

## Woman brought lawsuit against Legion of Christ on behalf of aunt

Brian Roewe | Feb. 18, 2013

Legion of Christ investigation

*Editor's note: The 2010 and 2011 depositions of Mary Lou Dauray, niece of Gabrielle Mee, were released to NCR as part of a court decision related to the lawsuit she brought against the Legionaries of Christ, her aunt's estate (controlled by the Legion), and Bank of America. The depositions reveal that Dauray herself had experienced the overwhelming power of a persuasive spiritual leader earlier in her life and that she feared her aunt had fallen victim to one as well after learning of the numerous allegations against Legion founder Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, who courted Mee as a prominent donor to his order. The following story is constructed from the two depositions. [See all stories in this series.](#)[1]*

Mary Lou Dauray last saw her aunt, Gabrielle Mee, in 1991 when Dauray returned to her home state of Rhode Island after living the previous 20-plus years in California.

During the visit, Mee and Dauray spoke of mostly family matters, but the 80-year-old aunt also told her goddaughter that she intended to begin a consecrated life. In Dauray's mind, that meant cloistered and separated from outside contact, meaning she likely would never see her Aunt Gaby, as she called her, again. She didn't bother to ask details about the community, like which order or where it was located; rather, she just wished her the best.

"I was happy for her," she said.

Dauray never did see her aunt again, but after learning of her death in 2008, she found the details of Mee's consecrated community disturbing and all too familiar. In some ways, it reminded her of her own past.

Dauray, now 72, grew up in Woonsocket, R.I. The daughter and first child of Lucille Jarrett and Charles Joseph Dauray (Mee's brother), she was raised Catholic. From age 5 through her high school graduation at 16, she attended the Convent of Jesus and Mary, founded by her great-uncle, Msgr. Charles Dauray.

As a boarder, Dauray spent most of her week at the convent, though she was able to return home for periods each weekend. Her time at the school gave her a feeling of spiritual bliss, she said. Mee would visit her occasionally, and the two would pray the rosary together. With Mee having no children, Dauray said she felt her aunt saw her like a daughter.

She maintained some contact with her aunt while studying political science at the University of Rhode Island, with Mee accompanying Dauray's father on campus visits. Her aunt also escorted her to New York to board a ship -- "which is a big event in those days" -- for Paris, where she spent her junior year studying at the Louvre.

"It was very special. It was very, very meaningful to me," Dauray said.

After graduation, Dauray took a job with the CIA as a covert employee for the Kennedy administration. Eventually, she was elevated to an intelligence officer and analyzed the political currents of Romania. She

remained with the agency through Kennedy's assassination and into the beginning of Lyndon Johnson's administration.

In the mid-1960s, she married Samuel Barnett Tannahill. A job opportunity for him with IBM led the couple westward to San Francisco, but four years into the marriage, it began unraveling. Tannahill had begun dating others, and the two "weren't seeing eye-to-eye," Dauray said, on everything from art specifically to life in general. Communication had halted.

Dauray had become tired and dissatisfied with her life as a house mom to their two children. She thought of her youth in the convent, describing it as "so pure, so beautiful, so safe," and found herself once again drawn toward communal living.

"There was still that pull of being in the safety and security of a convent existence and in the beauty of living in -- with a group. It was always pulling at me," she said.

The pull became stronger after meeting a Buddhist spiritual guru she knew as Dr. Ajari, who was the leader of a group called Kailas Shugendo. Around 1975, she divorced Tannahill and joined Ajari at a communal home on Pine Street in San Francisco with about a dozen others.

"It was enticing to me," Dauray recalled in her 2010 deposition, "and more than that it was a strong enough desire to go back to my religious roots in a deep spiritual way, and that was what compelled me to do this. And I really felt I had to do this just to continue to be spiritual in my life."

Ajari appealed to her artistic side, she said, allowing her the time and freedom to paint that was not afforded in her marriage. After a year at the house, she married fellow member Michael Leary and had two more children.

"It became a place of refuge and peace," she recalled.

But it wouldn't last. The time she spent painting gradually shifted to time spent working. Ajari controlled the group's schedule with daily rituals and tasks -- daylong prayers, mantras, prostrations and *gomas* (a fire ritual), along with cooking and driving -- and had members fund the group by giving up their finances.

Finding the others unfriendly toward her children, Dauray eventually moved into an apartment but remained in the group. Her mother joined her there, though Ajari frowned on communication with families.

There was no "final, compelling reason" to leave the group, Dauray said, but she began to realize something was wrong. After three and a half years, she told Ajari she was leaving -- "probably the hardest thing I'd ever done." Her leaving angered Leary, and the two divorced in the mid-1980s. With the help of a friend, Dauray began an interior design business, leading her to meet current husband, Alan Davis, in 1993, whom she married in the late 2000s. Dauray no longer follows any religion, but said she still enjoys the rituals of Catholicism and still believes in Jesus.

Two years before meeting Davis, Dauray returned to Rhode Island for the first time since college. She visited Mee at her home in Narragansett for several hours. While Mee was able to hold a conversation, Dauray said she wasn't "the same good old Aunt Gaby."

"She was in pain [from osteoporosis]. She was having trouble walking around ... but she was very sweet and loving and smiling," she said.

In their conversations of family, Mee told her goddaughter she was joining a religious order. Dauray recalled: "She said, 'I am going to join a group where I can offer -- I'm in great pain. Where I can offer all my sufferings

to Christ.' "

Dauray didn't ask further questions, instead saying she was happy for her aunt. She would not speak with her again. After Mee's death in 2008, Dauray began hearing media reports about her aunt's order (Regnum Christi, a lay wing of the Legion), specifically about Legion founder Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado fathering multiple children and about a Vatican investigation. From conversations with family and others, she learned her aunt was never left alone, and at times was prohibited from traveling.

The descriptions rang familiar to Dauray's experiences at Ajari's group home. She saw the Legion as a cult -- a term she refrained from applying to Ajari's group, instead calling it "cult-like" -- and inconsistent with her aunt's strong Catholic faith and charitable guidelines.

"I just know my aunt, and if she had known what was going on with the Legionnaires, she would not have turned over all her assets. ... She would have revoked [her support]," Dauray said.

In February 2010, she filed lawsuits against the Legion, charging that they unduly influenced her aunt by withholding information about Maciel in an effort to gain control of her estate. Dauray has stated she did not seek her aunt's money for herself, but would give it to a Catholic charity in good standing with the church.

A Rhode Island judge in the fall of 2012 dismissed her case against the Legion on the grounds Dauray lacked legal standing to bring suit.

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