

A WOMAN OF SOME IMPORTANCE – Isabel Kelly, FMSJ

Misquoting the famous line from Oscar Wilde’s satirical parody play on upper-class English life with its snobbish views of ‘lesser’ mortals, is deliberate on my part. Indeed, the late Sr Isabel Kelly FMSJ, was a woman, of not just of ‘some’ importance, but to many of us *great* importance, though she would never have thought that about herself.



Isabel, died on Friday morning, 28th May at her convent nursing home in Blackburn where she had been in ‘lockdown’ since the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Her cancer returned during that time and was diagnosed as terminal. Her mantra was ‘doing God’s will’ whatever her condition, whatever assignment she was asked to do or wherever asked to go. From her heavenly vantage point, she’s most certainly able to express gratitude for having lived that motto all her life!

I first met Isabel in 2005 when about 50 women religious (and three men) gathered in Southampton for a meeting on the issue of human trafficking. Statistics from the Home Office told us about 4,000 were trafficked into the UK, mostly women and girls and for the most part to ‘service’ the sex trade.

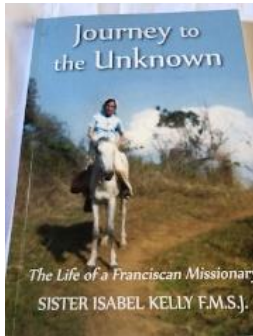
We gathered to discuss what we might do in response to Pope Francis’ call with the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) in Rome that all religious would do something to combat this crime.

Following discussion, ideas and proposals, three of us gathered in the corner of the hall having opted to form an Education awareness, Lobby and Campaigning group (especially with policy-makers) to ‘stop the demand’ We had a place to lobby MPs to bring into law what was then the ‘Nordic model’ of legislation – namely, prosecute the buyers/users and decriminalise providers. Stop demand.

Out of that meeting TRAC was born! Isabel she was a ‘young’ 71 then. As a tireless campaigner, unstinting in her efforts to raise awareness of this crime; to go wherever, whenever and with whomsoever invited (and there were many invitations) to speak passionately to highlight the causes of this modern slavery. She kept us on our toes! Almost daily, I got text messages from her and when *Whatsapp* became available, there was no stopping her. She would encourage us ‘*to pray, to take every opportunity to speak about human trafficking, BUT to keep our eyes open!*’

She used her iPad, her Mobile phone and whatever ‘gadgets’ were available to her to good purpose. She also wrote poetry, some very thoughtful articles, reflecting on doing God's will and the nature of friendship. The photo cover (inset) is a book written about her long years in Borneo and Ecuador. It’s a wonderful read! It came about at request of her family ‘*Auntie Isabel, write your story for us!*’ With Scottish and Irish blood in her veins, she was a born

story-teller! She joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) as a young woman and remained a life-long friendship with two other women – Iris and Margot – who joined with her. She sent me a copy '*Journey to the Unknown*' (inset) and when I told her I laughed so much, cried too reading it, that I used a stack of tissues, the next TRAC meeting she presented me with 12 packets of tissues!



Among her many stories, one will always remain with me. A few days before her assignment to Borneo, she was allowed to visit her family in Scotland for three days. There were conditions: She would travel by train, beads and prayer book in hand, eyes downcast and not speak to anyone. She must have nodded to the agreement. However, as soon as she boarded the train, she greeted anyone left, right, in front; behind; chatted all the way from Preston to Glasgow, told her travelling companions what she was doing, where she was going. And in her own words, had a great journey meeting lovely people! Years later, she disclosed her 'disobedient' act. As she said, '*wouldn't Jesus do the same?*' It was typical of the woman. I always admired her spirit of 'freedom' and courage, doing 'her own thing' and all the while doing God's will. May she enjoy the love and laughter of family and friends in the kingdom of God. We will miss her presence, smile and good humour.

A tribute to life-long friendship: <http://bit.ly/2U4c8Re>

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