

Jottings

The AIC / MHA Alumnae Newsletter
Fall 2012



A Journey for Awatif

By Larissa Marie Naylor '94

The bus swayed as we drove higher into the Atlas Mountains, which divide Morocco diagonally into north and south. I was headed south, to the outskirts of the Sahara desert. I realized, as I watched the landscape change, that perhaps this wasn't the best place to be going in the middle of August. I sighed and reminded myself that comfort wasn't the reason for this trip.

I wasn't exactly sure what the reason for the trip was. It had been a last-minute decision. When my friend Molly had told me she was going back to visit our training village, where we had lived for two months upon first joining the Peace Corps seventeen months before, I had felt pulled to go. I had promised 14-year-old Awatif – who had cried when I left – that I would come back. Yet it was at this imperfect juncture, with no gift and no way to ensure they would be home, that I inexpressibly felt it was time I did.

After nine hours of travel, I set out alone down the road leading dubiously into the desert. I walked for an hour before their house emerged from across the field. My heart fluttered as I saw that not only were they home, they were all – parents, six children, and others – gathered outside in the front yard. I waved, and smiled as they waved back. They waited in awe as I came shyly among them, kissed and greeted each one, and felt our joy grow in each other's presence.

But the tone of my arrival changed the instant I saw Awatif. She was pale, gaunt and bony, like a chemo patient. I realized with horror that she was sick, seriously sick. What a heartache and burden for this poor family, I thought. But I would wait till the right moment to find out more. I kissed her more closely and embraced her a bit longer.

As I was swept into their lives – fasting with them, playing perpetual games of cards with the youngest ones, helping the older ones with their work in the field and in the kitchen – our mutual joy and their unconditional acceptance gave me a feeling of homecoming. My improved language ability enabled me a greater closeness with them. I felt a renewed and deepened sense of belonging among them.

But I did not realize the extent to which I felt a part of their family – or the extent that I wanted to help them – until the moment I knew just how desperate things were. I had assumed Awatif's illness was a reality they were dealing with. But

later, when we were in the living room and no one reacted when an anguished cry – Awatif screamed for her mother like a toddler – came from the next room, I knew something was very wrong. She was curled up in the fetal position, writhing in pain and sobbing. But her mom simply gave her an icy water bottle to press to her stomach. After some questioning, I learned this had been the extent of the treatment she had received. I was dismayed and terrified. It was dawning on me that she had been literally wasting away right before their eyes, and nothing had been done for her. Something had to be done. How could they not see? Was it up to me?

My heart began pumping hard and my stomach tightened as I became aware of this new responsibility. My mind searched frantically for what to do. I started asking questions, trying to diagnose her. Everything told me this was something serious. I kept saying, she needs to go to the hospital. They seemed unmoved –



Larissa poses with three of the children of her host family as she makes an American-style omelet for them. On the right is Awatif, in her pre-illness playfulness.

Continued

were almost embarrassed by her dramatic behavior – yet, as is consistent with Moroccan hospitality, concerned about my distress. They were trying to reassure me. I was trying to alarm them.

But they weren't unmoved by Awatif. Their self-enforced denial was merely due to a sense of helplessness in the face of daunting obstacles. They had no money. They explained, as if I were a small child who didn't understand the realities of life, that the hospitals always charge money for medicine – even though they aren't supposed to – and sometimes even charge for the doctor's visit itself. Plus, there is the transportation to the hospital. They may have wanted to, but just weren't able to get Awatif the care she needed.

Now I knew what my gift would be. Refusing to let them be discouraged in the face of Moroccan health care corruption, I told the mother that I had a little money that I would give her if she promised to take her daughter to the hospital. She responded with a simple thank you. We decided, after speaking to Awatif, whose bout of extreme pain had passed for the time being, that the trip to the hospital could wait until Monday. I was leaving Sunday morning, but they would call me to let me know what the doctor said.



Larissa's host family lives in this complex, consisting of the main house, a shed for the father's pottery workshop, a stable for the donkey, and a courtyard for the sheep. Suquena, one of the daughters, returns from the fields with grass for the donkey.

