

## CHAPTER ONE

# TWIN FAMILIES

Carl had two great families—the Schmitz-Crimmins and the Passionists. Born as twins Carl and his sister Marian had a symbiotic relationship for seventy years. They were the twins of Luxemburg-Irish parents—William and Mary (Banks). Mame was the strong forceful parent—as can be seen from the recollections of her ten grandchildren—all born of John and Marian Crimmins. Carl's youth was spent in what is now St. Ferdinand's Parish on the northwest side of Chicago. It was a fledgling parish and rather ironical that Carl and his twin sister went to Mary Lyon Public School, where Mass was first held in the beginnings of this infant parish.

Mame Schmitz' heart was in her family and faith. It was watching his Mother putting the parish on its feet that Carl first sensed the value and importance of the Catholic Church. Mame would scrub the floor of the church, would spend days hovering over its temporal needs—raising funds, head of the Altar and Rosary Society—a woman in charge.

The first temporary St. Ferdinand's Church had a tin roof—scorching in the Chicago summers, noisy and rattling when rain poured upon it during services. Sixty years later Carl would often have to stop his homily when a cloudburst drowned him out as he preached in his humble tin-roofed church in far off Mindanao.

Here at St. Ferdinand's Carl met his first Passionists—Father Isidore Dwyer and Sylvester Cichanski who were giving a

mission there. Carl must have been awestruck. Shortly afterwards he was interviewed in the nearby Passionist monastery with his mind fixed on going to the Passionist minor seminary in St. Louis. The year was 1931.

In that same parlor today is a striking haunting picture of Father Carl. At that time, there were three formal portraits of Passionists—Walter Coveyou, Clement Seybold and Godfrey Holbein. The simple plaques under their pictures read that on April 24, 1929, these three were murdered by bandits in China. Carl looked at these pictures—transfixed. His first reaction was “Do you have to go away to be a Passionist?” At fourteen he seemed impressed but frightened by these three black-clothed men wearing the Passionist heart. And fifty-nine years later in the same month of April, Carl was to meet a similar Providential fate.

The Schmitz family endured an unbearable tragedy on July 17, 1931. For years the eldest child, Lucille, had been wracked with an illness that suddenly brought her to a tragic death. In this lingering illness the parents and twin children cared for Lucille at home. Carl at fourteen was intimately involved in that home of terminal illness. At that age he saw something of the terrible waste of death; but somehow, something of its terrible beauty and power.

Writing in 1977 to his classmate, Father Roger, he says: “July 29th is a memorable and indelible day in my memory. That was the birthday of my older sister, Lucille, who died on July 17th, 1931, just twelve days before her sixteenth birthday. She had been mostly bed-ridden for three years due to a rheumatic heart and other complications. She had acquired a maturity and sanctity beyond her years during her illness which she bore in a very uncomplaining and passionistic manner. At that time I was trying to decide whether to join the diocesan priests or the Passionists. For obvious reasons the parish clergy and my parents favored the first choice, although they did not try to influence my decision. I talked it over with Lucille and her immediate response was:

The Passionists, by all means. Six weeks later I arrived at the Prep Seminary in Normandy.”

The death of Lucille was borne with a stoicism which reflected the iron Luxemborg and Irish faith of Carl’s parents. Mame—the heart-broken mother—never showed publicly any grief until the moment of the open grave. This highlights Carl’s later emotional reserve—his cool self-control. At four and five years of age the twins were taught to shake hands with uncles and aunts. They never were to kiss in a family way. Carl brought this emotional reserve into religious life, which at that time was also bent on emphasizing and stressing that peculiar approach to spirituality. Obviously, Carl and his twin sister Marian had a relationship that could only be experienced by twins.

In 1955 Carl wrote to his sister Marian emphasizing their unity. There had been a family problem and Marian had written Carl concerning what she saw as an injustice against one of her many children. Carl responds: “Because we are twins, Marian, we share greatly in our emotional and psychological make-up. I understand your difficulty better than anyone else because of this—indeed I have gone through many such incidents.

“In our personal make-up, Marian, God has blessed us with many excellent qualities. But there are kinks. We are very idealistic, too logical and become too thin-skinned and self-righteous. Much of this is due to mental and emotional fatigue, because, unlike others, we have difficulty in sluffing off and laughing off our difficulties. Injustices do affect us greatly. Like Don Quixote, we tire ourselves with jousting with all kinds of presumed difficulties.

