

A generous soul

By Clare Zanzucchi

Mary K Barile, one of the first North American focolarine, passed away suddenly on December 23, 2014 in her sleep. Unexpected, but not unprepared: she spent her last two days visiting friends in need, giving a ride, bringing a Christmas gift to the nurses who cared for her mother years ago — acts of love preparing her for her final encounter.

She was born in 1946 in New Jersey in a family without financial worries. She was very outgoing, altruistic and spontaneous. She loved sport cars, music, her friends, and she had everything but was looking for something more.

In 2009, she wrote her personal life story. “We were home on a college break, and the conversation with a friend seemed always switched to life and its meaning and God. ‘But who is he really?’ I asked. After a moment my friend replied, ‘God is Love.’ I was taken aback by this answer only to discover that she had taken that line from an encounter she had had days before with members of the Focolare.”

In search for a meaning in her life, her own first meeting with the Focolare came just a few weeks later, when she gave in to her friend’s encouragement to meet the group.

“What transpired during that meeting was remarkable,” she wrote, “I felt myself immersed in the love of God. I still cannot define the feeling or justify how such a thing could happen with strangers, but that’s how my story began.”

On that day, she met Graziella de Luca, one of the earliest to follow Focolare founder Chiara Lubich. Compelled to know more, Mary K participated in a formal meeting held in a church hall in New York City.

“The audience consisted of regular people, older folks, young people, college age youth like us, priests and a bishop,” she wrote. “A variety of people gathered together, and the talk given by Graziella was about suffering and Jesus crucified and forsaken. Naturally, me being me, I did not sit but held up the back of the hall by standing. The more she spoke, the more powerful her words and the more the wall behind me softened ... I knew that I had hit upon something which I later discovered to be truth and life.”

With her honesty and generosity, Mary K understood that God was calling her to follow him through the Focolare. She remembered, “This Gospel message, this cry for unity, or this profound understanding of giving oneself to him was not easy. I did say my ‘yes,’ finally, thanks to the good wishes and praying of some good people, and on November 1, 1969, I arrived in the pre-school of formation in Chicago. I drove the entire way across the country and never looked back.”

She then went to study in the Focolare’s little city of Loppiano, Italy, in 1972.

In 1974, she wrote to Chiara Lubich, “I want to be always faithful and live our ideal in a pure way, just as you gave it to us. And I know that Jesus Forsaken is the key.” Mary K remained faithful until the end. After Loppiano, she lived one year in Belgium, then from 1979 on in Manhattan. Many people remember her enthusiasm and love in showing her beloved New York to visitors. Even in dark moments, she continued to build relationships and give herself to others.

Living City was always in her heart. She helped promote the magazine, signed up many subscriptions and continually helped us with her creative ideas.

In 2007, she wrote an experience for *Living City*, helping a woman with the public transportation in Manhattan: “What followed in our conversation was truly remarkable because I explained every detail of that tough time to her, which also included the relationship built with my boss during his last two months of life. One of the first comments I made to him was how this time was truly a ‘moment of God,’ and conversation after conversation was based on that: suffering and love ... My companion listened attentively and was most grateful for the travel assistance but mostly for the courage she had received from our conversation. My stop was approaching, and she thanked me. ‘God put you here today just for me.’”

That was Mary K — generous, ready to love and spend time for whoever needed her assistance. We all can learn from her that nothing should come before loving our neighbor.

With Susanne Janssen

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