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FATHER AMBY WHEELER, C.S.C.:

63 YEARS OF MINISTRY

ON 3 CONTINENTS

Presented by

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Ireland

On August 6, 1918, Martin and Mary (Phelan) Wheeler gave birth to their fourth child, Ambrose, in Roscrea, Tipperary, Ireland. He had two brothers, Martin and Earl and a sister Veronica. His family lived with his maternal grandparents who had a farm. He spoke fondly of them and his preparation to be a farmer. But when he was old enough to go to school (about 7 years old) his family moved to Dublin. They were members of St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish where he made his First Communion and was confirmed.

Ambrose did very well at St. Lawrence School and received high marks in his classes. Soon he became an altar boy. He recalled fondly the pastor who invited the boys over to the Rectory for a glass of milk and a roll. At that time priests were highly esteemed in Ireland. Ambrose admired the priests who served at his parish and thought seriously about becoming a priest.

Ambrose also vividly remembered his childhood in Ireland under the occupation of the British. He recalled the British troops entering his classroom packing the children into a lorry and hauling them to a field outside Dublin. They left it up to the parents to find their children. After the Four Courts in Dublin was blown up in 1922, even young Ambrose felt the turmoil of the Civil War in Dublin. He missed the peaceful life he had known on his grandparents' farm.

In August of 1929, when he was 12 years old, his life was changed dramatically by his parents' decision to emigrate to Brooklyn in the United States. The day of their departure, his family attended mass at St. Patrick Church in Queen's Town. They sailed aboard the *S.S. President Roosevelt*. In the Second World War, the ship served as a troop transport and was sunk. Their cabin was in immigrant class (the bottom deck in the center of the ship.)

During their voyage across the Atlantic, they encountered strong storms. All the children in the immigrant class were sea sick because the ship did not have stabilizers to cope with the violent seas. Ambrose fondly recalls the Captain as a wonderful person. When the weather improved, he had the steward go around the ship to collect blankets, mattresses and extra beds for the sick children to sleep on the outside deck. The kitchen staff made the children toast and warm milk. This thoughtful Captain regularly checked on the condition of his youngest passengers.

After the seven day voyage, the ship entered American waters. Since Martin and Mary already had American citizenship, they and their children disembarked at Hoboken, New Jersey, not at Ellis Island. Their final destination was Brooklyn, NY where they had relatives living. Their relatives were there to greet them in Hoboken. They drove the Wheelers to their new home in Brooklyn. Young Ambrose had heard the stories about America, but he could not find the streets paved in gold. The busy streets of Brooklyn filled with people, cars and trucks were a big change from the peaceful life on the farm that Ambrose had known as a small child.

Brooklyn

Initially, the Americans seemed to be in a big hurry and unconcerned with the new arrivals. But fortunately, their relatives were very kind and helpful to the new arrivals. His Aunt Margret (his mother's sister) lived in a six room apartment flat. With the Wheelers, there were now fourteen people were living in the six small rooms. The next day, his aunt cooked a big breakfast for everyone. She told them that she was bringing in two beds and more cots to accommodate them. She had also enrolled Amby and Earl at a Brooklyn school.

Their Dad, Martin, found a job working for Rolston's, which built stores in Brooklyn. Five houses up the street, his sister, Margret Callihan had a four story boarding house with the top floor unoccupied. She offered the Wheelers the five room apartment. Their Mother, Mary, found the local parish and met the pastor. She made arrangements for her two younger children (Amby and Ronnie) to attend St. Paul's school. The older sons were enrolled in their schools, Earl at St. Francis High School and Martin at Trinity College in Ireland.

Amby discovered that his education in Ireland gave him an advantage. Meeting with the principal at St. Paul's School, Sister Marian, he found that he was very up to date in his studies. He was put into the fifth grade. The only subject he did not have a good background in was in American history. He was temporarily in fifth grade until he acquired a proficiency in American History and then was advanced to the eighth grade. In addition to his studies, Amby also had a job delivering the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. His employers thought so much of this industrious lad, they gave him a new suit to wear for his graduation from St. Paul's School.

The next step in Amby's education was to attend Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame, Indiana. "That was the decision that framed the rest of my life here in America." But this decision came after a 3 to 4 month discernment process. Amby was familiar with the Redemptorist priests who had a Holy Redeemer Parish on 59th street in Brooklyn. From them he learned about the difference between diocesan and religious order priests, the training in the seminary and how to discern his vocation. He sent letters to several religious orders for information on their order, their seminary and their apostolates.

But it was his boss, Harold Taylor, at the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* who steered him the direction of Holy Cross Fathers. His brother-in-law, Fr. Charlie Young, was a Holy Cross priest. He was returning from his first tour of duty in the Bengal Mission to visit his family and friends. At that time the missionaries came back from the missions every seven years. When Fr. Young arrived in Brooklyn he was accompanied by Fr. James Goodall and Fr. Francis Wyss. Fr. Goodall was in charge of the Foreign Mission Seminary and Fr. Wyss had been a missionary in Bengal. Within an hour and a half, Amby decided to look into the Holy Cross Fathers at Notre Dame. On September 12, 1934, Amby arrived at the Holy Cross High School or Little Seminary.

