



Brother Justin Lucian (Thomas Joseph Belanger)

Thomas Joseph Belanger was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on January 20, 1925. Later in life Thomas was to write that he loved the Chinese Proverb, "*May you live in interesting times*" because, he said, "*I did just that.*" He was born the same year Calvin Coolidge was inaugurated President, the first television transmission of a moving image was produced by John Baird, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*, and Robert Millikan produced the first commercial phonograph records.

Thomas' father, Joseph Belanger, was born on the Gaspé Peninsula (Quebec Province), spoke French and a "*little*" English. Joe served in the medical corps in WWI and later worked as a laborer at a stone quarry. His mother, Rose, who had been born in Minneapolis, was described by Thomas as "*a piano player, a singer of local repute, a bi-lingual story teller, a good listener and an oft-consulted counselor.*" "*To live with Rose and Joe,*" Thomas once said, "*was to learn a French word a day and a new Italian aria each week.*" His early family life centered around French because his grandmother lived with his family and she did not speak English. His "*mother was also from French Canadian stock and had gone to a convent school where she learned excellent English and was determined to maintain a bi-lingual home for her children.*" The language of his childhood and the arias from his mother and his older sister, Annabelle, practicing together on the piano greatly affected his love of the French language and of music. He relished his French-Canadian heritage and all of his life he spoke beautiful French. Later in life he translated French writings and wrote a novel with its setting in France. He said it was not until he went to high school that he realized that "*not every home was bi-lingual.*" Annabelle became a singer who was featured on radio as "*Annabelle of the Red River Valley.*"

Tommy, as Annabelle called him, became her best friend and she, his. *"My constant best friend, Annabelle, has been my benefactor, confidant, protector, companion, and a source of much pride and joy, all my life."*

Thomas attended St. Patrick High School for a few years, at the insistence of his mother, he transferred to De La Salle High School on Nicolet Island. There he met the Brothers and learned about their history, their *"French History."* He was so overtaken by his desire to be like them that he asked permission of his parents to enter the Juniorate Program at La Salle Institute in Glencoe, Missouri. He said his father was *"not too pepped about it, until I explained to him that it was an all French Order and where I might even be working in France some day. So, he gave his permission and I left for Glencoe."* In his oral history interview in 1992 Brother Justin said *"the interest that I had in the Brothers was probably in large part due to my interest in French."* In that same interview he also spoke of his admiration for the great teachers he had at De La Salle High School and the Brothers he encountered there. *"They were the kind of model for an adult male that I wanted to be."*

In 1943 he entered the Juniorate and began his life as a Brother. Always a good and diligent student, the course work came easy for him. He loved the reading and studying and he said that while he *"wasn't the perfect model junior or novice, as I got in a lot of trouble in the Juniorate, I loved it."* When he entered the Novitiate he received the religious name of Brother Justin Lucian, a name he was to later make legally his own.

Following his Novitiate year, which Justin described as *"much like the Juniorate"*, he was off to St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota, for his Scholastic education. Once again he was overwhelmed by the Brothers he met there and the models they were for him. *"My biggest model at the time was Brother Jarleth Robert, my history teacher. I really liked him and I liked the way he taught, the crisp-no nonsense, no verbiage kind of presentation."* Justin bemoaned the lack of psychology courses at St. Mary's College in those days, a topic which greatly interested him. *"Instead, I thought I would take a lot of drawing – engineering drafting and architecture courses and I did. After I left St. Mary's I kept it up and went to the Illinois Institute of Technology for two years while I was teaching at De La Salle High School in Chicago and again when I was assigned at Cretin in Minnesota. I took courses in drafting and house design and building design, because I really wanted to be an architect if I couldn't be a psychologist."*

Justin's first teaching assignment was at St. Mel's High School in Chicago. He recalled the year was a difficult one for him as he did not like the style of the Director, whom he thought to be too strict. But, he was with one of his best friends, Pat Cleary, and Brother Lambert Thomas, who was teaching at St. Mel's, took both of them under his wing. Brother Leopold Thomas and Brother Benedict Hartigan, "Bish", *"looked out"* for him and *"helped with his lesson plans, and encouraged"* him and Pat. *"That made a difficult first year fun,"* Justin recalled.

The following year Justin was happy to be moved to teach at De La Salle High School in Chicago, where Brother Justin Matthew was the Director. *"We had a good time. I started to blossom and do all those activities that young monks did in those days. I took over the yearbook and learned something about the band that was so excellent there."* Two years later, to Justin's bewilderment, he was reassigned to St. Mel's. When the Brother Visitor, Brother Philip Matthews, made his first visit that year to the St. Mel Community in 1950, he *"looked at me and looked at his 'little black book', that he carried at all times, he asked me what I was doing here. I said you assigned me here, you forgot that I was here before."* Phil laughed and Justin said *"that's not very funny; I really don't like it here. I was very happy at De La Salle,"* and Phil said, *"O.K., it would only be for a year."* Before leaving Chicago that year Justin had completed his Master's Degree in Educational Psychology at De Paul University.

