



## THE JOY OF BEING A NUN

Sister Jean Marie Andrews FMDM

The thrill of driving ambulances attracted Sister Jean Marie Andrews to the religious life 50 years ago. She no longer drives ambulances but is still enjoying the religious life, as [Joyce Gan](#) discovers.

FOR THE LAST 50 years, Sister Jean Marie Andrews has led an adventure-filled and fulfilling life with the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM) congregation - from driving ambulances to simply being there to provide pastoral care to those who need it, and, now, to archiving the history of the FMDM sisters in the Malaysia and Singapore region.

Her "yes" to God, came through unusual circumstances though. She first learnt about the FMDM congregation through an article that appeared in "The Straits Times" about three Irish sisters who had come to Singapore from Hong Kong, after having to leave their China mission because of the advancement of communist troops. What appealed to her was that the sisters drove cars and driving was something Sister Jean Marie loved. "But I had no feelings then to be a nun! Far from it!" she recalled jovially.

A year later, at 21, Sister Jean Marie jokingly remarked to her friend that she might "join those nursing sisters in Singapore". Her friend spoke to a visiting Redemptorist Father Tom Creede who then asked to meet with her. "Curiosity got the better of me and I went to meet him but before he could open his mouth, I said, 'Father, I have no intention of becoming a nun,'" Sister Jean Marie recounts of how the evening was spent talking about everything but religious life.

Her call from God came some months later although she did not recognise it as such then. "I began to have a niggling feeling and my mind kept going, 'Why not! Why not!' I fought God for a year but the 'call' became more persistent," she remembers. That prompted her to request for some literature from Father Tom Creede on "those nuns in white and drove cars".

Little did she know that her request would give her a strong urge to respond to God. "Peace of mind and heart came only when I said 'Lord, if this is what you want, I surrender!'" With those words, Sister Jean Marie gave in to God's call. "And now, I wonder where the 50 years have gone. it is a miracle that I have persevered!" Sister Jean Marie remarks.

Her 'yes' to God came as a great surprise to her family though they were good practising Catholics who said the family rosary every night. This was because back then, Sister Jean Marie's one great passion was hockey and she even represented the Penang state team. "But I said to myself, this is for keeps!" in reference to her decision to join the FMDM congregation.

Sister Jean Marie likens her "yes" to God to the same exhilarating feeling she felt each time she dived from the diving board. She was fearful when she first heard God's call, the same way she was scared each time she went on the diving board. "But once you say 'yes' to the Lord, there's a feeling of excitement, peace and joy! So I said, 'Yes! This is what the Lord wants so here I am, Lord.' And I have no regrets, though I still miss my hockey!" she laughs.

## The years flew by

Looking back over the last 50 years, Sister Jean Marie shares how she fulfilled her sense of adventure elsewhere. Trained as a radiographer at the Royal Northern Hospital in London, Sister Jean Marie returned to Singapore and worked as a radiographer at Tan Tock Seng Hospital until Mount Alvernia Hospital was built. There, she set up the X-Ray Department in 1961 and remained till 1983.

She satisfied her love for driving as an ambulance driver between 1961 and 1971. She remembers those days as being very stressful as she used to have to rush off from her duties as a radiographer at Mount Alvernia Hospital.

Then there were the weekends spent selling flags to collect money for the hospital. "In the early days, there were many flag days, so I'm very proud of Mount Alvernia," she recalls and shares how they used to stay up to count their collection and then wake up early on Sunday mornings to go to church." Those were part of the struggles we went through and part of our service to God. We worked very hard back then," she adds. Her work then took her to Villa Francis Home for the Aged where she was Superior and it was there she discovered her love for pastoral care. "I love being there and holding their hands. I used to go round every morning to greet them, serve them lunch and dinner, making sure they had their meals," she says. "At Villa Francis, it's more about making them laugh."

From Villa Francis, she moved to join the Pastoral Care team at Mount Alvernia Hospital and Hospice. She recalls vividly an old man stricken with cancer, who used to sit by himself and who would wave her into his room each time she passes by. "I would sit there holding his hand and after about five minutes, he'll just let go of my hand and tell me that I can go. It's just the presence of a sister that he found comforting," she says.

These days, Sister Jean Marie has quite different duties. For the last two years, she has been archiving the history of the FMDM sisters from 1947. "At first, I thought I'd never be able to do it but Sister Claudia, our Regional Superior, asked me to try it for three months," she says. "Three months came and went! And I am beginning to enjoy it."

Sister Jean Marie has also been part of the Life Direction Team since 1985 and she enjoys her role as a spiritual and retreat director tremendously. "I like helping people to find God in their lives and how to relate to God in prayer. I think everybody needs to get away and be with God once a year," she says. She points out that she may be the retreat director but it is really the Holy Spirit that directs the retreat. "We just listen and help them in their needs."

As her golden jubilee celebration draws near, Sister Jean Marie reflects on the last 50 years and she remains grateful to God for calling her to the FMDM congregation. "Although serving God in the religious life is not a bed of roses, there were so many happy moments that compensated the difficulties one encounters. And it is by God's grace that I am still an FMDM. I now pray for his grace to continue persevering till the end of my life," she says.

Saturday Apr 22, 2006 saw Sister Jean Marie celebrating her golden jubilee as a religious sister at St. Francis Convent. Mass was celebrated by her brother, Father Robin Andrews.



**Blood brother and sister.**  
Fr. Robin and Jean Marie  
on day of her Golden Jubilee celebration

