

Interview Continued

3. What is your writing history? Did it grow out of your professional life as an English literature teacher of many years? Or did it grow out of your personal spiritual practice as a Christian? Or both?

I began journaling in high school “writing in my diary” you might call it. I had a friend who went “off to school” in the 10th grade, and when he left, I told him I would write to him and that became a habit too. (We were married 6 years later!!!) I excelled in English and French in high school (at St. Johns Country Day School!), majored in English, minored in history in college and began my teaching career at a small private school in Norfolk, Va. teaching U. S History and Ancient Civilization, with a focus on writing about history! I taught English as a Second Language in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School system in the late 70's early 80's working with Southeast Asian refugees mainly. I discovered that as they learned English, these children could tell me stories, I could write them down and they could read them back to me... thus they learned to read!

My adult spiritual journey began in Charlotte, leading me to understand the presence of God in all people, Christian or not, including the precious refugee children I was teaching. And so, I wrote about it, prayed about it and wondered about it. Simultaneously I was becoming more and more aware of a call to something, which I later discovered was the priesthood. My spiritual mentors at that time were the Rev. Bob Dannals and the Rt. Rev. Gary Gloster, both of whom are still my mentors.

When we returned to Jacksonville, I began teaching at St. Johns Country Day, teaching U. S. History, World History, World Literature and ultimately Advance Placement Literature and Composition. I was known as the history teacher who taught writing, and that was not always a compliment. But I couldn't resist teaching students how to write well in whatever subject I was teaching. And as they always say, the teacher learns the most. So that is how I cut my teeth on writing! Unfortunately for those I love, there are boxes and boxes and boxes of journals that will need to be disposed of at my demise!

4. How does writing (in different forms perhaps) strengthen one's spiritual life?

For me writing is praying in many ways. Whether I am reflecting on a passage of scripture, a poem, or a piece of literature, it is a way to read, mark and inwardly digest whatever message God might have for me and whatever question I might have for God. I am a notoriously early riser, so I am gifted with a block of time in the “wee cobwebby hours” of the morning (as C. S. Lewis called them). That is when I seem to do my best writing, and I do it every single day. It is a habit, a practice as addicting as my coffee! I believe that scripture is the living word of God, and each day I read and reflect on it, it speaks to me in a different way depending on my frame of reference and where I am in my life.

5. Do you teach writing as part of the work you have done as a spiritual director-teacher at the Cathedral or elsewhere?

I do not teach writing, instead I facilitate book studies, bible studies and pilgrimages of all sorts. I adored teaching writing, because I believe if you can talk, you can write, and when you tell people that they are incredibly freed up to compose. I have encouraged my grandchildren to start journaling and that has been such fun to watch.

6. Who are some of the inspiring spiritual writers who have influenced you personally and you as a writer?

I am not sure there is enough room here for me to list those who have inspired me... they run the gamut from novelists to poets to preachers and pastors. I am hungry for good writing that expresses the love of God and the beauty of Creation. Just to name a few: Frederick Buechner, Henri Nouwen, C. S. Lewis, Flannery O' Connor, Rumi, Billy Collins, Mary Oliver and Clare Tager come to mind.

7. What's an important question in this whole subject area I ought to ask but have missed out?

Perhaps Are you ordained? And the answer is no. I was not ordained for whatever reason, and it does not matter anymore. I feel that my ministry as a writer, pastor and colleague has been ordained by God, and I do not need a collar to practice any of those ministries.

8. How many years did you teach professionally? All at St Johns or at a number of schools? Did you major in English Lit in college?

As a newly married woman and only out of college for one year, I was offered a position at St. Johns Country Day School to fill in for my own high school English teacher in 1977! That's when it all began. I retired for the third time from teaching in 2010 (I think!)

Yes, I majored in English (did my undergraduate thesis on Flannery O'Connor), minored in history and dabbled in French in college. (Harriet Sophie Newcomb College for Women of Tulane University.)