“Little Sem”

Holy Cross High School Seminary was known as the “Little Sem” by the seminarians. It prepared the seminarians for their college courses at the University of Notre Dame. It offered a rigorous academic program. In his freshman year, 1934 -1935, Amby studied Latin A, English A, Algebra, U.S. History, Civics and Religion. In his sophomore year, 1935 - 1936, he studied Latin B, Greek A, English B, Geometry, Religion B, Medieval to Modern History. While a junior in 1936 - 1937 , Amby took Latin C, Greek B, English C, Advanced Algebra, French A, Religion C and Ancient History. In his senior year, 1937-1938, he studied Latin D, Greek C, English D, French B, Religion D and Biology. He graduated on June 8, 1938. (*Holy Cross Seminary Academic Records*)

In addition to their studies, the little seminarians were also being introduced to the religious life. There were regularly scheduled times for group prayers, daily mass and spiritual conferences. They also performed chores called “obediences,” such as house work and chores on the nearby farm. Brother Seraphim Hermann, C.S.C. was in charge of the farm and Amby’s work detail. A German Immigrant, Brother’s English could be humorous. He reported, there was a noticeable increase in the use of toilet paper, “please use your head.”

Among many happy memories of his days at the “Little Sem” were athletic games that they played together. There were of course, basketball, football and baseball games. But his favorite was the ice hockey matches which the little seminarians played in the winter on the frozen St. Mary’s Lake. He was goalie and saved the matches several times. But during one match while he was defending the goal, the hockey puck bounced up and broke off his upper front teeth. He bore this injury for the rest of his life. Eventually false teeth restored his smile.

There was a close family spirit in Holy Cross which Amby recognized early on. He recalled how the Provincial Fr. James A. Burns and other priests and brothers would come over to visit the “Little Sem” and have mass, dinner and recreation with the seminarians. He also remembers how there would be skating on St. Joseph Lake in the winter which often included the priests and brothers from the campus.

Within three years of starting at Holy Cross Seminary, his Dad, Martin, died in a car accident in New York City on April 20, 1939. Amby returned to Brooklyn for his Dad’s funeral and spent a few weeks with his Mom and siblings. “Mom had to carry the whole burden of raising us 4 children.” Somehow she was able to put all four children through college. Years later, she shared how difficult it was for her to let Amby go off to the seminary at age sixteen. During those years of the Great Depression, his widowed mother and aunts supported the children by running a boarding house, cooking in a Medical Clinic cafeteria and operating a gin still in his aunt’s basement. Brooklyn police, from time to time, would shut down their gin still, but it would reopen after a couple of weeks.

Rolling Prairie

On August 15, 1939, Amby and his fellow novices arrived at the Novitiate at Rolling Prairie. They were greeted by Fr. William H. Robinson, C.S.C., the new Novice master. (Fr. Robinson was just appointed to fill out the term of the previous Novice master who had taken ill.) There were 51 novices: 20 seminarians and 31 brothers. In a ceremony they received the cassock and cincture and were formally welcomed by Fr. Thomas Steiner, C.S.C., the United States Provincial. Also in attendance were the novices' families, friends and Holy Cross religious. A formal dinner followed for the novices and guests. (*St. Joseph Novitiate Chronicles, 1939-1942, p. 139*)

Amby described Fr. Robinson as a "prince of a director." His conferences could not have been a better introduction to the religious life and the ministries of the Holy Cross order. Fr. Robinson described the purpose of the Novitiate as a formative year which would shape the novices' religious life. They would have prayer, conferences, spiritual direction and work.

He gave them the daily schedule. Their day would start with meditation at 5:00 AM. They would then return to their room, make their bed, clean up and prepare for breakfast. They had a half hour of free time after breakfast. Each morning at 9:00 AM, they would have a conference in the classroom. The conference lasted about an hour and was followed by time for silent reflection. The novices came together for discussion.

After lunch, there was a work period. The Novitiate at Rolling Prairie had a farm. Amby enjoyed the chores on the farm which were out in the fresh air. The novices worked in silence except for getting directions. Br. Myron Bachenheimer, C.S.C. was their supervisor for the work period. After work and cleaning up, the novices had spiritual reading at 5:00 PM. Dinner followed at 6:00 PM. The novices had night prayer around 7:00 PM and retired at 9:00 PM. Grand Silence was observed until the next morning.

There were periodic breaks from the routine. Fr. Robinson had special celebrations for the holy days and holidays. He would provide snacks at these celebrations. The whole community of priests, brothers and novices would gather at these occasions. Occasionally, there would be guest speakers providing some variety for the conferences. Also there were visitors to the Novitiate such as Fr. John O'Hara (Dec. 27-31,) There was also the monthly "Visiting Sunday" for families and friends to visit the novices.

Most memorable to Amby was Fr. Robinson's realistic and common sense approach to the religious life. When a member of the staff reported that seminarians were using the bannister to go up and down the stairs (a violation of the rules), he told the novices, "I was going to reprimand you, but then I thought what are they put there for?" Amby said, "He was a very down-to-earth superior. Novices were to observe silence while doing their chores on the farm.

He told us, "the next time I am walking in the garden and you don't answer my greeting, you are going to be shipped out."

On August 16, 1940 Amby made his temporary vows which were received by Provincial Fr. Thomas Steiner. There were 16 out of 19 seminarians and 13 out of 20 brothers who professed their first vows. The brothers left for DuJarie that afternoon. The seminarians left for Moreau Seminary the following day. After 4 years at the Novitiate, Br. Myron was assigned to Texas. (St. Joseph Novitiate Chronicles, 1939-1942, p. 176)

Moreau (Major) Seminary

When Amby and his classmates returned in August 1940 to the major or college Moreau Seminary it was to a different building located on St. Joseph Lake. This building constructed in 1922 has served more recently as St. Joseph Hall (for postulants) and most recently as Sacred Heart Parish Center. Their arrival was unceremonious. The Superior, Fr. McKenna, was not there to greet them, they were simply shown to their rooms on the 4th floor. When they met Fr. McKenna they were given their schedule of classes.