From that point forward, there was a new lightness to Awatif. She was smiling and laughing again, where before she had been withdrawn and morose. She sat up more, whereas before she had lain curled up, even at the dinner table.

"I am going to the hospital," she beamed to me proudly. "It is mandatory." The Arabic word I had used was coming back to me.

"Eat," I urged her when I kissed her goodbye the next morning.

"Thank you, Wisaal," Awatif said.

"Thank you for everything."

A few days later, I received a phone call from the oldest daughter. They had taken Awatif to the hospital. She had had an infection. The doctor had prescribed antibiotics, and she had been taking them. When they put Awa-

tif on the phone, she was ebullient.

"There is no more sickness in me!" she exclaimed. "I'm all better now! Thank you, Wisaal. Thank you!"

My heart was full. I felt I could go home tomorrow and be happy. I had made a difference to someone.

Larissa, whose Moroccan name is Wisaal (which means "link"), works for the Peace Corps as community development volunteer in the area of health and women's empowerment in Morocco, North Africa. She was sent to Morocco in March of 2011. Larissa worked as a journalist in and after college and as a lawyer for eight years in Washington, DC. She feels that her decision to join the Peace Corps is the culmination of a life of community service which began at MHA.

News from the hill

Eleven Academy alums celebrate special anniversaries as sisters this year



Sister Mary Louise



Sister Christine Marie

Sisters Mary Louise Uebelhor, Christine Marie (Marian) Fendel, and Patricia Ann McGuire (1960 graduates), and former Academy teacher Sister Norma Fultz celebrated the 50th anniversary of their monastic profession on August 4.

For 48 years, Sister Mary Louise has been involved in music in schools, parishes, and at the monastery. She is currently music minister at the parish in Huntingburg, Indiana, composes music, and is a member of a contemporary

music group, Stillpoint.

Sister Christine Marie spent 44 years teaching, mostly special education, in California. She also did prison ministry. Since returning to Ferdinand, she has been ministering to the sick and elderly of St. Ferdinand Parish.

Sister Patricia Ann has served as a teacher, a missionary in Peru, South America, and a planned giving officer for Mission Advancement at the monastery. She is currently pastoral associate at St. Benedict Cathedral Parish in Evansville.

Sister Norma, formerly Mary Raymond, was a teacher and librarian at the Academy from 1962 to 1965. She was also a librarian and associate professor of library services and media resources at universities in Indiana and Illinois, and archivist at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy. Currently she does supportive services at the monastery.



Sister Patricia Ann



Sister Norma

On October 28, Sisters Maura Beckman '48, Vera Kloeck '50, Mary Benet Goodrum '51, Mary Roman Dall '52, and Mary Claude Croteau '49 will celebrate their 60th anniversary of religious profession.

Sister Maura has been serving in pastoral care for 21 years as director and chaplain at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center in Jasper. She also ministered for 35 years as a registered nurse and health care administrator.

Sister Vera was a teacher and principal for 44 years. She currently assists with activities in the monastery's Hildegard Health Center and as mail clerk at the monastery.

Sister Mary Benet currently does supportive services and works in the monastery kitchen. Prior to that, she was a teacher for 28 years and a librarian for 15 years.

Sister Mary Roman was a teacher and principal for 32 years and a reading consultant for 11 years. She currently serves as administrative clerical assistant at the monastery.

Sister Mary Claude does supportive services at the monastery. In the past she served as a principal, teacher, and substance abuse counselor, and held administrative positions at the monastery. She taught at the Academy from 1958 to 1967, was director of development, and Academy Alumnae director from 2003 to 2010.

Sisters Mary Alice Schnur '40 and Johnette Finis '39 will observe their 70th anniversary of profession on October 28.

Sister Mary Alice worked as an art teacher from 1945 to 1974, including 14 years at the Academy, and was director of the junior sisters at the monastery. For 31 years she served as a missionary in Guatemala, including six years as superior of the Benedictine monastery in Cobán. She currently does supportive services at the Ferdinand monastery.

