



Sister Profile

JULY 2023

Dear Friend,

Located 12 miles south of Boston is the second oldest town in Massachusetts. Weymouth was founded in 1622 and is the birthplace of Abigail Adams, the wife of President John Adams and mother of John Quincy Adams. It is also the birthplace of one of our Sisters, Sister Eleanor Smith.

Eleanor Ann was born on November 5, 1935. After having two sons, her parents, Charles and Adeline Smith, welcomed their first daughter.

Together with her older brothers, Charles and Richard, and her younger sisters, Frances and Barbara, the family lived in a home at the top of a large hill in Weymouth. Across the street was a spacious park that provided Eleanor and her siblings hours of fun in the sandbox and on the swings.

She attended Sacred Heart School and was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph from Boston. Since the school had 12 grades, she did not need to transition to a new school after she graduated from eighth grade.

She recalls the effect that World War II had on her family. Soldiers patrolled the park where they played. There was an ammunition depot not far from her home, as well as a naval air station. She remembers seeing the blimps heading for the coast to survey for German submarines.

The family did not own a car. They walked down the hill to town to purchase the things they needed.



(l to r) Charles, Eleanor, Richard



Eleanor and her brothers would accompany their mother to do the grocery shopping.

Because of the war, basic supplies needed to be rationed. Her mother gave each child ration stamps and assigned them to stand in line for either coffee, butter, eggs, or fish.





(l to r) Richard, Barbara, Sister Eleanor, Mother, Father, Frances, Charles



One year, her brother, Richard, decided to deliver newspapers. Unlike today, when cities are lucky to have one newspaper, people back then had access to many newspapers. Because of that, Richard's clients would often subscribe to more than one newspaper. He enlisted Eleanor's help to deliver 84 papers each day. It was quite a task, since they started to deliver at the bottom of the hill and then worked themselves up to the top. Her father held the bundles of newspapers while Richard and Eleanor went house-to-house delivering them and collecting the money.

During high school, Eleanor belonged to her parish's sodality. At one of their meetings, Sister Shawn Dunn, OSF, spoke of her ministry with developmentally disabled children at St. Coletta and Cardinal Cushing Schools in Hanover, Mass. Because of Sister Shawn's presentation, Eleanor visited St. Coletta School and was impressed by the hospitality and spirit of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi who ministered there.

After graduation from high school, the Sisters of St. Joseph were very surprised when Eleanor decided to enter the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in St. Francis, Wis. instead of joining their congregation.

Making the trip to Milwaukee with her family, Eleanor arrived at St. Francis Convent on

August 11, 1954. When she entered the novitiate, she was given the name Sister Mary Francis Bernard. She was professed on August 12, 1956.

Her first assignment was St. John the Baptist School in Jefferson, Wis. where she taught 52 second graders in a newly built school. Since Sister Eleanor had not yet received a degree in education, Sister Macrina Pietsch, OSF, who taught first grade, mentored her in the many tasks of teaching.

In those years, Sisters were sent out to teach having taken only a few college courses. So, on the weekends and during the summer months, Sister Eleanor would travel to Milwaukee to attend education classes at Cardinal Stritch College (later known as Cardinal Stritch University).

Before final vows in August 1960, Sister Eleanor decided to leave the congregation and return to Massachusetts. She applied for a job at St. Coletta and Cardinal Cushing Schools in Hanover and was immediately offered a job teaching junior high school students. It was during her years there that she finally received her bachelor's degree in education from Boston College.

After attending a conference sponsored by the Kennedy Foundation on special education recre-



Sister Eleanor mentoring a special religious education teacher at St. John the Baptist Parish in Jefferson, Wis.



Sister Eleanor's 25th Jubilee

ation programs, Sister Irene Kundinger, OSF, and she started a summer camp program for developmentally disabled children. The children attended school in the morning, and the afternoon was spent in fun recreational activities.

To supplement her salary, she worked as a waitress at Howard Johnson's restaurant. She is proud of the fact that she was employed at only the third restaurant opened by Howard Johnson.

Working with the Sisters at Hanover, Eleanor was edified by the way they lived out the Franciscan values in their daily lives. This is what drew her back to the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. She re-entered the congregation on August 4, 1970, and was professed on April 13, 1971. Sister Paulita Scally, OSF, who was the Superior at St. John the Baptist Convent in Jefferson, Wis., when Sister Eleanor taught there and had provided much support to her, welcomed her back with open arms.

Because of her love for children with special needs, she went back to Jefferson to work at St. Coletta's School for Exceptional Children. For 12 years, she taught junior high students and was in charge of the summer recreation program. It was during these years in Jefferson that she took special education classes at Cardinal Stritch College.

At that time, Sister Sheila Haskett, OSF, and Sister Coletta Dunn, OSF, developed a parish

religious education program, Journey with Jesus, to assist teachers in the religious education of adults and children with developmental disabilities. Sister Sheila invited Sister Eleanor to be one of the teachers who traveled each Saturday to parishes in Jefferson County and on Sunday to parishes in Madison, Wis. Parents appreciated so much the work of the Sisters that enabled their special needs family members to participate with them in the sacramental life of the Church.

To enhance the quality of life of the residents at St. Coletta's, Sister Eleanor assisted in transitioning them into group homes and apartments. This move from institutional living reflected the mission of St. Coletta's to recognize the human dignity and spiritual worth of all those they served.

In 1982, Sister Eleanor moved to St. Coletta's of Illinois in Palos Park, Ill. After two years teaching children with special needs and being the director of the residential program, she was asked to be the director of ministry at the Palos Park campus and later on, at St. Coletta's Tinley Workshop in Tinley Park, Ill.

For 38 years, she worked with the staff and clients to ensure that the Mission of St. Coletta's of Illinois and the Franciscan values of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi were integrated into all areas of the organization.



Sister Eleanor captures the beauty of creation in her photos.



Her care for the clients was always evident. She could be found visiting clients in their apartments and group homes. She wanted the staff and the clients to know that if there was a need, she was there for them and ensured that the rights of the clients were honored. She helped them find churches that were affiliated with their faith tradition. Her greatest joy was seeing the progress the clients made in meeting their goals.

This loving care extended to the clients' families as well. She spoke of meeting two blood sisters who came to St. Coletta's to meet their brother. The three siblings were separated as children when their mother left them. The sisters had reconnected and had been searching for their brother. Sister Eleanor had to share with them that their brother had died the month before, but Sister Eleanor was able to connect the sisters with their mother.

Her dedication to the welfare of those she served was well expressed by a letter she received from a co-worker:

“You have opened my eyes to see that years of service don't mean burn out or lack of compassion. They can actually create the pride of accomplishment, the beauty of growth and change, the feeling of joy when you see others meet goals. You have opened my eyes to see that this field

can be fulfilling if your focus is in the right place. You are a true advocate—I hope I will gain the confidence to advocate for my clients in the way you do.”

Like Sister Eleanor, our Sisters have dedicated their lives to be of service to others. They were given very little compensation for the work they did while in active ministry. Because of this, they were unable to save for their future retirement needs.

Whatever gift you can give to help us care for the medical needs of our retired Sisters that are not covered by Medicare, is welcomed and appreciated. In gratitude, our retired Sisters hold you and your intentions in their daily prayers. May God bless you abundantly.

Gratefully,

Sister Mary Kemen, OSF



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