

Eulogy Sr Norma Wood SM

Norma Alice Wood was born at home at 165 Westgarth Street, Northcote, Melbourne, on the 22nd August, 1920. She was the third daughter of John Walter Wood and his wife Catherine, who had been a Fitzgerald before her marriage. Norma (who very early in her life somehow was given the nickname of "Daudy" by her father) had two older sisters: Kathleen Alma who was 4½ and Evelyn May who was 2½ when she was born. The family was completed with the birth of John Fitzgerald who was born when Norma was 3.

All the siblings spoke of a happy childhood which was filled with the ups and downs of family life. All of them, with the possible exception of Ev, were blessed with a strong sense of humour and a good sense of the ridiculous which created a home full of fun and a lot of laughter.

John Walter, who was always known by his second name, Walter, had started his working life in the Commonwealth Department of Treasury and transferred to the Commonwealth Bank when it was set up in c1912. As a bank officer he was transferred to Sydney sometime in the mid-twenties to work in Head Office in Martin Place.

Our grandmother found a house in Vacluse, which was close to some of her cousins, and was keen to live there. However our Grandfather had found the house in Rosebery Street in Mosman, which was to be the family home for more than 40 years. It seems a major consideration in his choice was that he thought the trip to work by boat was very attractive and even after the Harbour Bridge was built he continued to travel by boat.

The local church, Sacred Heart, Mosman, was an important part of the family's life. The children went to school there - the girls to the convent, which was run by the Mercy nuns, and John to Marist Brothers, Mosman. It was an era of Sodalities and the Holy Name Society. There was also an active St. Vincent de Paul Society, which was very busy during the Depression years. The Wood children grew up in a friendly neighbourhood with many friends of all faiths. On completion of her schooling at the height of the Depression, Norma was fortunate to obtain work as a book-keeper in a millinery business.

During the war Grandpa, who was the Chief Cashier of the bank, was sent to Broken Hill with all the gold reserves not only of Australia but also of South Africa and England. This was done in order to protect the gold from the possibility of a Japanese invasion of Australia. Presumably it was thought that no-one would think of looking in the gaol at Broken Hill for the gold reserves. During this time Evelyn and Norma remained and worked in Sydney. Kath joined the WAAF in Melbourne and John joined the RAAF and served in New Guinea.

Norma had often expressed that she had a vocation but knew that the Mercy Congregation was not what she was seeking. She had at one stage thought that she would like to work as a missionary with those with leprosy. Her friend, Pat de Coek, had expressed a similar wish to join a Congregation and as it turned out both of them found the Marist Congregation to be their choice.

Norma loved her life in the Congregation and I don't think she ever doubted that she had made the right decision when, after the war, she finally entered. Dad always said that on the days when family could visit Norma when she was in the novitiate Grandpa was always up bright and early and urging the rest of the family to hurry as he didn't wish to miss any time with Daudy.

Norma loved her life as a Marist and was very happy with her choice. Whilst she found life as a teacher of early primary school children sometimes daunting, particularly during the 50s when the baby boomers filled classes to capacity plus, she never doubted her vocation as a Marist Sister. It is interesting to note that she was one of the four who were the first Marists at St. Benedict's School in Burwood in Melbourne and some five decades later she, with Sr. Dorothea White, was one of the two who were the last Marists at Burwood.

As her extended family we and our cousins were always delighted to spend time with Norma. She was always an enthusiastic guest at family birthday celebrations and a loud and keen singer of "Happy Birthday" and a very happy eater of cake!

As her family we thank her for her unconditional love, her enthusiasm and her great example of how to joyfully live life to the best of your ability.

God Bless, Norma, from all whose lives you have touched during your long and productive life.

Mrs Penny Noonan – niece of Sr. Norma Wood – 8th January 2016