Sister Johnette taught music in schools and did music ministry in parishes for 41 years. She was also a director of religious education. She currently serves in the ministry of prayer.



Sister Maura



Sister Vera



Sister Mary Benet



Sister Mary Roman



Sister Mary Claude



Sister Mary Alice

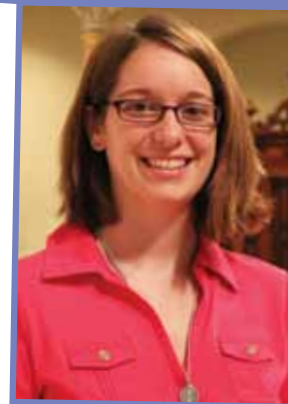


Sister Johnette

Monastery receives new member

On August 19, the sisters officially accepted Rachel Geracitano, a 22-year-old native of Louisville, Kentucky, into the Benedictine community. Rachel recently graduated from Bellarmine University in Louisville with a major in theology and a minor in psychology. She has been in contact with the sisters at Ferdinand the past two years.

"I have had the opportunity to work with Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, not only in my discernment process, but also with retreats and service trips. She, along with the entire community of sisters, has been incredibly welcoming to all my visits and questions about their life. I feel drawn to the Benedictine community in Ferdinand and am excited to learn and experience religious life with them."



Sisters return from California

Sisters Mary Esther Steckler (Academy principal from 1962-1967), Mary Ann Schepers '56, Doris Market '55, and Christine Marie Fendel '60 have returned to the Ferdinand monastery after spending over 40 years ministering in schools and parishes in southern California. These sisters, along with others from Ferdinand, went to California in response to a request from the bishop of the San Diego Diocese for sisters to help staff schools and to establish a Benedictine monastery in the diocese.



Sisters prepare for election of a new prioress

During their Community Days this past July, the sisters began a year of prayer and discernment in preparation for the election of a new prioress in June 2013. Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau '67, current prioress, will be completing her second term as prioress next summer and is not eligible for another term. The sisters ask that alums join them in prayer during these next eight months as they discern who will be their new community leader.



Interested in finding out what other alums are doing?
Join the Official Alumni Group on Facebook!

Search for "Marian Heights Academy/
Academy Immaculate Conception Official
Alumni Group"



Marilyn Petry, a Ferdinand native who now lives in Albany, Oregon, attended the Academy as a freshman in 1952-53. She and her daughter Kathleen, from Rhode Island, met in Chicago this summer and traveled to Ferdinand together, spending almost a week at the monastery reliving Marilyn's memories of Academy days.

Patricia (Segar) Fritch '47
"Please know that I appreciate the education and the spiritual guidance from the sisters. I will be forever grateful." Pat tried to contact classmates for their 65th anniversary. Those she reached were unable to make it to the reunion.

Barbara A. (Belford) Tucker '44 "I would like to hear in *Jottings* from other '44 graduates. I now live in North Carolina, have 6 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren. Staying active in ministries at my church in Greensboro. Always enjoy receiving *Jottings* and *Seek. Pray. Share*. Love the cookies from For Heaven's Sake. A great gift to others. Good to stay in touch with the Sisters of St. Benedict."

Rose Ann (Bramas) Blessinger '59 and her husband, Kenny, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary about a year ago. They live in rural St. Anthony, Indiana, and have four children and seven grandchildren.

Joyce (Goffinet) Greenwood '61 and her husband, Larney, celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on August 12 with family and friends. Joyce and Larney are retired and live in Tell City, Indiana.

Kathleen (Seng) Ebert '64 and her husband, Jim, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on August 19 with family and friends. They are the parents of three Academy alumnae, **Julie (Ebert) Becher '87**, **Jill Ebert-Lasher '93**, and **Kim Ebert-Zink '95**.

