



Mother M. Anselm, the principal, discusses lesson plans with the three lay apostles from the U.S., Kathleen Gardner, (left) Anne Shaughnessy and Judy Cronin.

We came, We saw — and Africa conquered

by
Kathleen Gardner

Life is full for three American girls teaching in a Nigerian secondary school. Each of us came straight from college to Africa to work as lay mission helpers. We agree with an all-out enthusiasm that this has been the most interesting six months of our lives.

Last year at this time I did not know Judy Cronin and Anne Shaughnessy; they did not know me, but at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut, along with all the graduation activities these two seniors were corresponding with Mother Teresa Xavier and making plans to go to Africa. At the same time at Our Lady of Cincinnati College I was first hearing of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, of their work in Nigeria, of such strange sounding places as Calabar, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo. Now one year later here we are together at Cornelia Connelly Secondary School in Uyo, Nigeria, along with Angela

Brady, an Irish girl who was here nearly a year ahead of us.

"How did you hear about this place?" "Why did you decide to come here?" These are usually two of the first questions asked of new arrivals. When I asked these questions of Judy and Anne who arrived one month after me, the reply was that they had been interested in doing this type of work in Africa but, at first did not know where to get information or who to contact. One day they happened to look at a copy of *The Pylon* which was in their school library and seeing Mother Vicar's address in Nigeria they decided to write — just to see what would happen.

My own story was much the same. I, too, had been interested in the lay mission movement, but I knew very little about it. My brother, Bill, who is studying for the priesthood at the North American College in Rome, had known of this

interest and had encouraged it. In December 1959, he and a friend were at Castelgandolfo at a papal audience where they met two St. Patrick's priests.

After talking for a short while, Bill discovered that they were stationed in Nigeria. He told them of me and they suggested that I write to the Holy Child nuns about teaching for them; Bill forwarded the address which they gave him to me, and I wrote, little dreaming of what it would lead to.

How well I remember receiving that first letter from Mother Teresa Xavier saying that they would like to have me come out and teach for them. I read that letter over and over and to all my friends and room mates at college; and I knew immediately that I wanted to come. Africa! It sounded very exciting and very far away. It sounded *too* far away to my parents!

During the summer as I prepared for my journey, getting the passport and visa in order as well as the necessary injections, it was interesting to watch the reaction of different people when they learned I was going off to teach in Africa. Many were concerned about my being rather close to the Congo where so much trouble was just beginning. Many thought I was crazy and could not believe that I was actually going to do such a

"wild thing"; some thought it would be "a good experience — but..." And a few shared my enthusiasm and wished to know every detail of my plans. As the time grew nearer, I became more anxious to leave and fearful that something might happen to prevent my going.

At last on August 23rd, 1960, I was on my way, high up above the Atlantic ocean, beginning the biggest venture of my life. I was alone and rather nervous but never once wanted to turn back. On the evening of the next day I arrived in the city of Rome — where it had all begun. It was evening, and as the plane flew over the city everything appeared washed with golden light. Outlines, shapes, colors seemed clearer and more definite here than at any place I had ever been; this sensation of sharp clarity and brilliance lasted throughout my week in Rome.

At the airport I looked for my brother Bill but he was not to be found. Finally I took a taxi out to the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus on Via Boncompagni where I was welcomed so warmly by all the Mothers. It was lovely and peaceful after my long trip.

The next morning Bill came to the convent and I learned that he had indeed been at the airport, but on the wrong side! It had been

Science class - Imelda Enang, Mary Achikeh and Evelyn Kofon examining the properties of carbon dioxide.



English class - reading Hamlet under the direction of Mother M. Kieran.



two and one half years since we had seen each other so we spent the morning catching up on news of family and home. This began the tour of Rome, seeing all the magnificent fountains, monuments and churches, and the Holy Father himself. In between sightseeing I was hearing all about the new land I was going to from the Sisters who had visited C.C.C. in Uyo. Yet with all my preparation I hardly knew what to expect. It was impossible for me to picture what the country would be like, and life there. And the same thing is true for each one here; a person has to wait and learn about the country by living here — no one can accurately describe it.

Then the last part of my journey — Africa! At Port Harcourt I was greeted by Mother Teresa Xavier to whom I had written that first letter and the many subsequent ones, who had helped with all the arrangements, who had made my coming here an actuality. The 60 mile trip by car to Uyo seemed very short; I was looking from side to side, fascinated by my first view of palm trees, picturesque native huts of mud and thatched roofs, men and women in brightly colored native wrappers carrying great loads on their heads. It was too much to take in at one time!

A brief stop at Ifuho Convent at Ikot Ekpene and then my new home — C.C.C., Uyo. I do not know just what I expected to see. The beauty of the compound amazed me with its fine buildings — classroom blocks, students' cottages, and Chapel — the red roofs a pleasing contrast to the ever present green of the plants and trees. The word "compound" had always suggested to me a small, closed-in area; yet one main quality of the C.C.C. compound is the spa-

ciousness. And the African sky added to this quality; it is such a big grand sky and always changing.

