

60 YEARS ALREADY!

"These women have the mission to make us know God, to speak of Christ. And they are leading by example. I'm terribly lucky."

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LIVING AT HOME ... AWAY FROM HOME!

Leaving behind her war-torn country, Alice Locong arrives in Montreal at the age of 18. The young Vietnamese Buddhist wants to become a pharmacist. By a combination of circumstances, she

knocks on the door of the very first residence of Opus Dei for students. She would then live there from September 1959 to June 1962.

"I have wonderful memories of Montboisé," says the retiree today. "I had a very small private room. Every morning, Father Martin would come to celebrate mass, then we went to university. When we came back home, dinner was waiting for us. In the space of six months, I gained 10 pounds!"

"At its fullest capacity, we were 21 residents, in addition to the women of Opus Dei. We ate together and shared a lot. After dinner, we would meet in the living room to chat. Laura played the guitar and Denyse sang. We relaxed and had fun, before going to study. I also attended spiritual formation activities. I was not a Catholic, but I really liked the great principles of Catholicism."

"The coordinators at Montboisé were such fine people! They were intelligent, educated and friendly, always ready to serve with abundant energy. This intrigued me. Clearly, they were motivated by something..."

"They wanted to make it easier for us to study. The meals, cleaning and washing were taken care of. I was at peace. I could share my problems and my dreams, and concentrate on my studies. Here, I had friends, and this gave me a lot of security."

With freedom, leaders arise

Time has passed and more than 400 students from CEGEP and university have had the Montboisé (now Fonteneige) experience, attracted by the family atmosphere there, just as in the residences in Quebec City, Ottawa and Toronto.

Always respecting the religious freedom and the personal freedom of

each young woman, the goal of the leaders has not changed. It is to facilitate circumstances that will allow these young women of different religions (whether they are practicing their religions or not) to flourish and to study well. With this support, they become leaders in their fields: straight-forward, honest, professional, pro-active people, who are well prepared for the challenges of today's world, which includes the needy and less fortunate. A spiritual foundation is offered to those who wish it.

This atmosphere of freedom at Montboisé, also intrigued Denyse Larrivée, a student from Trois-Pistoles, Québec who was looking for an apartment in Montreal. She says, "There, I found women with a deep knowledge of Catholicism. Super modern women. They were like us: they loved to laugh, to sing, and to dance. What a very nice example of

Christianity. I pondered how to reconcile Catholicism and this way of life? I had never seen something like that before, and it attracted me."

So attracted was Denyse that she became the first Canadian *numerary* of Opus Dei, preceded by Annie Sioui (*associate*) and followed by Gabrielle Soucy and Des-Neiges Dupré (also *numeraries*), and many others. These women discovered their vocation to Opus Dei, which was then a new phenomenon in the Catholic Church. Such a vocation comes in different ways (as a numerary, supernumerary, or an associate). Hearing God's call, one may be a single person, a married person, or a priest. Always, it is a call to seek holiness in everyday life and to evangelize and encourage the world to follow Christ. This is precisely what Des Neiges experienced: "Living in Montboisé, I understood

what it was like to love. And I found my vocation: to share love."

Putting God into the heart of the world

Laly Martin, a pioneer of Opus Dei in Canada, explains: "When God calls someone, it happens internally, through an event or a person. The spirit of the Work is that the laity live close to God, putting God at the heart of their family and professional life."

Alice later understood: "These women have a mission to help us to know God and to speak about Christ. They manifest this by example. I find myself enormously lucky. I did not do anything to deserve this. It was given to me. In life, we may plan a lot of things, but the best is not what we plan, it is what is given to us."

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