFM Provincial Ministers, held in the General Curia

in February 1990.

My extra job as Secretary of the General Chapter meant that I had to ask for help in the SFO General Spiritual Assistant's Office. Fr Reynaldo Brizuela OFM was appointed Vice General Spiritual Assistant in 1990. I knew Reynaldo in Mexico, where he was the National Spiritual Assistant to the SFO. He stayed in the SFO Office until the end of the Chapter.

From June to August 1990, Rome was full of visitors, including those from Australia and New Zealand. Aussie-roos can hop over continents, but who thought Kiwis can't fly? Since I was often away, I regretted that I missed seeing visitors.

Although my friends in the General Curia quipped that I stayed at home only long enough to change my underwear, I spent a whole month of 1990 in the SFO Office, working through the accumulation of correspondence and preparation for the fast-approaching OFM General Chapter. Fr Reynaldo dealt with all that he could then left for his annual holidays.

Again, after a brief and exhausting spell in the SFO Office, trying to get a million things out of the way, I left for San Diego, California, to begin the proximate preparations for the OFM General Chapter, to be held in June in 1991. I returned to the Curia in Rome in time to celebrate Christmas.

Having returned from San Diego to Rome, I suffered from jetlag as it is harder on the body's system to fly from west to east than from east to west. I'm told that's because it's easier to travel with the spin of the earth than against it. Mr Mal Rafferty, my contact with the University of San Diego and the man in charge of preparations there for the Chapter, visited us in the General Curia in Rome, in January. Over a weekend, we settled many points and arranged for my next visit to San Diego late in February 1991, when most things would be finalized.

The newly elected Presidency of CIOFS, the SFO International Council, met in Rome in January 1991. We heard about the outbreak of hostilities in the Persian Gulf and sent a telegram to the Pope and another to the Secretary of the United Nations, expressing our support of their initiatives for peace.

The preparation for the General Chapter took up most of my time, but it was a valuable experience since it gave me, as nothing else could, an insight into the size and complexity of my Franciscan Order, with its 19,000 members in all corners of the world.

I will report later in detail on the OFM General Chapter in San Diego USA in the section headed **1991**, under **VISITS 1984-1997**.

After the Chapter and in Rome again, I walked off the plane from South Africa into a day-long meeting of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants of the SFO. The four of us worked very well together. After a few days of catching up in the Office, I joined the Presidency of CIOFS, the International Council of the SFO, for a week's meeting. I celebrated, on 4 November 1991, the feast day of my Patron, St Charles Borromeo, with the three other General Assistants in another day-long meeting at our General Curia, in Via S.Maria Mediatrix. We had an Italian feast the next day when we attended the opening of the Academic Year at the Antonianum, my Order's University in Rome.

Frequent Flyer 1992

After the visit to Argentina in 1992, I settled in the Office for a while. Two piles of mail demanded attention and kept me busy through Lent.

On the Eve of Pentecost Sunday in 1992, on the feast of our Australian Province, Fr Maurice West OFM presided at Sung Vespers at the General Curia in Rome, and I had the privilege of flanking him. I'm not an enthusiast of the solemn liturgies of our General Curia and usually manage to keep off stage. I'm happy with my daily Mass in the little chapel of the Italian Sisters nearby. We get along together, with less formality.

From Lithuania in 1992, I returned immediately to a meeting in our General Curia of Franciscan volunteers for the Commonwealth of Independent States and for Albania. We learnt more about the Church in the countries of the former Soviet Union, with a view to resurrect the SFO in those countries. It was already implanted, long before Communism.

I celebrated the 1992 Christmas Midnight Mass in Rome with the Franciscan Sisters who reside in their Motherhouse at Via Lorenzo Rocci. They are of the same Institute as our Kedron Sisters in Brisbane.

Summer 1993

New Year 1993 found me more at home in the Curia than usual. It would have been nice if being at home meant having a quiet time and doing all the leisurely things that one would love to do, but the work for the SFO was constant and demanding. At the end of January, the twelve members of the Presidency of CIOFS, met at Casa Leonori in Rome and prepared for the SFO General Chapter to be held in Mexico City in October.

In Rome, we had heady celebrations at the Antonianum for the beatification of John Duns Scotus, the famous Franciscan Theologian who gave us headaches in our student days. On 20 March 1993, we joined the Pope in a grand liturgical celebration in St Peter's Basilica.

September was the month for ploughing through office work, apart from the three weekends in Sorrento, supplying Masses in English for the end-of-season tourists. After October, I put in another super-concentrated week at the SFO Office. Fr Peter Cantwell OFM from Australia visited the Curia with a large group of friars in charge of Franciscan formation, after their long seminar in Assisi.

Summer that year was relentless. I stayed indoors, tried to ignore the exhausting heat and humidity, and tackled office work while perspiration dripped off my arms.

