

Beatriz Gomez-Klein '73: How Scholarship Forged a New Future



I was holding on to a post to keep from falling down,” **Beatriz Gomez-Klein '73** remembers. “My cousin, still a child herself, had her arms around me, trying to comfort me. There was a bucket at our feet. The smells and the rocking of the ship were making us so very sick.”

This is how Gomez-Klein recalls her journey from Cuba to the United States in 1962 in the aftermath of the infamous Bay of Pigs Invasion and Fidel Castro’s rise to power.

“My cousin and I traveled alone. My father and sister could not leave Cuba. They didn’t want to leave my 20-year-old brother, who was in prison there for his involvement with the underground resistance against Castro’s regime,” recalls Gomez-Klein.

This was not the first time she had experienced loss. At the tender age of seven, she lost her beloved mother. “She was my idol,” Gomez-Klein says, her sorrow still apparent so many years later.

At the time, Gomez-Klein was attending a school run by the Order of the Society of the Sacred Heart. She adored her school. When the grief-stricken child asked her father if she could board there, he agreed. The kindness and faith of the sisters provided the comfort Gomez-Klein so desperately needed.

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This period of solace did not last long. When Castro confiscated all private property in the 1960s, the school was closed and the sisters were ushered out of the country. Her father hired tutors to teach his daughter at home. “He was afraid that I would be indoctrinated at the public schools.”

He feared for his daughter’s future as well and sent her in the Bay of Pigs cargo exchange ship. Gomez-Klein’s oldest brother was already in the United States. He met the girls in Miami.

“I stayed awhile there, but there were so many Cubans in Miami that I wasn’t

making enough progress in learning English, and so I traveled to Louisville, Kentucky, to live with an aunt and uncle there.”

Gomez-Klein soon moved to

New Jersey from Louisville to live with another maternal aunt. She enrolled in Newark’s Barringer High School. “I still don’t know how I got up the courage to tell

the guidance counselor that I wanted to go to college. She must have thought I was insane! I had no money.”

The counselor looked at her thoughtfully and said she knew a priest in the area who might be able to help. The counselor made an appointment, and Gomez-Klein’s aunt accompanied her. He gave her an application for Caldwell College.

Caldwell offered her a full scholarship. “Without the scholarship, I could never have thought about going to college.”

Her new start was marked by more tragedy, however. Only a few weeks into her freshman year, her father passed away.

“At that point, I felt as though my loss was complete. By the age of 19, I had lost my mother, my school, my country, and then my father.” Far from her childhood home and new to college, Gomez-Klein doubted her ability to continue.

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newspaper.” The sense of sisterhood and community at Caldwell gave her hope. “We had so much fun. When we had free time, we would put on little plays and skits. Even the sisters would play along!”

Gomez-Klein remains in close touch with her Caldwell classmates, a group that includes the dear cousin.

While studying sociology, she considered entering the Dominican Order and took

on religious studies as a second major. She graduated cum laude and with Delta Epsilon Sigma and Kappa Gamma Pi honors, even while

shouldering the responsibilities of class president in her senior year.

Although Gomez-Klein ultimately chose secular life, her sense of vocation remained strong and she pursued a master's degree at Seton Hall University in education with a focus on rehabilitation counseling. She earned a second master's degree and an advanced certificate in clinical social work from Rutgers University and New York University, respectively.

Gomez-Klein's professional experience includes serving as a rehabilitation counselor and later as a psychotherapist at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). In 1976, Governor Brendan Byrne appointed her to the board of trustees of the New Jersey Youth Correctional Institute. She served as a field instructor and supervisor for the baccalaureate social work program at Seton Hall University and on the UMDNJ Clinical Records Review Committee. In

the 1990s, Gomez-Klein worked for the Visiting Nurse Association of Essex Valley as a case manager for elderly, disabled and AIDS individuals.

In 2001, Gomez-Klein opened her own practice in psychotherapy. She works with individuals and couples who want to learn to cope with depression, anxiety or interpersonal relationships. Her bilingual skills and her natural compassion allow

her to reach a diverse community.

Gomez-Klein's community service includes work with bereavement groups at

Our Lady of the Holy Angels Church in Little Falls and as a behavioral health consultant for Notre Dame parishioners in North Caldwell.

She received the Visiting Nurse Association Achievement Award in 1996 and the University Health Care Excellence Award from UMDNJ in

1999. Caldwell University recognized her accomplishments with the prestigious Veritas Award. Today, she is supportive of her alma mater, serving on the Veritas Award Selection Committee. She has included the university in her legacy plans as well. “I want to give back to the institution that gave me so much.”

Among her many achievements, Gomez-Klein considers receiving the C-Pin in her freshman year at Caldwell the greatest honor she has ever received. “At that time, C-Pin recipients were chosen by their classmates. Earning it meant that you were considered to be the shining example of the Caldwellian woman.”

Anyone who has ever met Beatriz Gomez-Klein would be inclined to agree: she remains a shining example of a Caldwellian woman! ■

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BEATRIZ GOMEZ-KLEIN

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Graduating from Caldwell College.

MOST INFLUENTIAL BOOK?
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