

SAN DIEGUITO HALL OF FAME 2017 INDUCTION OF SRI MRINALINI MATA

October 13, 2017, San Dieguito High School Academy, Encinitas

SISTER ISWARI: ...She entered the ashram on June 10th, 1947 and as you already know, she had three more years of high school. So it was from June to September that she had her introduction into the Encinitas Hermitage. And she told me the first day she arrived she had her little suitcase, she went up the stairs to a very active kitchen, as Paramahansa Yogananda loved to entertain and invite people over and cook for them.

She had a big sink full of spinach that she was told to wash and that it had to be very clean. So from that day forward she was assigned to the kitchen. She did a lot of cooking and housework. But shortly afterwards he had recognized your Merna, our Mrinalini Mata, as one that he could build on for the future because of her attunement, spirituality, and high intellectual involvement.

So she was drawn in closer to him to help him with his editing and with some of his writings and she was dismissed from the housework. As you can imagine, some of the older ones were unhappy about that! Even though she enjoyed her household work, she always wanted to do what he assigned to her and whatever he wanted her to do.

At that time he was reading a book called "The Saints That Moved The World," and he would circle words as he read them off and afterwards he would hand her the book and say, "Look these words up and memorize the meaning." In that way he was training her for her future work.

One time he jotted down a paragraph and handed it to her and he said, "Move this around and make it sound better." So she took the paragraph and she reworded it and brought it back to him. He read it and said, "Did you do this?" She said, "Yes," and he said, "Pretty good!"

So from the beginning she showed that she had that ability. He also told her to study the great literary works of Shakespeare, and that calls to mind Mr. Jordan.

She had Mr. Jordan as her English teacher and she deeply respected him. She often talked about him and about how much he helped her in her education and in her literary ability. When she started his class, he had given the students a little aptitude test to see where they were in their studies. After the class he called her up and said, "You are way ahead of all of these students and you are going to be very bored in this class. Is there something you would like to work on that you feel would help you?"

She asked to study Shakespeare. Each day she went to the library and she would work on a paper that she had in mind, and at the end of the year she handed in her paper, and she got an A-plus."

Now I understand that our Guru Paramahansa Yogananda attended her graduation and also he brought his rock collection to the school once. I don't know if any of you remember that. But they set up tables and he set out his rocks and he shared that with all the students here. That was a real high point in her education here.

She always told me -- I was fortunate to be with Mrinalini Mata in her later years, and Sister Sarala as well, as close with her. During that time she did reminisce, and she remembered her time here and very much valued her education and I know our Guru Paramahansa Yogananda also valued education. He was actually made to go to college by his guru, who told him, "When you come to the West, they'll respect you more if you have some letters after your name. So he went to college before he came to this country.

You know, he came at a time before Yoga and Meditation were common household words. Ahead of his time but still he drew those to this path, those who were receptive.

She was living in San Diego at that time before she entered with her mother, her sister, her brother and her father. Her mother and her sister were going to the San Diego Temple. She was skeptical of the swami from India. But he was very interested in her, and she would say to her mother, please bring her to the temple.

Finally she agreed, and when she entered the temple with her Bible tucked under her arm. But when she realized that P G loved Christ very much and he loved the leaders of all religious spiritual movements, after that first meeting she had a deep spiritual awakening and soon after her parents gave her permission to come into the ashram.

In the final weeks of her life, she was working very diligently on the SRF lesson study course. This was a task that GuruGi gave her early on and he said, "This will be your life's work." That was to revise and update the early lessons that were written in the 1930s when he was quite busy traveling across the US giving lectures. He wanted those to be revised and he told her to write the advanced study course.

So she had worked on that throughout her life, in between all the other responsibilities of being a Vice President and the President and Editor-in-Chief and many, many books that she was working on, but about two weeks before her demise she was working with Brother Chidananda, who is now our newly elected president, and he was reading the lessons to her because her eyesight had begun to fail. So she was doing her editing in her head. She would say, "No, I think you should say it this way," after he would read it to her.

