

Kindness is a Conviction—Shelley Lee (1966)

The Maryknoll spirit is a compassionate heart that embraces the world with selfless devotion, sensitive to and cares for people in need.

Shelley Lee, the first female Director of Home Affairs and a former Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs, is well known for her earnest concern for the orphaned and victims of catastrophes.

Hong Kong acclaimed Shelley as the “Community Godmother” after she unstintingly helped and cared for the young victims of the 1996 Pat Sin Range hill fire. In 2003, together with three other top ranking female government officials, she initiated the set up of the “We Care Education Fund” to support the education and living expenses of children orphaned by SARS.

Shelley did as much, if not more, to support her alma mater as she had done for society. As a committee member of the Maryknoll Convent School Educational Trust, she initiated and organised many projects to raise money for the school’s much needed facilities, such as the new wing extension built in 1990’s, which cost millions. Over the years, the Trust has raised more than \$10 million for the school.

“We organised a gala premiere in 1992 for the movie *Swordsman II* produced by Tsui Hark. His wife Nansun Shi, and Rosamund Kwan and Michelle Reis who acted in the cast, are all MCS old girls. The event raised over a million dollars.”

“I love my alma mater and would do anything for it. I won’t mind being humbled nor deterred by tedious processes. At one time, I approached the Hong Kong Jockey Club for a matching grant, trying very hard but not knowing what to expect. I was very pleasantly surprised when it gave us \$20 million in the end.”

Although no longer a committee member of the Trust, Shelley is still very much involved. She continues to contribute ideas and help to raise funds.

Shelley spent 14 years with MCS, from kindergarten to Form 5. There are plenty for her to reminisce about - the redbrick buildings, beautiful gardens, serene chapel and most of all the Sisters. One of her fondest memory is exchanging morning greetings with the Sisters; they would always return with a warm hug.

The first of May, May Day, was the most look forward day in the year for Shelley. “The scholar of the year will be dressed up as the May Queen. She will wear a crown and mantilla and stand around the Virgin Mary Statue in the central court yard to pray and take pictures with us.”

There were lots of other gleeful memories. “We were not allowed to say something like ‘Oh, you’re bad.’ in Cantonese because they are vulgar words. Every Friday was English-speaking day; we would be fined 5 cents if we spoke in Cantonese that day. We owe our solid English foundation to the school, and especially to Sister Santa Maria, our English teacher .”

Shelley was not born of a well off family and Hong Kong in general was not as prosperous in the 1950’s as it is now. She is the middle child of 9 siblings. “Three of my sisters also studied in Maryknoll, We could not afford new uniforms and had to pass on our worn uniforms year over year. One day, when I was eleven, a Sister gave me a sealed plastic bag to bring home. I can never forget the awe when I opened the bag and found an old school uniform with a new school badge. I was overwhelmed by the Sisters’ discreet kindness.”

“Maryknoll may not be the best school in academic achievements but it is certainly a school dedicated to life education. We were taught to be generous, to live and let live. The Sisters and teachers never urged us to win in any competition, all they care is that we enjoy and learn from the experience. Not all Maryknollers are top achievers but they are all warm and loving people. The Maryknoll spirit is ingrained in us; we will live it for the rest of our lives.”

To Shelley, MCS stands for “Motherhood, Charity and Sharing”. It has shaped her life and invigorated her to continue serving the community through volunteering after retirement from civil service in 2005.