The following year Justin's father died suddenly. He had fallen down the stairs, hit his head and died instantly. Brother Philip kept his promise and reassigned Justin, this time to Cretin High School, close to home. *"I loved that more than the other two assignments,"* Justin said. *"I never thought I could adjust to a military place, but Cretin was a marvelous school."* He was soon named Dean of Discipline and Sub-Director of the Community. This assignment was one of the most enjoyable periods of his life. He lived with Brother Loman Patrick, *"who became very influential in those six years, because he kept passing books on to me that he read and I would have to read them so we could discuss them. He read a couple of books a week and I could hardly keep up with him."*

After six years at Cretin he decided the job was *"getting too soft and too nice and I wasn't being challenged too much. 'Too Much' was the freshman building that was built and I was to be in charge of it and to be a Principal. I really detested the whole idea. My career is going to be teaching and counseling and I see it not in running a school,"* he told the Brother Visitor. Justin had long wanted to go to the missions in the Philippines and this seemed to be just the right time to make that move.

Somewhat to his surprise his request was granted and he and Brother Benedict Lidinsky boarded a freighter called the *Fern Bay* for their 30 day voyage across the top of the Pacific to Manila. While on the freighter they studied and read about the history of the Philippines. Upon arrival Brother Gabriel assigned Benedict as Principal of the high school and Brother Justin as Guidance Director. The Brothers at De La Salle College wanted to have a counseling program set up and now they had, for the first time, someone who was interested enough to really work hard to develop a program. Justin was delighted and Brother Gabe gave his *"carte blanche"* to build an office and get the programs under way. It was in these early years in the Philippines that Justin earned his Doctorate of Humanities in Dumaguete, Philippines.

Two years later Brother Gabe, who was Director of the Community, President of De La Salle College and Brother Visitor of the District of the Philippines, made the decision to bring all of the Philippine Brothers studying in the United States at St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota, back to Manila and to open a Scholasticate of their own on the

island. He approached Justin and convinced him that his background in counseling was just what was needed for the first Director of Scholastics. A bit reluctant at first, Justin agreed to be named Director of the De La Salle Scholasticate in Manila, and began immediately setting up the program for their formation. He remained as Director from 1960 until 1963 when the opportunity for him to make the Second Novitiate in Rome became available. The program for the Second Novitiate for that year (1963-1964) was devoted totally to Directors of scholastics from around the world. About 40 international directors met and lived and studied in Rome. Justin said, *"I loved it, I just loved it. It was a terrific program and I learned a great deal and made lifelong friendships."*

Justin returned to the Philippines and again assumed his duties as Director of Scholastics in 1964. He enjoyed the job, working with the young Brothers and encouraging their formation to be model men for their students. Brother Philip Nelan had succeeded Brother Gabriel as Provincial while Brother Charles Henry was Assistant to the Superior General. Three years later Charles Henry was elected Superior General and he came to Manila. After speaking to all 100 Brothers in the District, Brother Charles Henry, approached Justin and told him *"They want YOU!, all 100, of your Brothers in the District. You are to be appointed the new Provincial of the District of the Philippines."* Somewhat overwhelmed, he accepted his obedience from the Superior General.

For the next four years Brother Justin worked diligently to build up the District, encouraging the work of the Brothers and especially the scholastics and young Brothers of the District. It was during this period that he produced several publications. One of the early ones was *Everybody Calls Me Brother*. This was adapted to the Philippines and was used widely throughout the English speaking world in vocation work. He also produced the text and the workbook titled, *School Counseling and Reading for Counseling*.

Political troubles were abundant in the Philippines but Brother Justin worked hard to avoid involvement. In 1970 a wave of nationalism swept the country. Using his best judgment, Justin knew it was time at last for a Filipino Brother to lead his people. He was happy to recommend Brother Benildo Feliciano who was chosen to succeed him as Provincial.

Justin returned to his first love, the role as teacher, at De La Salle University in Manila for four more years. He loved the Philippines and the people he taught and encountered there but in 1974, after sixteen years in the Philippines, he chose *"to return to the United States, having fulfilled the role of what a Brother Missionary intended to do, that is, to help the missionary country develop its own native Brothers, establish stability, and then leave. Brother Justin left the Philippines, but his heart remained close to the people and he corresponded with many former students and teachers until his death."*

His next assignment was to be his final one and was to last thirty-three years. He began working in Memphis, Tennessee, at Christian Brothers College in the fall 1974 and was given the freedom as the Director of Guidance to development programs for the campus. One that he championed for the students was the Peer Counseling Program for new

Freshmen. It was a mentoring program to help first year students with their first days, weeks and months of College and to know they were not alone in their experiences. The program still exists today, some thirty-five years after its' inception.