Jane (Beckman) Chappell '65 recently received the prestigious 2012 Athena International Leadership Award from the Rotary Club of Jasper, Indiana. Jane was chosen from among 12 finalists. The Athena award recognizes women who demonstrate outstanding leadership attributes in their personal lives and careers — women who have achieved the highest level of professional excellence, contribute time and energy to improve the quality of life for others in the community, and actively assist others, particularly women, in realizing their full leadership potential. For much of her career, Jane was associated with areas of health services. For over 30 years she served as executive director of TRI-CAP Family Health Services in southwestern Indiana. She was active as a member of the Board of Directors of Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center, the Dubois County Health Department Home Health Advisory Group, Teen Hotline, Teen Wellness Center, Crisis Connection, and Dubois County Health Partnership. Congratulations, Jane!

AIC/MHA Alumnae News

Former roommates and **1979 graduates Dr. Peggy Scherle-Mueller and Sister Mary Frances Schafer**, who hadn't seen each other for about 30 years, reconnected at Ferdinand this summer. Peggy's daughter, Chloe, accompanied her. (An article in the spring 2012 issue of *Jottings* reported on Peggy's accomplishments and national recognition for developing a cancer drug approved for manufacturing last year by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.)



Debi Cason '83 "It is with great sadness that I ask you to post a note about my mother's passing. I read of the passing of DeAnn Meyer's sister, Terri Looney. I am thinking of them in their time of need. I hope that all is well with you and all the wonderful people that were such an important part of my young life. I hope to be able to come to a reunion weekend sometime. God bless."

Attention!

We welcome updates and news from our alums!

Please send us items about yourself or other Academy alumnae (with their permission) that we can publish in *Jottings*. Send via e-mail (pseng@thedome.org), or U.S. postal letter (address on back cover of *Jottings*), or the "news link" on the bottom of the alumnae web page (thedome.org/alumnae).

AIC/MHA Alumnae News

Mimi (Suzuki) Takahashi '86 from Japan visited the monastery in August with her 8-year-old daughter, Suzuko, who had participated in an international YMCA camp in New York for two weeks. "It was so nice to show my daughter the place I love the most in the U.S. It was like coming home. It's sad that the school is no longer here, but the sisters are still here; they have not changed." During Mimi and Suzuko's stay at the monastery, they spent time with former teachers, one of Mimi's host families, and classmate Myrna (Vaal) Jacob, who lives near Ferdinand. "MHA was a big part of my life. It made me who I am now. I am very thankful to my parents who sent me here. It takes a lot of courage to send a child abroad at a young age. Now that I'm a mother, I'm not sure I would be able to do that." Mimi recalled traveling from Tokyo to Ferdinand by herself as a 15-year-old, knowing very little English, and carrying a note that her mother sent with her to give to someone at the airport if she needed help or got lost. The simple note, which Mimi still has in her purse, contains a phone number



Julie (Uebelhor) Buechler '76, former Spanish and ESL teacher, visited with Mimi and Suzuko and showed them around southern Indiana and Kentucky.

and message to call Sister Mary Austin at Ferdinand. When Mimi and Suzuko were leaving Ferdinand to return to Tokyo, Suzuko asked, "Can we come back next month?"

Jennifer (Jay) Sorensen Cutza '87 "After several years with Peace Corps and USAID in Romania, I joined the Department of State in 2007. My first two tours of duty were in Israel and Cuba. I am currently serving in Lagos, Nigeria, managing Africa's busiest immigrant visa unit."

Catherine (Mott) Rydberg '88 "I married David Rydberg on May 21, 2011. He is an anesthesiologist in Rockford, Illinois. Because of an accident a little over two years ago, I no longer work as a surgical tech but stay busy with Emily (15) and my twins Michael and Charlie (9). Free time is quilting, room mom, and charity work."

Kim Nasief-Westergren '92 shared news of her family. She has a 3½-year-old daughter, Sophia, and 1-year-old son, Grady. "We are very blessed that they are healthy and lovely children."