“Marian, the above is not pretty. In this perhaps you can see traces of both Mother and Dad—The Chicago Irish and the too literal serious German tendencies. Our personal blessings balance these, if only we respond to the grace of God.”

The twin spirituality of Marian and Carl grew with the years. Although parted by thousands of miles with only rare visits home, Carl and Marian corresponded through letters—literally hundreds of them. The ten children that John and Marian Crimmins parented only deepened their relationship as is obvious from Carl's love of his nephews and nieces and the multitudinous grand nephews and nieces.

Carl and Marian shared in a deep way the death of Lucille. Mame sent them immediately after the funeral to the grandparents' farm in Wisconsin, while she and her husband William worked through their own private grief.

Years later, the deaths of their parents, especially that of Mame, proved a great bond of unity despite the oceans between them.

Mame who had been so active and involved with her family—all of the grandchildren speak of this—was stricken with what we now call Alzheimer's disease. At the time of Father Carl's silver jubilee it hit home. Staying with his Mother then, she told him she had a son in Japan. Carl told her he was the son, but it did not register.

Another time Carl wrote her about his coming. Only Father James Patrick met him at the airport. Arriving home he found his mother scrubbing the floor, surprised at his arrival and oblivious to the letter Carl had written her.

This mental and emotional death which was so hard on Carl and Marian came to an end in 1975 when Carl was deep in the mountains of Mindanao. When Carl was contacted and came down from the mountain and found the one available telephone, it was obvious he could not come to share his loss with his beloved twin sister. The duty that Mame had instilled in him from youth showed—he said it was impossible to get a substitute.

Marian writes: "We understood each other perfectly. He didn't have to give me reasons, because I knew him. I missed him for fifty-six years."

In the following years, Carl constantly mentioned Mame his beloved Mother. Once he wrote: "Just finished the stations. Shades of Mame—how this reminded me of her."

Frequently he recalled memories of his childhood and family in his letters.

"Well, Bill, I was left speechless, which is something for a son of Mame Banks . . . My mother had a good business head, but I am afraid it did not seep into my genes. I am more like my Father who was happiest when he could pick up the tab. So I always put the work of keeping books and keeping accounts into other more capable hands. It seems to work out okay." (Bill Harte: Letter of June 19, 1980.)

"Greetings from up here in Manila. Came up one week ago, July 1, for some R & R . . . Plenty of time to sleep and relax, but the Banks-blood in me never taught me how to relax properly, and the Schmitz-farmer blood in me has my eyes popping open automatically at 4:30 or 4:45 a.m. Am in A-1 physical condition, 155 lbs., so maybe I do not need much sleep. . . ."

"Only recently did I feel my age. Before that, I swear in all honesty and truth, I didn't feel a day over Uncle George Banks' proverbial thirty-nine."

"This month I am grounded here at the Mission. Like your Mother and my Mother, and very likely you yourself, I am just not the 'complete rest' type, but can rest better when I am active. Do you remember old Grandma Bridge Hughes?" (Harte: October 17, 1980.)

"Hello again. It is now Tuesday morning, 9:00 a.m. I have fallen into the bad habit of waking up every morning at 4:30 a.m. Of course, I retire at 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. every night. It must be the farmer in me from my Dad's genes, although he was not an early riser, at least not in his later days. My Chicago-Irish mother was the up-and-out-to-daily Mass-every-morning type. Now Marian is following in her footsteps, dragging John with her, albeit quite willingly on his

part. But I am and always have been definitely the early-bird type, and almost utterly hopeless after 9:00 p.m. at night. It is still dark as pitch when I get out of the sack and light the little kerosene lamp. On a cloudless morning, though, there is a bit of silver on the eastern horizon, battling with the still very bright stars . . ."

In a recent movie, "Men Don't Leave," there is a theme of how the Dad, killed in an accident, lives on in his two young sons. Carl in leaving for Japan in '54, returned every five years, every three years. Each time he found a growing Schmitz-Crimmins addition—ten in all. Like the movie, "Dad," their memories of Carl live on—although impossible to chronical but a few of them.

Colleen Rosen, a niece, an actress, recalls: In coming home every three years he left me feeling proud of him. He was human, but awesome. The ten of us were always much quieter when he was around—a marked blessing for my parents. There was a spiritual quality about him—before twenty, I saw him as an uncle, afterwards, when my own spirituality developed, as a PRESENCE.