I was just beginning to get really settled and accustomed to the country when Anne and Judy arrived. There are three Americans now in our household and one Irish girl — the only place of the missions where the Americans outnumber the Irish! However, after six months Angela Brady has still retained her Irish accent although once in a while she says, "Hi," and she now eats hot dogs, hamburgers, pop corn, and pizza. In April, Vimolia, a lovely



Clare Coughlan arrives at her bungalow on the Holy Child compound, Lagos... Only 30 new students can be admitted to this school next term — and 600 children have applied! The need for teachers is great.

Indian girl from Ceylon, came to teach science and give a further international air to our little group. And in April, also, a third lay mission helper from Albertus Magnus College arrived in Nigeria.

Clare Coughlan, spurred on by the glowing letters from her friends, came to teach mathematics in the Holy Child School in Lagos, some 500 miles away.

For Judy, Anne, and me, running a household is something new, and here in Africa we have the added confusion of a wood man, vegetable man, fish man, meat man, errand boy, and egg woman to keep track of. Nevertheless, by now we are accustomed to getting our meat wrapped in a huge banana leaf and have become quite proficient at haggling over the price of oranges.

Our day begins early — Mass at 6.15, followed by a hurried and busy breakfast at which we try to catch the morning news on the radio, check the time and set the watches and clocks, plan the day's menu and make out the shopping list. Budgeting is a bit tricky since we have to translate pounds and shillings into dollars and cents, but by now we have it down to a system: I am in charge of the kitchen since I enjoy cooking and teaching Maureen our cook, new dishes; Anne is our thrifty financial expert who inspects the "kitty" each morning and writes down carefully each expenditure. And once a month the four of us make out our shopping list and go to the supermarket forty miles away at Aba for the monthly supplies, which is always a hot and tiring process but thoroughly enjoyed.

The household business being taken care of, we go off to inspect the girls' cottages and then to our classes, Judy teaching history, Angela geography, and Anne and I English, and each of us religion. The students here realize the value



A mobile butcher shop is part of the Nigerian scene — and Kathie, Angela and Anne get their meat wrapped in a banana leaf!

of an education; they are eager to learn, and they work and study diligently to pass the School Certificate Examination which is taken at the end of Form V. They are full of questions about American girls of their own age, schools, skyscrapers, ice and snow.

Classes are over at 1.10 p.m.; we have our dinner and then a siesta. At 4 o'clock Adoration in the Chapel followed by a game period which each of us directs once a week. We are at last catching on to net ball, which we find similar to basketball.

Softball has been recently introduced by the American tutors who enjoy pitching and batting and shouting "Strike three!" more than the students.

After games there are various clubs. Angela will usually be in the hall directing the choir, Anne out on the athletics field with Mother Mary Cosmas training the athletes in running, high jump, long jump, javelin and discus throwing; or she and Judy may be out on the tennis court teaching the Form VI girls tennis. Once every two weeks they direct the Debating Club.



**Kathie
makes
friends
with a
pet
monkey.**

My own club time is spent working with the girls on the school magazine, *the Cornelian*, or teaching the ballet class which I began soon after arriving. The girls naturally have such a good sense of rhythm that they catch on quickly to the steps although they are so different from their own native dancing.

Finally, all activities finished, we have our supper then maybe a game of bridge. Bedtime comes early for us and we fall asleep quickly under the mosquito nets, often to the sound of the drum from the village and the night noises of the frogs, cicadas, crickets and the countless other African insects.

Many would perhaps consider life here difficult owing to the absence of the conveniences and luxuries that are taken for granted at home. Indeed, there are times when we would certainly appreciate the use of an electric iron or stove, or being able to turn on the faucet and have hot water flow; or enjoy an evening of watching television. Yet it is surprising how easy it is to get along without all these things. Life here is simpler, and in a way, more leisurely. There is more time to get to know and understand people — Africans and Europeans. To talk, listen, learn about the customs and the backgrounds of the people, and observe the growth and development which is taking place so quickly in Nigeria. Especially since the country gained its independence in October 1960, new

buildings, schools, roads seem to appear overnight. This period of change is a fascinating time to be in Africa and we are happy to be contributing a bit to the progress of the country in the field of education.

The Catholic Church is doing a great work here in furthering education and at the same time, giving the children and young people a firm foundation for their faith, bringing many into the Church, and instilling Catholic principles to guide them during their school years and in later life.

The St. Patrick priests have established the Church firmly in this section through their work of the last 30 years. Under the direction of Bishop James Moynagh and the auxiliary Bishop Dominic Ekandem, the Catholic Community has a vitality and vigor which fits in with the growth of the country in all fields. We were convinced of this when we attended the Holy Week services at the Cathedral in Calabar. The ceremonies were beautifully and fully carried out and at each one the Cathedral was packed. There was a spontaneity and force in the singing and the responses — truly the priest together with the people. To see 2000 Africans holding their lighted candles high in the darkened church renewing their baptismal vows — renouncing Satan and expressing their belief in the truth of the Catholic faith in loud strong voices — strengthened our own faith in the future of the Church here.

But to ensure that future many workers are needed, lay as well as priestly and religious. Every effort must be made now, at this decisive period, if the Catholic Church is to have a leading and prominent role in this great continent of Africa.