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

414-744-1160

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Sr. Noreen, as a postulant, with her Mother

Dear Friend,

It is always interesting to me how many different ways there are to get to meet people. I first met Sister Noreen Zehnpfennig, though indirectly, when I was 12 years old. As a 7th grader, I was part of a field trip that came to St. Mary's Academy to see an operetta which was directed by Sister Noreen. I came again as an 8th grader. Looking back, I can see that this experience had an element of recruitment in it and it worked. My heart was set on coming to St. Mary's for high school. Why? I wanted to be in an operetta!

But travel distance was an obstacle, so my heart's desire was redirected. However, my heart was still in love with the wonderful operetta productions. Sister Noreen was somebody special in my mind because I had so enjoyed myself as part of the audience, and I knew that she was responsible for that enjoyment. To this day, I remember how it felt to be watching and listening to everything on stage.

Years later, as an OSF sister and music teacher myself, I would get to know Sister Noreen personally. Let me share her life story with you.

As Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, we have some strong ties to the State of South Dakota. Between 1902 and 1981, our sisters taught school in eight different towns and cities. Currently, Sister Mariella Boehmer lives in Mitchell and does volunteer work. The impact of our ministry in this far flung state is evident in the fact that 68 women entered our community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a long way from home.

Sister Noreen Zehnpfennig comes from Parkston, South Dakota. She was born at home in 1921, the second of three children with an older brother, Louis, and later, a younger sister, Shirley. She was baptized Carol Doris, but when she became a Novice in 1941, she received the name 'Noreen.'



The family lived in town where her father, Herb, was a businessman who worked hard during the great depression. He had a great love of flowers and, in his free time, he enjoyed hunting and fishing. Sister Noreen often went fishing with him, but admits that the strong attractions were the summer sausage sandwiches they took for lunch, and listening to the wind in the cottonwood trees and the swishing waters over the Jim River Dam.



Sister Noreen describes her mother, Nettie, as a wonderful parent and homemaker. She had a lovely voice and on Sundays, after the roast was in the oven, she would gather her two daughters to sing together. Sister Noreen was able to accompany the singing, and they would work their way through a stack of music close

to a foot high. Two favorites she can remember are “Deep Purple” and “Smoke Gets in your Eyes.”



Learning has always been a joy for Sister Noreen, and as a student at Sacred Heart School in Parkston, she met our sisters and “loved them.” Each of the grades had its own classroom so she had many different sisters in her eight years there. It is easy to see how learning was nurtured from an early age for Sister Noreen because she was so attracted to her teachers.

In 1953, Sister Noreen directed this production of “Song of Norway” which featured Sister Joanne Nicgorski in the lead female role, at St. Mary’s Academy.

Music was one of her favorite subjects, along with history and English. She began piano lessons in the 2nd grade with Sister Adeline Falk and continued studying with her until she went away to college. At the public high school Sister Noreen attended, she played in the concert band, which occasionally functioned as a marching band as well as a pep band for football games. A versatile player, her instruments were clarinet, mellophone (a substitute for the French horn) and, when needed, tympani.

In addition, Sister Noreen was a member of the mixed chorus, the girl's glee club, an ensemble (a vocal sextet) and performed in the school plays in dramatic roles. She had a lead role as Grandmother Tierney in "Through the Key Hole," and her family and friends told her, "You looked just like your own grandmother." As a participant in speech contests, the sleepwalking scene from Shakespeare's "Macbeth" stands out in her memory.

After graduating from high school, Sister Noreen went to St. Teresa's College in Winona, Minnesota, and began studies in English. However, she stayed only one year because she decided to enter the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in Milwaukee. It was time to follow her call from God. As a postulant, Sister Noreen continued her studies but was able to change her major to music. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in music from Cardinal Stritch College (now University) and a master's degree from Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University.

Students were always the prime focus of Sister Noreen's teaching, whether it was at the elementary, high school or college level. She taught private lessons and classroom courses, and directed ensembles, choruses and stage productions. Three grants for summer study between 1975 and 1989 from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) expanded her learning in the music of America and North India, Afro-American music, and the Peoples and Cultures of America, 1607 – 1763.

Toward the end of her active ministry, Sister Noreen spent 10 years as the organist and choir director of the Congregation of the Great Spirit in Milwaukee, the first urban Native American parish in America. She said that, "During and after the liturgies, I got to know many friends and their deep spiritual and family values."

Part of being a music teacher has been playing organ and directing choirs for Masses and other services. Since the 4th grade, Sister Noreen has been a choir member. The Eucharistic Liturgy (Mass) has been central in her life since she was a child. Growing up, devotions on Sunday evenings were a part of life. Sister said that if she had a date on a Sunday night, there was no going out until after the evening devotions.

As a postulant and novice, singing in the convent choir and having Sister Mary Anthony Zirm as organist and choir director was so enjoyable. Sister Noreen says that Solemn Vespers on Sundays was a favorite time for her. The Gregorian Chant was so beautiful and added so much to prayer.

At the time of her Golden Jubilee in 1993, Sister Noreen wrote that, "Life has been wonderful - - spiritually, intellectually, professionally, and community-wise - - and I have always stayed close to my family. I enjoy my nieces and nephews. I take pride in the students I taught, and I find my ministry among the Native Americans in Milwaukee most gratifying."

At the present time, Sister resides at our Motherhouse, St. Francis Convent. She moves a bit slower now than when she was conducting operettas or teaching classes, but her mind still moves quickly and a good hearty conversation is always possible. She is grateful to have time to be with her good friend, Sister Marie Ritzke. Friendships grow and deepen over the years and the lasting friendship of these two sisters is very evident.

We see every day that, even though sisters may be in frail health, their faith is still strong, deep

Homing

by Sr. Noreen Zehnpfennig (5/11/1994)

If I were a bird
How off' would I fly
To mingle my song
With meadow-lark's scintillating melody,
Wafted on soft prairie breeze,
Finding counterpoint with
Mourning-dove's distant cry.

How I would wing my way
Through pillars of golden-rod
Gleaming in noon-day sun,
Or gentle corn-flowers
Reflecting arches of blue, blue sky.

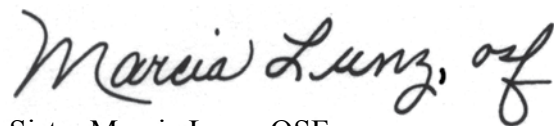
How I would rock and rock
On cotton-wood perch,
By day and by night,
To be aroused with falling stars,
Telling me dawn is nigh.

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and lasting. That faith enables them to pray each day in gratitude for our benefactors who strive to share what they can to help those who spent their lives helping others. May we count on you to help us with the retirement costs for our retired sisters? Your donation is a sign of hope to our sisters and a concrete response to their prayers for the support they need today.

Francis lived a life of generosity, giving of the little he had because he understood that "it is in giving that we receive." May God reward your generosity with abundant blessings of inner peace and joy.

With a grateful heart,



Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF

PIANO FUND

The 7-foot Steinway grand piano in St. Francis Chapel, built in 1924, is aging and, at this time, needs a new sound board and strings. The estimate for this work is \$16,000, which is far less than what it would cost to replace it, but, undeniably, still a good sum of money.

This piano is used in addition to the organ for Mass and prayer services. It is also used in special concerts given for the retired sisters at the Motherhouse.

If you would like to do something special and make a donation toward the restoration of this piano in honor of all of our present and past sister musicians, your gift would literally be music to our ears. You may indicate this on the enclosed response form. Be assured of our prayers for your goodness to us.



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