

Taking the plunge

I met the Focolare in 1975 through friends. I didn't really understand it but something kept bringing me back. My two friends got involved with the young people quickly. I was invited to a Music Festival in Rome. All the young people were going and I decided to go along. While in Rome I met Lieta who was the group leader at the time. She fascinated me because she was so full of life and I asked her so many questions. During the time I was there, I saw that the young people didn't just talk about living the gospel but really put it into practice. e.g. when I came back from the bathroom in the hostel, my bed was made, nobody said who did it. Another time we were going on a bus in Rome and one of the girls who had been so busy rehearsing for the music festival insisted on me sitting down on the seat and she stood even though she was exhausted.

The music festival was called a Gen Fest where young people from all over the world came and expressed their lives through songs music and mimes. At the end of the festival, I was very impressed that everything was put back in order.

On the way back on the plane, I deliberately sat beside Lieta and, God love her, I never stopped asking her questions about her life all the way home. She fascinated me, she was only a few years older than me, she wasn't a nun, she said she wasn't going to get married and yet she was so happy, where I was not.

There was a lot going on in my life at that time. My mother had been ill for years and as I was an only child and very close to my mother, I was so bitter that she did not have good health. My father deep down was suffering because of my mother's health too and sometimes it was too much for me because we had no close relatives to support us. I wanted to escape and forget all this suffering.

I was torn between getting more involved with the Focolare and my life as I always known it. Eventually I took the plunge and started to live this way of life with the other young people. I discovered that my vocation/call, was to live this life and bring it into wherever I am in the world. Then when my mother died, and at this stage my Father was becoming blind I found such a family in the community of the Focolare where so many really gave their lives for me, really supporting me at that difficult time.

All along, I had wanted a family of my own and prayed that I would meet someone. I heard Lieta was storming Heaven for me. Then I met my husband Ciaran who was also involved with the Focolare and through him I felt God had given me an extended family. We have been married for 27 years and have 3 sons.

During those early difficult times, I didn't believe God had a plan for me at all. Oftentimes, I felt God had forgotten me, but looking back now, I can see the path that I was taken along by Him. Life isn't always easy and there have been many challenges along the way, but we have been able to overcome them through loving and supporting one another and through the community who share this life with us.

I have discovered that by nature I would be quite a negative person and perhaps more of a talker but because of trying to live the Gospel and love and empathise with each person I meet, I can be more positive and to my surprise sometimes people have opened up to me and shared many difficulties. I have learned to listen to people in a non- judgemental way. tried to be more positive and try and see things in a new light. Over the last few years, I have found people tending to pour their hearts out to me, I feel its because I listen the way Chiara has taught us to listen, being empty, non judgemental. Recently two of my neighbours husbands have died and I have tried to be there for them. Making the phone call, asking them how they are, dropping in on them. It means a lot to them

Our sons came to the Mariapolis with us down through the years and were involved with the young people. However, like a lot of young people, they have their difficulties with the church. Yet at the same time, living in an atmosphere of love and unity that Ciaran and I try to live at home, they have had many experiences of being the first to love, to endure the small trials of suffering with dignity, being non-judgemental with their friends and giving their time to others, all of which experience they would share with me and say they try to do it in “the Focolare Way”.