

Julia Nanette Kelly

7 December 1924 - 20 August 2017

To do justice to Nanette Kelly in the time and space of a eulogy is both a privilege and a challenge. Julia, thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of many who have formed her wide network of friends and colleagues.

I thank all those who have shared with me memories and information about her. While I have been preparing what I would say, there's been a voice in my head, and you can guess whose, saying: "*Anne, don't make a fuss. This is all you need to say: she was born, she lived and she died.*" Well, I'm not settling for that.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge Nan's much loved sister, Gretchen, whose health does not allow her to be here to-day. The bond of affection between the two sisters was tangible. Every week without fail, wherever Gretchen was living, Nan would arrive in her little car to take her out for the day or afternoon. This continued at first when Gretchen moved to St Joseph's Nursing Home at Kensington. When it became impossible for Nan to visit, both sisters knew the pain of isolation from each other.

Nan was born on 7 December 1924 at Wangaratta in Victoria. Her father was the doctor and I imagine her mother, whom we all knew as Pixie, was given fully to rearing her three children, Nanette, Gretchen and John. She was educated by the Brigidine Sisters in her primary years and had a lifelong love of and regard for them. She had only just turned 10 when she arrived at Sacré Coeur Melbourne in February 1935 as a boarder.

That was the beginning of a love of the Society of the Sacred Heart, of RSCJ and of all things associated with us.

School records show that she achieved academically from the outset and that she was a leader. It was a time of the movement for Catholic Action, inspired by the Belgian Cardinal Cardijn who promoted action through seeing, judging, acting. I wonder if this sowed the seed in Nan for a life of service and responding to any need she saw. Someone said to me: *She had an eye for need.* This echoes words Mary MacKillop often said to her Sisters: "*Never see a need without doing something about it.*"

Her academic achievements and her leadership were recognized in her final year. The Annual Prizegiving was presided over by the Archbishop and attended by a number of priests. Nan was awarded the Prize for Excellence which meant that she received the First Medallion and Ribbon of Merit, as well as prizes for Distinction in Studies, Christian Doctrine and general good conduct, all requirements for the Prize for Excellence. She also won prizes for History, History of Art, German and Science. There is a delightful entry in the School Journal on 17 December 1942: *"It was an outstanding occasion in the history of Burke Rd because the Prize for Excellence was merited for the first time since the foundation, a period of 54 years! Nanette Kelly was the winner and the enthusiasm of the school knew no bounds. They found it difficult to restrain themselves until the Clergy had left the room."*

Nan was awarded a Bursary for Newman College, University of Melbourne where she excelled in Science subjects. The 1945 school annual reported that, as well as continuing her university studies, she was also teaching Science and German part-time at Sacré Coeur and was still doing that in 1947.

1946 was a very difficult year for the Kelly family. Gretchen entered the Society of the Sacred Heart in February, aged 18, a major separation for her and the whole family. Both her father, Dr John Kelly and her grandfather, William Kelly died within a very short time of each other. Subsequently Pixie, Nan and John moved to Melbourne.

Probably in the late 1940s - early 1950s, she travelled to England and taught at a prestigious school, the Alice Ottley School for Girls. With her spirit of adventure, she would sometimes go to the Headmistress saying: *I'm off to Paris for the weekend and I'd like to leave a little early on Friday.* Nothing daunted Nan, even the renowned Headmistress, Miss Roden.

Though it's not clear when she returned to Melbourne, it seems that she would have been back, living with her mother and brother, Johnnie, when he died in an accident in 1957. Undoubtedly, resilience was a character trait of these two remarkable women.

Nan and Pixie moved to Sydney in the early to mid-1960s, closer proximity to Gretchen being part of the motivation for the change. They lived for a time in the eastern suburbs and became parishioners of St Joseph's Edgecliff.

One day Pixie noticed a new unit building being constructed right behind St Joseph's Church. They decided to move to Karoola on its completion in 1968. Nan lived there until 2014 when she moved to Albert Court. She was the Honorary Secretary of Karoola for most of those 46 years and a great friend of many of the residents, never too busy to help anyone at any hour of the day or night. She especially loved the garden and spent many hours there after she retired.

Nan was involved with St Joseph's and dedicated to the Parish since she first moved to Sydney. One of the Franciscan Friars who remembers her from her early days said she was committed to looking after every wedding, every funeral and to setting up everything to make it easier for those involved. Nothing was a trouble to her. He remembers her fondly and admired her commitment, her loyalty and her generosity.

In later years, Nan took over more duties. Her day always began with the opening of the Church and attending the 7 a.m. Mass. Undoubtedly, her faith was the bedrock of her life, a faith that was lived in action and service.

