



PILGRIMAGE IN BYGONE ERA – Members of Anna Fusco's pilgrimage to the St. Anne de Beupré Shrine pose on the steps of the shrine in this photo from the late 1950s. Anna is near the center of the arch, next to a sister. Granddaughter Donna Roy kneels directly in front of her. Mrs. Roy's sisters, Faythe and Martha, and cousin, David, also are in the photo. (Photo submitted by Mrs. Roy)

Shrine trip a 75-year family affair

Carrying out a legacy of love and devotion to Saint Anne

By Mary Chalupsky
Transcript Reporter

WEST HAVEN – The legacy of Anna Fusco's pilgrimages to Quebec's St. Anne de Beupré Shrine lives on today, 75 years later, in her grandchildren and three daughters.

And though she died of cancer in 1970, she would consider the pilgrimages, begun in an era now gone by, as an act of faith in God carried out through three generations of one family.

"This pilgrimage reflects the faithful seeds of my grandmother's devotion," said Donna Roy, who now leads the pilgrimage with her sisters, Faythe and Martha; cousin David; and Anna's daughters, Anita, Marion and Edna.

"It's a legacy to my grandmother," she continued about this year's July 10-14 trip to Canada. "She never asked us, 'Would you continue the pilgrimage?'" said Mrs. Roy. "We're just always called to do it. There's been years when we've said, 'This is our last.' And then, we just do it," she said with

a laugh.

The reason? "It's an incredible experience," explained Mrs. Roy. "You're renewing your spirituality. It's a block of time when you can get away from your routine and be with God without worrying about anything.

"You're in these beautiful shrines and just in awe of the people of faith who go on pilgrimage," she noted. "Plus, there are all the miracles that people have reported, even those on our trips. It opens your heart. It's so emotional. People are praying and they're just euphoric. And you're always in the presence of God.

"It's such a beautiful experience. It's the perfect vacation, and they're a lot of fun. I remember going on one pilgrimage and crying for five days and then laughing for five days."

According to Mrs. Roy, it all began when Anna Sperandeo Fusco made a promise to Saint Anne that she would bring pilgrims on an annual pilgrimage to the St. Anne de Beupré Shrine and

other Canadian Shrines until her dying day.

People say that even as a little girl, Anna was very religious, attending Mass and devotions regularly. Perhaps the fact that her maiden name means "hope in God" in Italian put a call upon her life that she heard.

Anna lived at 538 Chapel St. in New Haven, facing Wooster Square. She was active in both the Italian (St. Michael) and French (St. Louis) parishes. But it was at St. Louis Church, where she participated in a nine-day novena to Saint Anne every July, that the seeds were planted.

"Everybody went," said Mrs. Roy. "It was so packed. People came in buses, and the doors of the church opened so that people spilled out down the steps and into the street."

Often, priests from the Shrine in Quebec would be invited to come to St. Louis to lead the novena.

"In those days, people had public devotions that they preserved and a level of faith that was unshak-

able," she said. For example, "they would say that 'Saint Anne called them' to go on the pilgrimages. But that generation is dying off now. People don't have that kind of fervor anymore."

Because of Anna's devout faith, the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, the French community of sisters assigned to St. Louis Parish, encouraged her to affiliate with the Shrine's Archconfraternity of St. Anne and lead pilgrimages to Quebec. Overcoming hesitation and her own fears, she led her first small group to the shrine in 1933 before making the pilgrimage an annual event.

Anna later formed the St. Anne's Pilgrim Society to spread devotion to Saint Anne through good works, with meetings held in the convent basement. Mrs. Roy still remembers attending card parties held to raise funds to bring handicapped people and those who couldn't afford the trip to the shrine.

Some pilgrims go every year.

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“It’s a wonderful thing,” said Marge Solecki of North Haven, who has been making the pilgrimage since the ‘70s and is a former secretary of the society. “Saint Anne is a great healer. My own sister was healed of a throat problem. I believe in it totally and love to go. It’s so uplifting spiritually.”

“What I remember about my grandmother, first and most importantly, was her love for God and that she was always, always praying,” said Mrs. Roy. “Grandma was a woman of intense faith. She always had her rosary beads in her hand, at work, at home, in church, and even slept with them in bed.

“Everything she did was directed by God, and always for his glory,” said Mrs. Roy. “We thought she was married to God.

“She would always bring priests and nuns on the pilgrimage and she always, always, always prayed for vocations,” said Mrs. Roy, who noted that Anna, like her daughters, was a third order Dominican who was close to the Dominican friars at St. Mary Parish in New Haven and the cloistered nuns at Our Lady of Grace Monastery.

Anna’s daughter, Edna Fusco Casolino of Orange, said, “This was her mission.” Mrs. Casolino said her mother opened a corset business in 1947 called Saxon Kent that she managed with her daughters, first in Derby and then in Orange, before the family sold the business 10 years ago.

“People were always coming in and asking my mother to pray for this person or for other intentions,” said Mrs. Casolino. “It was like an apostolate. We kept prayers on the counter for people to come in and take with them.”

Next July 10-14, the Anna Fusco Memorial Pilgrimage will visit the shrines of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, Notre Dame du Cap, and St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal, as well as travel to Old Quebec City and Montmorency Falls. The cost is about \$600. Information is available at (203) 488-2451 or www.quebecshrinespilgrimage.com.

Today, Mrs. Roy and her family wouldn’t consider life without the pilgrimage. “We wouldn’t want to upset Grandma,” said Mrs. Roy.

“As children, we were always involved with the pilgrimage,” she said. “We would always hear about it from my grandmother, through the novenas and the priests from Canada who would come and stay in our house. We were always surrounded by the pilgrimage.

Mrs. Roy said the cost of the trip covers the expense of organizing it. Any excess money is donated to the shrines.