



Little Sisters, Big Hearts

On Salem Church Road in the outskirts of Newark, the elderly of Delaware are welcomed with open arms to the Jeanne Jugan residence. Here the Little Sisters of the Poor fulfill their mission of humble service. Since 1903 the Little Sisters have worked tirelessly in Delaware to ensure quality long-term care for those in need. The Jeanne Jugan residence, named after the foundress of the Little Sisters organization, has been open since 1978. At this home, one of 250 throughout the world, the Little Sisters serve approximately 100 residents with the kindness and generosity handed down for over a century.

Now an international organization serving in thirty-two countries, the Little Sisters of the Poor trace their beginnings to the selflessness of one woman. In 1839, Jeanne Jugan opened her home to an elderly woman named Anne. In sacrificing her own bed for the well-being of a stranger Jeanne discovered her mission. She dedicated herself to providing a home for those without one. As word of Jeanne's kindness spread, her service blossomed. The Little Sisters charism quickly spread beyond France, to London, England in 1851 and then to Brooklyn, NY in 1868. Upon her death in 1879, Jeanne Jugan's work had grown to count 2,400 Little Sisters in 10 countries as far reaching as Algeria and Malta.

The Jeanne Jugan residence in Newark, Delaware glows with the warmth of both the Sisters and the residents and feels more like a home than a care facility. Lining the front hallway are individual photos of the residents dressed as clowns with smiles shining beyond their painted faces. Hazel, a six year resident and 13 year volunteer, made their costumes from old curtains. From staff to residents, the people here go above and beyond to ensure everyone is comfortable and happy. When welcoming a group of residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina, Sister Raymond decorated their rooms in a New Orleans theme to make them feel even more at home.

Proud of their happy home and what they describe as a family, the residents jump at the chance to show it off with a tour. This tour includes a visit to their art room where one resident teaches a painting class. Images of half-finished landscapes, still lifes and portraits pepper the walls and easels scattered throughout the room; the finished products hang proudly in the artists' rooms. They also point out the rec room where various celebrations and performances take place. During the celebration for Mother Provincial, two residents, Russell and his girlfriend June, performed a duet here.

Many of the residents had never attended a live show before Art-Reach. They describe the opportunities and experiences as “a whole new world.” Deeply grateful for what they consider to be a “gift”.



Dedicated to humble service, the Little Sisters create a home for the elderly of limited means and Art-Reach has enhanced the selfless, holistic care for which the Sisters strive. As one Little Sister, Sister Raymond, says: “[Art-Reach] brings an element of culture into our home that they haven’t been exposed to because of finances, not because of not wanting it.” She continues by describing the outside reaction to these opportunities. “They tell their families they went to the opera last and the family thinks: ‘Uh oh. Mamma’s losing it!’ ‘Till they come down and find out that it’s true!’”

When asked about their experiences with Art-Reach, the residents, Dot, Katherine, Hazel and Mary, eagerly reply all at once with words like “unbelievable,” “amazing,” “phenomenal” and “wonderful.” The residents of the Jeanne Jugan house have attended almost 50 shows in less than a year of membership with Art-Reach, sometimes going out three or four times a week. “And we have thoroughly enjoyed each and every one!” exclaims Hazel. But the Little Sisters still haven’t had their fill. Beverly Mullen, an administrator and coordinator of the Art-Reach program continues: “Oh if we were allowed, we’d go out every night!”

Always looking for more chances to explore the arts, they have attended countless shows in Philadelphia but have also traveled to the outer suburbs and as far as New Jersey. Although a newly acquired GPS has made the trips simpler, the residents insist they would go anywhere to see a show for one dollar. “No place is too far,” they declare. They also remain protective of these opportunities, as Beverly vows through laughter to “keep (her) mouth shut (around prospective members.) “I don’t want them cutting in on our share,” she insists. “Don’t you be taking our tickets!”

Many of the residents had never attended a live show before Art-Reach. They describe the opportunities and experiences as “a whole new world.” Deeply grateful for what they consider to be a “gift”, they have difficulty identifying a favorite show. “Every time they

come home I hear ‘It’s the best we’ve ever seen!’ says Beverly.
“It’s true” echoes Dot, “every one.”

They have even recreated some of the shows themselves during the car ride home. Once following a performance of Arsenic and Old Lace, they adapted the eccentric plot into their own play. Beverly explains the process: “Fred [took on the role of] the kook who was burying people down in the basement.” Contagious excitement fills the room as everyone begins to smile and giggle with the memory. As they begin to reminisce, different stories fly around as Katherine says flatly, “You can tell we enjoyed these shows.”

Summing up her experiences on a more serious note, Mary, a thirteen-year resident, says: “we would never ever be able to pay for any of this. It is unbelievable.” And just in case anyone doesn’t agree, Katherine promises: “if they question whether it’s a worthwhile thing, you should bring them down here and we’ll convince them!”

-Sarah McCague

***To promote new membership in Delaware, Art-Reach is currently waiving the regular membership fee for new members in Delaware who join Art-Reach for one year. If you are interested in becoming a member of Art-Reach contact the Programming Department at 215-568-2115.**