The building of the Albert Court Retirement Hostel was perhaps one of Nan's greatest challenges. She saw the need for a Catholic retirement facility for parishioners. In the early 1980's, she, with Fathers Peter McGrath and Mel Cotter, formed a committee to raise funds, design and build the beautiful Hostel/Nursing Home that is there to-day.

After many challenges, Albert Court was built and opened in 1993. Nan was the Secretary of the Committee through all those years, on the Board and then a volunteer. It was finally her home for the last three years of her life.

Nan was a woman of friendship. She had many friends across the world, of all ages and in all walks of life. She was much loved by them all.

Evidence for this may be deduced from the fact that she had 14 godchildren – many of her friends calling on her in this capacity. Speaking with some of them this week, I heard recurring themes: she always found time for them, she treated each as though they were the only one, she was great company and fun, gave wise and timely counsel and was interested in every aspect of their lives. One godson said to me: *We were her children.*

Nan taught for a time at Ascham School in Edgecliff. With the introduction of the Wyndham Scheme in the 1960s, many Science teachers especially in Catholic schools were faced with new approaches for which they were not prepared. Many a Brother or Sister was coached by Nan in new methods. She was prominent in the Catholic Science Teachers Association and co-authored a Biology text book for Higher School Certificate.

She was a Senior Lecturer at Sydney Teachers' College. We can only try to imagine her influence on students, the ways in which she enabled them to become good teachers, insisting firmly but kindly on high standards and also the impact she would have had on her colleagues. The words of Janet Erskine Stuart, a great Sacred Heart educator, could surely be applied to Nan: *It is not so much what we say or do that educates; what really educates is who we are.*

Nan's education at Sacré Coeur Melbourne was the source of her love of and support for the Society of the Sacred Heart and its schools in Australia and New Zealand. She served on a Provincial education advisory committee in the 1970s.

Being an alumna from Melbourne, she was able to take a somewhat impartial role in bringing about the fusion of two Alumnae Associations of Kincoppal and Rose Bay at the time of amalgamation of the two schools, leading to the foundation of the Sacré Coeur Association New South Wales in 1975. She was again involved when the Constitution of the New South Wales Sacré Coeur Association Incorporated (NSWSCAI) was reviewed, revised and adopted in 2011.

One alumna from this time recalled Nan writing something she called "The Musings of a Tribal Elder". She was passionate for the alumnae association to "reflect the source, history and traditions of the School's foundress, St Madeleine Sophie Barat and the origins of the Society's educational philosophy." The Preamble to the Constitution does this - a lasting legacy of Nan's courage and confidence in "good stewardship" and her deep faith in all things Sacré Coeur that permeated her words, actions and encounters with all who knew and loved her.

Nan was appointed to the School Council of Kincoppal-Rose Bay in 1977. She chaired the Council's Committee which planned all the events associated with the Centenary in 1982. These included the Centenary Exhibition of memorabilia, the Centenary Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral, two Banquets at the Sydney Town Hall, the book launch of "Living Stones" by Sister Leila Barlow, the official opening of the Hughes and McGuinness Centres. She carried out this multi-faceted role with great efficiency and charm.

In 1983, she was appointed Chair of the School Council, a position she held until the end of 1989. She ran very well organised and efficient Council meetings. Council members and the Principal were asked to present monthly reports on ONE page only. *'We do not need to cut down any more trees'*. As Principal, I could count on her wise counsel and loyal support. She would often remind me *that the cemeteries are full of indispensables*.

As Chair of the Council, she oversaw the process of recruitment for the first lay Principal, chaired the interview panel and negotiated the incoming Principal's contract. This was new territory. She carried this out with due diligence, appropriate consultation, a sense of collegiality with the Council and accountability to the Society. As the retiring Principal, I experienced her unwavering support and sensitivity.

Another great love of Nan's was Sancta Sophia College. She was appointed a Member of the College Council in 1977, a position she held until 2000. An active contributor to Council, Nan took a particular interest in the College Treasures, the Library and the College Archives. She was honoured for her contribution to the College by being made a Fellow by the Council. One Chair of the Council said that she was the no-nonsense person to turn to for clear thinking and wise counsel.

I have spoken to a number of people this week or received written testimonies from them. I have been touched by words and phrases used to describe Nan and now, in conclusion, name but a few: she was kindness personified, indefatigable, a connector of people, great fun, always interested in the other person, always available, a woman of great resilience, empathy, humour and common sense.

Nan was involved in a day of reflection for Alumnae in 2014. The theme was "The Vocation of Ageing". Words of St Madeleine Sophie shared that day speak to me of Nan: *"As time goes on, the aged often come to a freedom which brings in its wake a quiet love and a kinship with all."*

As we celebrate Nan's life to-day, let us give thanks that she knew and lived *the freedom which brings in its wake a quiet love and a kinship with all.*

Rest in peace, dear Nan, until we meet again.

Sr Ann McGrath rscj