

a centenary of canberra's catholics

A woman of inspiration and deep faith



ABOVE: In the backyard, 1993.

LEFT: Kath and husband Frank, 1970.

BELOW: Kath (back row far left) with brothers Maurice and Harold Maher and Bishop Patrick Dougherty. Front: Brother Owen Maher, sister Ellen Taylor and Sr Mark LCM, in the family home.



In the 16th in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power tells of the contribution of Kath Scott, a woman who saw much of the early growth of the capital.

Scotts Crossing is the name given to the street which runs through the Canberra Centre from Cooyong Street to Bunda Street in Canberra city. The street is clearly named after the original Scotts Crossing which, before Lake Burley Griffin, served as a secondary bridge across the Molonglo River a little downstream from today's Kings Avenue Bridge. It led up to St John's Church.

there a year before moving to nearby Wentworth Avenue in Kingston, but they never lost their affection for this close-knit community, regularly attending Mass in St Therese's after its opening in 1948.

It was named after the pioneering Scott family into which Kathleen Maher married in 1930. Kath's husband, Frank Scott, was the youngest in a family of 13 children who farmed in the area around Scotts Crossing from the 1860s.

Kath and Frank Scott were blessed with four children, Maureen, Kevin, Shirley and Frank, all of whom attended St Christopher's School in Manuka.

Kath, who herself belonged to a legendary Braidwood district family, was born on 22 August, 1900, to William and Elizabeth Maher (nee Lyons).

I had the good fortune to be a classmate at St Christopher's of son, Frank, through whom I was introduced to the whole family, often coming from Queanbeyan to spend weekends with them.

Visitors to Reidsdale today can visit the site of the cheese factory where members of the Maher family and others delivered their dairy produce.

I recall us tending to Frank's horses near Scotts Crossing and being involved in many adventures with my intrepid mate. I often tell the story of one occasion when Kath was unwell and I gathered with the family as we knelt around the bed to recite the rosary. When it came to young Frank's turn to lead a decade, kneeling at the foot of the bed, he nonchalantly counted the 10 Hail Marys on Kath's toes!

Son Kevin describes Kath's growing years: "Kath was the third of 10 children. She spent an idyllic childhood, although a hard-working one, helping both on the farm and in the home with her younger siblings. "Kath's early life, nurtured in her loving family, set up her life-long philosophy of 'love of God, love of family and love of neighbour'. Kath's 8km commute to Reidsdale Public School was often on foot or on horseback, the long-suffering horse often carrying two or three siblings at a time on an adventurous trek over creeks and paddocks."

Kevin recalls that Kath remained in her Wentworth Avenue home until two weeks before her death aged 96. Her devoted husband, Frank, had died in 1970.

Frank and Kath's courtship between Canberra and Reidsdale was made possible through Frank owning a motor vehicle. (Contrary to Mgr McGilvray's suggestion in The Hallowed High Adventure that Frank Scott drove an unreliable T-model Ford, I have it on good authority that Frank drove some very admirable automobiles and that a Buick was among them!).

I can verify the description Kevin gives of his mother's life: "Kath led a full and active life, involved with her family, extended family, friends and the church. In Fr Haydon's time as parish priest, he was a regular visitor to the Scott family home. Kath rode a bike well into her 60s and was a keen tennis player, playing regularly at the Kingston Tennis Club. Kath was an active and long-time member of the Catholic Women's League.

After their marriage in the Reidsdale church, like so many Canberra's identities, Kath and Frank began their married life in Causeway. They remained

"Kath became a catechist after Frank's death and was devoted to the children she taught for a period in excess of 25 years. Her philosophy of love and service to others was evidenced by her opening her home to children in need.

"During holiday periods she would sometimes have young children from church homes or from families who were suffering hardship. On one occasion, Kath had a little fellow who was a bit of

a terror. When heading off home at the end of the holidays, Kath pleaded with him to try to work hard at school and be well-behaved to which he replied in all seriousness, 'All right, I'll be very trying'.

"In her late 80s, Kath was delighted by the birth of her two youngest grandchildren. Still being fit and healthy she enjoyed looking after them and delighted in the occasional 'sleepover'. Being a daily communicant, Kath would often take these youngest grandchildren by bus to St Christopher's for Mass. This was often followed by a walk through Telopea Park to play on the swings. Her youngest grand-daughter was known to remark that, with her Nan, she had attended more funerals than all her peers put together."

In her later years, it was a great joy for Kath to have not only her four children

and their families in Canberra, but also to enjoy the company of the three remaining siblings, brother Harold, and sisters, Hannah and Ellen. Hannah, known as Sr Mark of the Little Company of Mary, was at one time provincial and played a key part in the establishment of Calvary Hospital in Bruce. She died in 2007, aged 101. The remaining family member, Ellen Taylor, was beautifully portrayed in March 2011 as a 100 year old representing inspirational women on the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

After her marriage and arrival in Canberra in 1930, Kath Scott and her family witnessed much of the early growth of the nation's capital. Kath's deep faith, her courage in times of hardship and her generosity of spirit are an inspiration to all Canberrans who love their city and strive for the betterment of its citizens.



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