But that last meeting they had, I was blessed to be able to be there and he said to her, "Do you feel that the lessons are finished, are you satisfied?" And she said, "Yes, I am at peace." Two weeks later, she went to be with our Guru in another place. I feel her here.

She did know that she was nominated to this high honor. A little story behind that: I would get her newsletters. I was taking care of her mail and whenever the newsletters would come, if I saw something interesting I would read it to her. This particular newsletter had a write-up about Mr. Jordan. So I took that to her and it also said that there were memorial bricks and that two of them had been dedicated to Mr. Jordan.

She said to me the last time we were down here, "I want to go and see the bricks!" So I drove her to the school, this was about two years ago, and we walked on the grounds and we found Mr. Jordan's two bricks. She said, "I feel like I should tell somebody that I am here!" I guess that you all found out that she was here!

I'm sure she is here with us, and I am sure she is, as we all are at SRF, so grateful for this honor, for all that you did to help her in her life and I think that she also helped all of you.

She does have a special friend here today, who brought her yearbook, and she has the letter that Merna or Mrinalini wrote to dear Joyce. I would like to ask Joyce to come forward and she would like to share this letter with you. It really not only describes not only who she was then--but I read the letter before I came up here and I think it also really described how she was all through her life.

(Joyce Darby Tighe comes to lectern.)

JOYCE: You guys are very lucky because I'm not going to speak a whole lot of stuff! My husband Bruce will tell you I never stop sometimes.

Merna Brown was my friend. Merna Brown had lovely, brown, naturally curly hair that I was very jealous of. But she was peaceful.

We used to have lunch together sometimes on the grass. I got to go visit her on the Hermitage and stay overnight with her and her mom, and I got to meet the Master, I think it was 1948 when visited the Hermitage and I was allowed to go up and meet him.

Merna was always at peace. She wrote something in my annual, I'd like to read it to you and let you know that this was the kind of girl Merna was back in those days.

(She reads from the annual.)

"My dearest Joyce,

It is futile to try to express in words how much I have enjoyed having you as one of my dearest friends ever. June 10 cannot mean the end of our friendship, for true friendship never dies but grows with the years - fed by the sparks of remembrance.

I think your choice of a profession, nursing, is a wonderful one. I know you will be successful because you own the qualities which lead to success - personality, unselfishness, kindness, and spirituality.

The door of the Hermitage is always open to you and I hope you will come often. Just meeting the Master is a blessing that will go with you all through your life, no matter what path you may follow.

Till I see you again, and I know our paths will cross - all my love and wishes for your happiness,

Merna Loy"

(Joyce stops reading and addresses the audience.)

Loy was her middle name and there was an actress by the name of Myrna Loy at that time, too. So she and I had a little thing about that, too!

Merna and I, well I moved around the country because I married a Navy man and I wasn't able to come, but the few [reunions] that I came to, she was never there. But she let me know one time that she was up in San Francisco.

Merna and I had a that kind of friendship that you pick up like a lot of us do here. You know? We don't see each other for ten years but when we come back, wow! The years just drop by!

So I learned more today by being here, and I'm so glad you told me about Merna's last times. And I know that she walked the walk. She walked the walk wherever she was. And for that she was a blessing in my life.

SISTER ISWARI: I want to tell the story about the Straight A's!

JOYCE: *(pointing at Sister Iswari)* She told me this story but I don't know about the Straight A's!

SISTER ISWARI: Mrinalini Mata did tell me about her best friend, and she had told Paramahansa Yogananda Gi about her best friend Joyce. And he said [about Joyce], "How are her grades?" And this must have been the time that [Joyce] had straight A's. And Guru Gi said to [Mrinalini], "I want you to get straight A's, too!"

And so that semester she worked very hard and got straight A's. But she remembered you as her friend, and she was really grateful."

(Joyce puts her hand on her heart.)