

## **Sr Mary Callista Nolan.**

**I invite you to look at the picture of Sr Callista in the booklet.** There is such a gleam of mischief and glee in those smiling eyes that one can't help but wonder what was going on in that agile brain! Last week during one of her more lucid moments, Celie Creigh asked Callista what she was doing and she answered so aptly: *" I do what I like when no one is looking!"*

**How well that sums up what Vera Josephine Nolan did throughout her long 98 years of life.** Born in Annandale on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1912, Vera was the second child after Kathleen, of Schoolmaster Paul Nolan and Catherine McDonald, Dressmaker. She was followed by four more children Claire, Marie, Joan and Raymond who made up the family who lived on the Central coast at Tumby Umbi and Wamberal and who later moved to Woodville and Aberdeen. Such movement was a motif of Vera's life which spanned almost a century. So many movements occurred during that long time. You can see photos of Vera with her parents driving off in the sulky to Sunday Mass and flying in the red kangaroo to New Zealand – a broad spectrum of living! If she could have, I'm sure she would have taken a flight in a space ship.

**Some years back Callista wrote a short piece about her early life** that reflected a happy and interesting childhood growing up under the influence of her dad who instilled in her a great love for Australian flora and fauna wandering the bush tracks of the Wamberal region. To balance that wild life, her mother schooled her in a variety of crafts in which she excelled. Her sense of self is illustrated on Christmas Day the occasion of her First Holy Communion – having been prepared by her mother. At the church, there was a great crowd of sodalities all decked out in colourful regalia as was the custom for the feast. Seeing all this glory Vera thought it was put on in her honour. And why not! These were sad years too and stories of the soldiers killed in the Great War brought grief to their neighbours and was shared by the Nolan family. By contrast, the 1918 victory celebrations in Wyong was a wonderful memory for a small six year old!

**Strong faith characterized the Nolan family** so Vera was impressed by the devotion of her father who harnessed the horses every Sunday for the long twelve mile drive to Wyong for Mass. Walking three miles to the local School of Arts to attend a Mission was par for the course for young Vera, so she could write: *"All this, taught us to cherish our faith, especially the Mass."* The usual lack of schooling opportunities in those days

meant that Vera came to Lochinvar to board and complete her Secondary education. These were happy years full of friendships that endured for a lifetime.

**These days when our students finish the HSC there is much talk of the “gap” year.**

Well, it is not surprising that Vera was before her time in that too. What a year she had - enjoying country life at Aberdeen to the full! She recalls: *‘A joyful succession of pastimes, outings, balls etc and all the social pleasures available to young people at that time’* After such frivolity, it is amazing to see her leave it all behind to come to the Novitiate at Lochinvar in December 1932 and become Sr Mary Callista of the Holy Innocents – no irony in that title!

**She needed all the resilience that life had taught her as the tough years of the Depression and the Second World War came tumbling down on the world.**

Undaunted, she was Professed in July 1935 and her life of teaching began in earnest. The broad experience of her early life came to fruition in these years when she could turn her hand to a great variety of teaching spanning the whole range of classes from Kindergarten to Senior Secondary as well as caring for Boarders.

**Conditions were a far cry from today’s ‘smart boards’ and laptop computers.** In Wauchope three Sisters taught in the Church with no partitions between them. Callista had a third class and the other two were secondary classes. She said her MOST enjoyable year was teaching a large group of 80+ Kinders, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> class in the early ‘50’s and the most taxing was struggling with small Secondary Schools after the introduction of the Wyndham Scheme. Holidays became a never ending round of studying science at University and Summer Schools. Small wonder that such a regime called on all of her skills and tested her patience to the extreme. We can’t be saints all the time !

**What a relief it must have been when at last she could put away the chalk** and turn her formidable skill to managing the school canteen and providing much needed support in a variety of ways including accompanying a group of students on a camping trip to the Red Centre... photos show how she entered into the experience with gusto. A welcome renewal year at Baulkham Hills gave her a refreshed view of life and a trip to New Zealand climbing the Fox Glacier appealed to her sense of adventure. Throughout these years, Callista always had happy times with the family who had been with her in so many ways over the years. Photos tell the story of get-togethers with ‘Aunty Vera’ always a central figure – probably teaching the younger members of the clan a few tricks!

**1985 was the year she retired to Swansea** and became caught up in a variety of Parish activities such as Catholic Women's League, St Vincent de Paul, RCIA, Bible Study , small group meetings and visitation of the sick and elderly – interspersed with a great output of craft work that supported the work of Concraft and the Ministry of the Congregation. If that was retirement, it lasted eleven and a half years before she moved yet again to Charlestown still keeping busy with her apostolate to the Day Care Centre and as she said in 1998, *“Thankfully, I am still able to carry on a little of this work.”*

**This work ethic was strong in Sr Mary Callista** so giving it up was a big break in her life. However, she accepted the coming on of her aging years and appreciated and enjoyed *“the comforts of the beautiful buildings and pleasant surroundings which have been prepared for us of the older generation”*. Swansea Southern Cross Tenison Apartments became her home for the last decade of her life and there she took on the mantle of our oldest sister in the Congregation.

**This last year has been one of teetering on the brink of eternity.** It was a bit like Shane Watson trying to get the elusive Century in the Ashes! However, it was not to be and when she fell and broke her arm the effort was too great. At Belmont Hospital she was given loving care by the nursing staff and was visited especially by our Sisters Norah and Celie Creigh. They had been with her on that last day as she edged to the end of the road and Celie wrote of 'our little Vera' :

*I just want to assure you that I don't think she could be in a more loving and caring place. Once you walk into that section you get a good feeling, and the staff are there ready to do anything for you. It was lovely listening to the way the staff talked about Vera and what they are doing for her. Today there wasn't a movement out of Vera and she looked so peaceful.*

Indeed she was peaceful and at a quarter to six, on Saturday night she slipped quietly away to heaven to join so many members of our Congregation and her own beloved family who have gone ahead of her.

To all those who cared for Sr Callista we say a grateful thanks and to all her friends and family- especially her sister Joan and brother Ray - we offer our prayers and sympathy. Rest in Peace 'Little Vera' of the Holy Innocents.