

AGNES ELIZABETH BEAUVAIS JOHNSON
MARCH 31, 1902-APRIL 1, 1999



PHOTO OF MRS. JOHNSON AND HER FRIEND MOLLY
ST. JOSEPH'S VILLA 1998

HISTORY OF AGNES ELIZABETH BEAUVAIS JOHNSON

The following is the transcript of the oral history of Mrs. Agnes Elizabeth Beauvais Johnson. Mrs. Johnson was interviewed in her studio apartment at St. Joseph's Villa on Sunday, August 12, 1995 by Cece Holt. Mrs. Johnson's only remaining brother had died and she was very sad so I asked her to tell me about her family and early life.

Agnes Elizabeth Beauvais Johnson was born on March 31, 1902 in Stillwater, Minnesota. Her parents were Julius Beauvais and Anna Malloy Cuenat Beauvais. Her paternal grandfather was from France. Her father was born in St. Mary's, Canada and was also part Indian, possibly of Huron lineage since the Huron Indians lived in this area. As a young boy Julius moved to Illinois. His mother died when he was only four years old. He and his two year old brother were cared for by their sisters. They were active boys and Mrs. Johnson remembers her father's vivid account of how he once climbed a water tower. Anna Beauvais was originally from Wisconsin.

The Beauvais family lived in Minnesota but Mrs. Johnson assumes that in keeping with his Indian heritage, her father was a "roamer" and moved the family to Montana, near the Flathead reservation, where they lived from 1905 until 1907. Mr. Beauvais was employed as a clerk in a store. The family then returned to Minnesota until Mr. Beauvais obtained a job in a hardware store in Pueblo, Colorado. In 1911, Mrs. Johnson's oldest brother Lee, returned to Minnesota to help his mother transport six children to Colorado via a train. Their brother Lloyd was already in Colorado and Mrs. Beauvais was pregnant with her ninth child. Mrs. Johnson remembers celebrating her ninth birthday on that train trip.

Julius and Anna had nine children: Lee, Lloyd, Florence, Frances, Agnes, Joseph, Phillip, Marie and Marguerite. Her last surviving brother Phillip died in 1995 in Pueblo. Mrs. Johnson remembers her father as a handsome, soft spoken person. The task of disciplining the children belonged to Anna and Mrs. Johnson remembers her as being strict. The family attended St. Leander's parish in Pueblo. Her father had a beautiful voice and sang in the choir.

Ermine H. Johnson worked with Mr. Beauvais at the hardware store. It was Mr. Beauvais who nicknamed Mr. Johnson, "Johnny." Mr. Johnson was a widower with two children Helen and Walter. Mr. Beauvais introduced Agnes and Ermine who were married at St. Leander's in 1928.

The Johnsons lived in Pueblo for 10 years, moving to Salt Lake City in 1928 because of Mr. Johnson's job as a traveling hardware salesman.

They lived in an apartment in Sugarhouse and attended St. Ann's parish for eight and a half months. Mrs. Johnson still remembers the day "when I saw that beautiful Cathedral." The Cathedral has been close to her heart for more than fifty years and she has fond memories of clergy and people she has known there. One of her favorite possessions is a framed picture of St. Agnes as depicted in one of the stained glass windows. This photograph was given to her by Willie Littig, a local stained glass artist, who worked on the windows during the interior restoration of the Cathedral. Mrs. Johnson is quick to point out that St. Agnes must be a very special saint because she is found in the stained glass window as well as one of the murals. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson contributed funds for the confessional on the east side of the church. They are also contributors to Judge Memorial Catholic High School and their contributions helped in creating a computer lab at Judge. For many years Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were seen at daily mass and 8:00 a.m. Sunday Mass, in the same pew near the front of the Cathedral on the east side "our little spot in front of St. Joseph's altar.

Agnes Johnson died on Friday, April 1, 1999; one day after her 97th birthday.

Mrs. Johnson frequently reminisced about her years as a parishioner of the Cathedral of the Madeleine. On Sunday August 9, 1998 I asked her to tape some of her memories. At the beginning of the tape we begin with her marriage to Mr. Johnson and their subsequent move to Salt Lake City in 1938.

The following information was obtained from Mrs. Johnson when I would visit her at the Villa.

Her earliest memories of the Cathedral deal with meeting Father LaBranche. She recalled Fr. Mark Benvegnu who also lived at the Villa while she was there. She commented that young priests would come there and stay for awhile and then go on to other parishes because the Cathedral was "really very different from other parishes."

