

Coffee and Doughnuts with Rocky Wagonhurst and Marianne Banister Wagonhurst

By Paul McMullen

pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org

Rocky Wagonhurst and Marianne Banister Wagonhurst, founders of the Claire Marie Foundation and parishioners of St. Joseph in Cockeysville, sit down with the Catholic Review. Marianne Banister Wagonhurst is a former news-anchor for WBAL-TV.

CR: What, and where, are your Catholic roots?

RW: The Catholic Church has always been a huge part of my life. My mom's family were devout Catholics growing up in San Francisco. When we moved to Los Angeles in the early 1960s we found the church to be not only our spiritual and educational connection to our new life but the introduction to lifelong friends. As a family, we volunteered for committees and fundraisers and attended Mass weekly. When Marianne and I moved to Baltimore in the mid-'90s, we followed my parents' cue and found our own connection to our new home through St. Joseph Parish in Cockeysville. Marianne converted to Catholicism there in 1997, just before Claire was born. Both Claire and Hillary, our other daughter, attended kindergarten through fifth grade there.

CR: Adolescent melanoma took Claire (pictured below) in 2014. How did your faith help during that most difficult time for a parent?

✘ MBW: Our faith was as integral to Claire's battle with the disease as was her medical team at Johns Hopkins. We left no stone unturned, medically nor religiously. The support and prayers offered from countless prayer groups from St. Joseph's, St. Jude Shrine, Claire's classmates from the class of 2015 at Notre Dame Prep and staff there, friends, family, was monumental.

We truly believe even though the ultimate miracle of a cure did not happen, there

were many, many smaller miracles we witnessed along the way. Our faith in God and his presence in our everyday lives is stronger than ever. We feel Claire's presence every day. We believe, with all our heart, she will forever be there for us and others.

CR: What led you to start a foundation in her name?

RW: We did not want any other families to go through a loss like ours. Even though it is thought to be a disease of older people, adolescent melanoma is in fact the number two cancer in young people and as with Claire, can be caused by hormonal factors related to puberty. People need to know how to prevent it.

CR: What qualities are you looking for in recipients of the college scholarship created in her memory at Notre Dame Prep?

MBW: Claire loved the arts program at NDP and had been accepted to study interior design at both the University of Alabama and Georgia Southern University just days before passing.

We want other young women at Notre Dame Prep to take the journey of which Claire dreamt. With that in mind, students in the senior class who plan to major in some form of professional design arts are asked to submit their art portfolio and a short essay to describe their vision of their own professional future in the arts while celebrating the joy, color and beauty of the world as Claire did.

CR: Favorite saint?

RW: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower.

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