In preparation for future graduate work and teaching at one of the universities (Notre Dame or Portland) operated by Holy Cross priests, the seminarian's academic program was designed to fit his abilities and interests. He would be required to study philosophy for the priesthood. But Amby had a strong interest in teaching the biological sciences. He met with faculty of the Department of Science. They recommended classes in mathematics, chemistry and physics. The summer classes would allow time to study the sciences.

Holy Cross College

In June of 1943 Amby graduated with a Bachelor in Arts in Philosophy from the University of Notre Dame. Having already completed a year of college courses before the Novitiate, he was able to complete his college education in three years. The September after graduation, Amby took the train to Washington D.C., where he began his studies at Holy Cross College, where he studied theology. Amby found the buildings and campus of Holy Cross College to be very beautiful. He also enjoyed the wonderful Library of Congress, National Archives and museums. Washington's rich intellectual and cultural life was very stimulating.

In 1947, Amby graduated from Holy Cross College with a Master in Theology. After graduation, he and his classmates returned to Notre Dame. Then on June 13, 1947 he was ordained a priest at Sacred Heart Basilica on the campus of Notre Dame. Archbishop of Fort Wayne, John F. Noll, was the ordaining prelate. There were thirteen men in Amby's ordination class. After his ordination, Amby was assigned to help during the summer at Holy Trinity Parish in

Poughkeepsie, NY. During those months, he was able to visit his widowed mother and his siblings. He was given his obedience to spend a year of study at Notre Dame by Provincial Fr. Thomas Steiner. Returning to Notre Dame in late August, he began a year of study in science in preparation for his work on a Doctorate in Biology. He visited the Biology Department where he met with his friend, Professor Reiner who was in charge of research. He signed up for Chemistry, Physics and Biology.

After his year of study, he went to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. to investigate their Doctoral Program in Biology. He met with Professor Reynolds who was the Department Chairman. He described the program as one which was to prepare the student for a career in teaching science. There were several other priests in the program. During the summers, Amby and his classmates were given the opportunity to do research in Marine Biology. One summer was spent in Jamaica and another was spent in Massachusetts. Amby earned a Master of Science degree in Biology at Catholic University in 1950. He earned a PhD in Biology in 1952 also at Catholic University.

University of Portland

When Amby met with the Provincial, Fr. Theodore Mehling, he was anxious about his next obedience. There was the possibility about working at the Lobund Research Center at Notre Dame. But Amby was worried he would be doing primarily research, instead he preferred to teach. There was also the possibility of taking a teaching position at the University of Portland. This possibility excited Amby because he had never ventured farther west than Chicago. Being an intrepid explorer, when the Provincial asked his preference, Amby replied he would like to go west to Oregon. He also had heard that Portland was much smaller than Notre Dame and would be a better place to start his teaching career.

The next day, Amby learned his first assignment as a Holy Cross Priest would be to teach at the University of Portland. Amby took the train across the country to the Pacific Northwest. After his arrival in at Portland, he met with the Dean of the College of Sciences, Fr. James G. Anderson, C.S.C., who outlined his teaching schedule. Amby taught a course in Zoology to pre-medical students. He taught a generalized Biology course for Arts and Letters students.

Amby was one of several Holy Cross Priests who had PhD's that were assigned to teach at Portland by Fr. Mehling in the early 1950's. In his book, *The University of Portland Story*, author James T. Covert calls the early 1950's as Holy Cross' "vintage years." (p. 151) By 1955, the Holy Cross community contributed \$180,000 which was one fifth of the annual budget. They also had a "great community spirit" which added a special tone to the campus atmosphere. Portland which had once been the Province's "Siberia," or place of exile, became a very desirable assignment. Many spent their entire career working at Portland.

Portland was the ideal place for Amby to start his teaching career. The student body was small enough to know your students as individuals not as numbers. With the help of two talented do-it-yourself carpenters, Fr. George Dum and Br. Godfrey Vassallo, C.S.C., Amby redesigned the laboratories and their furnishings. He loved helping the students with their lab research, “such as the study of the various phases of development in the life of many, many organisms.” Amby now considered Portland to be his “home.” He had settled into his career of teaching Zoology at Portland when he received “the call.”

Salzburg, Austria

In 1963, Fr. Howard Kenna, C.S.C., President of the University of Portland, made Amby an offer he could not refuse. The University was going to set up an Overseas Year of Studies in Salzburg, Austria. The program needed a director. There would be 40 students, young men and women from the University in Amby’s care. In April 1964, Fr. Kenna sent Amby ahead of the students to set up the living quarters, designing the schedule of classes, hiring the faculty, and the many other details for a successful program.

Also in preparation for his Salzburg assignment, Amby had learned to ski downhill and cross country. In the early 1960’s he had taken on a weekly assignment of two Sunday masses at the Mount Hood Lodge. Part of the package was skiing instructions. Many of the students had camping, hiking and skiing in their background and these skills flourished during their year in Salzburg. There were several skiing trips for the students to enjoy.

This was also to be year of “immersion” in the Austrian culture. Amby worked with Austrian language teachers he had met in Salzburg. He took a German class himself and arranged to have evening classes for the students when they arrived in September. The students would also take part in cultural evenings of singing, dancing and socializing at a local Gasthaus. A bond was formed between the students and the local residents through these activities. When Amby moved to Notre Dame in 2006, I took him to a couple of Salzburg Reunions which were held here so that Amby did not have to travel. Their reminiscing confirmed how much they enjoyed their year in Salzburg & how much they had bonded with one another.

Amby encouraged travel during the breaks in the academic schedule. In a time before fears of kidnapping, hijacking and terrorism, students traveled freely across Western and Southern Europe. The Portland program insisted that these young adults not travel alone, they were to travel with a couple or a few companions. When they returned from their wandering, they would share their experiences with the rest of their classmates. Amby offered a prize for the group which traveled the farthest from Salzburg. They had to have a signed affidavit confirming the destination they had reached. On one occasion a trio of young women won the prize when they returned with a letter from a ship captain in the Spanish Navy.