Bronchitis 1994

We were warned early to expect a virulent strain of flu that winter. I came across it first at a meeting in Bavaria, where one friar had a sepulchral cough. I said to myself, "Oh no! I can do without that!" I had been free of colds for some time but for double security I presented myself for vaccination. Almost at once, I had my first bout of bronchitis that lasted two months. I blamed the vaccination, but it was just as well, because I had no fever.

I had done my utmost to keep clear of doctors but that time it had to be. The doctor was lavish on having X-rays and tests, and he prescribed antibiotics and aerosols. I lost my voice until the medicines ran out. I was back to normal for Christmas Midnight Mass with the

Franciscan Kedron Sisters at Via Rocci. Two days later, the second bout of bronchitis struck me, which lasted a month. Fortunately, I had had no travelling commitments since November. Incidentally, the doctors in Rome were excellent but the standard of general hospitals let them down abysmally. I was spared of that experience.

Curial base 1995

After visits to South America, I returned to the General Curia on 22 March and made a valiant assault on the office backlog. In those years, the General Curia served as the base to which I returned after making a series of Pastoral Visits. The frequency of visits can be gauged by the little of common interest that I could write about them, and of the brief time that I spent in Rome between visits.

In my frequent absence from the Curial community, I had to arrange for a friar priest in the Curia to celebrate daily Mass for the Italian Sisters down the road. The Sisters had secured me officially as their Chaplain in the Roman Diocese. I suppose that our Minister General knew!

On Holy Thursday in Rome in 1995, I joined the Pope and a few thousand other priests in the Morning Mass of the Chrism, in St Peter's Basilica. Two days afterwards, the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants held our annual "long meeting", from 22 to 25 April. Then the Presidency of CIOFS met in Monte Cucco, Rome, from 28 April till 4 May 1995. Having both meetings so close together made the going harder.

Preparations 1996

I spent January and February of 1996 in the SFO Office in our OFM General Curia, Via Santa Maria Mediatrice, 25, Rome, making readjustments and preparations. The readjustments were necessary when two Ministers Provincial replaced two of the four General Spiritual Assistants. I needed to prepare for lengthy visits during the year. Preparations assume much time, but a slip could leave me stranded overseas for weeks.

The Presidency of the SFO International Council (CIOFS) met at Casa Leonori in Rome, in February 1996. This was the Order's Executive Council. It included the Minister General, the Vice Minister General, six Councillors representing language areas, the Representative of Franciscan Youth and the four General Spiritual Assistants. They met at least once a year for a week of intensive work, more so when preparing for a General Chapter.

St Isidore's College, Rome

I made another quick visit on 15 March 1996, to St Isidore's College, Rome, where twenty Irish Secular Franciscans were engaged in a course of Franciscan Formation. We discussed "Secular Franciscan Spirituality for Today". I could have done with a full day to do justice to the topic, but they gave me their generous attention.

The Carabinieri

Just when the end of my twelve-year term of office as General Spiritual Assistant was in sight, I found other interesting avenues opening. It took years of language practice and, I suppose, a lot of unconscious acculturation, before one could handle many things. For example, I shared my experience and ideas about the lay apostolate at the request of the National Vice-President of the Association of the Carabinieri, Italy's paramilitary police force, who was in charge of the volunteer services (the lay apostolate!) of the Association's members. It was fascinating to discover that we faced the same difficulties and that we could help each other.

After the summer holidays in 1996, I had time to attend to the SFO Office in Rome: I wrote reports of visits, answered correspondence, attended meetings, wrote minutes, published my *Letter to the Assistants*, and enjoyed a taste of stability.

The friars of our General Houses in Rome spent a weekend in November 1996 at the Sanctuary of Mater Divini Amoris to celebrate our third annual Chapter of Mats together with our Minister General, Fr Hermann Schalück OFM. "Chapter of Mats" refers to an early general gathering of St Francis and five thousand friars in Assisi after 1221. "Mats" were makeshift shelters made of reed-mats. Nowadays, we call a large gathering of friars a Chapter of Mats. In 1996, it was a rare opportunity to meet a cross-section of our Order, especially the student friars at the Antonianum University.

My Patronal Feast Day

The friars in Italy didn't celebrate their Birthday but they did celebrate their Patronal Feast Day. My Franciscan feast day was on 4 November, the Memorial of St Charles Borromeo. The Basilica of St Ambrose and St Charles, on Via del Corso in Rome, buzzed like a beehive on 4 November 1996, when the priests, whose names were either Charles, Carl, Carlo, Karl, or Karol, concelebrated Mass in the Basilica on our Patron's Feast Day and prayed especially for Karol Wojtyła ("Voytoowa"), better known as Pope John Paul II.

