



**Sisters of
St. Francis
of Assisi**

July 2009

3221 S. Lake Dr., St. Francis, WI 53235-3799

414-744-1160

www.lakeosfs.org/giving



Since 1849

Dear Friend,

A long life is a blessing from God, especially if our talents and skills develop and are shared through the years. I want to introduce you to Sister Virginia Weiss who is a very “young” 84 years old. She is remarkable in the ways she has taken the skills she learned early on, developed them and shared them generously in her ministry of teaching and now, as a volunteer, in her retirement.

Sister Virginia was born and grew up in northern Wisconsin, in the small town of Park Falls. The second of 11 children in her family, she has, in some sense, always been a teacher because she often helped her younger siblings with their homework. When one of her younger sisters became ill and had to miss school a whole semester, the school work was brought home and Sister Virginia was one of the family members who helped her keep up with her studies. When her sister returned to school, she was right on schedule with the rest of her classmates.

As a young girl, Sister Virginia decided to be a Sister. She loved the Sisters who were her teachers, seeing them as wonderful women and wanting to be like them. It didn't occur to her to inquire what a Sister does. That she would be a primary teacher for 50 years and, after that, engage in meaningful volunteer work in retirement never crossed her mind. Sister Virginia's sight was set on just being a Sister. So when she was told that she would be teaching, it came as a surprise to her. And at that moment she was introduced to the meaning of ministry in the life of a Sister. As it turns out, she spent 50 years ministering very effectively as a primary teacher.

Sister Virginia believed that every child could learn, regardless of ability, and she tried to help all her students to be the best that they could be. Her experience with students in her classroom was enriched by the summers that she spent with children with developmental disabilities.



Sr. Virginia Weiss

Center:
Graduation
from St. Mary's
Academy in 1942.

Bottom:
Virginia's First
Communion in
Park Falls, Wis.



At top:
Sr. Virginia enjoys
a campfire
meditation.

Center (l to r):
Sisters Marie
Celine Beierwaltes,
Virginia, Marcia
Lunz and Rita
Kosednar share a
picnic lunch.

At left:
Sr. Virginia visits
Lambeau, home
of the Green Bay
Packers.

One summer one of the boys in her care suffered from seizures, and Sister Virginia learned how to notice the onset of a seizure and what to do when a child was experiencing one. Later she had a student in her classroom who sometimes “froze” when asked to respond but eventually would answer. Sister advised the child’s mother to have a doctor check this out. It turned out that this child received an early diagnosis for seizures and, with treatment, outgrew them.

Sister Virginia acquired a love of reading and the ability to read even before she began school because her mother read to her. In her classroom, Sister Virginia read to her students in the hope that they would acquire a love of reading by acquainting them with a variety of literature. What was read was chosen for different reasons. Sometimes it was based on how a book fit in with the current studies, or a child may have requested a book, or just because it was a good book. Some of the favorites were: *Dr. Seuss*, *The Little Engine That Could*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and *Stone Soup*. The latter was always accompanied by making a pot of soup.

Songs were also an integral part of a school day. Sister Virginia remembers that “Sneaky Snake” was perhaps the most favorite song. She recalls how eighth grade students would come back to visit her and talk about, and sometimes even sing, the “Sneaky Snake.” Here is a sample of the lyrics:

*And then sneaky snake goes dancing
Wiggling and a-hissing
Sneaky snake goes dancing
A-giggling and a-kissing
I don't like old sneaky snake
He laughs too much you see
When he goes wiggling through the grass
It tickles his underneath.*

Figuring out ways to reach a student who was having difficulty was a challenge to which Sister



In 2002, Sr. Virginia (l), was featured on the cover of *Slices of Life* with Anna Diep, OP, from Vietnam (center), and Helen Wagner, SSSF, another tutor at Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services. *Slices of Life* published the writings of adult learners for 11 years.

Virginia applied her puzzle-solving skills. She recalls the child who was having so much trouble with learning until she discovered that if she sang to him, and he responded in song, the learning block was unlocked. A hallmark of her teaching was creating ways for children to pursue individualized instruction so that they could approach learning with their strengths and achieve success.



In addition to volunteering several days per week as a teacher at Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services, where adults were tutored in reading and literacy skills, she also provided secretarial services.

The meaningful moments experienced in such a long career in the classroom were many. Seeing a child's eyes light up when an idea was understood; watching students work out conflict with words, not fists; seeing the shy ones come out of their shells – these are moments that are very much alive in Sister Virginia's memory.

There were also many humorous incidents. Sister Virginia still chuckles today, remembering how excited students would call her “mom” and, later, “grandma.” In her later years in the classroom, when she needed glasses to read, one student took it upon himself to keep track of where she laid her glasses, and that cut down on the time it took to find them. Even in the solemn prayer of Thanksgiving at her retirement liturgy, one of the prayers carried some humor as it recalled Sister's gift of courage for confiscating cans of shaving cream from some mischievous students on the last day of school!

Sister's years of classroom teaching were summed up well in a song composed by one of her former first grade students, Robert Wachowiak. This was sung to Sister Virginia at her retirement party. Here is a portion of that song:

*You have taught us how to read and write.
You have taught us how to share.
You have been there when we needed you
Thank you for showing you care.*

*When we needed help to tie our shoe,
When we couldn't add up two and two.
When we needed help to read a book,
We have counted on you.*

*We were here in the rain and snow.
We were here when the sun was bright.
You were there to teach us how to read and
write...*

*After fifty years of giving
After fifty years of shining a light
You are leaving us, But you'll always be within
our hearts.*

In retirement Sister Virginia donates her time and shares her skills in a variety of ways. From tutoring English as a Second Language at Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services, to filing for Sisters in administrative ministry, to computer work at a nursing home, to helping a good friend prepare materials for presentations, she works quietly and efficiently, bringing a sense of calm to her tasks.

But Sister Virginia is not all work and no play. Her interests are many. Some began as a child; others were acquired through the years. She is a great baker and loves to try new recipes when cooking. Sewing and gardening are lifelong hobbies, though the challenge in gardening now is getting up and down to tend the plants and weed. She has always been interested in learning how to make different plants grow. Her success is very evident in the beautiful and healthy African violets she raises.

Sister Virginia works all kinds of puzzles and loves to read mystery stories, travel books or books on nature, and poetry, as well as other topics. She is a good conversationalist because she is interested in so many areas.

In looking back, Sister Virginia says that “life goes on, changes happen, you grow as things occur and grow with them.” While some people see life as a burden, Sister Virginia uses her problem-solving skills to work out solutions. She views life as a gift from God, a very precious gift, which, if appreciated, brings one closer to God.

The Persian poet, Hafiz, is a favorite of Sister Virginia. In one of his poems he has God speaking to him, and God asks: “What will you let Me do for you today?” As Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, we do a lot for God, but we also must let God do for us. One of the ways that happens is when friends like you contribute to the retirement needs of our Sisters. Your donations are tangible evidence of God’s providence in our lives.

Sister Virginia and all of our retired Sisters are very appreciative of your generosity. You are remembered daily in our prayers. Thank you for your care and concern.

In St. Francis and St. Clare,

Marcia Lunz, OSF

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF

P.S. We welcome donations of any size. In these difficult economic times, we recognize that often even small gifts are a sacrifice. We are grateful for whatever donation you are able to send for the care of our elderly sisters, and we include your needs in our petitions to God. Thank you.



As a postulant, Virginia poses with her parents, Joseph and Mary Weiss.

As Franciscan women who have a commitment to caring for all of creation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi use environmentally friendly or post-consumer paper and soy ink whenever possible.

