

You & Me

Interview ELISSA LAWRENCE

These two sisters became nuns and travelled for their work, now they enjoy living together for the first time since they were children

**Sister Mary Randle, 77,
Carina, Good Samaritan Sister**

Until five years ago, Ellen and I hadn't lived together since we were children. Now we share a two-bedroom apartment.

We grew up in Bulimba, on the bend of the Brisbane River, in a family with seven children – our sister Veronica (who died in 1997 aged 59) and our brother Tom (who died in a car accident outside Mount Isa in 1979, aged 37) are in heaven.

Veronica was a Good Samaritan Sister too. Our brother Charlie, 80, is a Marist Brother and he also lives in our same complex (at Azure Blue Carina retirement village). Ann, 71, has a unit in this complex too with her husband Jack but he is now in the nursing home part. Our sister Carmel, 72, and her husband live at Morningside.

So four of us – Charlie, Veronica, Ellen and I – followed a religious life. Growing up, we said the rosary every night and went to Mass every Sunday. Mum had qualifications as a secretary but, with all the children, she didn't work. Dad was a clerk at TC Beirne in the Valley. People were always welcomed at our home.

I knew I wanted to be a nun when I was very young and I was 19 when I entered the convent. Over my life, I have taught at schools in Sydney, Melbourne, Whyalla in South Australia and in Kiribati in the central Pacific – I was there in 1994 for six months and again in 1997 for five years. I did overseas study with a year in Ireland and a sabbatical in Rome and America. I lived away from Queensland for 31 years so it is lovely to be living with Ellen now.

I'm more hot headed than Ellen and I'm the one who gets things done and annoys the hell out of poor old El. We wouldn't be human if we didn't get a bit shirty with each other but we are not a family who get into long silences. Ellen's got a wonderful sense of humour and if she thinks I'm getting too serious, she goes on with a lot of nonsense until I laugh.

You don't retire from being a nun. Ellen and I pray together every morning and once a week we have Lectio spiritual reading and reflecting on the Gospel.

I've learnt gratitude from my time with Ellen. It's a gift that we are here together and we can look after each other.

At this stage in our lives, what more can you do than be kind to each other and love each other.

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PICTURE: MARK CRANITCH

**Sister Ellen Randle, 74,
Carina, Good Samaritan Sister**

Growing up, I looked up to Mary. She was practical, she would help Mum and organise things, even when she was quite small. She was a good organiser but a worker too.

Mary's decision to become a Sister could have influenced me to do the same but I think that's where my heart was set.

Both our parents had a deep faith. I can remember my father saying his prayers morning and night. As a girl, it showed me the importance of nurturing the faith we had.

We attended Lourdes Hill College – Mary was ahead of me by a few classes – and I saw the nuns working and teaching, it just attracted me.

At 19, I went to Sydney and studied to

be a primary school teacher. My first teaching position was at Manly Vale in NSW. I also went to Mitchelton in Brisbane, Whyalla in South Australia (Mary was there at a different time), and in Queensland at Innisfail, Hughenden, Ayr and Charters Towers. For 20 years, I had principal roles and I enjoyed that too.

You do have doubts along the way, even when you get to your 70s you wonder sometimes, “Could I have done something different with my life?” But any doubts haven't stayed with me long.

At the end of 2015, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. It was a shock but my neurosurgeon told me no two cases are the same and if you've got to have something this probably isn't a bad thing to have. So I'm just living with it.

After all the years of living apart, I do cherish the chance to have this time with

Mary and I'm thankful for it. We have our moments but you have just got to let it go. There's no point holding on to any arguments.

We live in a lovely community. I do the exercise classes, I go to the gym and work on the equipment. On Thursday afternoons, Mary and I go up to the local school (Saints Peter and Paul's, Bulimba) to listen to the children read and help them along. We also take Holy Communion to some parishioners in the nursing home part of the complex.

Mary and I play cards together, a game called Skip Bo. I also love crosswords and I do them most days. My other sister Ann does them too and we do the competitions in the Lovatts magazine. It's really good and sometimes you might win something. Last year I won a \$25 prize voucher. That was really wonderful.