She joined the Altar Society and the Legion of Mary. Mrs. LaBranche asked her to be a promoter of the Sacred Heart. The promoters had a certain number of names of persons to whom they should send leaflets. Mrs. Johnson went door to door delivering her leaflets so she could meet the people. The Legion was to be the leading organization of the parish. She never understood why it faded out. Mrs. LaBranche, the mother of Father LaBranche had been a very good Mormon who later converted to Catholicism. Father Collins from Our Lady of Guadalupe was the Chaplain. They met monthly, it was a "must."

As a member of the League she always scheduled her hour of adoration for noontime. Mrs. LaBranche was always there and that was how they became better acquainted. She sat at one end of the pew and Mrs. LaBranche at the other.

Mrs. Johnson always attended daily Mass. They lived in an apartment on Third East and then purchased an apartment house of their own on Fifth East until they

purchased their home at 166 D Street in 1958 where she lived until she moved to the Villa. She remained active in the Sacred Heart League and the Altar Society and also attended weekly meetings of the Legion of Mary. The work of the Legion of Mary involved going door to door to find Catholics. She remembered Msgr. Kennedy saying that he would walk blocks and blocks trying to find the Catholics and that was the way the parish grew. In response to my question she noted that the parish was very big and very active.

The names of parishioners whom she remembered are as follows: the LaBranche's were outstanding; Lucy Quinn, the secretary for the Bishop; Jim and Vera Quinn (Jim was a good friend of her husband's; Dick and Edna Quinn. (Although Mrs. Johnson had a sharp memory she could not recall names of parishioners from early days; but when I visited she often asked for parishioners who I knew since 1975 when we came to the parish).

Msgr. McDougall came to Cathedral and was pastor for about 20 years. Mrs. Johnson said he like him and commented on his history as a journalist and prisoner of war. She wondered what had happened to her copies of Monsignor's books. "He was a hard worker," she commented.

The Johnson's donated money for the confessional and she wondered if the plaque stating that they had contributed money for the confessional might still be in place.

Mrs. Johnson recalled a number of the Irish priests. Father Francis Sloan was one. She recalled that a number left the priesthood. Sometimes there were as many as four priests assigned to the Cathedral.

She knew Bishop Hunt and Bishop Federal was remembered as Auxiliary Bishop and Pastor of the Cathedral. Both Bishop Hunt and Bishop Federal lived in the rectory. She laughed about Bishop Hunt's father who also lived in the rectory and "the old fellow" would often get out and be found walking in the middle of the street. She commented

that his father was a Presbyterian and never became Catholic. We joked that perhaps he was in the middle of the street trying to get to the Presbyterian church which is located across the street from the Cathedral.

She remembered a priest named Fr. Francis but could not remember his last name. There was Fr. John Hart. "We liked him greatly," she said. She was concerned that she was forgetting names. She remembered Father Bircumshaw and Father Hope as deacons. Father Hope calls her "grandma." She gave her car to Father Andrew.

She remembered restoration projects. One she remembered vividly; and that was an outside restoration. It was a first Friday in December. A little girl was leaning against the door and she said "I am going to faint." She put her arms around her planning to walk her to the rectory. There was a wheelbarrow outside the door and as the girl fainted she pulled Mrs. Johnson down with her. She tripped over the wheelbarrow. She walked all the way home. She waited in the emergency room until 1:00 p.m. where she learned that her nose was "crushed like an egg shell." The nose was put in a cast till the day before Christmas. In her usual perky manner she talked about having fallen four times (it was breaking both hips that eventually made her realize that the Villa was the best place for her) and that she must "be accident prone." Despite that she said "I keep right on going; I have no thoughts of dying." One of her favorite phrases was "I'm as busy as a cranberry merchant in December. Mrs. Johnson loved words, poetry and limericks. She enjoyed writing limericks.

She joked about coming to the Villa as the start of "another story." She fell in 1993 (the first time). She called her neighbors, the Masons when she fell and could not get up. They had keys to her house and were able to get in. She went to the Villa for rehabilitation. Afterwards she returned to her home; she fell again a few months later. Not only did she have to have hip surgery again but also a mastectomy (whenever I would ask about the mastectomy she would say, "I have to worry about walking; I do not have time to think about cancer. I do

not know it for a fact but I suspect that the pain she felt in her lower back during the last month of her life was caused by the cancer. She never liked to talk about her health when I visited. It was only when I brought up the subject of her seeming to have a cold or be in pain that she would comment about her health. Usually she would just ask me to buy her some Cepacol throat lozenges. When she had to have cataract surgeries on one eye and a year later on the other her only complaint was that I had to wait too long for her when I should be with my family. I will never forget having to take her to the Moran eye clinic for a 6 a.m. appointment the day after her surgeries. She worried so about being ready so the last time she told me she slept in her clothes!! We used to call our runs to the hospital "our great adventures." "Haven't we had a lot of adventures," she would say to me, " then add, "I want to lived till I'm 100 so we can have more."

