

Sister Elizabeth Legere

I am sure that for many St Thomas Alumni glancing through the last bulletin, the announcement of Sister Elizabeth Legere's death would have gone virtually unnoticed. However, for those of us who attended STU between 1970 and 1980, those few lines in the condolences column had a much greater significance.

For us, many of our memories of St Thomas are so interwoven with our recollections of Sister Legere that it would be hard to imagine one without the other. She was an important part of life on Campus, especially for those of us who lived in residence.

Who can forget the 10 pm gatherings in the basement of Vanier Hall for her renowned hot chocolate – her way of encouraging fellowship and community in the house? She was also famous for her clam chowder, and the occasional batch of corn chowder for us non-Maritimers. I remember one year during Lent when she sold over 700 pieces of fudge to raise money for the missions. Each piece had been made in her tiny room in Vanier Hall, on the two-burner hot plate. I had the privilege of living across the hall from her in my senior year. There were many mornings when I woke up to the smell of peanut butter fudge at 6 am.

Sister Legere was also an avid hockey fan and a loyal Tommies supporter – not an easy task when they went 1 and 39 over two seasons! She never missed a home game and made sure the boys had a fresh batch of fudge for the bus on the out-of-town trips. She was also known to offer a bit of private tutoring to the players if their marks fell and their position on the team was in jeopardy.

With the exception of my parents, no other individual has had a greater influence on my life than Sister Legere. When I was young, I always thought that my first encounter with a saint would be in the hereafter and involve white flowing gowns and halos. You can imagine my surprise when

she came in the form of a seventy-year-old woman in a navy blue dress whose halo was the veil of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception.

Sister Legere's kindness and gentleness touched everyone around her. She didn't preach her religion, she lived it. She told me once that she hoped that she could influence the students by demonstrating how happy she was in the life she had chosen. She certainly provided a living example of what it means to be Christian. She lived a life of selflessness, dedicated to the service of others. You always knew you were in God's presence with her.

She had a wonderful "joie de vivre" and took great delight in even the smallest of God's creatures. She loved birds and always provided food for the chickadees in the winter. She built a special feeder so that the starlings couldn't bully the smaller birds. After she retired from formal teaching she was assigned an office with no windows in the basement of Vanier Hall. No problem. She painted a window on the wall, added a few birds and flowers and enjoyed the view.

She retired several times from STU but her resignation was turned down more than once. At the President's urging, she agreed to stay on campus for a few years after she relinquished her teaching responsibilities. She was provided with a budget for sugar, condensed milk and clams and given an office where she could do some tutoring. What a strong acknowledgement of the importance the Administration placed on her presence!

She was close to eighty when she finally left STU. She moved to St John, to continue her life of service at Rocmaura nursing home. I had the chance to visit her there a few times. Even at the age of ninety she was still taking regular shifts as portress, working in the cafeteria pouring coffee, and, making rosaries for the missions.

When I received the inevitable news of her death I could only be happy for her. In the last letter she wrote to me she was looking forward to being

reunited with her family and was wondering why God was taking so long to call her home. Her eager anticipation to see her Lord and His Blessed Mother was inspiring.

As I reflect on all of the wonderful memories I have of Sister Legere I can't help feeling a certain sense of loss. However, her warm smile and joyous laughter are etched permanently in my heart and I feel quite sure that she continues to pray for me and each of the thousands of people she touched in her lifetime. Actually, it feels pretty good to know that I have a friend in such high places.

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