

Memories of Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly



When I arrived at CNR in September 1960, I was assigned a Spiritual Mother--(Mother) Sister Dorothy Ann. Sister Dorothy Ann was not only my Freshman history teacher who inspired me with a life-long interest in history, but also a trusted confidant who guided me through my four years at CNR. Her enthusiasm for learning and her positive attitude have remained with me throughout my life. When Sister Dorothy Ann became President of CNR, I looked for opportunities to reconnect with her at Alumnae events. My husband, Harold, and I always enjoyed speaking with her about her dynamic leadership of CNR.

Jacqueline Compton D'Alessio, SAS '60

Sister Dorothy Ann was on campus when we were and since my surname was Kelley, I always felt a special connection! That was true even though she must have been from a different clan since she only had one "e" in her surname.

Mary Lou Kelley Crane, SAS '62

My impression of her was her calmness, serenity, and poise. Twice she called me in to ask why I wasn't getting better grades. I had a NYS Regents scholarship and a scholarship from CNR. I was surprised because I thought my grades were good.

Genie Jansen, SAS '62

Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly was "class mother" for our CNR '63 class. I was in awe of her and kept my distance.

Then in the 80's, my husband John and I would meet and chat with Sister DAK at the monthly coffee hours after Mass in the CNR chapel. Both she and John had grown up in the Bronx and she always made a point of saying where she was from when meeting people. John loved that about her. So, we invited her to dinner. And she came. Her housewarming gift to us (after a Dec 1997 house fire) was a framed quote from St. Teresa of Avila: "IN THIS HOUSE ALL MUST BE FRIENDS, ALL MUST BE LOVED, ALL MUST BE HELD DEAR, ALL MUST BE HELPED." And we tried to make it so.

At dinner, conversations delved into politics, the need to know history, the rising voice of women in spheres of influence. Sister DAK was especially concerned about the role of the laity in the Catholic Church and organized a meeting for alumnae furious about sexual abuse in the church and the tepid response to it. Thus was born the Upper Room (2002), chaired by Sister DAK until her death in 2009, then by Sister Alice Gallin, and then by Alice Duffy Grant '63 and myself.

One of the saddest days of my life was March 27, 2009 when I received a phone call at work that Sister DAK had died. I knew Sister DAK with many titles attached to her name - - Class Mother, President of CNR, Chancellor, NYS Woman of Distinction, Beijing attendee, Ursuline Provincial, but the best and last was friend.



Beth Hofstetter, SAS '63

I had the privilege of spending five days in Sedona, AZ and the Grand Canyon with Sister Dorothy Ann.

In the fall of 2000, Sister Dorothy Ann and Sister Ursula were visiting Mary Dehn Van Dessel (CNR '56} who had been an Ursuline from 1956 through 1969. I met Mary in Arizona in the mid-90s.

Mary invited me to join them on their planned trip to northern Arizona. I was driving on the first day with Dorothy Ann in the front seat and I asked her why she chose to attend CNR. She quietly proceeded to tell me about her childhood, her mother's death in childbirth, and her father being a single parent. She continued to tell me about her student years at CNR and her decision to enter the convent. I felt honored that she would share that with me. The two in the back seat were so surprised also.

What a wonderful travel companion! The Grand Canyon through her eyes continues to be a treasure.

At my next CNR reunion, Dorothy Ann asked me out to lunch at her favorite New Rochelle diner. The two of us ate and chatted as if we were long time friends.

I cherish my memories of this lovely, gracious lady.

Marti (Martha) Dymkoski Haney, SAS '65



As a history major at CNR I had heard about the legendary Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly. She was not on the faculty during my years at the College (1962-66).



I did not personally meet Sister Dorothy Ann until 1996 under very different circumstances. That spring my mother (Margaret Connor Reid CNR 1940) passed away. We had lived in nearby Larchmont for more than 40 years. She had moved to a walkable neighborhood in Mt. Vernon when she was no longer able to drive. She left behind her Larchmont parish of Sts. John and Paul where she was a founding member and really did not have a church connection. My sister (Carroll Reid CNR 1968) and I had a long discussion about where to have her funeral. We finally decided without knowing if it was even possible a perfect solution was to have the service in the CNR Chapel. My mother loved CNR, was her longtime class agent and a recipient of the Ursula Laurus award. We grew up hearing much about the College and many of her Larchmont friends were fellow classmates.