Bangladesh

Returning from the Salzburg Program, Amby resumed teaching Zoology at the University of Portland from 1965 to 1967. He was then assigned to teach science at St. Dominic College in St. Charles, IL from 1967 to 1968. At the end of spring 1968 semester, he received an urgent request from the Provincial to take on an entirely different teaching assignment at Notre Dame College in Dacca (Dhaka), (East Pakistan) Bangladesh. There had been a significant exodus of senior missionaries from Bangladesh, only 5 or 6 of 13 remained by 1970. Among the reasons for this exodus was increasing tensions between the indigenous Bengalis and their Pakistani overlords which exploded into a War of Independence in 1970. On June 19, 1968, Amby flew to Dacca and the most dangerous assignment in his career.

Amby was one of four new recruits from the USA who came to lend a hand. He had a PhD in Zoology and brought years of teaching experience. He intended "to remain only a short time, but gave seven years of most valuable service, guiding the college as Acting Principal through the crucial period of the War of Independence and as Principal during the reconstruction following the war." C.A. Gillespie & J.S. Peixotto, (*The Spirit of Notre Dame: the History of Notre Dame College, Dhaka, 1949-2000.*) p. 88.

As Bangladesh moved toward war, the Bengali students were swept up into political activity. Like every other college in the country during 1968-1969, Notre Dame College was wracked by student strikes and constant tension. This had a negative effect on the morale of the college faculty. Fr. John Vanden Bossche, C.S.C. was the Principal. "He found the pressure and frustrations so great that he finally asked to be relieved. He left in mid-September 1969 for the U.S.A." (p. 89) Fr. Joseph Peixotto, C.S.C., who had been at the College less than six years was appointed Acting Principal. He was advised and supported by the experienced senior teachers and survived a serious student revolt in 1969.

Fr. Richard Timm, C.S.C., had been away on sabbatical (1968-1969) at the University of California, Davis. He returned to Bangladesh in September 1970 and took over as the Principal of the College on November 15, 1970. But a cyclone and tidal surge in the Bay of Bengal on November 12, 1970 would take Fr. Timm away from the College to work on cyclone rehabilitation. Amby returned to Bangladesh to take over the administration once again. (p. 93) The slow response of President Yahya Khan to the cyclone intensified the animosity the Bengalis felt for the West Pakistani government and the desire for independence.

As the Bengalis and West Pakistanis moved toward war in 1971, there were daily riots and killings. The Pakistani army was losing control. Government workers were told not to report to work and they obeyed. Educational institutions were ordered to close and they did, including Notre Dame College.

Amby had to walk the tight rope between the West Pakistani government and the activists who were students at the College. Although he sympathized with their desire for a free Bangladesh, he warned the students not to endanger the College by openly engaging in anti-government activities. He provided them with food and shelter but they had to be off the property by dawn. They complied with his request. They did so because Amby had shown deep respect for them and their Muslim faith. He made a point to get to know some of the leaders of their mosques and took part in their worship. He also adjusted the College's calendar to accommodate their Muslim feasts and Ramadan.

The war broke out on March 25, 1971 with a two day massacre of the Bengali people. Indiscriminate shootings and setting fires to the city caused thousands of civilian deaths. On the second day of the Reign of Terror, the Army surrounded the Holy Cross Brothers' St. Gregory's High School where hundreds of Hindus had taken refuge. They arrested all the Hindu men there over the bitter protests of the Brothers. They were taken to another location and shot in cold blood. "It was a time of panic. The College Fathers did not know whether or not their time of reckoning had come." (p. 95)

"Administration of the college during 1971 was a very delicate and trying task, done very tactfully by Fr. Amby Wheeler, with the support of Frs. Jim Banas, Bob McKee and Steve Gomes." (p.95) The West Pakistani government ordered the College remain open, because they wanted all institutions to continue normally to give the world the impression the uprising was of little consequence. So the College complied with the order and remained open although most of the students had fled to the villages or to India. Young men of college age were considered suspect by the military of being "*Mukti Bahini*" (freedom fighters.)

Amby recalled a harrowing experience of being summoned to appear before the Pakistani military governor of Dhaka, Tika Khan. Amby feared that he would not return from this meeting for he had given sanctuary to students who were freedom fighters. Instead the governor wanted to make sure that the College remained open. Amby assured him that it would remain open. He did not tell him there were almost no students attending classes.

Notre Dame College became a haven for refugees of the war. Orphans from the Bottomley Home in Tejgaon were evacuated to the College when the nearby airport was attacked. The UN set up its headquarters in Mathis House at the College. It became a protected area recognized by both sides. . The War raged on for nine months. On December 4, Indira Gandhi had sent in the Indian Army to crush the Pakistani army. Pakistan surrendered on December 16. Bengalis moved out of the College and hundreds of terrified "Biharis" (non-Bengali Muslims who sided with the Pakistanis) moved into the College to escape being massacred by the victors. The College was protected by the Indian Army which escorted them to refugee camps. Many eventually reached the safety of Pakistan. But thousands suffered in camps.

Of his many accomplishments during his service in Bangladesh, Amby was most proud of the Literacy Program which he established in 1972 with an English teacher of the College, Clement Rosario. It is a free program for slum children (many orphans) in Dhaka. At the start, two teachers taught 40 pre-primary age children in the afternoons after regular classes. It provided nutritious food, a safe place to get a basic education. Soon the Literacy Program outgrew its original school for 120 children. By 1979 it had grown to 1300 poor children in its own long tin-shed building for grades K to 8. (p. 131) Although Amby left Bangladesh in January 1976, he cherished his turbulent seven years of service there. He continued to support the Literacy Program for the rest of his life. Today the Literacy Program has grown to 1450 children.