He needed his privacy and so would often go for a walk—always taking one of us along as his silent partner. He seemed to come into his own when he went up into the mountains. Primitive, tribal, primal taboos. He seemed to love a basic raw life.

I knew he loved me very much—his last postcard from California was that of a lone coyote. The message: A seldom seen native of the Green West. I am still trying to figure it out.

His is no other life I have ever known. He IS a great grace to me.

Mary Finch, another niece, recalls: He was a man of peace—I could talk problems over with him—spill out what was bothering me. And in his slow voice he would always give good advice. He felt a greater need to be in the mountains—it

was harder, more demanding. He tried to convert the rebels, to hide them from the military.

He loved farming at our grandparents' place in Wisconsin and was happy to show the Bilaans how to farm. He was a man who loved the earth. Uncle Carl was Irish—always on the go like Grandma. He never wanted to quit. Like Grandma, he always wanted to help people. His loss is unbelievable. How could anyone do that to such a man???

Gerard, a nephew, recalls: My uncle was a man who lived poverty. Once in coming back—certainly unwillingly—to recover from surgery—my Mother gave him a winter coat, sweater—all the layers necessary for a Chicago winter. He wanted no part of it. He never seemed to have a suit—always some kind of mish mash—leftovers from some depot in the Philippines.

Once we went out for a meal—he opened his wallet to find \$7. This was at a Wendys, in a not too safe neighborhood, so I told him not to flash his wallet. His answer was: Priests should not have a lot of money and people should know that. Since the meal came to exactly \$7—we escaped safely.

Carl lived for the missions. He was so creative. He was opposed to building a vast compound—wanted decentralization through small groups—what has come to be called base communities. His mission was to go to the people, to go to the mountains. Carl wanted to preserve the tribal culture and tribal customs as much as possible. He certainly was not an entrepreneur, but did encourage the people to sell tribal handicrafts through a co-op so that the profits would be distributed evenly. Carl wanted sharing—not individual profit—and at the same time, this would be a chance for the people to better themselves, to gain more self-respect. The first time I saw Carl's simple grave—a white cross—it struck me how he died as he lived, with his people.

Lucille Carney, another niece, speaks of Carl: When Carl got older he would relax more and not be as critical of Americans. But there were times earlier that he would be

shocked at our waste of food. How a family of ten children could waste food, he never explained. But when I went to the Philippines, I understood what he meant—he was so happy with the poor—he would talk about walking up the mountains to bring the poor and the sick food and medicine. He would sleep sometimes in a shack with as many as twenty on the bare ground. After visiting his mission, I have a much greater value of food, of money.

I always see Carl as a reflection of Grandma Mame—she had an iron will, Carl, her only son, had an iron will.

James, another nephew recalls: As a thirteen-year-old I vividly remember Uncle Carl as Japanese—his Japanese shoes, and his love of Japanese culture—bowing, flowers, language. And in the Philippines it was the same—he became identified with their culture. Carl had no airs—he loved simple people and definitely would be uncomfortable with the country club set.

He often lectured us on wasting food, money and we would slyly remind him that he was a smoker. This seemed to be a crack in his total involvement with the poor—a little bending in his austere lifestyle. But he would only laugh when, with the pointed logic of youth, we brought up the subject of his smoking. To us it made him more human.

Coming back once from Notre Dame he wanted to eat—but insisted on going to an all-black diner. He was so much at ease there—and he always wanted to visit his beloved Alabama. He always seemed more at home in difficult areas, in areas of poverty. Definitely he struck me as being a foreigner in the U.S. And he was so thrilled when my wife and I adopted a baby from Guatamala.

Carl had an absolute iron will. He knew exactly what he wanted and also had great control over himself. Carl and my Mother—his twin—would accept each other without trying to change each other.

Carl treated me with love—his is a great loss. His love—how much it has helped me, has opened for me a new

world—and the world is not middle class America. Carl to me was a man who wanted commitment—but it was commitment with a flair for adventure. His face would glow when he talked of his vision of the mountains.

Bill, another in a long line of nephews, speaks of his Uncle: To me he was almost a biblical presence—you wanted to touch him. I envied him—his commitment. He knew what he wanted and he did it. I never sensed any doubt in his vocation.

