

“Everybody has a calling and your real job in life is to figure out what that is and get about the business of doing it” Oprah

I have a bevy of Sisters in my life. Not the steal your sweaters, cut off all your barbie's hair, never answer texts on time type (although I do have one of those who I also love to pieces), but ones of a religious order. I spent each Sunday for the first 14 years of my life with the Sisters of St. Joseph, taking for granted how they would enlighten my view of the world. As a child I became accustomed to seeing these women in roles of power and influence. Witnessing for myself the magic created when women come together and work towards not only a common goal, but the greater good. The success of their community relies on their respect for one another, their empathy and inimitable work ethic, which I would grow to accept as the status quo. In my adulthood I find myself dispelling myths and misconceptions about the lives these women lead. There is much more to them than the beautiful hymns they sing.

At a young age, these women heard their call to serve and have devoted their entire lives to that service and to each other. Their lives are far from one dimensional. They are smart, open minded and dynamic professionals who experience the benefits of women working together firsthand. Many pursue what we may consider more traditional careers as nurses, high level administrators, social workers, artists, addictions counsellors, writers, educators, principals and some continue to be students themselves, pursuing masters and doctorate degrees.

From 1983 to 1998 My god mother, Sister Winnifred McLaughlin (clearly never too cool for a party hat) served as President and CEO of what was then the Sudbury General Hospital. Hundreds of employees and patients proved to be an interminable work load. We have all watched an episode or two of House, ER or Grey's, manning the helm of a hospital is not a position for the faint of heart.

These days, she is into her 80's and can be found at the St. Joseph's Motherhouse. Walking through the halls with her finger still firmly on the pulse, a genuine tour de force.



My aunt, Sister Aileen Cassidy (enduring/enjoying one of many hugs) is acting Spiritual and Religious Care Coordinator at the Motherhouse. She began her career caring for patients and their families experiencing crisis through critical accident or terminal illness. Today she manages end of life care and services for her fellow Sisters, more accurately her friends and mentors of more than 50 years. A 24/7 job that requires compassion and strength I can't even begin to understand.



Current General Superior Sister Bonnie MacLennan (having a laugh with Terry O'Reilly) has a PhD in human relations and organizational management as well as a Licentiate degree in Canon Law. A wealth of practical experience and higher education, left her incredibly informed yet in every conversation reminds me to be open to the possibility of more.



With the median age of their community over 70, most people would be enjoying retirement but these women, and many like them, remain hard at work, honouring something they recognize to be bigger than themselves and worth every sacrifice. That is something even a skeptic like myself can admire. I am not particularly religious and my opinions may differ from those of the devout, but when it comes to family, we tow the same line. All the long days, new endeavors, relocations and sudden career changes are somehow manageable as they are embraced by the unbridled support of this, their chosen family. They approach each challenge the same way they do everything else, as a fully united front. Sisterhood in the truest sense of the word.

I too believe that at some point everyone hears their call, we just need to be listening for it. It is the same call that took some of you to law school, to parenthood or to perhaps to continuing education. While theirs may be unconventional by millennial standards, I have immense respect for the lengths they go to honour it and in turn one another.

Happy International Women's Day!

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