Having no idea how to make this happen, I called my mentor and friend Sister Alice Gallin explaining the situation and our request. She told me only the College President could give permission for the use of the chapel. The President was Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly. Alice said she would make a call. I heard back within a few hours that permission for the Mass in Holy Family Chapel was granted. From that point on, Sister Dorothy Ann took over all the service arrangements. This woman whom I never met arranged for the college chaplain to say Mass, recruited an organist and did all the readings herself. She apologized that we would have to find our own priest to go to the cemetery! My sister and I never expected a busy college President to spend half the day for someone she did not know. Her sympathy and her compassion shone brightly that day. As Eileen Niedzwiecki has written, she had a special grace “rooted in her deep love and respect for all humanity which she expressed in many ways, through many avenues, on many occasions.” This was one of those occasions. I will never forget her kindness that day which was more meaningful to my CNR family than all the accolades she received over her well-lived life.

Susan (Sue) Reid Wilke, SAS '66

My memories of Sister Dorothy Ann:



1. She was head of the History Dept, and I was a history major. When I wrote my thesis, I was amazed to learn she had traveled to the NYC library to check my quotes. To my chagrin she noted on my paper I only quoted part of the author's statement on the subject under discussion.

2. Once we had lunch together when she was in Washington, DC. Much to my surprise she ordered a martini and a rare hamburger.

3. I lived in Washington, DC when Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in as the first female member of the Supreme Court. Sister called me to see if I had any contacts with her office because she wanted to ask her to give the graduation speech at CNR.

Jane Kenny, SAS '67

In the mid '80s I spent a few years working for the College as the West Coast rep/social director for Sister Dorothy Ann. She would travel to California about once a year and we would pile into my ancient Honda Civic, along with a random Keane baby, and visit alumnae up and down the coast from Santa Barbara to San Diego. D.A. was an unfailingly good sport, full of interesting stories and always willing to participate in luncheons, dinners, picnics and parties. I asked her once if she ever got sick of it all. She said no that she loved meeting the alumnae of all the different classes and relished the opportunity to talk about the college.

We spent many happy hours on the interstate, solving the problems of the world. I miss her.

Maureen Roche Keane, SAS '68



After graduation, I reconnected with philosophy professor Tom Taaffe and his wife Juliette Romano (SAS '72) on a NYC playground. An enduring family friendship ensued. Every Labor Day for three decades we'd visit the Visitation Monastery in the Berkshires for liturgies.

On the roundtrip Tom invariably reminisced about the pioneer he fondly called "DA." As founding director of the School of New Resources, Tom credited Sister's persuasive negotiating skills for the transformative relationship with DC 37. He'd riff on his and DA's shared belief that education changed hearts not just minds.

Though Tom left SNR administration to teach at CUNY, Manhattanville and FIT, they stayed close. He'd regale me with the latest municipal, county, state or national recognition for her ecumenical, pedagogical, and interracial work. Tom thought Sister Dorothy Ann's appointment as delegate to the 1995 UN International Conference on Women in Beijing thrust DA's commitment to bolster the potential of all women onto the global stage.

Kristin McDonough, SAS '68



Of the many memories I have of Sister Dorothy Ann, two especially stand out for their insight and empathy. The first occurred while I was attending her excellent class on the Urban History of America. At one point Sister turned and looked at the class to convey to us the significance of the times in which we lived. We had no idea, she said, of the watershed moment the Sixties were - that we were at the axis of social change. The second occurred on April 4, 1968, the night Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. I was returning from the library to my dorm room at Maura Hall when I came across Sister standing alone in the dark, a small radio pressed to her ear. "They have killed Mr. King," she told me brokenly. "Lord what have they done?" I am not certain of the exact words but we shared a moment of fear, pain, and frustration as Sister Dorothy Ann acknowledged the terrible loss.

Cynthia Sinnott, SAS '69



I graduated from CNR in 1970 and had the pleasure of meeting Sister Dorothy Ann in my first year at Brescia Hall. I came to CNR from a fairly sheltered background in Puerto Rico. With her guidance as Dean of CNR, Sister Dorothy Ann opened my eyes to a much bigger world and the value of education. What a beautiful and intelligent woman. I will never forget her. May her soul rest in peace!

Marie L. Dexter, SAS '70

Sister Dorothy Ann stayed with us when she came to San Francisco for an alumnae event in 1984. I explained to her assistant that although we were flattered, there must be other more comfortable alumnae homes. We didn't even have a guest room. She called again to say that Sister didn't mind and would like to stay with us. In a frenzy, we bought a new mattress and put our older girls in sleeping bags in the baby's room, determined to be excellent hosts to show our admiration and affection.

Our toddler was my alarm clock, so I awoke in horror the morning after the arrival realizing I had overslept. I dashed to the kitchen and found Sister Dorothy Ann drinking coffee in a chenille robe with curlers in her hair. Sarah was buckled in her highchair, Cheerios on the tray, a sippy cup in hand. Despite my embarrassment, I was struck by the beauty of the moment.