He had a temper—he was like Grandma Mame. She was tough, indomitable in helping to raise the ten of us. When she said: Clean your room—we cleaned it.

I saw Carl as a man who disciplined his temper, but shared the compassion and care so much evident in Grandma's twins. But Carl also struck me as a man who like Grandma always saw things black or white. With his compassion he always had this keen sense of justice—of doing the right thing. At home, as it was with Grandma, you do the right thing or else. With Carl on his mission it was either you do the right thing or I will stand up to you all down the line.

A cousin of Carl's—Bill Harte, a lawyer who was to be an immense help to Carl in funding his mission school—speaks of Carl with deep awe. He says that Carl never had any desire to stay in this country—he wanted to be a missionary to China from the earliest years. He wanted to evangelize and this strange esoteric word became a value to me over the years. Carl gave me an experience of what it meant to evangelize—one meaning being to identify with his people. Carl was an upbeat person—kicked out of China, facing racial bigotry in Alabama, he had a determination as a young priest not to let it get him down. He viewed himself as a Japanese when in Japan—he loved their etiquette, their art of writing, painting.

Carl had no fear of death. When in the Philippines it happened that a group from the Peace Corps were at his mission. They had trouble starting their jeep—Carl lifted the

hood only to find a bomb nestling among the valves. If the jeep had started, they all would have been blown to bits. But Carl remained very calm about the whole deal. Death had no hold on Carl. He wrote in 1984: Maybe when the time comes, the Lord will call it quits while I am still in the saddle.

Often looking out my office window in the Chicago Loop—you can see the Daley Center, the City Hall, the State Building. Then I look at Carl's picture on my desk. To me he has chosen the better part. Carl to me was a man of passionate peace. He reminds me of another man of our time—Ghandi.

Carl had a rich home with his family—a home of love and faith. Carl also had another home—a home from first year high school onward with the Passionists of the Chicago Province. These twin homes formed his life of love and faith.

Father Roger Mercurio lived with Carl in the Passionist home from 1936 until 1945. They moved from St. Louis, St. Paul, Kansas, Detroit, Chicago and Louisville. Of this "class" of 1944 there are many deep memories for Roger.

Carl was especially fond of swimming. He would talk of swimming in Lake Michigan, for his mother took Carl and his two sisters to the beach during the summer vacations. Carl liked the opportunities for swimming in the lake and later in the Pacific when stationed in Los Angeles. He was a strong swimmer with powerful strokes.

As I think back on those years of long ago, I sometimes wonder whether Carl enjoyed swimming because it was something he could enjoy without having to compete with others. Like so many of us, Carl did not really like to lose. Swimming was not competitive, so he could exert himself to his heart's content and not end up second to someone else. Of course, he did compete in football, basketball and handball. But I sort of believe that he was enough of a "loner" to enjoy a non-competitive sport like swimming.

During our years in Chicago, Carl was deeply impressed by the stories of the Chinese missionaries who had returned to the states for a furlough. Fathers William Westhoven, Francis Flaherty, Harold Travers, Gregory McEttrick and others lived with us in Chicago. They had many tales of their experiences of ministering to the people or escaping from bandits and Japanese bombs.

His dream of going to China now became ever stronger. He became convinced that he was being called to be a missionary. Eventually after ordination he volunteered to go if and when it would be possible to send missionaries once again to China.

He was fired up even more when on weekends he would be assigned to go with one of the "Sign preachers" [a preacher who would appeal to the people for subscriptions to the Passionist magazine, called *The Sign*]. Carl would go along to place envelopes and pencils in the pews between Masses and to help take up the collection. Of course, he would hear the appeal of the preacher, which usually was concluded with a story about our missionaries in China who were supported through the subscription to the magazine.

During those years Carl and I became closer. He began to share his missionary dream with me. I caught the dream also, but never with the clarity and conviction that he had. We would talk about this from time to time. Especially for Carl, China became a reality.

I must mention that Carl always struggled with his sensitiveness. To some extent he preferred not to compete lest he lose. At other times he would hold back lest he be challenged or misunderstood. He could "hurt" easily. One time, after some differences of opinion at a music practice, he announced that he was "resigning" from the office of music director. I believe he struggled with this sensitiveness throughout his life.

Father John Aelred Torisky was his Director during the first year in Detroit. Resident presently in Daneo Hall, Father