

## TESTIMONIALS FOR BROTHER DOMINIC BERARDELLI

Brother Dominic was one of the advisors who helped me, as a staff member, and five students, who were attending a Lasallian Studies international trip to Yangon, Myanmar. He had visited the Yangon Brothers when Myanmar was under military rule in the 1990's. I cannot do justice to the way he told the story, but I will never forget it. I don't remember the exact year he visited, only that it was in the mid to late 90's.

He told us that he arrived in Yangon, tired, of course. The Brothers picked him up from the airport, and tucked him in when they got home (where we all were going to stay as well in January of 2014). The Brothers told Brother Dom to keep his passport next to the bed for easy access as they were pretty confident that the military would be raiding them to check the paperwork. This was apparently a common thing to do, checking on the foreigners, particularly Christian ones, who weren't even staying in whatever hotels were offered back then. Sure enough a couple of days in, Brother Dom was awakened by a Brother and told to bring his passport and come downstairs to the courtyard. He sleepily grabbed the passport and tottered downstairs.

The courtyard is good sized and spreads out into a large paved area where soccer (football) games can be played. They may have gone there as Brother Dom remembered many people, lots of noise, and the Brothers standing quietly in a line where he joined them. A young military man (Brother Dom couldn't distinguish rank or anything, but he looked young) went to each Brother one by one and each would hand their ID cards to him. He came to Brother Dom who handed him the passport. As you know a passport is like a booklet and apparently the young officer had not seen one before and he turned it over with a puzzled look on his face. Thinking to be helpful, Brother Dom took the passport back, opened to the ID portion, and handed it back to him with a smile.

That was the wrong thing to do.

Looking back, Brother Dom thought he had hurt the young soldier's pride. At the time he was just trying to be friendly. The soldier started shouting at him and the Brothers instantly starting talking in Burmese, trying to calm the situation and explain, but it was no good. Brother Dom remembers being grabbed and tossed in the back of a truck (no windows) with a final view of the Brothers valiantly defending him. He was afraid for them. Would they also get into trouble? Where were they taking him? The truck eventually ended up someplace-- it was still night and he was bewildered, and eventually found himself in a Burmese prison cell. He described the room as small with a cot and sink with a bucket in the corner of the room. He sat on the bed worrying about his situation for many hours. The cell got lighter so he knew day was there but he didn't know what time it

was when they finally came to get him, but he guesses it was late morning or early afternoon.

He said that he was questioned in English, of course. The questions were civil enough at first. What was his name? Did he have friends in Yangon? Why was he there? But he could see that the questions were pointing towards them trying to get him to admit to being a spy. He kept repeating over and over how happy he was to be visiting their lovely country and that he was there to be with his fellow Brothers. He didn't refer to the Brothers desire to educate the populace as they would see that as subversive, but merely spoke of visiting their lovely country and enjoying the delicious food, etc. Finally his inquisitor asked if he had visited the zoo. Brother Dom said that he had not, but hoped to do so very soon. This apparently relaxed the inquisitor as he spoke with great animation about the wonderful zoo there in Yangon. He then sharply stopped and asked him point blank if he was there to spy for the Americans. Brother Dom repeated all that he had before, and eventually the questioning ceased. He was sternly told that they would be watching him. He said that almost abruptly his passport was returned to him and he was taken quickly (so quickly that he admits to be terrified) to the front of the building where he was unceremoniously dumped outside the great doors and he found himself alone.

He remembered that he really didn't know where he was. He had no money, and no idea how to get back to the Brothers house. And he was afraid that this was a ploy-- was he really free? He looked around and remembered just looking out across a large parking lot in front of the building--- to see people waving at him. It was the Brothers. They had followed the trucks and were waiting-- for as long as it took-- until he was freed. Brother Dom had tears in his eyes remembering that. He said he had never been so glad to see anyone before or since.

That being said, he went back to Yangon several times. That was all about being a Brother. But that was the only time he was arrested. He assured us that none of us had to worry about that, but it was a great lesson in being careful !!

**Susan Birkenseer**

It is very difficult to describe someone like Brother Dominic. You would think that someone kind-hearted, lovable, honest, and pure in his beliefs could be described. For the Dominic who was my friend for the last 10 years at the college and what I have to say about him is that "he was the loveliest I ever met". I know in my heart that he'll be standing just behind the Pearly Gates greeting everybody as they come in after they meet Saint Peter with a smile, a handshake, or a hug and showing them the way.

**Al Gonzalez**

Brother Dominic loved the students and always supported them. One year, when he found out there were students who could not afford to go to a school dance, he called me up and said "Cesar, how many students do you know that can't afford the dance?"

I replied, "I know at least 3." He said "Good to know. I'll call you back."

About 5 minutes later, he showed up at my office, came up the stairs and approached my desk out of breath and with his wallet out. He paid for those 3 students and even gave more in case others needed his help. While giving me the money he said "I try to help these students when I can because I know they have other things to deal with." He paid for many other students at other events over the years.

I'll never forget that generosity from Brother Dom. I think that is definitely something the students here at St. Mary's College will miss.

**Cesar Ramos**

I have worked and prayed with Brother Dom since I started working at Saint Mary's College 12 years ago. His love of people made it easy to love him. He came to our office regularly and we helped him on many occasions to assist students in need. We had a small prayer group that he set up on Wednesday mornings for staff that was something I looked forward to. He would bring us our ashes on Ash Wednesday when we could not get away from our desks to attend the mass on campus. Brother Dom could be found anywhere on campus doing what he did best, connect with students, faculty and staff. He loved our annual Christmas "Lighting of the Tree" event in our building, where he would start us off with a prayer and songs. This is how I will always remember him.

**Donna Ubeda**

In March 2011 I was interviewed for the position of Associate Director, Center for International Programs at Saint Mary's College of California. Brother Dominic was on the interview panel. He was so warm and caring that I felt at ease at the interview. I, of course, wrote him a thank you e-mail later that day for interviewing me and shared the sentiment that I hoped that we would cross paths again. A week after my interview, I was offered the position and Brother Dom reached out to me with the following message:

I am delighted with the good news that you will be joining us in the Saint Mary's College Family!

Welcome and if there is anything I can do to help get you comfortable and started smoothly just ask!

I am delighted!!

Brother Dom

I was fortunate enough that my office was down the hall from his office. I saw him often and he shared many stories about his time abroad, his love for spicy food, and his overall zeal and joy of working with students and parents. He often came to my office to share some snacks, especially pretzels! He loved working with the international students and often joined us at special events. Two years ago he welcomed a group of international students to the Brother's community on campus for a bag lunch. He shared the importance of Lasallian education and the history of Saint Mary's College of California. The students truly appreciated this experience, especially getting a chance to see the Brother's community on-campus.

I miss him terribly but I feel honored to have shared many wonderful memories with him.

**Maria Flores**

Brother Dom was constantly a joy to be around. I had known him since 2012. He was one of the first to welcome me and my family to the Saint Mary's College community. I became a student ambassador and president of APASA during my time as an undergraduate student. Br. Dom would invite me into his office and we would talk at length about SMC, APASA, the Philippines and our lives. I got to know him very well and I constantly would go into his office to eat the candy and chocolate covered mangoes. He would not hesitate to check in with me any time he saw me. Usually it was accompanied by a big hug as well.

**Ardi Samonte**