As we chatted, I asked Sister how she could slip so easily into each role as daughter, sister, aunt, friend, colleague, religious sister, college president, etc., and I marveled at her reflections on the gifts of joy that each of these experiences brought. That visit I learned so much more about her - including her revelation that she loved housework!!!

Eileen Niedzwiecki, SAS '72

I do remember Sister Dorothy Ann very well. She was Academic Dean when I was at the College of New Rochelle. A few American Ursuline Sisters in Thailand who taught me at Mater Dei School, Bangkok, were friends of Sister Dorothy Ann such as Sister Theodore, Sister Miriam Hahnenfeld, Sister Celine Ann Sisk and Sister Francis Xavier Bell. I remember Sister Dorothy Ann to be a strong leader who knew her students and was very kind. She knew me by name and still remembered me when I went back for the 25th reunion of our class.

Barbara Sumitra Phongsathorn, SAS '72

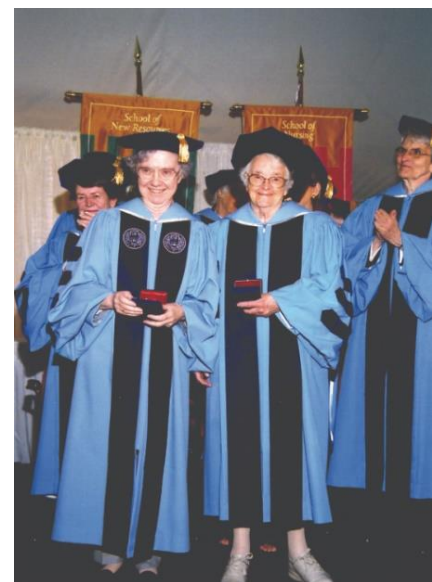
After graduating from CNR, I lived for most of my adult life in the New York area — Manhattan, Brooklyn, and suburban New Jersey. But, in retirement, my husband and I moved to a small city (population under 7,000) in mid-coast Maine. A conversation with one of the owners of my favorite local bookstore revealed that Marsha Kaplan's first job after college was as the assistant to then-dean, Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, overlapping with my years on campus.

Anne-Marie Nolin, SAS '75

My recollections of Sister Dorothy Ann are too many to cite just one or even a few. On the whole when I think of Sister Dorothy Ann, I think of her wisdom, kindness, leadership, patience and dry sense of humor. Our class tried her patience for sure but she never "lost her cool." She was, is and will always be a role model for me. I admired her tremendously...and still do. I know my life was certainly enhanced by her presence.

Suzie Smith, SAS '76

Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly was one of the most dignified and capable administrators I have ever known. I always felt that Leland Castle was the appropriate place for someone of her demeanor and qualifications to work. I know that in fact, Sister Dorothy Ann lived in and worked in more modest settings, but it was the image of her as "Queen of the Castle" that stayed with me. Smart, spiritual, forward-thinking, good-natured and professional, Sister Dorothy Ann moved CNR forward during her tenure as president. She represented the Ursuline Order, one that was established in 1572, and fostered the strong Ursuline tradition of educating girls. I received an excellent education at CNR and am proud to have been a student under her leadership. Her strong moral compass made her an excellent fit for College President. Her retirement from the presidency was certainly the end of an era.



Mary Carmody Yulo, SAS '83

My lasting memory of Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly is a small one. However, it is poignant when cast against the background of today's busyness where people barely acknowledge each other as they bustle down the street. I was walking on campus one day and I said "hello" to Sister Dorothy Ann who smiled as she was coming toward me. Even before I identified myself, I felt seen and I walked away from that brief encounter feeling good about myself. I transferred to CNR because my dear mom trained nurses who glowed about their experience there and she was firm in her conviction that CNR was where I belonged. Moms know these things and she was right.

Judy Colobong, SAS '88

I'm not 100% sure this is an accurate memory (how our minds play tricks on us), but I remember that my dorm, Brescia (opposite The Castle, where "Sister Dot" lived), had a lot of false fire alarms when I first moved in as a freshman - often late in the evening.

We would all have to trek out and cross the street, waiting for the firemen to arrive, check everything, and then give the all-clear - often in our pj's!

I'm sure that at least once, "Sister Dot" came out to chat with us and make sure we were all OK. (We may have used "Sister Dot" or "Sister Dottie Ann" for those who graduated in the early '80s among ourselves, with affection. But we would never dared call her that to her face!)

She also made sure she attended at least one performance of every Props N' Paint production. She was very encouraging when I took it over when it was very much in debt - approving my idea for a fund-raiser and allowing it to go ahead.

She was a fantastic person.

Karen Parks, SAS '93



Dorothy Ann Kelly, O.S.U.
President