



Sister Alice Tobriner

(Sister Marian Leona)

May 17, 1922 – January 31, 2012

Based on Reflections by Sr. June Kearney

Reflecting on the life of Sister Alice Tobriner has been a delightful experience because she was imbued with the heart of a true adventurer; perhaps because she was born on the island of Oahu in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

The eldest of 3 daughters, she began her studies at the Academy of the Sacred Hearts, where she “received an outstanding education, and *years* of piano lessons” that enabled her to accompany her father, who played the cello.

“My wonderful teachers, Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, gave me a deep understanding of prayer in general and in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. My teachers in grades one through twelve were the most wonderful people in my life. My eighth grade teacher was a grandniece of Father Damien, and certainly influenced me deeply in terms of my religious vocation. The Sisters gave me an outstanding education which became the basis for my own interest in study and research. They recommended me for a scholarship to College of the Holy Names (when traveling through San Francisco they had become acquainted with our Holy Names Sisters at St. Joseph’s School).

With that very clear evidence of God’s Providence in my regard, I knew that my vocation would be fulfilled in the Holy Names Community, whose representatives I so admired during my 4 years at the College, such as, Sister Rose Emmanuella who was most influential in my thinking, not by what she said so much as by what she was. From then on, my adventures have never stopped.”

Her first teaching experiences occurred at St. Monica’s and St. Andrew’s High Schools in Southern California, followed by a summons to College of the Holy Names as Dean of Students for 8 years. Sr. Della Stanton recalls that, as a student, she was deeply impressed by Sr. Alice, who was a true mentor that inspired her greatly. Sr. Della shared this story:

“Probably the most unusual and scariest thing we ever did was when I taught her to drive a car. I was a senior at the new college. Driving up Mountain Boulevard, above the College, was nail-biting to say the least when she first began. Good student, though!”

Sr. Alice went then to Marin Catholic High School where she taught a sociology course to the seniors. Sr. Marcia Frideger recalls:

“Sister Alice had a different student each day give an oral report on the reading while the rest of us took notes. She corrected our notes and handed them back to the whole class (about 25 students) the next day. By the time we got to college, taking notes was a breeze, and we had a sense of confidence about presenting to a class of students.”

Sr. Alice began her studies at Stanford University for her doctoral studies, earning her Ph.D. in the History of Education and in Tudor-Stuart History. Subsequently, she was assigned to Ramona as Vice-Principal. Carol Larkin sent this remembrance:

“When I lived with her at Ramona, she would spend evenings in the recreation room making beautiful wood-burned plaques, inscribing inspirational words into the wood. Her work inspired me to incorporate wood-burning into my art classes at Holy Names High School. She was a kind, quiet person.”

Sr. Alice spent 2 years at California State College/Los Angeles as Associate Professor of Education. She returned to Northern California when she was named Chair of the Education Department at Holy Names College (1970-1980). Sr. Alice taught courses in Social Foundations of Education, Philosophy of Education, History of Education (of course!), and the Master’s Research class. She developed the Master of Arts in Education, strengthened both the Elementary and Secondary Credential Programs, and encouraged our students (including our own Sisters) in obtaining their teaching credentials. When the Commission on Teacher Credentialing unexpectedly opened a one-time-only window of opportunity, Sr. Alice spent long hours studying transcripts and verifying the professional teaching experiences of our Sisters, including those who had left the community, to help them obtain **Life Teaching Credentials.** }

Much of her considerable creativity and energy led to a Master’s of Education in Gerontology as well as in Career Education, and International Education; and she devised a Program in Continuing Education.

Sr. Rosemary Delaney said that Sr. Alice *“was woman of vision and a connector!”* and sent information about one of Sr. Alice’s ministry ventures:

“In early 1976, Sr. Alice contacted Sisters Mary Ondreyco, Mary Pat LeRoy, Maureen Delaney, Mary Becker, Kathleen McCann, Marion Mills, and Rosemary Delaney with an idea to develop and submit a proposal to the California Post Secondary Education Commission in Sacramento to request funding for classes for adults in West Oakland. These sisters were in a variety of ministries in Oakland. . . . The proposal was funded and the program (called the West Oakland Community Leadership Consortium) began in the Fall of 1976 and was renewed for 3 additional years. The classes for adults were in 4 areas: community organizing, parenting, senior citizens, and English as a Second Language. . . . Participants were encouraged to pass on what they were learning to neighbors, friends and family. . . . West Oakland participants enjoyed this forum as a great opportunity to celebrate personal growth, educational enrichment, and community.”

Sr. Alice was a creative administrator who brought marvelous enthusiasm to her work. She possessed true insight, great energy, and the ability to inspire others. Students and faculty appreciated her insight in solving problems, skill in persevering through obstacles, and genuine warmth and compassion for each person who entered her office.

Sr. Alice maintained involvement in our community activities, served on various committees and was a delegate to 3 Provincial Chapters.

Her next move was to the East Coast where she spent 5 years at Georgetown University as Associate Dean for Student Affairs, and a year at the Library of Congress in the Congressional Research Division—a plum position for a devoted scholar!

After returning to the Bay Area, she became Executive Assistant to the Director of Catholic Charities in San Francisco and said, *“It delights me no end that I still have the energy and health to work for a salary to continue financial contributions (to the SNJM Community).”*

Our adventure-loving Sister went off to London for a final year of research (and it was, she writes, “sheer delight!”) in her pursuit of knowledge about the Almshouses of 16th Century England, as well as on her long-time loves of Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus. Upon her return, she continued her writing endeavors. She also became involved with research and proposals in the matter of pollution prevention in industry and airports (through the Environmental Protection Agency in San Francisco). Sr. Jo’Ann De Quattro sent a whimsical remembrance:

*“Did you know that when Sr. Alice worked for the EPA she designed alternative ways for people to get to the Los Angeles Airport rather than drive cars? One of them is the FLYAWAY bus that I often use to travel to and from LAX and Union Station! **She was quite a woman!**”*

I conclude with words from our Flyaway Alice:

“Throughout all of this, I have seen the Hand of God clearly marking my way for me so that I have never doubted His care and designs for me. Yes, it has been one long, wonderful enterprise in keeping up with Him as He leads in strange but exciting ways in my regard.

Religious life for me has always been an exciting experience. Who knows what my next adventure will be before you read these notes at my funeral.”

One of her final comments encapsulates her never-failing sense of humor:

“I do not see the point of an open casket, but I will not rise up and argue that point.”

So now we bid you farewell, remembering always your cheerful, encouraging leadership that inspired confidence in so many of your students, colleagues and Sisters, and reminded us that when one door is closed, there are at least 3 others waiting to be unlocked. Your ever-present cheerfulness, love of study, research and writing, and your never-failing desire to help others will live on in our hearts.

In the Book of Baruch 3:33-36 we read:

God, who dismisses the light and it departs, calls it and it obeys trembling; before whom the stars at their posts shine and rejoice. When God calls them, they answer, “Here we are!” shining with joy for their Maker.

. . . And so, dear Alice, may you continue to shine with joy forever with our loving God.