

## In the beginning...Stories about Early Days of Villa

Please note that these stories/memories of the early days of Villa St. Joseph are somewhat based on reality and at the same time altered by twenty years of recall experiences. What is remembered today in 2016 may not be exact in details but the incident/experience is somehow based on some details that are true while others temper the truth by twenty years of recall.

– Sr. Michelle Prah, first Administrator of Villa St. Joseph

1. During the actual pre-construction phase of Villa St. Joseph a number of preliminary tests were done on the site which was intended to house VSJ. One of these tests was a study to determine the historical significance of the parcel of land intended for the construction of the Villa. Phase One of the Archaeology Study revealed some interesting “artifacts” that then required a Phase Two—which meant VSJ had to spend additional money which was not in the original budget. This second phase, we feel, was prompted by the local word on the street that the CSJ property was once inhabited by our Native Indian brothers and sister. Upon completion of Phase Two the Villa was presented with the actual artifacts that were discovered. These findings were in a small plastic bag – a few chips of some rocks plus a one inch bracelet of pink and white small beads. Efforts were made to contact a local gentleman whom we were told was interested in local Beaver County artifacts to see if he wanted to research the items and determine their significance. In a few words, the gentleman was not interested. Thus ended our archaeology digs!



2. When the original space of the café was in the process of being constructed, it was noticed that the floor, which was at the time tiled, seemed to slope toward the outer wall. As was our custom, many folks walked through the completed sections of the building to eye-ball what was done. True, many such “inspectors” were not actually construction people but they did have good common sense. One such “inspector” approached the crew working on the Café and shared that she felt the floor was sloping toward Route 65. Naturally the crew did not agree and said it just appeared that way. Not being deterred by this remark, the person left and returned with a bag of marbles which she spilled on the floor. Instantly the marbles all rolled toward the windows. Hmm...seems the floor did have a bit of a slope.

3. **The Villa was originally set to open in mid-January 1997. The original staff had been hired and were invited to our initial orientation which was held in the Motherhouse on January 14, 1997. There was one challenge the Villa construction was not ready for occupancy. The staff were informed that if they could return to their former jobs, they could return. However, if that was not an option, since they had terminated their former employment, the Villa would “hire” them to assist in preparing the facility for our opening. However, during this time of preparation they would be asked to work at variety of tasks—none of which had any resemblance to the positions which they were actually hired to do at VSJ...this pioneer staff washed windows, cleaned floors, hung window treatments, made beds, etc. for the next two weeks. This pioneer staff was aided by several Sisters of St. Joseph who also assisted in preparing the Villa.**

4. The Villa, after the initial visit by the surveyors of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, opened by welcoming four Sisters of St. Joseph as the first residents of the Fontbonne neighborhood. Two Sisters who were to work at the Villa “volunteered” to sleep at the Villa to provide some familiarity for these first VSJ residents. The television cable system was not operative at this time. Knowing that the Sister residents were accustomed to watching both Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune, one of the soon-to-be-employee of the Villa taped a session of each of these programs. Each evening, of the opening days of the Villa, the tape was played. On the third night, one of the sister residents said, “I think we already saw this program!”