For nineteen years, 1974 to 1993, Justin worked in guidance and counseling at Christian Brothers College and saw it grow into Christian Brothers University. During his time as teacher at CBU he taught ten different psychology courses and assisted in organizing the curriculum for the Human Development major at the university. It was also during this same period that Justin presented papers at international conferences and seminars at UNESCO in Paris, France, at the University of Oslo in Norway, at the University of Antwerp in Belgium, at De La Salle University in Manila, at Queen's University in Kensington, Ontario, Canada, and at universities throughout the United States. He presented papers and seminars in the early years on guidance and counseling and in the later years on gerontology. In 1996, in recognition to his outstanding achievements at CBU he was awarded the coveted *Brother Lawrence Egbert Distinguished Service Award*.

Justin loved to write and his writings include such books as "*Biography of Brother Stephen O'Malley and A Soldier's Letter, the Story of the Philippine American War in Batangas*". In 2007, just before his last encounter with cancer, he completed a book about Owen Curran, a young man who marched with General Sherman through Georgia and who later joined the Christian Brothers to become Brother Emery Ildephonsus. In 2005 he published a novel, *Professor Baker's Hand Grenade* and his earlier works include *Pass Christian College* and *CBU Milestones*. From early in his career as a teacher he set aside time each week to write. In his later years he said, "*I write every Sunday morning without fail and have done so for over fifty years.*"

Justin retired from the Counseling Department at Christian Brothers University in 1993 but immediately entered the classroom himself to study reptiles and then became a docent at the Memphis Zoo, an instructor in herpetology. He proudly continued this work for twelve years until his health would no longer permit him. In was during this period, in 2003, that he was honored as *Professor Emeritus* at CBU, an honor he cherished. "*Brother Justin Lucian's varied interests ranged from psychology to snakes, but he always followed his own dictum: 'Never stop learning.'*"

After having been cancer-free for several years, on a routine visit to his doctors he was told the cancer had returned and that it was "*everywhere.*" When he asked the doctor how long he had to live, a week or a month, the doctor answered, "*Yes*". He lived another four months, dying on April 7th, the same day as the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle. This was something that would have brought a large smile to Justin's face.

Only a few weeks before his death he committed to the District Archives "*Two loose leaf note books of complete autobiography for Archival edification, (with pics).*"

And typical of Justin, he wrote his own "*Funeral Homily of Sorts.*" It read: "*Let us remember we are in the presence of God. Welcome to my last class lecture. I'm grateful*

for your combined presence here so I can say 'goodbye' in a defined manner. I have had a lovely life. Generally, it was fun, filled with laughter, and awful jokes. There were many funerals, some sickness, but always hope. My life, of course, included YOU folks. So you must now take some credit for my happiness and joy over the years. I loved life. I loved being at De La Salle University in Manila and then at CBU. I loved teaching, Administration of schools and departments, communities and districts, was always considered a part-time unavoidable distraction from the real part of this vocation - - teaching. I was proud of my academic life, my counseling, teaching, lecturing here and there, writing and traveling, often my lecture notes at the ready. As you know I was a sensate person. I often touched you, psychically and physically. I was used to reaching out and touching someone. I also cried, at weddings and funerals, graduations, and good movies. Every night I began sleep by lying on my back, staring at the ceiling, taking a deep breath, and thanking God. I thanked Him for people like you. Whenever I was asked to explain the origins of my vocation I hesitated to answer. Who knows? A vocation, like love, is somewhat of a human mystery. Right now, I'm glad I was loyal and persevering with 'the monks.' Yes, I love life. But I always knew it was just a rehearsal for the genuine article, the really real work, eternity, the LIFE after death. So here I am and there you are. There is no doubt about it. I'll be seeing you. You probably suspected you will most likely not live forever. I often thought I'd die in a plane crash. But what do I know? Brothers, and everyone, thanks for what you were to me. Ecce Quam Bonum (Behold how good it is!) Carry on and REJOICE. What I have just done is a great career move. Thank you, Lord! Class dismissed.

Tour of Duty

St. Mel High School, Chicago, Illinois	1947-1948
De La Salle Institute, Chicago, Illinois	1948-1950
St. Mel High School, Chicago, Illinois	1950-1951
Cretin High School, St. Paul, Minnesota	1951-1958
De La Salle University, Manila, RP	1958-1960
De La Salle Scholasticate, Manila, RP	1960-1963
Second Novitiate, Rome, Italy	1963-1964
De La Salle Scholasticate, Manila, RP	1964-1966
Provincialate, Manila, RP	1966-1970
De La Salle University, Manila, RP	1970-1974
Christian Brothers University, Memphis, TN	1974-1993
Memphis Zoological Society Volunteer	1993-2005
Christian Brothers University Community, Memphis, TN	2005-2007

A word of gratitude goes to our readers: Brother Mark Gubbels, Brother Ignatius Brown, Brother Joel McGraw, Brother Terence McLaughlin, and Brother Robert Werle who wrote this short biography. Omissions and errors are those of the writer alone. Copyright 2009, Copies and reproductions cannot be made without authorization from the: De La Salle Christian Brothers Archives, 2455 Avery Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, 38112, 901-321-3243.