



Sister Maria Rochford CJ 1930-2016

by Sister Colette Flynn CJ

Diana Rochford, Sr Maria, was born and grew up in Enfield North London where she had a blissful childhood. Her father was a third generation market gardener. Her mother had been a Gym Mistress.

When World War II was declared Diana was 9 years of age. She was sent to school to St Mary's Ascot, considered a safe place. Two years later I was also sent to Ascot and for the same reason. When there was an air raid warning we were woken up by Mother Mercedes. 'I'm so sorry the cow has gone.' (Our name for the siren.) We traipsed down to the Gym where we spent the rest of the night on mattresses on the floor. Diana was in a bunk on the Gym stage from where she looked down with great interest at the goings on below. I also remember her playing hockey, inner or centre forward and very fast, and also playing excellent championship tennis.

Now mostly in her own words – "When I was 15 I felt that Ascot was the place for me. I entered in 1948 with Barbara and Louise as my companions. I took things in my stride and was very happy and thrilled to be part of it all. I was happy with everything.

I knew very little about Mary Ward but I read about her and thought she was a saint. She had been advised to take the path in life to which she was most attracted and that lay straight ahead of her. It was like that with me – a straight line to God.

When I had completed the Noviceship, and then my studies, I was sent to Hampstead, then Ascot, and then Shaftesbury which I loved, especially playing lots of tennis. From 1959 until 1984 I was in Ascot, and had various jobs including Librarian and Head of English. I was also on the Diocesan Education Panel and was Provincial Secretary for some years, when I had plenty of opportunity to drive.

I had two sessions in Zimbabwe teaching English and RE in St Ignatius School, Chishawasha. I've also worked in Cambridge looking after the boarders, and when I went to Hampstead in 1993 I did the TEFL Certificate. I was very happy working with the Jesuit Refugee Service, visiting asylum seekers detained in Harmondsworth Detention Centre and teaching them English. I had English students in Hampstead as well. I felt empty when in 2002 the Government offered all asylum seekers free English lessons in various colleges."

Sr Maria came to St Joseph's in 2010 because her memory was gradually deteriorating. But she had such excellent social skills that this was often hard to spot. She loved being in the fresh air and she loved walking, but getting home was often a problem. To make life more interesting for her, Marion took her to the Harrogate Flower Show. When they met up to go home Maria appeared with a huge armful of beautiful flowers. She had acquired one bloom from every display, picked each up to admire it and forgot to put it back. Marion also took her on two holidays, one to a cottage in Scotland, and next time they explored the Northumbrian coast visiting the Farne Islands and the puffins.

Maria's walking range got shorter and shorter. Having a friendly, happy disposition she made many friends nearer home who always welcomed her – the bookies to watch the races; Sainsbury's to read the papers; Chris Cesar's to see his beautiful landscape photos and to recommend them; and the tattooist to enjoy the free coffee he offered his clients.

Among Maria's interests was singing and she had a beautiful voice, but everything interested her. As at the start of her religious life she put all her resources into whatever it is she was doing, ignoring anything she considered peripheral. I pray that she is now enjoying the joy of her 'straight line to God'.

May she rest in peace.