

Left at an Orphanage, Embraced by Ursulines

BY ELLEN MCKNIGHT



Sister Annette with some of "her boys"

Mike Duncan was five years old and mystified when the court ordered his mother to take him, his two brothers and sister to St. Joseph Children's Home in Louisville, Kentucky. Abandoned by her husband during WWII, Mike's mother had no income and was caring for her invalid parents, all while trying to rear five children aged eight and under.

Today, Mike understands that, "Mom did the best she could."

The four oldest siblings went to the orphanage as a group at the request of their mother, who didn't want them separated. An infant sister was sent to relatives. At the orphanage, Mike and his brothers joined a rambunctious crew of 47 boys. Mike would live at the Home from the age of five to eleven.

Little did Mike know a second mom would step into his life at St. Joseph's—a mom unlike any "mom" he had ever seen, a nun in full habit. This was Sister Annette Rutledge, who took care of over a thousand boys, "her boys," as she called them, during her 42 years

of service at St. Joseph's. To all those in her care, she was a house mother, disciplinarian, confidant, leader and for some, their best friend. Mike says unequivocally, Sister Annette changed his life for the better.

All activities for the children were confined to the campus buildings and grounds where they had food, clothing, shelter, chores, education, religious instruction, sports, music, structure, stability and most of all—adventure on the grounds.

A second separation, more traumatizing than the first, came when their mother remarried,

and she and her second husband came to the Home to take the Duncan children back. Mike remembers hanging onto Sister Annette's skirt and sobbing. He said St. Joe's was the only home he had really ever known, and now he was experiencing being taken away from "his home" for a second time.

Mike said once they settled into the family home with their mother and stepdad they were

afraid to venture outside, as it was a world apart from St. Joseph Children's Home. Luckily, a neighbor invited them all to a birthday party, and besides cake, they experienced a taste of freedom. He cheerfully admitted there was no turning back!

After serving in the army, Mike met Helen. Both were born and raised in Louisville, lived blocks apart and worked in the banking business. They met while waiting at a bus stop together, and that was the start of a long courtship that led to marriage.

Now retired and with no children of their own, Mike and Helen stay very active in their parish, with friends and in the community. Both were involved for decades with St. Joseph Children's Home.

Mike and Helen are grateful for the care Mike and his siblings received at the orphanage and wanted to update their will to ensure the organizations and people who influenced their lives would be remembered. Including the Ursuline Sisters, who staffed the Home from 1897 in 2010, as beneficiaries in their planned giving just made sense.

Reminiscing about Sister Annette, Mike said she was visited often by hundreds of boys whom she helped to raise. Many of "her boys" were at her bedside praying the rosary when she took her last breath on an overcast day that quickly turned into sunshine and birds singing. He believes she showed them a sign that she would be looking out for "her boys" in eternity.



Mary Catherine Duncan with her children on a visit to St. Joseph's. Clockwise, Mom, Kathleen, Diana, Mike, Patrick and Daniel



Mike and Helen Duncan

What's in Your Will?

If you have included the Ursuline Sisters, or you are considering inclusion in your planned giving, please make sure this information is on your legal documents:

Corporate Name:

Ursuline Society and Academy of Education

Mailing Address:

3105 Lexington Road
Louisville, KY 40206

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