

Faine McMullen, RSCJ

One of the great privileges of my life was knowing Faine. I was fortunate enough to have her as a mentor while attending Newton College ('67), where I was first exposed to her brilliance, sharp insights, high standards, keen sense of social justice, indefatigable energy, sense of humor, deep faith and kindness.

Most who encountered Faine were mesmerized or intimidated - I was probably both. To say she was my role model would be presumptuous- there could only be one Faine - but she was certainly an inspiration.

After my graduation, our paths crossed many times. When Faine was working with the Boston Archdiocese's Planning Office for Urban Affairs, which was designing and developing affordable housing in Greater Boston, I was working in a housing project in Boston, trying to organize and manage a multi-site tutorial program. We had mutual friends who also were involved in social justice, civil rights and community action programs. Most of us were struggling to figure out how we could make our ideals and values operational; how we could have a positive impact on neighborhoods and communities that were marked by poverty and social inequality.

Our projects could be innovative, exciting, occasionally rewarding but also discouraging. Despite our good intentions, many of us were unskilled, and had more hope and enthusiasm than knowledge or ability; and we were relatively naive about the obstacles we would encounter.

Faine however, was the gold standard for successful community activism, and was an inspiration to all of us. An extraordinary advocate for the poor, especially the most vulnerable, she knew programs needed to have clear goals and be bigger than one individual. She knew that motivating the involvement of many players was essential to success. A brilliant lawyer, strategist, shrewd and skillful negotiator, she was an inspiration to a team of activists, all of whom were committed to developing affordable housing. Her impeccable ethics helped to establish her reputation as she was trusted in boardrooms as well as communities where people were suspicious of those who said they were "there to help" but were long on promises and short on delivery. She was not only committed to developing affordable housing - she was enormously successful. Her reputation was based on promises made and kept. Faine taught community activists how to win!

As I was working in the same Boston environment, I knew some of Faine's opponents who might have made the mistake (once!) of underestimating her and the team at the Urban Affairs Office. I often thought of the many Boston landlords and affordable housing opponents who had to reorient their strategies after they encountered Faine's brilliance and strategic thinking in a courtroom, conference room or community meeting.

Later, Faine and I worked in Washington, where she was providing free legal services in impoverished neighborhoods. We compared notes on our projects and programs which tried to maintain a focus on poverty and social inequality. I had matured, become more sophisticated in my efforts and Faine was thrilled to hear what I was doing. We discussed many of my (mis)adventures all over the country. She thought it was dangerous that I had monitored elections at a community health center in Appalachia (especially when she heard I was almost

the only one not carrying a gun) - but we laughed about some of the comic aspects of the situation and she cheered me on. I was always grateful that Faine's joy, enthusiasm and activist faith were motivators to "keep on keepin' on".

Over the years, she was always my mentor, but she became a dear friend, as well as a protector. In 1988, when we met in New Orleans, she was advocating for low-income seniors, and I was involved with developing community support programs for the mentally disabled in Connecticut. We discussed the populations we were both dealing with and the challenges of developing adequate services in the face of poverty, racism and social inequality. As always, talking with Faine was an opportunity to confront the existence of suffering not as a sign of hopelessness, but as an opportunity for compassion. Faine was always better at that than I was, but she helped me to focus my intentions and my energy.

I was scheduled to be on a panel at the American Psychiatric Association Conference the day after we met, but hours after our meeting, I was rushed to the Tulane Emergency Room and eventually told I had no choice but to have very high-risk emergency spinal surgery. Faine had become concerned after our meeting, as she could see I had been in intense pain. She took it upon herself to track me down, arrived at the hospital, became my advocate and after my surgery, negotiated my discharge to her RSCJ community residence. I was cared for and coddled by all the RSCJs until I was able to return to New England. Faine and I never stopped reminiscing about the rescue and the time I spent with the loving and kind RSCJs.

Over the years, Faine was a faithful correspondent and supporter, consoling me after the sudden and unexpected death of my Father, whom she greatly admired; years later supporting my decision to care for my Mother; always asking for my "dear sisters" - Joanne (Newton '68) and Maureen. We shared a deep commitment and loyalty to family. I loved hearing about her brothers and sweet sister, Grail, who was also an RSCJ and ultimately lived with Faine at Kenwood and Teresian House, where I was able to visit them.

My visits to Kenwood were always delightful. Although I didn't need or expect to be entertained, Faine graciously scheduled activities she thought I would enjoy. She joined me in art classes but candidly admitted her own limited artistic ability. I brought Faine, Grail and other Kenwood residents on shopping trips to Office Max (Faine's personal favorite as she always needed supplies for her extensive clipping, filing and article circulation industry - part of her commitment to keep people informed about hot topics/current events). She was not a judgmental person, but could not tolerate anyone being uninformed or ill-informed. She had to do her bit to keep information circulating.

Our visits to CVS became nervous romps for me as I tried to keep track of who was where and if everyone was able to manage their shopping lists. Faine also wanted to make deliveries to families and programs where she knew people were in need. I was amazed that somehow, she was able to organize her one-woman "social service agency". Sharing was essential to her being.

My visits to Kenwood were also occasions for prayer, reflection and meditation, especially in the beautiful chapel. I appreciated that Faine shared the RSCJ's community of devotion, support and kindness with me.

She was always supportive of my professional and personal choices but hoped I would develop a stronger spiritual life. I lamented that I was a burden on her capacity to guide me, imposing on her time and energy. Nevertheless, I always appreciated her enthusiastic support and knew she never stopped praying for me.

We were friends for almost fifty years, until her death at Teresian House in 2015. The last time I saw Faine (at Teresian House) - I can't remember which of us was in a wheel chair or walker (perhaps both of us), she kept reaching out from whatever device she was using, trying to push or pull whichever device I was using. The scene of the colliding devices was both hilarious and poignant. It was impossible to persuade her not to keep trying to help me. Her capacity for caring knew no bounds.

I was so grateful that when Faine couldn't maintain contact with me, her kind friend, Sister Joan Gannon, kept us in touch with each other. Yet another expression of the kindness, sensitivity and generosity of the RSCJ community.

As I reflected on the many years, I knew Faine and the many roles she played in my life, I had indeed been intimidated, mesmerized, inspired and loved by Faine. I knew I was not the only one she referred to as "Dear One", but her affection was so intentional and unconditional, I was sure each of her many "Dear Ones" felt as I did - unique, special and loved.

The deep love she gave to many, including her "Dear Ones" and the values she believed in and encouraged will live in our hearts and influence our life choices and commitments.