

## SISTER ANNE OF THE TRINITY



Sister Anne Clem answered the Lord's call on September the fifth, 1997.

The days, months and years of her final journey were filled with both sadness and joy. Sadness, because as each stroke took its toll we experienced the fading of Anne's vital presence among us. Still, we knew a certain joy in the fact that she did not suffer and remained at peace even in the midst of increasing diminishments.

Anne's first stroke occurred June 25, 1989, the day after we celebrated her eighty-third birthday. This stroke resulted in a partial paralysis of her right side. After her initial hospitalization and with typical determination, sister carried out the prescribed physical therapy.

Contributing to community work was a high priority for Anne so she was delighted when by year's end she once again could answer mail and help fill print shop orders. Though no longer able to answer the phone and door regularly, people in all walks of life remembered the inspiration

she was to them and many continued to keep in touch by phone and letter.

After this first stroke it was obvious that Sister tired easily and sometimes suffered from a certain mental confusion. This last condition was the more difficult because Anne was keenly aware of her lapses. She once made this poignant remark to an enthusiastic visitor who told Anne that she was delighted to get to know her. "You can't know me, I am no longer myself."

Just as we were rejoicing in this period of Anne's better health a massive stroke occurred on July 22, 1991. Because nothing more could be done for her in the hospital, sister was brought back to the monastery on August the fifth. Dr. Noah Smernoff, our faithful friend of many years and her primary physician, advised that all medications be withdrawn and warned us that sister probably would not live longer than ten days; her condition improved immediately!

Thus began a long journey for after this initial improvement many and various setbacks occurred, including congestive heart failure. As sister emerged from each episode weaker but still with us, Dr. Smernoff could only marvel. Our chaplain at the time perhaps expressed the mystery best when he remarked, "God still has something for her to do here below and someone, somewhere needs her life of prayer."

We were fortunate in being able to provide the twenty-four hour care sister needed here in the monastery. Mrs. Clem, though adamantly opposed to her daughter's decision to enter Carmel, nonetheless established an independent family trust fund for sister's medical care should it ever be needed

Rita Ellis was Anne's main caregiver during the day and she watched over sister with unmatched skill and devotion. Irene Ramos, another excellent trained nurse's aide, gently and graciously cared for sister's every need throughout her shift. This arrangement made it possible for us to spend quality time with Sister, reading to her, praying with her and bringing her daily Communion.

Anne Elisabeth Clem was the only daughter of Major General John Lincoln Clem and Elisabeth Sullivan Clem. She was born in San Antonio, Texas on June 24, 1906. Anne shared with us many childhood memories of those Texas days when she sat in the backyard fig tree, enjoying her book and the figs as well. However, eating dinner alone with her nanny, according to the social norms of the day, was not so fondly remembered.

When Anne was still a child the family moved to Washington, DC. Her playmates included the children of various diplomats and high ranking army personnel, which did not stop any of them from engaging in the usual children's pranks, such as racing from floor to floor and ringing neighbors' doorbells.

Once of age Anne, however reluctantly, was expected to accompany her mother on various social calls. Anne often spoke fondly of Green, the faithful chauffeur who continued to drive Mrs. Clem about for many years long after Anne was in Carmel.

Sister was particularly close to and fond of her father, Major Clem, the famed Johnny Shiloh of Civil War days, also known as "The Little Drummer Boy of Chickamauga." His life has been featured in many articles, books and in more recent years, a movie by Walt Disney. From her father Anne inherited a sunny sweetness, an obliging manner and an indomitable cheerfulness, all of which combined with the sterner qualities from her mother's side to create a most unique personality.

Fr. Edward Leahy OCD, now also gone to his reward, caught Anne's spirit when he once remarked, "Sister Anne you are truly irrepressible, nothing can keep you down." And it was true. Whatever happened, misunderstandings, corrections, ill health, Sister maintained an unquenchable cheerfulness based on a rock solid foundation of trust in God's love and care.

Strong-willed as her mother, when Anne decided to enter Carmel a battle of wills resulted. An agreement of sorts was reached: Anne would attend school in Paris, make her debut in Washington and then the question of a vocation to Carmel would be discussed.

Fr. Fulton J. Sheen was Anne's director at this time. In a letter written on July 25, 1927 to Mother Teresa Seelbach at the Carmel in New Albany, he delicately alludes to the situation:

"Miss Clem has been a penitent of mine during the past year and is most anxious to enter Carmel. She is a young lady of refinement and solid virtue, steadfast in the service of God, immune from a worldly spirit and imbued with a willingness to sacrifice much for a closer union with God."

A rather heavy social life was imposed on her by her mother and this she lived in accordance with her mother's wishes, but in the depths of her own heart she was thinking of other and more serious things. Her devotion to Mass and Communion despite physical inconvenience and parental discouragement has been very notable and praiseworthy."

Although directors' letters of recommendation often seem to have no relation to the person involved, in Anne's case this letter rings true. Though reticent about her past, from Anne's spontaneous remarks over the years a picture very like the one Fulton Sheen described in his letter can be drawn. Her detachment "from the world" as we used to say, was extraordinary and her faith only deepened through the years.

The Paris interlude seems to have passed uneventfully enough and at the end of that time Anne became one of

Washington's most successful debutantes.

The "Coming Out" accomplished, and her part of the compromise with her mother fulfilled, Anne made plans to enter Carmel. In 1922 Mother Theresa Seelbach had made the New Albany foundation from the Carmel of Bettendorf, Iowa, with Sister Hilda and another sister who later returned to Bettendorf. When Anne arrived six years later, Anna Lee Elder (Mother Miriam/Indianapolis) Agnes Costello (Mother Agnes/Des Plaines, Chicago) were there to welcome her as well as several other novices. Thus began a journey during which Sister Anne never looked back. It was this core community that established the Indianapolis monastery in 1932.

One of the stories Anne laughingly shared with us concerned her trip to enter the New Albany Carmel. Arrived at the train station in that small town on August 10, 1928 Anne located a taxi, but when she gave the address of the little frame house on East Ninth Street that served the nuns as a temporary monastery the driver emphatically answered, "Lady, you don't want to go there!" And no wonder, dressed in the height of fashion with hair stylishly bobbed, Anne must have looked a most unlikely candidate for Carmel.

The Albany Tribune had a field day when "The Society Girl" received the habit. The same type of publicity occurred three years later when after her solemn profession on May 29, 1930 she received the black veil.

After serving the Indianapolis community in various capacities through her many gifts, in 1954 Sister Anne became one of the founding members of the Reno monastery. She left both the Indianapolis monastery and ours a wonderful legacy of a whole-hearted life lived fully and selflessly in God. A woman of strong convictions and great intelligence, humility did not come to her naturally, but she strove always to live in the truth. The scribbled-on envelopes that she left behind, and for which she was famous, the bits and pieces of paper stuck away in various prayer books all speak of her continuing efforts to grow in God's truth and love and in the knowledge of God's ways. An avid reader, eager to learn, we owe our overflowing library of theological books to sister's discriminating taste.

Anne now knows in reality what she once wrote:

"We are never alone. May God lift our hearts beyond all shadow, and may we know, in peace and joy, that God is beyond all darkness, Light of the World, our Hope and Truth and Way."