California

When Amby returned to Notre Dame in 1976, he found that the world had changed dramatically. He had been overseas during some very significant crises in the country: the Viet Name War, Watergate and the Recession. Even more significant were the changes in the Catholic Church following Vatican II. The Holy Cross Community had also been through some dramatic changes: the separation of Notre Dame from the Holy Cross Community, the exodus of religious from the Community, the decline in vocations, the new style of leadership. Amby discovered that the Provincial no longer could place him in a position at the University without a lot of consultation with the laymen on the Board and in the Department of Science.

So with his characteristic taking the initiative, Amby began to look for an assignment and in warmer climes than Northern Indiana. His old friend, Br. Andre Lechtenberg strongly recommended that he come to work at St. Francis High School in Mountain View, CA. The Provincial agreed and he was assigned to work there for eight years (1977-1985.) Amby was the Chaplain for the Brothers and the School at St. Francis. He also was the golf coach for St. Francis. They had outstanding golfers and won the tournaments with great regularity. When he left St. Francis, it was said that the Jesuit high school heaved a sigh of relief that their golf team could successfully compete. He befriended B.J. and Bebe Cassin who invited him to their home and to their summer home on Lake Tahoe which became his favorite solitude.

During the summers of his time at St. Francis High School, Amby assisted in the Parish of Corpus Christi in Lake Tahoe. He offered mass at the Church during the week. But it was not able to accommodate all the out-of-town vacationers. He and the summer vacationers created an outdoor chapel in Tahoma to have Sunday mass from July 4th to Labor Day. Many of the vacationers who attended the outdoor masses remained very close and dear friends even after Amby left St. Francis and California. Amby also renewed his passion for skiing. Soon he had started a Sunday mass at Squaw Valley during the skiing season. In addition to the masses, he also had weddings in the beautiful chapel which was built across from the Lodge.

Florida & Arizona

In 1985 when Amby was 67 years old, he moved to Christopher O'Toole Lodge in Coco Beach, FL. Christopher Lodge is the independent living residence for our senior priests. The climate and topography is tropical like Bangladesh. He also ministered to senior citizens in the neighborhood. He told me that it was not long before he recognized that many of them were widowed and suffering from isolation and loneliness. To remedy this, he would celebrate a mass at their apartment building or retirement home. Then they would have a potluck meal together. The seniors enjoyed these get-togethers and they had them often.

In 1990 when Amby was 72 years old, he moved into the Casa Santa Cruz in Phoenix Arizona. The Casa is the independent living residence for our senior priests. The desert climate agreed with Amby and he enjoyed being able to swim and walk every day without the snow and ice of winter. I would not call it a "retirement home" because all of the priests there are still very active. Amby certainly had no desire to retire. He assisted regularly at St. Paul's Parish in Moon Valley. He also had Sunday mass at the Casa which many senior citizens from the neighborhood attended.

He was no longer skiing or playing golf as he had done for many years. While still in California, he began to experience the onset of macular degeneration. He recalled that his first realization of this condition was on the golf course playing with his friends, the Cassins. He was unable to focus on the golf ball when he attempted to tee off. It was a terrible shock to someone who loved outdoor sports, reading and his independence. His doctor told him that he was unable to sleep at night thinking of Amby driving a car. This is when his many friends in came to the rescue by driving him to his ministry with the senior citizens and many other activities. Among his friends was his doctor Jack Poles, his wife and family. Amby celebrated Passover and Chanukkah with them as well as many other happy occasions.

Notre Dame

In 2006, with his macular degeneration becoming an increasing concern, Amby and his superiors agreed that he needed to move back to Notre Dame. The Fatima Retreat and Mission House had been renovated in 2005-2006 to serve as Fatima House, a residence for retired and semi-retired Holy Cross Priests and Brothers. Amby actually arrived a few weeks before Fatima House was open for occupancy. At the same time, I had been assigned to be the Director of the Indiana Province Archives Center. Although I had been in Holy Cross for 40 years, our paths had never crossed. I rented a U-Haul truck to move my "stuff" from Notre Dame High School, where I had been a history/religion teacher from 1977-2006. Unfortunately U-Haul did not have a 12 foot truck. Instead I got an 18 foot truck.

When I pulled into the Fatima circle, it caught the attention of Amby. He said that he had to see who and what was in that "big truck." He found that the truck was about half empty. This was my first encounter with Amby. Over the next five years we became the best of friends. Later I found out from Jack, Amby's friend, who drove him & his belongings from Phoenix up to Notre Dame, that Amby could have used a U-Haul truck. He recalled that even though Amby could no longer play, he had a hard time parting with his golf clubs and equipment. He filled a large plastic bag with golf balls. Jack quipped, "I am glad that Amby was a golfer and not a bowler." In time, Amby gave his golf clubs, his downhill skis and his memorabilia to friends.

That first Fall of 2006, I became aware of how poor was Amby's eye sight. I began to help him with his reading and writing. He did not allow himself to be discouraged or limited by his failing vision. He enrolled in a Computer class at Notre Dame. He also obtained a Merlin Reader which allowed him to do limited reading. In January of 2007 I was putting in his eye drops before I went off to work in the Archives. That morning he suffered a greater loss of vision. We went to the eye doctor. The prospects for recovering his vision were grim. There was an experimental procedure of injections in the eye which Amby declined. He nevertheless did not give up on his daily walk when the warm weather began.

