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Some thoughts on my 40 years at Webster University.

I came to Webster College in fall of 1963. Sister Francetta Barberis was president of Webster and Sister Jacqueline Grennan was vice-president. I was sent by the Sisters of Loretto to Webster because I had just come from what was considered by many as the most liberal and most celebrated program in Religious Education in the world. I had attended Lumen Vitae in Brussels, Belgium the year before. The lecturers at Lumen Vitae were either framers of the Vatican II documents or they were men influenced by the framers of the documents. The year had changed my spiritual life completely, opening my mind and heart to a new way of living my religion and of following Jesus. I was ready and eager to help Webster students to embrace this new catechetical movement.

Studying at Lumen Vitae had turned my spiritual life upside down and teaching at Webster College turned my life as a religious and as a teacher upside down. I had spent ten years teaching in parochial elementary schools, grades 1 through 5. The religious communities I had lived in were small and adhered to strict religious practices. My teaching was closely supervised and so was my religious life. But at Webster I was teaching college students and, although I had a magnificent chairwoman in Sister Ann Patrick Ware, I was expected to be independent in making decisions about my teaching and, although I had a wonderful superior in Sister Bernice Juen, I was expected to be independent in making decisions about living my religious life.

Everything was new and exciting to me. I attended as many lectures and meetings and plays and concerts as I possibly could. I was like a sponge and couldn't get enough of the academic world. And I was very much influenced by Jacqueline whose ideas I admired and feared and often fought against. It was Jacqueline who was responsible for turning my ways of thinking about education upside down. Jacqueline already had a national reputation as an educator. She had served on Kennedy's Presidential Panel on Education. She brought to Webster some of the nation's most distinguished educators, Jerome Bruner, Phillip Morrison, and Jerrold Zacharias to name but a few. I was privileged to meet these great men with great minds and to listen to their various views on education. I was constantly having to think and rethink what I believed was good teaching.

Dr. Bob Davis and his Madison Project were brought to Webster from Syracuse University. The Madison Project was a federally funded reform program for teaching math in the elementary school. The project was an enormous boast for Webster. Bob Davis had an electrifying influence on the training of prospective elementary teachers. His materials were designed to engage young students in the excitement of discovering the patterns and underlying concepts of arithmetic and beginning algebra. He tried out

his ideas and materials in many of the inner city St. Louis schools. Many Webster students, math majors or not, had the opportunity to work with him. His discovery method techniques were effective in other areas of instruction as well. Bill Walton, an education innovator in science who came to Webster from MIT, was also changing the way our future teachers were thinking about teaching. I was very interested in their work because of my previous experience as an elementary teacher, and I also had responsibility for supervising student teachers.

Prospective elementary teachers were encouraged to choose a major in a content area rather than in education. We believed that elementary teachers should be specialists just as secondary teachers were specialists. Jacqueline often said that we learn to teach by learning to learn, and this was accomplished best by having an in-depth knowledge of at least one discipline.

As it turned out, the Webster student teachers who had been influenced by the reformers like Bob Davis and Bill Walton made a significant impact on their cooperating teachers and principals. The superintendents in the school districts of Clayton, Ladue and University City actually begged Webster to offer in-service training of a similar kind for the teachers in their respective school districts. The superintendents were helpful therefore in getting us the Ford Grant that made the Masters of Arts in Teaching possible. Most in-service elementary teachers had had little or no college courses in math and science. The first courses offered in the MAT were in those two neglected areas. The MAT courses were content-centered. The courses taught math and science, not methods of teaching math and science. The methodology was taught by demonstration for the graduate courses were taught using the methods best suited to teaching elementary students: hands-on experiential activities, small-group activities, the discovery method, etc. I was director of the MAT from 1965-67. The MAT soon expanded to include Language Arts and Social Science.

I developed the MAT in Religious Studies as a summer program which religious men and women from all over the United States attended. We even had a priest participant from Canada! The program was designed to offer to its participants the “fresh air” of Vatican II’s teaching. Our featured lecturers were such outspoken theologians, biblical scholars and visionaries as Dominic Crossan, Raymond Brown, Mary Schaldenbrand and Mary Ellen Mulvahill. Religious education specialists such as Rev Joe Dillon and Rev Jim Drane were instructors and group leaders. In 1970 the changes in Religious Education had become more commonplace and participant numbers dwindled. The MAT in Religious Studies was renamed the MA Individualized. Bill Dugan became its director and he designed an individualized program for the employees of the St. Louis Post Office. Thus the MA in Management was born.

