



Sister Jean Stabile's story begins in Somerville, New Jersey, where she grew up in a family "blessed with loving Catholic parents." Along with her younger brothers, Sister Jean was enrolled in the public schools and enthusiastically participated in many activities. At the beginning of her sophomore year in public high school, she was thrilled to be chosen as a JV cheerleader (which should not come as a surprise to anyone who knows the ever energetic Sister Jean!)

Sister Jean's life took a dramatic change when the parish priest persuaded her parents to transfer their children to Catholic Schools. She was enrolled in St. Peter High School, which meant that not only would she be leaving her public school friends and activities, but she would also have a daily bus ride of at least 15 miles each way. However, Sister Jean says that the move to St. Peter High School led her to a future she could never have dreamed.

It was at St. Peter's where Sister Jean first came in contact with the Sisters of Charity. "Until I got to St. Peter's, I didn't even know that the Sisters of Charity existed. At St. Peter's, Sisters of Charity taught practically every class. They were great teachers." Sister Jean remembers hearing one of the Sisters of Charity, Sister Regina Marie, address the students on religious life during her senior year. She became convinced that God was calling her to religious life as a Sister of Charity.

After graduation from high school in 1943, Sister Jean entered the Sisters of Charity and went to live at the Motherhouse in Convent Station. She fondly remembers her days as a postulant in the "Band of '43." She continued as a novice, where she also received training to be a teacher. She enjoyed learning, praying, and also having fun with the other novices. She remembers going sleigh riding, in full habit, on the convent grounds down to a pond. She also went on long walks with the Novice Mistress and would often pick apples at the orchard that was on the property.

At age 19, Sister Jean was sent out to be an elementary school teacher at St. Rose of Lima School in Newark, New Jersey. She used her training and, as any new teacher, she also learned on the job. "It was wonderful. I remember one time, as a young teacher, when the crayons were kind of hard, and I thought, let's put them on the radiator to soften them up. So I put them on the radiator and got involved in something and all of the sudden one of the children called out, "Sister!" I looked to see the crayons melting all down the radiator. They all looked lovely falling down in all different colors!" She admits, "I got in trouble for that, which I should!"

Sister Jean supplemented her on the job training with formal teacher education at Saint Elizabeth College. She received a B.S. in Elementary Education in 1950. Her later educational credentials include

a Master of Arts in Education from Villanova University in 1965 and a Master of Science in Administration and Supervision from Fordham University in 1988.

After ten years of teaching at the elementary level, Sister Jean was assigned to teach in high school. She says that she loved high school teaching best of all. "Through the years, the happiest and most challenging experiences came from moving from grade school to high school." She taught at St. Peter High School, the same school that she had attended as a student. She also taught at Sts. Peter & Paul High School in St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands.

Perhaps Sister Jean's favorite assignment was returning to St. Peter High School as principal. She loved interacting with the students and was obviously loved by them. Sister Jean faithfully attended school sporting events and pep rallies (perhaps using her cheerleading training from years earlier!) From time to time, she still proudly wears a wool jacket embroidered with "Sister Jean," which she wore when seated on the bench with the team at football games. She continues to keep in touch with several of her former students and loves to hear from former students who are now parents or teachers themselves.

In 1998, Sister Jean came to the Academy, where she served as Dean of Students. At that time, she also moved into the Motherhouse. She found it a wonderful experience to live with other sisters in the Motherhouse. She really values the opportunity to join other sisters for morning prayer, daily Mass, and evening vespers. "Living here is a blessing in so many ways. You can share so much with the 70+ sisters who live here. You have discussions on world events or on our community or sports, or anything."

Sister Jean reflects that some things have changed since she entered the Sisters of Charity in 1943. For one thing, sisters no longer wear the habit of that day, which featured a cap with intricate starched ruffles called "flutes." The "fluter" had to bleach the cap, then add starch, roll the cap through a machine, and then place it on a block for shaping. Sister Jean said that you did not want to become known as a good fluter, or you would never be able to escape from doing that chore for other sisters who would only be too glad to give the job to someone else.

To Sister Jean, the essence of being a Sister of Charity, however, remains unchanged. "I never had any doubts about my vocation." She is devoted to Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and what Mother Seton and Saint Vincent DePaul both so beautifully and powerfully represented in the way they lived their lives. "Always do for others. Saint Vincent de Paul saw Christ in everyone. That is a beautiful thought to have with you in religious life. You are doing it for Christ." She encourages others to read about Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, "because that would also sum up what the Sisters of Charity are all about – the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth."

Sister Jean, along with all the other Sisters of Charity, continues to pray every day for vocations. She trusts God, and hopes that women will listen for God's call to them.

Though no longer in full time ministry in education, Sister Jean remains vital and active. She loves to drive and coordinates the transportation program for sisters who live in the Motherhouse. She goes out almost every day to drive a sister to an appointment to attend to another errand. When waiting for

someone to be finished with an appointment, she prefers to use the time to take long walks rather than sit still in a waiting room. Between all her comings and goings, Sister Jean also volunteers in the Development Office. She enjoys following sports and current events, and especially enjoys spending time with her loving extended family.

Sister Jean will celebrate her 70th Jubilee as a Sister of Charity this year. We congratulate Sister Jean and expect her to keep going for many more years in the ministry that brings her, and all those she meets, so much joy.

Interviewed and written by Wendy Relation

Photo by Donna Sartor