By Fall of 2007, Amby was persuaded by me and other friends that he really needed to move to Holy Cross House. Although he wanted to stay at Fatima, he was a realist about his failing vision and accepted the move. I reassured him that he was always welcome to visit the Archives which is right next door. He took me up on that offer regularly stopping in for our coffee break. Almost every weekend, we would do something together, a concert, a drive in the country, going out to a restaurant. He had also befriended Roger and Chrissy Klauer who invited him to dinners, picnics, holidays.. We also drove up to visit with his long-time friends Dave and Maura Russo in Barrington, IL which he enjoyed immensely. Three summers (2008-2010) we flew out to Lake Tahoe, CA to visit his many friends and to stay with B.J. and Bebe Cassin. On his last visit, the Cassins had arranged a party at their home to celebrate his 92nd birthday (August 6, 2010) on a lake cruise boat. It was a wonderful tribute to Amby.

Amby was very dedicated to a daily walk. He would allow me to accompany him, but he would take off on his own. His walks from Holy Cross House over to Fatima along the busy St. Mary's Road worried many people. He was restricted to just walking around Holy Cross House. In the Fall of 2010, he had a number of falls and had to be accompanied on his walks. His health noticeably declined. In July we had planned to take a tour of Glacier National Park and the Canadian Rockies. But by early May it was clear he would not be able to travel beyond Holy Cross House. He lost his appetite which was a sure sign to me he had resigned himself to the inevitable. His journey in this life ended just a month shy of his 93rd birthday on July 10, 2011 when he went home to God. We celebrated his funeral on July 12th at Sacred Heart Basilica.