Bob Davis and Bill Walton had attracted other education reformers to Webster. We therefore had a need for an elementary school that we could use as a laboratory for experimentation in development of materials, in classroom management and in teaching methodology. The College School was opened in 1964. We did not want the College School to be a “Catholic school” but we did want to have a program in religion. My

challenge was to develop a non-denominational religion program that would be acceptable and enriching to children of all faiths, or of no faith. I was amazed at how lively religion classes could be when students could share ideas with children of different backgrounds than their own. My students and I all learned about contemplative prayer from a young Quaker girl who explained to us how to “empty our minds for God”, and we understood better what it meant to be Christian when a youngster whose family went to the Ethical Society explained that he was not a Christian because he did not believe that Jesus was God and did not consider himself a follower of Christ.

Like most of the other faculty at Webster I was struggling with the basic notion of what a liberal education actually meant. It was no longer possible to be a Renaissance Man or Woman with mastery of all the important aspects of knowledge. The mission of higher education was the topic of endless discussion and argument among many of us. We were especially dissatisfied with the required courses that were supposed to make a student “liberally educated.” These were often considered shallow and unimaginative attempts to provide a survey of what should be a complex and rich subject area. Finally, the faculty voted to do away with general degree requirements. Much of the philosophical basis for this change was associated with the belief that learning demands an in-depth study of a particular discipline rather than a superficial introduction to many. We believed that in many cases depth led to breadth. The most troubling question was: did doing away with general education requirements in a Catholic College mean that we could no longer require religion courses? Wasn't this at the heart a Catholic College education? This was a soul searching, divisive and agonizing decision. In the end religion courses were given no special privilege and were no longer required at Webster. Strange as it may seem, with no religion requirement, the percentage of Webster students taking religion courses was greater than the percentage of students taking religion at Notre Dame.

The notion of a “Catholic College” soon came into question. Jacqueline, as President, was struggling with the basic mission of every institution of higher learning, that is, the mission to permit and foster free speech, free inquiry and free investigation of all sorts. As a member of the congregation of the Sisters of Loretto she felt enormous pressure to follow the “suggestions” of the Archbishop of St. Louis that were at times in conflict with that mission. Her first decision was to ask for dispensation from her vows so that her decisions could be considered her own, rather than that of the congregation. However, with the support and encouragement of the leadership in the Loretto congregation, Sister Luke Tobin and Sister Helen Sanders, she went one step further. Webster College became the first Catholic institution of higher education in the United States to transfer ownership from the religious congregation to a lay board.

The decision was one that proceeded from the basic principles adopted by the Sisters of Loretto following Vatican II. We believed in the openness to ideas and to people of other faiths as directed by the Vatican documents. We believed that an institution of higher education should be free to investigate any ideas or topics that were academically relevant. We had also made a commitment to the principle of the “individual over the institution.” Therefore, giving up ownership of Webster College meant that the Sisters

of Loretto were not responsible for staffing the institution and individual Sisters were more free to teach at Webster or not as they desired.

By this time boys had been admitted into the Art department and slowly became accepted in all the other departments in the school.

In the late sixties Sister Barbara Ann Barbato, Richard Singer and I sponsored a radical educational experiment called the On-Campus Sabbatical. We were convinced that the most important thing a student could learn was how to learn, and how to keep on learning the rest of his/her life. So we offered a semester's worth of credits (15 credit hours) to students whose task it was to learn what they wanted to learn the way they wanted to learn it. Students found amazingly original things to learn and ways to learn them. For example one student traveled throughout the Southern States producing a photo history of the lives of southerners in many different walks of life. Two students had a semester's internship as business executives. They "owned and operated" a Campus Coffee Shop that provided snacks and entertainment to the college. The On-Campus Sabbatical only lasted one semester but out of it emerged the Center for Experiential Learning. During the 70's and early 80's this center provided a unique educational opportunity for many Webster students, especially non-traditional-aged students.