Lindsie (Jung) Fransen '01 "My husband, Rob, and I welcomed our first child, Abigail Joyce, on February 29, 2012. (Leap Day!) She is absolutely adorable, and we are over the moon! I can't wait to bring her to the 'hill' to introduce her to everyone. I continue to work as an oncology nurse for AlphaMed Physicians Group, an adult oncology infusion center, and I also continue to pursue my Family Nurse Practitioner degree at Loyola University Chicago. I miss all of my MHA girls and hope that everyone is doing well. It's been a few years since I've been back, and I always love visiting and seeing friends. I hope I will be able to attend the summer reunion sometime."

May they rest in peace

Alumnae: Mary Agnes "Mickie" (Mitchell) Olinger '39, Gertrude (Goffinet) Amos '42, Marjorie (Rietman) Tonn '42, Tommie Ann (Hall) Meyer '44, Sister Mildred Wannemuehler '48, Anna L. (Dehon) Williams '48, Norma Jean Farmer '49, Cyrilla H. (Ruhe) Lamkin '52, Mary Paula Blair '62, Joyce (Janas) Bonny '72

Husband of: Dolores (Laake) Schwinghamer '52, Norma (Knapp) Powell '65, Darlene (Schnaus) Ofer '67, Linda (Kreilein) Schuck '68, Astrid Moreno '84

Mother of: Sharon (Jahn) Cavanaugh '59, Kathy (Hardesty) Kochis '63, Linda (Little) Wenning '64, Carolyn (King) Zimmer '65, Janice Greene '69, Doreen (Slaats) Harney '69, Margaret (Slaats) Hill '71, Tina (Senninger) Kobetsky '80, Maria Miles '80, Debi Cason '83

Father of: Donna (Schwinghamer) Roesner '75, Miriam (Arango) Jump '78, Marta (Arango) Nangle '83

Brother of: Peggy (Sonderman) Nord '45, Sharon (Swain) Werner '49

Sister of: Esther Schepers '29, Sister Marilyn Market '42, Madeline (Nellessen) Cummings '82, Lauren (Nellessen) Verholtz '84, Barbara (Nellessen) Bovard '85

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Class gatherings

Most of you know that the “official” Academy Reunion takes place each year on “the hill” the last weekend in June. However, Academy class reunions also happen at other times and places during the year. For classes whose members live in close proximity, it’s not too difficult to gather periodically. But when classmates live a greater distance from each other, it becomes a challenge.

Such was the case with the **class of 1987**, which gathered in Chicago in July to celebrate their 25th anniversary. Early in the year they proposed the idea, and after months of postings on Facebook, plans were made. “We specifically chose Chicago as a place to meet as it seemed to be the most convenient for so many,” said Caroline Homolka. Classmates in Chicago offered suggestions for specific places to stay and things to do. Jennifer Stuecker took leadership in coordinating and organizing the weekend and encouraging, sometimes pleading, for members to sign up. As the weekend drew closer and some started hedging on their commitments, Jennifer posted on FB: “Good grief, you girls make me work!” Eventually 12 of them attended, plus two from the class of ’89 and one from class of ’86.

“It was a lot of fun. Everyone looks fantastic and all seem to be living full, interesting lives. I haven’t spent a weekend laughing like I did in a long time. It is so wonderful to be in contact with such amazing women, and we are all so appreciative of how MHA brought us together,” Caroline said. After the reunion, Jennifer posted: “Weekend with my MHA girls...priceless. Getting ready for work Monday morning...not as much fun! Love all of you!”

Eight members of the **1967 class** spent a weekend in July at Kathy (Lechner) Weyer’s house in Ferdinand to celebrate their 45th anniversary. They ate lunch at the monastery one day and invited sisters who taught them in the Academy.

