

Elizabeth Moriarty RSCJ

5 February 2013

We are here to remember and honour a great woman and Religious of the Sacred Heart, Elizabeth Moriarty known as Betty. In preparing this eulogy I have drawn on her personal records and the memories shared with me by RSCJ.

Betty was born in Melbourne in 1916 of Irish and New Zealand parents, the fourth child in a family of 2 brothers and 6 sisters. Her mother died when she was 13, an experience of loss that she felt throughout her life. She wrote that her mother's death "matured me fast as I helped my eldest sister "bring up" the youngest children". Her father, a strong personality, is said to have taught his children to stand up for themselves. Her primary education was at the Presentation Convent and secondary with the Faithful Companions of Jesus and at Sacre Coeur Melbourne.

Four of the daughters entered religious life, Betty and Agnes the Society of the Sacred Heart and Mary and Pat the Little Company of Mary. Their aunt, Agnes O'Connell, was already a Religious of the Sacred Heart. Betty entered the Society at Rose Bay in 1934, made her first vows there in 1937 and her final profession at Sacre Coeur Melbourne in 1943. After some teacher training, she taught at Stuartholme in Brisbane and Kincoppal at Elizabeth Bay. One former pupil remembers her as firm but kind, a teacher who made her classes very interesting. Another recalls her kindness and sensitivity on the death of a loved brother in the war.

A significant chapter of her life began in 1953 when she was sent to Japan. For the next 13 years she taught in Tokyo, mainly in the International School of the Sacred Heart. In 1966-1968 she was Dean of the English Department at the Song Sim College for Women at Chun Cheon in Korea. She undertook a Diploma of Theology at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila before returning to Korea as Principal of the Sacred Heart International School for 2 years. She returned to Japan until a new phase of her life began with involvement in the Movement for a Better World from 1973-1977. In her curriculum vitae, she describes her work in this movement as "all over India" and "all over the Philippines".

The call to return to Australia came in 1978. Betty did not return by the most direct route. She records many countries visited en route "studying the spirit of the Society and prayer movements". She wrote about what she hoped to do in Australia:

- To work for the renewal of the Church by giving retreats and seminars
- To offer seminars of discernment on the charism and mission of specific congregations
- To visit and share with small communities in isolated areas.

The time of transition back to the ANZ Province was very challenging for Betty and for RSCJ. After 26 years in the different Asian cultures, she struggled with community life in Australia and did not hesitate to address the lacks she found in us.

For the next three years, she records her ministry as “renewal for religious, all over Australia, New Zealand and Fiji”. Her love of all things Asian found a new outlet in Melbourne when she worked at the Asian Bureau under the auspices of the Jesuits.

She was appointed Superior of the Karlaminda Community for 2 years, 1986-1987 where she was very clear that her role was to be in charge. Then Korea called again and she spent 2 more years in Seoul. After such broad international experiences, it is hard to imagine the transition to her next ministry of pastoral care in Esk, a small town in the Brisbane Valley where she spent 2 years. During this time, she made contacts with the Korean community in Brisbane and maintained these links over many years. Mention must be made of her time living in outback Australia, helping various religious communities and working with Aboriginal people.

Illness led to a period of recuperation at Kerever Park where she then joined the Community. During this time, she found outlets for ministry being particularly active with the Christian Meditation Community in the Southern Highlands, with Amnesty International and with the Jewish community. She was very ecumenically minded and attended the Jewish feasts at Bowral with great regularity even when she was living in Sydney. Her letter writing and involvement with Amnesty International was of formidable proportions. She was always impressive in her zeal, energy and single mindedness. Finally, when the older community at Kerever Park closed, she moved to Karlaminda in 1999 for ongoing care. In 2002 a request came from the Korean Province for RSCJ to teach English to younger members. She was confident that, at the age of about 87, she had the stamina and necessary capabilities to respond. She accepted the decision of the Provincial Council that this was not a viable option.

So far, I have traced events and developments in Betty’s life and ministry. Memories shared with me reveal the real person. One who knew her in Sydney before she went to Japan in 1953 and later in Japan said there was one word to describe Betty: bigness. She was big in her

presence, her heart and her soul. All her gifts were on a large scale; she had no time for small mindedness. Her opinions and ideas were bold and strong. Her sense of mission motivated her teaching in Tokyo and Korea and she was passionate about prison reform in the Philippines.

