

Hardships help woman grow into a 'good and faithful servant'

Sr. Camille D'Arienzo | Dec. 26, 2012 Conversations with Sr. Camille

Marie Colucci, her husband, Andy, and I have spent much time at [Mount Saviour Monastery](#) [1] in Pine City, N.Y. We've been blessed by the hospitality and prayers of the Benedictine monks and have witnessed the ever-increasing flocks of sheep that provide labor and financial security for the community.

For more than 30 years, I've benefited from the wisdom and welcome of its prior, Fr. Martin Boler. Marie knew him longer. We grieved together at his mid-November funeral. But Marie, 80, and Andy, 81, have seized opportunities to express appreciation and affection for the gifts received from Mount Saviour. One day each week, Andy cooks for the monks and their guests. And Marie, for the last year of Boler's illness, visited him almost daily and advocated for his welfare until the end.

Sr. Camille: How do you explain this devoted loving relationship?

Colucci: Sister Camille, we first met Father Martin 53 years ago when we were invited to attend the Mount Saviour Study Club. Father Martin, along with Father Benedict and Father Agustin, took turns leading the group discussion. The relationship evolved over those 53 years into a deep and loving friendship. Over the years, Father Martin faced disappointments and difficulties in his life, as we have in ours. He suffered the deaths of close friends, including his brother, and the deaths of some dreams. As he bore heavy burdens, Andy and I were a safe refuge for him.

I was always grateful to know you were there for him. My knowledge of you is pretty much confined to our meetings at Mount Saviour. I'd like to know what your family was like.

My first recollection of my childhood was the death of my Grandfather Bonetti. Soon after he died, we moved in with my Grandmother Bonetti and my unmarried uncle. My immediate family included my parents and my sister, Irene. My extended family was a warm, loving Italian family. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins were so much a part of my family that it's hard to imagine what life would have been without this support system. My father was not a part of my everyday life. I don't remember that he even worked. What I learned later in life was that he ran a gambling house before gambling was legal and served time in prison. To this day, I do not know if any family member knew my sister and I found this out. I can remember hating New Year's Eve because he got so drunk.

Did the situation improve for you?

Yes. I was about 4 or 5 when we moved in with my Grandmother Bonetti. I remember going to daily Mass with her. She was all of 5 feet tall and 5 inches wide, a tiny woman with an inner strength and deep faith. It was through her example that I grew into the faith.

You've celebrated your 80th birthday. Do you have strong childhood memories?

I remember the beginning of World War II. Each day, I sat on the floor reading the newspaper. When Hitler

marched into Poland, I absorbed the scary feeling of war. My grandmother prayed each day for peace. My parents never went to church, but my mother did see to it that I attended catechism classes. My religious education was based on the Baltimore Catechism, and I believed every word of it. I can remember preparing for first Communion and being told something wonderful would happen when I received Jesus for the first time. Nothing happened, and it was then I began to wonder what was wrong with me.

What was that part of your childhood like?

The house we lived was half of a duplex, with my mother's sister and her family living next door. We had a large yard with the railroad tracks as the boundary line. It was the neighborhood meeting place, and we had great fun in the summertime playing hide-and-seek, kick the can, games we never tired of. We were very close, and my aunt and uncle always included us in their vacations. All this ended when, in a drunken rage, my father argued with the landlord and we were all kicked out of the house. My grandmother and uncle moved to Somerville with other relatives and we moved in with my paternal grandmother Gallo and my father's family.

How did that work for you?

I was the first grandchild of the Gallo family, and as such, I was a favorite. Even while living with my other grandmother, we always ate Sunday dinner at the Gallo house. It was a single-family house that my grandfather built in 1901, one block up from where we lived. This was the one time we could count on my father to be present.

The neighborhood was a mixture of Italian and Polish families. I was very close to my grandparents. They dearly loved my sister and me and kept us safe. Throughout these years, my mother always worked, and my father did what he did, hung out on street corners or in bars.

Has this family tragedy taught you anything helpful for yourself or others?

My life experiences have made me very open to reaching out to all who are "other." I believe God has blessed me with the gift of being a "good and faithful servant" in caring for those in need. This doesn't sound very humble, but I strongly believe God has helped me learn compassion from my own hardships.

How did your mother cope with his behavior?

She was a hard worker. She never complained about my father. Never. She refused to take part in family gossip, never said an unkind word about anyone, and did not have a prejudiced bone in her body. Her life was hard, and she eventually became an alcoholic herself. I am grateful for her gift of refusing to criticize others.

Did others criticize you?

When I entered junior high school, I had a rude awakening. I was suddenly introduced to another world. I never thought about where I lived or if I was rich or poor. Suddenly, I discovered that I was poor and lived on the wrong side of the tracks. This was my first awakening to class distinction. I compensated for this by being a good student. I was very friendly and clung to my faith, wearing it as a badge of honor. It was at this time that I began attending Novenas every Monday evening. I made the nine first Fridays and saw the church as a place where I was welcome and safe. In my senior year, I decided to apply to Montclair State Teachers College. I was accepted but did not attend, as there was no way for my family to pay the tuition.

