

WAR-TIME TRANSFORMATION

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It was October 1943, during the “Japanese time.” My father was in the “blacklist” of the guerillas which meant he was to be “liquidated.” We had to leave our home and evacuated to Lingayen. There I met a friend who was a Postulant at St. Scholastica’s Novitiate. She had gone home to have her denture fixed. We got to talking about her experiences in the convent. I was very interested, and she was so eager and enthusiastic that we spent practically the whole night sharing and enjoying her stories! I was also so edified that I started to wonder whether this was the life meant for me, too. The following day, I prayed hard for God’s enlightenment. Was this His will for me? Shall I act on it? Soon afterwards, I asked for the address of the Novice Mistress.

I told my mother of my decision. She was very supportive. But my father was another matter: he believed that my help was needed for the further education of my three brothers and a sister. However, I wrote my letter of application and sent it with my photo. My application must have been a surprise to the Novice Mistress. I had never studied in a Catholic School, never had contact with any Sister except one who was really not yet quite a Sister – the postulant, Porfiria Tuazon. I waited for a reply to my letter, but received none. Still, I prepared the other requirements. I had a medical check-up; requested the parish priest for a letter of recommendation (he jokingly asked whether he would add a comment on my social life, that I never missed a dance in town); and my school records. Then I received a questionnaire and a list of things I had to bring. One of the questions asked was whether I had my parents’ permission. Every night I begged my father for permission, but he gave the same answer that my help was needed at home. But one night, my mother came and interceded for me. That worked! I got his consent – though an unwilling one.

The things needed to enter the convent were my next preoccupation. I turned my party dresses and dancing gowns into bed sheets and whatever else was needed. It was not easy to procure things, since this was war-time. My mother promised to send me the other things when “times were better.” Anyhow, on hindsight, those things would all have been lost when St. Scholastica’s was burned by an incendiary bomb.

Entrance day was March 1, but I came only on March 3, since travel during those times was very difficult. My father, my brother and a cousin accompanied me to Dagupan where I took a train. I had to be hoisted through a window, and my father had to climb over sacks of rice blocking the doors. At Tutuban, the Japanese opened my luggage and took out some articles. The following day, I came to St. Scholastica at last! I had never been there before. Sister Galla, the novice mistress, welcomed me and told me she thought I had changed my mind since I did not come on entrance day. Learning that there were Japanese soldiers in the house, my father was trembling when he left me at the parlor. At last I was in the convent! On July 10, I became a Postulant. When bombing became intense in September, the Postulants were advised to go home – but I asked to stay in spite of the dangers. And I have stayed since then – 60 years ago!