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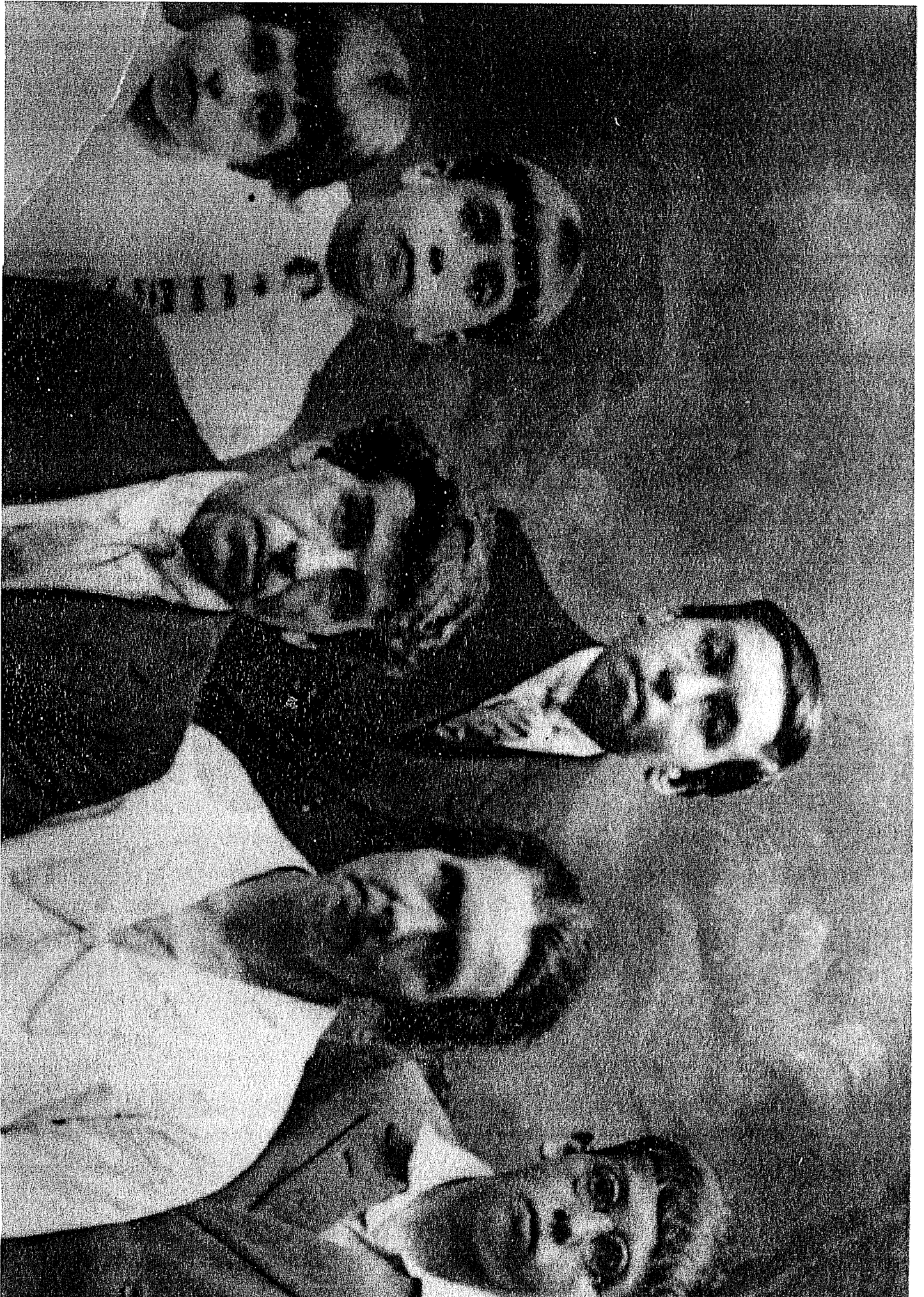
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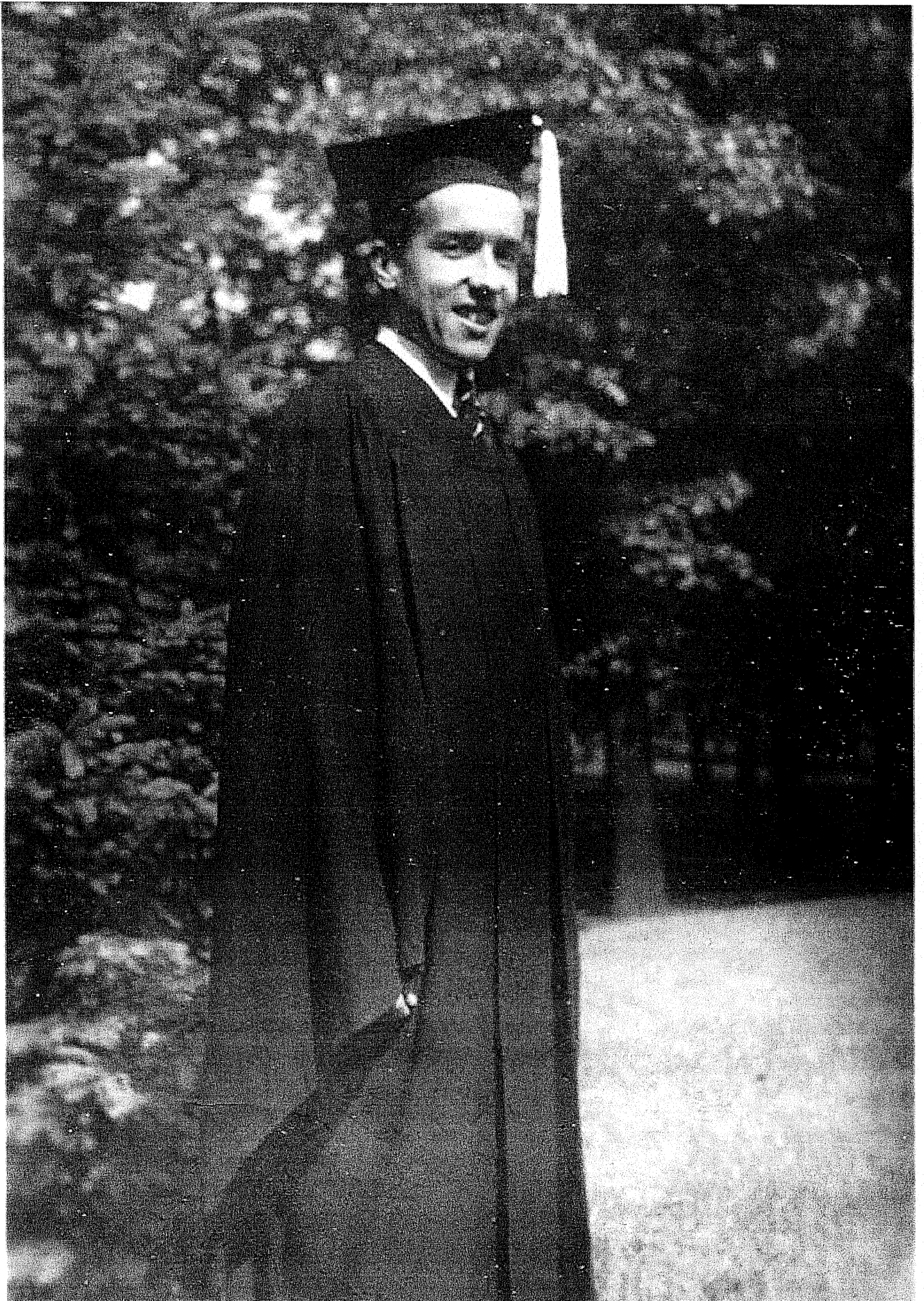
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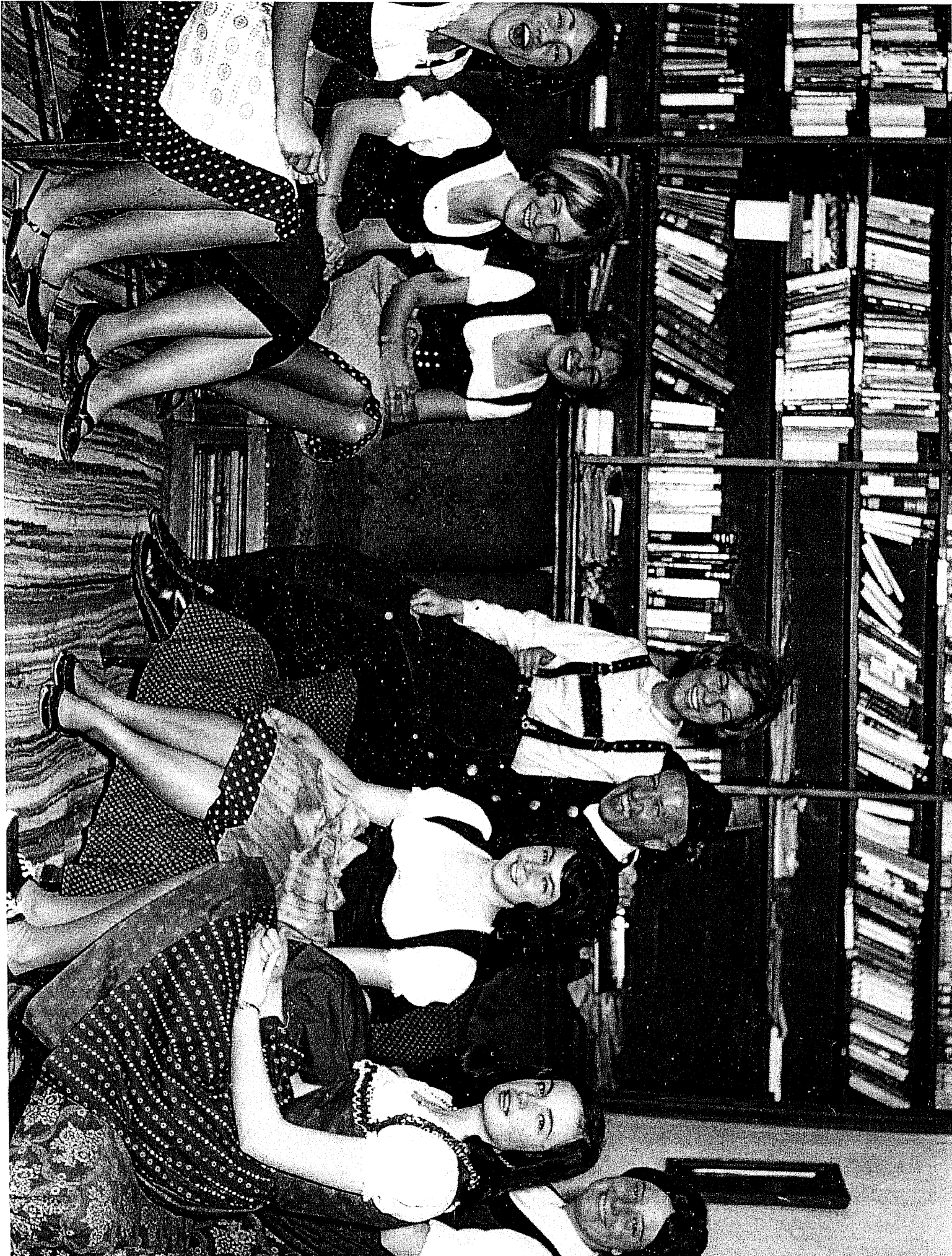