The Presidency of the SFO International Council (CIOFS) met in December 1996 at Monte Cucco, Rome, for the first time after their election. These meetings were always intense, but we managed to have a pleasant time along with the workload.

I accompanied my Minister General, Fr Hermann Schalück OFM, on 21 December 1996 to meet the OFM-Assisted Council of the Italian Secular Franciscans at their Centre in Via delle Mura Aurelie. I insisted that Fr Hermann do all the talking as they had heard from me many times, and this was his first visit.

I made the usual trek down to St Peter's Square to gaze at the larger-than-life Crib and the massive Christmas Tree and say a special prayer for my relatives and friends, and all Secular Franciscans and their Spiritual Assistants, that they might experience the love, joy, and peace that only the Christ Child, our Saviour, could bring them. I celebrated Christmas Midnight Mass, as I had often done, with the Franciscan Sisters at Via Rocci. A large crowd of local people attended, so it was a typically Italian event, with tiny Bambino Gesù carried in

procession before Mass and laid in the manger under the altar.

End of an Era 1997

Lent in Rome

The proverbial “three bags full” of mail that had accumulated in my absence of six weeks waited patiently after my home visit in 1997. Even so, industrial strife paralyzed the postal service into Italy since the beginning of the year. There had been such a mountain of bags at the airport with nowhere to store them that they were all destroyed!

Tragedy

For over ten years, I enjoyed the friendship of the family of Giuseppe and Rosina Saccà and of their friends. I took Holy Communion on Sundays to Pepe’s mother who lived near the General Curia. Tragically, in a heavy storm in August, Rosina was killed in a car accident while Pepe, the driver, suffered injuries. I celebrated Requiem Mass for Rosina and for the family and their friends in the General Curia’s church, where I had first met the couple. My first and only wedding in Italian was in 1988, when Pepe and Rosina’s son, Giampaolo, married his Rosa in the same church of our General Curia. I was more nervous than they were.

Australian visitors

In October 1997, I enjoyed six visitors from Australia, none of whom, regretfully, could go to Assisi because of the disaster caused by the recent earthquakes. We felt those quakes in Rome, but no serious structural damage eventuated here. It was a dreadful feeling, knowing that somewhere else people were at the epicentre.

The SFO held its General Elective Chapter in Rome in July 1997. A lengthy preparation had led up to it.

On returning to the OFM General Curia, I met for the first time the newly elected Minister General, Giacomo Bini OFM, and the General Definitors (counsellors of the Minister General). They told us not to expect any changes in the curial staff until September, so it was business as usual till then. I spoke with the Minister General on 15 June who confirmed my provisional plans for a sabbatical year in the Holy Land in 1998.

End of my years in Rome

On 10 December 1997, I received from the Minister General the document, sent to the Australian Provincial Minister and to the Guardian of the OFM General Curia, which confirmed my return to the jurisdiction of the Australian Provincial Minister. Among other things, it meant that the Australian Province would need to cover the expenses of my Sabbatical Year. The months were racing away. I needed to stop more often and just be aware of the present moment and enjoy God’s presence in it, as well as the presence of the splendid people whom I met. One of the conditions of my Franciscan life was that I met many fine people briefly, knowing that I would never see them again. I became acutely aware of this when the end of my time in Rome was in sight.

Appointment of General Spiritual Assistant to the OFS

On 1 October 1997, our Minister General announced a list of changes of staff in the General Curia. My successor would be Fr Nils Thompson OFM, from Albuquerque, New Mexico USA. I had much to do with the choice of Fr Nils. The SFO General Minister, Emanuela de Nunzio, an Italian lady, had requested a North American friar, fluent in English and Spanish, and with experience of spiritual assistance to the SFO. Fr Nils and the SFO Office received a helper. He was Fr Ary Pintarelli OFM, from Brazil, who had already been in the General Curia as the Portuguese translator.

Handing over

Fr Nils arrived at the General Curia on 31 December, and would assume his responsibilities on 1 January 1998, his sixty-third Birthday Anniversary. This arrangement, announced by the General Definitory on 27 October, allowed me only ten days in which to introduce him to the requirements of the job, so I trusted that he would be a quick learner, if not a wizard!

From the Netherlands, where I had helped the National Council to formulate their National Statutes, I returned to Rome in time to celebrate Midnight Mass in 1997 with the Franciscan Sisters at Via Lorenzo Rocci. Regretfully, that would be my last Christmas with the Sisters. After my visits to Germany and the Netherlands, I would be grounded until the one-way flight to Tel Aviv on 11 January 1998.

Addio, General Spiritual Assistant's Office!

For the last time from the OFS Office in Rome, with profound sadness, I wished all Secular Franciscans and their Spiritual Assistants throughout the world, together with my family, relatives and friends, a peaceful Christmas Season and God's choicest blessings in the New Year. As they have been saying for thousands of years, "Next year, in Jerusalem!"