

Centennial Conversations

~ interview by Wendy Edwards & Anina Minotto

Meet Jean Bruce Poole



– and all her children and grandchildren plan to gather to celebrate her 100th birthday in July.

In 1954 the young family started attending All Saints when John Burt was rector. On her first Sunday, Jean noticed all the women were wearing hats and gloves, so she said “I promptly bought gloves and found a hat for the following Sunday.” Speaking of her church background, Jean says “I went to St. Paul’s Girls’ School in London. We had Morning Prayer there, but other than that, I had no religious upbringing.”

Nevertheless, over the last seventy years, Jean has found a home at All Saints Church. Reflecting on long term friendships from ASC, Jean shares “I continue to connect with my Covenant group from 1995. We still meet on Zoom once a month! Some people might remember Alastair & Mary Biggart, and Alastair & Geraldine Greeves. We’re all still in touch – even though those friends have moved back to the UK. I led a Covenant group or two, as well, and found that to be an excellent way to meet interesting new people who found their way to All Saints.”

As we continue our Centennial Conversation series, it is a true delight to turn the All Saints spotlight on Jean Bruce Poole – who will be celebrating her own centennial on her 100th birthday on July 13.

Born in London in 1924, Jean was raised with her six siblings in the shadow of World War II ... moving from London to Brucefield (the family country home north of Edinburgh) just before the beginning of the war.

At the age of eighteen Jean joined the WRNS (Women’s Royal Naval Service, known as the WRENS) and was given the choice of three different jobs: plotter, coder or as part of the Bletchley enigma project -- which required working with numbers which she was not fond of doing – so she opted for the plotter. Plotters received reports by radar (which was in its infancy) and each had about 40 destroyers to follow. The destroyers would escort the merchant ships bringing much needed supplies to the British Isles – and there was a huge map on a table with blocks representing the ships which plotters would maneuver according to plot positions.

After D-Day, Jean was sent to Ostend, Belgium (after getting permission from her parents since she was under 21) and worked as a plotter for mine sweepers where she was the only woman on the boat as she reviewed and corrected charts. She recalls that she was well received and kindly treated by the boat crew.

After the war, Jean studied Civilization at the Sorbonne in Paris, and in 1949 she married John Shirley Ward (a Pasadena native) who worked on implementing the Marshall Plan in Paris. In 1952 they moved to Pasadena. Jean and John raised three children – Laetitia, Reavis and John

“I always feel as though the clergy are there for me,” she continued. “They care about what happens. And I think they’re there for anyone who wants to have that kind of attention.”

In her outside-All Saints life, Jean spent fifteen years as a Huntington Library Docent and did a lot of work for the Pasadena Symphony. Eventually, she and her first husband divorced, and she needed to find a job. Jean began at the Old Mill in San Marino working for the California Historical Society. It was at first a grist mill, built in 1816 by Franciscans, and then became a family home. After five years there, in 1977 she went to work at an office on Olvera Street as senior curator and then historic museum director of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. She ended up writing a book, *El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles*, which was published in 2002 just after she retired.

Recalling another favorite All Saints memory, Jean says, “I love being in the sanctuary at Christmas time when the Pasadena Symphony and LA Children’s Chorus perform. It’s absolutely beautiful and reminds me how fortunate we are to have such an inspirational space to worship in every Sunday.”

Jean also reflects on her volunteer work over the years. “I’ve been part of All Saints’ Lay Counseling Ministry from its beginning. That has been the most meaningful volunteer work I’ve done at the church. I’ve even had a client meet with me here at Monte Cedro after I stopped driving. I do feel limited by not being able to drive myself everywhere I’d like to go, but having managed that until just a few years ago was a blessing!”

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Question 1: What is the one thing you are most grateful for at All Saints?:

“What keeps me coming to All Saints after all these years I’d have to say is the community. I always sit on the lectern side of the church, near the center aisle because I love it when so many people going up to Communion stop to greet me! I also like it when I’m asked to read from the lectern during a service. I know that I am contributing something meaningful for all who are gathered together.”

Question 2: Tell us a story of your favorite memory of your years at All Saints:

“In the late 60s and 70s, Bill Rankin was a priest at All Saints. He became such a good friend as well as teacher

for me. I was part of a study group he led called Journey in Faith. Members of that group got to know each other well and I have very fond memories of that time. Bill Rankin’s faith and friendship influenced my thinking about a new direction for my life that was a big change for the better.”

Question 3: What are your hopes for All Saints as we move into this next century here at 132 N Euclid Ave?:

“I hope its aspirations for peace and justice in the world will be realized. It has always been willing to challenge what society is saying should be the norm, and we have helped to change some things. All Saints obviously needs to persevere.”

