



May 2019

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Dear Friend,

I have to confess that I had never heard of Cumberland, Wisconsin, before I talked with Sister Richelle Ranallo. It is in the northwest corner of the state, and its fame once rested in being the rutabaga capital. Today Cumberland is often called the "Island City" because the main part of the city, including the original settlement, is located on land surrounded by Beaver Dam Lake.

The seventh of 10 children of Henry and Lucy Ranallo was a girl born on October 14, 1932, in Cumberland. She was baptized Phyllis Ann on November 6 at St. Anthony Church. Growing up in a close knit Italian family, she attended the Cumberland Elementary and High School. After graduation, she entered the Sisters of St Francis of Assisi in Milwaukee, Wis.

When volunteers are needed for our Pet Blessing Ceremony, I can always count on Sister Richelle Ranallo to help out. Growing up on a farm, her view of animals was very utilitarian. They fulfilled a purpose and had their place outdoors. But her 'conversion' to appreciating animals as part of God's creation and seeing their value as pets happened quite unexpectedly.

At the time, Sister Richelle was teaching at St. Aemilian Orphanage (now called St. A's) in Milwaukee. It happened that she was away visiting her sister when the question came up as to whether or not a boy could bring his cat

with him to St. A's. His parents had given up on him, and now his foster parents were giving him up, and the only family this boy felt he had was his cat. However, the cat would have to live with the sisters.



Sister Richelle's First Profession in 1953, her high school graduation in 1950, and her First Communion in 1940.



(At left) Sister Richelle with her parents on their 50th wedding anniversary.

Meanwhile, on the home visit at her sister's house, Sister Richelle found out there were two very young white furry kittens in residence who were very cuddly and took a liking to her. What really won her heart was that the cats sat quietly in her lap while she prayed. When she returned to St. A's and was asked about having the boy's cat stay with the sisters, there was no problem.

However, this experience of changing one's viewpoint had happened at a deeper level when she made her decision to be a sister. In high school, she and a best friend teased about going to the convent if they wanted to make a point to others, especially their boyfriends, that they could be independent thinkers. For Sister Richelle it was only words. She had no desire to be a sister.

One evening at a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) meeting in the parish, everyone was sitting in a circle and listening to the pastor deliver his lesson for the evening. The discussion led to the topic of mixed marriages based on a question from Phyllis. The pastor talked at length about the challenges of getting permission for these (it was before the Vatican II Council) and Phyllis blurted out to not worry about her, she was going to go to the convent!

Where this came from, Sister Richelle said she had no idea. "It must have been the Holy Spirit." And now that she had said this, she felt an obligation to follow through. But what convent?

Her pastor offered to take her to visit the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in Hurley, Wis., and she found them to be so welcoming and joy filled. Returning home, Sister Richelle said she had such a sense of peace and knew that being with these sisters was where she belonged. She was acquainted with the orphanage in Superior, Wis., and our sisters were also there. Sister Richelle loves children and could imagine herself as a group mother.

On September 8, 1950, Phyllis entered the community in Milwaukee. Knowing that a college degree was not necessary to be a group mother, she asked to work in the kitchen instead of going to Cardinal Stritch College. When her pastor found this out, he informed Sister Francis Xavier Hofschulte, who was in charge of the postulants, that Phyllis had won a scholarship to Cardinal Stritch College. Needless to say, Phyllis was enrolled in classes the second semester!

She was received as a novice August 11, 1951, and received the name Sister Richelle. On August 12, 1953, she made first profession of

College graduation, 1967





vows and final vows in 1956. Jubilee celebrations in 1978, 2003 and 2013 were joy-filled occasions. Fidelity to God's call is a gift and her commitment over the years never wavered.

Her love of children served her well in the primary classroom during a long teaching career. Seeing the growth and development of the children intellectually, spiritually and emotionally was very satisfying. Teaching was also a learning opportunity for Sister Richelle.

She remembers one boy who was a bit difficult to handle, and with so many students in the classroom, it was hard to always take the time needed to be patient. This boy's mother came to see Sister Richelle and asked that, even with so many students, could she be more patient with her son. "The boy has no father; I am a single mother and trying to do my very best." This was an eye opener for Sister Richelle. She explained to the students the next day that this boy had no father and

could we all work hard to help him feel accepted and a part of the class. She said that the students put their hearts and souls into this and the spirit in the classroom was the best ever.

Years later Sister Richelle ran into this boy at a camp program. Now a young man, he was a counselor at the camp. We don't often have the chance to see the effects of our relationships into the future.

A more immediate message of hope for a student happened the day Sister Richelle took her first graders over to church to prepare for participating in the upcoming 40 Hours Devotion. As she began to tell the class that they were in church to practice for 40 Hours, one little girl dissolved into tears. Between sobs she said, "I can't. I have to go home after school." A little explanation saved the day.

In 1979, Sister Richelle was one of the Milwaukee Archdiocesan teachers to receive a citation as an outstanding educator. Her methods of teaching were successful, but her love and care for her students were the basis which promoted a learning environment. The love she had for young children transferred easily when she transitioned into the role of coordinator for our elderly sisters at a nursing home. Later she served as a pastoral minister in a rural Wisconsin parish near her hometown.

Sister Richelle (center) with her siblings in 1996.





(Above) The Pax Christi award, a pastoral ministry honor, was given to Sister Richelle by the Superior Diocese of Wisconsin.

(Right) Snuggle time for Ava in Sister Richelle's arms

(Below) A friend's dog, Chloe, sports pretty ribbons after her first haircut.



As a community of sisters, we are striving to live out of a contemplative stance. Sister Richelle found suggestions for doing this in *Illuminated Life* by Sister Joan Chittister. "Grow a plant, love an animal, walk in the rain, and profess our consciousness of God." I didn't ask her about walking in the rain, but I know she definitely engages in the other three.

Sister Richelle's involvement in life is ongoing. She is very helpful to the sisters around her and joins me in asking you to be helpful to her and the other sisters with a gift to support their medical and physical needs. In active ministry, these sisters served in parishes and schools without adequate compensation and no retirement benefits. Catholic education flourished under their leadership and teaching. Their prayers today are as effective as their leadership and teaching were. Every day they pray for our benefactors.

Whatever gift you can give is welcome and appreciated.

God's generosity knows no end, and you will be rewarded for your generosity and kindness. In our Franciscan tradition of expressing gratitude, we say in advance, may God reward you.

In St. Francis and St. Clare,

Marcia Lunz, OSF

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



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