Another recalled that during the 90'S, Betty, when in Brisbane, regularly convened reunions with the Korean community: alumnae, relatives, students of her years of work in their country. Whenever Betty organized such meetings, she did so with style. Duchesne College laid out carpets red or otherwise for her, whatever was available. It felt as if they were receiving a visit from a senior government official. These were great gatherings with limousine arrivals and much love, laughter and reunion.

Another RSCJ admired the intrepid courage and determination with which she travelled the globe, promoting the Movement for a Better World and journeying around Outback Australia giving retreats to religious in isolated areas. It may have been her zeal and understanding of prophetic ministry which made her appear overbearing and demanding in community where she must have felt restricted.

I was touched during a conversation with another RSCJ because I felt Betty was being revealed with honesty and sensitivity. As for all of us, there were two sides to her: on the one hand, she could be demanding, more likely to give commands than make requests. I was often reminded of the TV character, Rumpole of the Bailey who would refer to his wife as "She who must be obeyed". But deep down there was a gentleness – that was the other side which became more evident as she mellowed in the later stages of her illness. Perhaps she found her true self. At Karlaminda when the Community Leader would quietly give her a direction, this strong willed woman would humbly acquiesce. Her overwhelming love of God was the main force of her life. She loved and lived her faith, was a deeply spiritual person. Another RSCJ wrote that she was a woman before her time as she struggled for women's place in the world - a woman of vision, no matter what the implications.

Several spoke of her devotion which was nourished from various sources. The Rosary was a central prayer, fifteen decades daily and, when a further five decades were proclaimed, this was an added joy for her. At the Little Sisters, the recitation of the Rosary was broadcast to the residents' rooms, something appreciated by Betty. One wrote of a special connection she had with Betty, "what might be called a common spiritual interest. Whenever I talked to her usually she or I would bring up the subject of *The Way of Divine Love*. She was concerned that interest

in it had waned". A later devotion was to the Divine Mercy, the picture in a central place in her room and a supply of leaflets ready to give her visitors.

Old age and the circumstances of living in an aged care facility brought frustration for Betty. Perhaps there was always an aloneness and sense of isolation which was felt more deeply at this stage of her life. At Karlaminda, her desire to travel continued when her physical strength did not allow this, something she could not always understand. Perhaps this disappointment was strongest when she could no longer visit her family. She placed great importance on seeing them, having been away from Australia for so many years. She struggled with pain and various symptoms and constantly sought further medical opinions, not always gaining the result she looked for.

When Karlaminda was closing, Betty was offered a place with the Little Sisters of the Poor at Randwick. Her response to this was very positive: there would be daily Mass, a chapel, the environment of a religious order. She moved there peacefully despite the cost of leaving a Society community. As the only RSCJ, there was a sense of isolation, eased by the daily visit of Nancy Fitzgerald and visits of others. She established a new way of connecting with RSCJ in the Province by sending cards for birthdays.

As we celebrate Betty's life to-day, she is being remembered with love and appreciation in Provinces where she served. An RSCJ from Japan wrote this: "I remember the joy she gave me when I came back to Japan and met her. With her characteristic accent and blue eyes, she spoke of her joys experienced in different parts of the world where she had been, I think it was Korea mainly. I got an impression she was young in spirit and shared her youthfulness in her missionary life here in the East. I was in Australia in 1980 for our Recyclage work in Sydney. I recall that she was full of enthusiasm about her involvement with the Aboriginal people. She showed me several pictures of Aboriginal art, saying that Aboriginal people have special gifts of seeing through the physical bodies to the interior reality. It was a revelation to me. She seemed to love these people with an insight into their spiritual gift. As I recall this now, I have a feeling that she herself was someone that saw through the visible reality to the inner gift of each person. During these last few years, she used to write often to our Provincial, sharing memories of Japan or the beauty of the nature around her room. May she find the full answer to her thirst of what is invisible, but beautiful in the heart of God."

We, Religious of the Sacred Heart, want to express our deep appreciation to the Little Sisters of the Poor and to the staff for their untiring kindness to Betty, the wonderful care they provided, their wholehearted acceptance of her, seeing to the heart of who she was. We thank you for keeping watch by her side for the last days of her life.

In conclusion, I give the final word to Betty, using the closing lines of a meditation she composed for a group she was guiding:

Feel enveloped in the unconditional love of the Father. Listen to Him in the depths of your heart. How do you feel?

Sunset is like this at the end of the day. It is surrounded in the mystery of His Creative Love. There will be a special sunset at the end of our lives too. Enfolded in His love, we can see the sunset now, but we believe in this mystery of heaven, which God has prepared for us.

Enjoy it! What a sunset!

Anne McGrath RSCJ