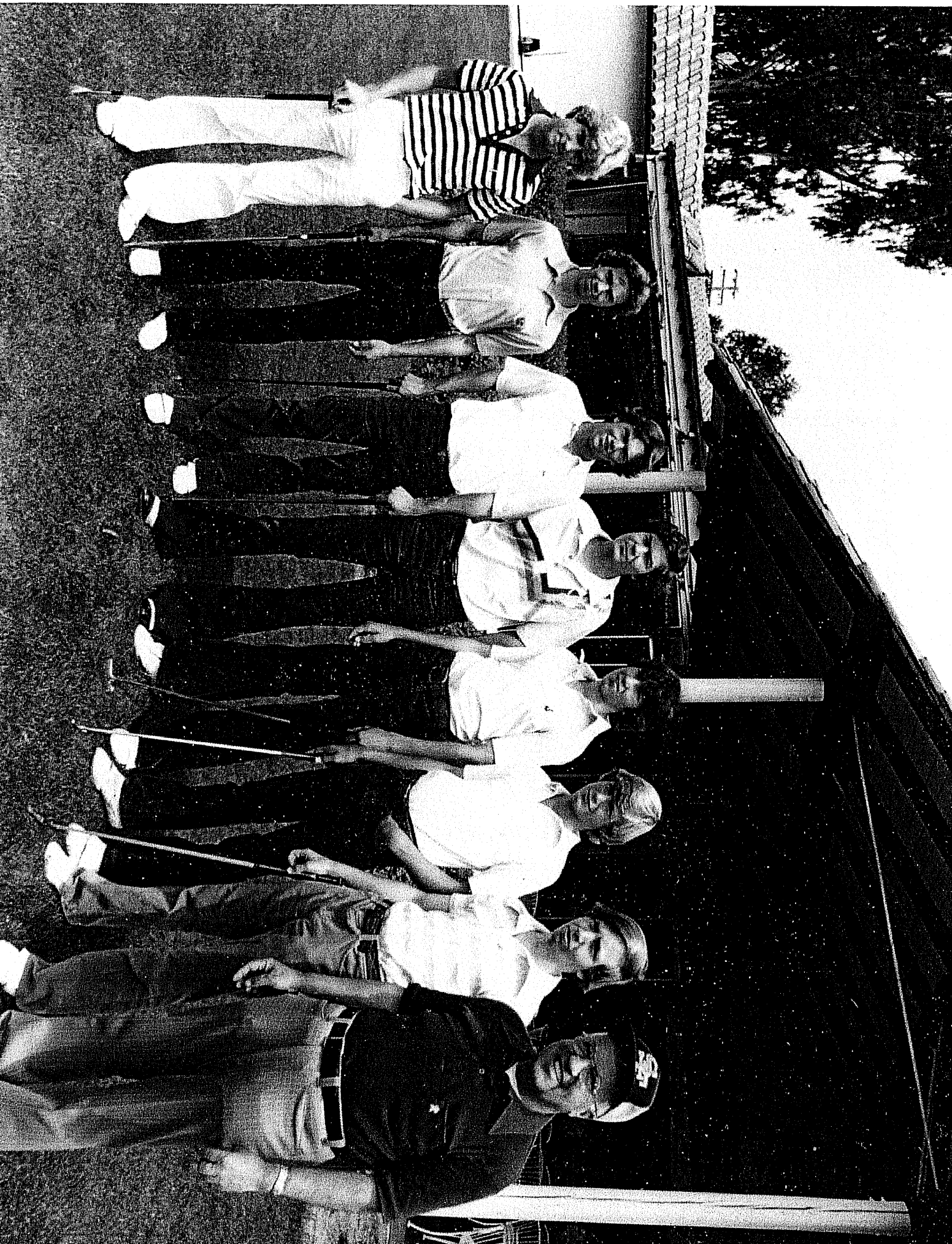














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