



A great peace

Sr Mary Roarty celebrates a remarkable 60 years



Sr Mary Roarty was born in Sydney in 1927 and attended Loreto College Kirribilli for 12 years and later Sydney Technical College. Sr Mary entered religious life in 1947 and this year she celebrates a remarkable 60 years with the Loreto Sisters.

On discussing her decision to enter religious life, Sr Mary says, "There's always an element of mystery in such a call. All I can say is that I experienced a deep conviction within that this was what God was asking of me - and I just had to do it. With the decision came a great peace, and in spite of the ups and downs of religious life, this peace has been always present. I chose the Loreto Sisters because I had no knowledge of or experience with any other religious order and the memory of the nuns who had taught me remained an inspiration".

Sr Mary began her career as a primary teacher at Nedlands in WA, while gaining registration from Melbourne Training College. She taught at Nedlands for 5 years, followed by 12 years as Mistress of Schools at Portland in Victoria. She then took on a teaching role at Loreto Kirribilli for four years and a further three years as community leader. Her next stop was teaching in Brisbane for four years and her next move was one that inspired and impacted on her greatly. Sr Mary moved to the Kimberley where she taught for twenty years, in the township of Broome and then to the more remote communities of Lombadina, Kalumburu and Turkey Creek in the east Kimberley. A further period of time was spent in the small rural community in the Pilbara at Three Springs, where she was involved in pastoral work.

Her great love and dedication to the people in the Kimberley began when she realised very quickly how lacking in confidence, self-esteem and ambition they were.

"They were so different from the children I had taught for years. One of the common expressions I kept hearing was 'we're just rubbish people'. This went to my heart and I prayed to God that I would find a way to help them see themselves completely loved by God and equal to all children. So I concentrated on trying to develop their natural skills which were quite outstanding in the areas of art, music, sport and nature studies.

"As well as these gifts, they possessed such qualities as a great sense of fun, openness, thoughtfulness, and a loving nature- I tried to build on these skills - to increase their confidence and pride - We had art every afternoon - and they loved it! I did my best with the three R.s, but diverted somewhat from the Perth education syllabus! As far as results went, there was progress, but it was slow, however, the attendance improved over the years and school was a happy place. I grew to love them and as the years passed most of my time and energy was directed towards teaching the most needy how to read and write. When I was teaching in Kalumburu some years later, I heard the sad news that three of my past students had committed suicide, all in early twenties - I remembered them as fine young men - I think this reflects the sad situation of the Aboriginal communities.

"There still exists a very strong inferiority complex and there are few opportunities for jobs. The years of suppression in the early days of settlement run deep in their veins. Government compensation in monetary terms is no answer. Education is the bottom line, I think, and this is my deep disappointment. Helen Parer is our brave lone IBVM voice in the Centre. We pray that many young people may feel called to go to help support the aboriginal people who are really very much part of "our" land. Aboriginal people taught me more than I taught them - further, I got rid of a lot of the clutter in my life up there!

There have been many of our sisters who have inspired me as well as my two brothers and my IBVM sister, Anne. Many of the lay people whom I worked with in the Kimberley in education and also in the medical field were also a great inspiration. It's a harsh environment, but has some compensations, but it's isolated and can be very lonely, so I admired their dedication. I think these people signify that it is a really challenging Call which, if one can cope, it is well worth answering."

Sr Mary currently lives in Sydney and spends her time visiting nursing homes and giving prayer services. She enjoys gardening at home and just "being" with a good family community.