A dear friend who studied at The Catholic University of America suggested applying there. He said if I was accepted, he'd help me figure out a way to pay the tuition. I was accepted and obtained a work scholarship.

How and when did you meet Andy?

I met Andy in September 1955. My friend Mim was dating his roommate. The dental school was having a party, and Mim asked if I would be Andy's date. It was a wonderful evening. We soon fell in love. Andy graduated from Georgetown's dental school in the spring of 1956 and we were married Sept. 15, 1956. Andy is the most un-Italian man I ever met. Kind, thoughtful, easy to be with and to talk to, and absolutely trustworthy. I laugh every time I think of inviting him for dinner in an apartment I lived in with my friend Joan. I cooked a spaghetti dinner and he told me how delicious it was. After we were married, I, of course, cooked a spaghetti dinner. Andy sort of coughed and told me he would teach me how to make a really good spaghetti sauce.

Andy is a kind, patient, loving husband and a role model for our children, especially our five sons. They all cook, do dishes, laundry, garden and are good at repair work around the house.

Where did you live?

In 1955, the United States was at war with Korea. Andy was in his senior year at dental school and had a choice to make: be drafted or enlist for two years in the service of his choice. He chose the Air Force. Our first two years of marriage were spent at Otis Air Force Base in Falmouth, Mass. It was there that our first children were born, Mary Grace in August 1957 and Joseph the following year. We lived off-base and joined St. Patrick's Church, where Mary Grace and Joseph were baptized. We made many wonderful friends and started a study group using the Adult Baltimore Catechism. I still remember one question: "John is a communist who says he is very happy, but is he really happy?" I know what the expected answer was, but thought it the dumbest question ever. Thank God for Vatican II! We still belong to the Bible study group started by Father Martin, who invited us to join it 15 years ago when Andy retired. The group includes a woman rabbi named Miriam. We meet every Friday morning after Lauds. Not a session goes by without someone quoting Father Martin's words of wisdom or asking, "What would Father Martin say?"

How would you describe your marriage?

The easy answer is it is a wonderful marriage. A marriage that I wish all could have. Neither one of us takes this blessing for granted. It's not without disagreements, but we continue to grow, learn from each other, and work at keeping the relationship strong and loving. We share a deep, abiding faith in God, and are thankful for our relationship to Mount Saviour.

Since we have retired, we now start our day with Lauds and attend Mass a few times during the week. I can't imagine what life would be without this gift.

What is your favorite scripture passage?

Luke 1:26. Luke's amazing story is not about what Mary did to deserve this honor. It heightens my dependency on God, my awareness of his love and mercy. I can't earn these gifts. They are his to give. I must accept them with love and gratitude. I'm not always able to do this and find myself trying to prove myself to God. As Father Martin would tell me, "God's love is freely given, just be open to receive it."

How do you pray?

I enjoy reading the Bible and learning of God the Father through the life of Christ. I recognize the importance of relationships. I am so aware of the beauty that surrounds me: the song of birds, beauty in the humble flower of the dandelion, the blessings of family, the joys of friendship, my unique loving relationship with Andy. When Jesus chose the apostles, he said, "Come follow me." Fr. Joseph Gabriel, Mount Saviour's new prior, gave a

sermon on the Feast of St. Andrew that instructed, "Jesus did not say, 'Follow my philosophy my doctrine, my dogma ...' He said, 'Follow me.' " The humanity of Jesus has shown us the way through love, forgiveness, righteous indignation and service.

Would you say something about your children and grandchildren?

We have been blessed with six beautiful, healthy children and eight grandchildren, five of whom are adults: Michael Andrew, the twins, Damien and Adrian have completed college and are now working, and Nicholas is in his third year of college. The next grandchildren are what we call the "second generation": Caleb, 12, Maria, 10, and Aidan, who will be 10 in July.

What causes you sorrow?

Our greatest sadness is that none of our children has kept the faith. This is a mystery to Andy and me. Our children and grandchildren are in our daily prayers and we have confidence that they will one day be open to God's invitation to come home to it.

Is there anything else?

My sorrow, my hopes, my joy are all part of one concern. Somehow, we've lost the sense of community in this country and the realization that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. I'm saddened by the senseless taking of lives through war and guns on our streets. I long for all hearts to be open to caring for one another. From that comes great happiness.

[Mercy Sr. Camille D'Arienzo, broadcaster and author, narrates *Stories of Forgiveness*, a book about people whose experiences have caused them to consider the possibilities of extending or accepting forgiveness. The audio book is available through the book's website, storiesofforgiveness.com [2].]

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