“There is absolutely nothing to compare to the sisterhood developed in a boarding school! After 45 years, we still love and uphold each other in our grief, sickness, joys, hopes, and fears. Through it all, we are the same fun-loving Academy girls who came out of a special school that instilled in us the skills needed to deal with all that life has thrown at us in the past 45 years.” (Theresa Bauer ’67)

“I really enjoyed our 45th class reunion. I think we’re all still full of joy, spirit, and mischief. Whenever I approach Ferdinand, and “the castle on the hill” comes into view, I get a warm feeling inside, and good memories come flooding back. There’s something about that beautiful place and the wonderful people that I have come to know and love. Those were definitely “bonding years” for us young teenagers. We worked together, played together, and were homesick together. We made it through good and bad times together. We laughed and we cried, and we became “sisters.” Today, we still share stories, laugh, cry, and remain like family. That’s the beauty of it!” (Darlene Schnaus Ofer ’67)



1967 class gathering: front row Katie Schwenk, Barbara (Hansen) Schuch, Darlene (Schnaus) Ofer, and Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau; back rows, Kathy (Lechner) Weyer, Theresa Bauer, Donna (Webber) Slathar, and former teachers Sisters Michelle Mohr, Norma (formerly Mary Raymond) Fultz, Joella Kidwell, and Mary Alice Schnur. [Margie (Etienne) Edwards was not present for photo.]



For old time’s sake, Darlene Ofer takes a bite of strawberry pie at her class gathering in July to update a photo of her in the 1967 Pax yearbook — eating strawberry pie.



Class of 1987 celebrated their 25th anniversary in Chicago this summer. Bottom row: Rae Ann Goldmann Bisbee, Kris Rolih ’89, Lara Oppenheimer, Jane Henley. Top row: Jennifer Stuecker, Cheryl McFolling, Kim Lathrop ’89, Michelle Lathrop Kissel, Chris Allender, and Caroline Homolka Masters.

Alumnae Day Highlights

Alumnae from all over the country — Washington, New York, Colorado, Georgia, Virginia, Tennessee, and other states — came to the annual summer reunion on “the hill” in June. Angie (Vaal) Miller, class of 1987, received the prize for traveling the farthest — from Seattle, Washington. At least 115 alums and guests visited on campus during the weekend.

Of all the anniversary classes, the class of 1972 had the most present (12). In memory of their classmate, Joyce (Janas) Bonny, who passed away in March, they made a contribution of \$1,035 to the sisters in gratitude for their Academy education and formation. Members of 1977 and 1982 classes also made class donations.

A trend seems to be developing among older alums. Aware of the passing of three of their classmates since their 55th anniversary two years ago, the class of 1955 made great effort to gather again this year at the reunion. More classes are encouraging members to come to the reunion every year if possible, rather than every five years.

It's not too early to mark your calendars for next year's reunion — June 29-30. Class years ending in “3” and “8” will be celebrating special anniversaries.

From the class of 1972 — Thank you for...

- “all you’ve taught us, for shaping the women we are, for providing a safe haven and a place to come home to”
- “lifelong friendships created at AIC”
- “sacrifices made so we could have the best education possible, the example of faith and community, and for great role models”
- “cherished memories”
- “four years of friends, education, and fun”
- “support during my teen years and providing the family I needed during those formative years”
- “sharing this wonderful place with all of us”

The “Vaal girls,” had their own family reunion of sorts when, for the first time, all four of them could attend Alumnae Day together: Myrna Jacob '86 and daughter Linda, Angie Miller '87, Karen Scherzer '98 and daughter Molly, and Jenny Keller '99 and daughter Gabriella.



See more photos
from past reunions
on the sisters' web site:

**[thedome.org/
reunionphotos](http://thedome.org/reunionphotos)**





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AIC/MHA Alumnae Association

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THANK YOU Academy Alums!!!

- for staying connected and involved with our Academy family and with the Sisters of St. Benedict
- for volunteering your time and talent — in the gift shop, bakery, at special events, with fundraising projects, outdoor work on the monastery grounds, and much more
- for serving on boards and committees
- for making financial contributions
- for being ambassadors for us, helping to tell our story and affirming our lives and ministries
- special thanks for helping with the Sisters' Summer Social in July — contributing items for theme baskets, art booth, quilt booth, country store, and volunteering in booths



Thanks to all AIC/MHA alumnae for supporting the sisters and their ministries in so many ways.