She watched the construction of the new addition to St. Joseph's Villa and would later move to the new area. She lived in four different rooms at the Villa. During the construction she was so interested in the machinery that I went to the library and checked out a children's book of construction machinery so she could identify the machinery she saw in action. Mrs. Johnson came to love the Villa and called it "home." She was grateful that she could attend daily Mass as well as daily recitation of the rosary. During her stay she became close friends with the Sisters, especially Sr. Ambrose, Sr. Rosalie and Sister Thaddeus. She renewed friendships with Msgr. Benvegnu, Father Mobley, Msgr. Stoffel, and Bishop Federal.

Returning to her memories of the Cathedral she recalled the special Mass in honor of the Johnson's fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1978. Deacon Silvio Mayo had them renew their vows. Father Kaiser was the celebrant of the Mass. A reception in their honor was held in the Social Hall. Nancy Leary was in charge of the reception. She remembers having Father Meersman, Father Blaine, Father Hope celebrate Masses in their home on D street.

Mrs. Johnson recalled the Thanksgiving Mass of 1938. Bishop Hunt was the celebrant. "He was a wonderful orator," she said. "He was known all over the U.S. because of his radio program."

Her memories of the interior of the Cathedral are that it was beautiful. She remembers a cleaning of the interior long before the cleaning done for the restoration.

She remembered two choir directors, Margaret Sullivan and Adine Bradley. In 1951 Bishop Dwyer commissioned the restoration of the organ and the organ was rededicated in honor of his parents. She remembered that there was a notation of this on one of the pillars.

Her memories of Father Dwyer included when he was first made pastor and walked to their home; "just dropped in for an unexpected visit." She chuckled, "When I went to the door I just about dropped dead. Imagine trying to converse with such a brilliant person." She got to know him quite well. "I would have masses offered for my Father and Mother and when I would mention the name of my father, Julius Beauvais, he would go back in history and tell me all about the city of Beauvais and its famous cathedral and the Bishop of Beauvais." History just "poured out of him," she said.

Msgr. McDougall came in 1960 when Father Dwyer was named Bishop of Reno. She said there was a nice transition as both were very well educated.

She chuckled at the fact that she could so vividly remember details about her youth but was getting forgetful about more current history.

Bishop Federal came in 1951 as the auxiliary bishop. He would celebrate Mass at the Cathedral. Mrs. Johnson recalled that he had Holy Hour on First Fridays. He would lead the rosary walking back and forth in the sanctuary. "That's where I learned that the three Hail Marys were to be said for an increase in the virtues of Faith Hope and Charity," she reminisced, "I think of that ever since." (Mrs. Johnson always kept her rosary beads

near at hand. I would often visit and find her in the midst of saying a rosary. One day she was very distraught because the cross had fallen off her favorite rosary. We did our best to repair it but the cross continued to fall off; she gave it to someone to repair and never got it back. She would never use a fancy rosary which she had received as a gift. She took out a pale white rosary; which she often carried in a little pouch in her pocket. This rosary was buried with her. Her other treasures were her family picture; the watch and pearls which Mr. Johnson gave her as anniversary gifts and a ring which belonged to her mother. When she died the picture was given to her granddaughter and she was buried with the others. She would wear her pearls and her ring only on Sundays, when she always dressed up. The first time she had hip surgery her beloved watch was misplaced. I finally located it with the help of a nurse at Holy Cross Hospital. For future surgeries she insisted I wear the watch and keep it wound. I had to take the watch to Paul Thomas Jewelers whenever it needed repairs. She would comment that when Mr. Johnson bought it for her he was told that it would have a lifetime guarantee. I would tease her and tell her that no one had expected her to have such a long life time. In her last days she would ask me to wind the watch for her; as she always relied on it to know the time. Shortly before her casket was closed, I wound her watch one last time.)

I told Mrs. Johnson that I would read a list of the names of the priests who had been at the Cathedral. She made the following comments about these priests:

Fr. Frank Brusatto: He baptized her granddaughter Peggy.

Fr. Francis Sloan was from Ireland; also recalled a Father Francis Kelleher.

Fr. Gavorchin: He consecrated their home to the Sacred Heart in 1957 (Always amazed me at how she recalled dates.) She had a picture of the Sacred Heart in numerous rooms in her house and kept one in her room at the Villa.

Fr. John Moran was the Chaplain of the Legion of Mary.

She walked faithfully with the Legion for eight years.

Msgr. Hedderman was there as a young priest.

Father Meersman: "He was very colorful."

Fr. McInally: Eventually moved to California. A number of young priests came and then went.