I was also very involved in the peace movement during the Vietnam War. I was a member of the executive committee for the American Friends Service Committee. As a group we planned, organized and participated in dozens of peace demonstrations in the St. Louis area.

In November, 1969, Sister Ann Sullivan and I went with a busload of college students and joined over 250,000 other war protesters in the March on Washington, the largest anti-war demonstration during the Vietnam War. Each member of the Missouri delegation carried a placard displaying the name of a soldier from Missouri who had been killed in Vietnam. We marched from the Washington monument to the steps of the Capitol where we deposited our placards in flag-draped caskets. Ann and I got tear-gassed in the street as we were walking back to the church where we were "camping out". Tear gas is amazingly painful. We were not even in the immediate vicinity where it was sprayed but our eyes burned for hours. And I had bloody feet due to wearing new boots on this long hike!

In spring of 1971 I was a representative of the American Friends Service Committee to the Paris Peace Talks. Sister Luke Tobin and Sister Ann Patrick Ware were also members of the group. The beautiful and talented folksinger, Judy Collins, was also on the trip with us and I was privileged to be her roommate. As representatives of the American people we were permitted to talk with and listen to the various Vietnamese delegates including Madame Binh herself. The delegates who were least willing to talk with or listen to us were the members of our own United States Delegation. They actually got up and walked out of our scheduled interview. As they left us Judy Collins intoned and we joined in the chant: "All we are asking is give peace a chance!"

It was soon after this that I went through my own personal metamorphosis. I fell in love with Ed Sakurai, a colleague in the math department. I left Webster in the fall of 1971 to spend a year in Kansas City to “get a little distance” and to decide the future of my life. I decided to ask for dispensation from my vows and in June of 1972 I married Ed Sakurai and returned to St. Louis. There was an opening in the College School, still part of Webster College, for a math specialist in 4th, 5th and 6th grades. I decided to be a math specialist and I took the job. My previous work with the Madison project was of some help, and I was married to a mathematician. I found a new relationship with Webster’s MAT in mathematics. I was now its student rather than its director. When the College School became independent of Webster College, I was invited to join the math department of the College as a specialist in math education.

At this time the math department at Webster was very small and the senior members of the department were most reluctant to be chairperson of the department. Being chair was much more work than it was honor! So I volunteered and became chair of the math department of Webster College, a long way from the religion professor of a few years before. I remained chair of the department for 16 years during which time we became a math and computer science department and grew into one of the largest departments in what was now called Webster University.

Ed Sakurai had been doing research on the new “personal computer” during his sabbatical back in 1977. He was convinced that this development would revolutionize all our lives and we were able to get most of the faculty interested enough to support us in our first efforts to obtain computers and teach computer studies. At first we owned 5 Commodore Pets and taught BASIC programming. We added Computer Studies to our title in 1984. Ed and I both received a diploma from IFRICS, the Institute for Retraining in Computer Science. In 1991 we hired two full-time computer science faculty members, Al Cawns and Brenda Boyce. We changed our department name to Math and Computer Science in 1992. By this time our degree had evolved into a unique and successful program. We had chosen to walk the middle road between a computer science program found in a traditional engineering school and an information processing program found in traditional business schools. Our curriculum was technical at the same time as it was practical. Our goal was to prepare students for the future by teaching them the fundamentals of computer science, but we also wanted them to have enough practical training to be able to walk into a business and be immediately useful to their employers. Our reputation and steady growth makes us believe that we have at least come close to achieving our goal.

During my second career at Webster University I was very active in faculty governance. I served on various faculty committees. In particular I served several terms on the Faculty Executive Committee, the central governing body for the faculty. I served one term as the chair of the Faculty Executive Committee (now called the President of the Faculty Senate).

I finally retired as chair of the department of math and computer science and now I am enjoying teaching computer programming to our beginning computer science majors. I

am still active within the department but most of my time and energy I give to my students and to my teaching.

The Webster University of today is very different from the Webster College I came to 40 years ago. But somehow I still feel at home at Webster and I thank God for each new day and each new semester and each new group of students who sit in front of me wondering what kind of teacher I will be.