Fr. William Flegge and Father Patrick Pickford were two others who she remembered. She remembered that Fr. Flegge left for awhile and then returned. She said that some of the young priests often left the priesthood. "Those were heartbreaking days when they disappeared," she said. They were not told that the priests had left the priesthood. But it was wonderful when they came back. She inquired if I knew more about how Fr. Merrill was doing. She remembered that this was a time of upheaval at the Cathedral. Priests were coming and going.

She again spoke of Father LaBranche and the priests choir. The choir sang at funerals. When Fr. LaBranche sang "Panis Angelicus." She would be seated next to Mrs. LaBranche and Mrs. LaBranche would say, "When Jack starts to sing, I quit praying." "He was remarkable, a small priest." He died of a heart attack while on a fishing trip. His mother was a "great Mormon who became a great Catholic," she said. She added that he had two sisters who became Daughters of Charity.

Msgr. Patrick Kennedy was pastor when they first came to the Cathedral. He would walk up the hill and say in his Irish brogue "How's your heart.?" His hands would be wet with moisture after his walk.

Fr. Walter: He was a German priest who would walk back and forth in front of the Cathedral. He used to come to their house.

Fr. Sloan: He was an older priest. He was very holy and had a great sense of humor. He was also a Chaplain for the Legion of Mary.

Fr. Ciprian Bradley: "Oh my goodness yes, when we first came in 1938 he was here at the Cathedral and I had known him in Pueblo." He had served at St. Leander's.

Msgr. Moreton: She remembered his name but could not remember what part he played. She remembered seeing him at funerals. There were many monsignors. She commented that very few monsignors were appointed now.

Msgr. Stoffel: He was colorful and used to make the most "humorous sermons." "Oh, we liked him a lot," she said.

I asked her about the outdoor restoration in 1975. She remembered some new framing around the windows but it was needed again. She remembered going to a Holy Hour and the whole Resurrection window was out and a canvas covered it. There was a big wind blowing it around so they went to the rectory to tell them about it "because it looked like the whole place was going to be wrecked."

She recalled that Archbishop Dwyer was instrumental in building the Cathedral School. She often wondered why it was not continued. (Since I taught at Cosgriff and Judge Memorial, Mrs. Johnson always wanted to hear about what was happening at the schools and would question me about events which she had read about in the *Intermountain Catholic*, which she read faithfully along with *Time* or *Newsweek*. She discontinued her subscription to the *Salt Lake Tribune* because all too often she read an obituary about the death of someone younger than her; whom she'd known.)

The Sisters she remembered were Sister Karen who still kept in touch. She also recalled Sr. Lorraine who had come to visit her at the Villa.

She remembered visiting St. Mary's of the Wasatch for a Christmas play. "The little ones were in charge of acting and they had no written script, they made it up as they went along. We took my brother Lloyd and he would laugh his head off. The nuns did not know from one minute to the next what would happen."

This was one of Mrs. Johnson's favorite prayers. She had committed it to memory and said it daily.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

I am going to reveal to you the secret of sanctity and happiness. Every day for 5 minutes control your imagination to the things of sins and your ears to all the noise of the world, in order to enter into yourself. Then in the sanctity of your baptized soul, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, speak to that divine Spirit, saying:

"O Holy Spirit, beloved of my soul,
I adore you.
Enlighten me.
Guide me.
Strengthen me,
Console me.
Tell me what I should do.
Give me your orders.
I promise to submit myself to all that you desire of me
and to accept all that you permit to happen to me.
Let me only know your will.

If you do this, your life will flow along happily and serenely, even in the midst of trials. Grace will be proportioned to the trial and you will be given the strength to carry it and you will arrive at the gates of paradise, laden with merit. This submission to the Holy Spirit is the secret of sanctity.

- Cardinal Mercier

I asked what had sparked their interest in Judge Memorial High School and donating so generously. She said it was the only high school "so why not give toward it."

"I think Catholics should support their school." She commented about the forty computers which were purchased with their donation. Judge students occasionally came to visit on her birthday to thank her for generosity. These visits delighted her as did visits from Msgr. Fitzgerald.

Her thoughts on St. Joseph's Villa: "This is a very good place to spend the rest of your life." One day Sr. Rosalie was wheeling her in her wheelchair and someone said " Oh, Agnes you always look so happy," and I said "Well, this is a happy place to be in."

Archives-Diocese of Salt Lake City
ORAL/TAPED HISTORY INTERVIEW
Wanda McDonough Oral History Collection

Interviewee: Agnes Elizabeth Beauvais Johnson 484-5486
Name Address Tel

Interviewer: Cece Holt
Name

Interview: Aug 1995- 1998 St. Joseph's Villa
Date Place

I willingly contribute my testimony recorded on August 9
19 98 to the Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City
to be deposited for public inspection and used for purposes of
historical research.

Agnes E Johnson
Interviewee
Cece Holt
Interviewer