Dear Friend,

Superior, Wisconsin, lies on the northern border of the state on the shores of Lake Superior. It’s a long trip south to Milwaukee, even today with good roads. In February 1952, when Sr. Rosalynn Dzikonski came to the community, she travelled on an overnight train accompanied by Sister Rose Oswald (†1996).

At that time, there were two times of the year in which to enter our convent, September or February. Knowing how harsh the winters can be, why would someone from northern Wisconsin choose to enter a convent in south-eastern Wisconsin in February? Sister Rosalynn has a perfectly good reason for having done so. Her goal was to be a sister and she wanted to do that as quickly as possible. However, first you had to be a postulant. Entering in February shortened her time as a postulant by six months and brought her to her goal of being a sister that much earlier!

At this point, let’s hear from Sister Rosalynn in her own words about her life before that train ride. She wrote,

“A prospective member of the Franciscan family entered this world on August 3, 1932, when I was born into the family of Pearl and Joseph Dzikonski, which then consisted of three boys and a girl. As years passed, two more girls and two boys were added. In her later years, my mother related that she thought you should pray for the child in your womb for them to become a priest or a sister. She hesitantly added, ‘I think I did that for you.’

“My life of faith began when I was baptized in our small Polish church in Superior, Wisconsin, and given the name Rose Mary. This faith was nurtured primarily through my mother – a simple, beautiful, faith-filled
woman with a Franciscan heart, who was very close to nature and whose very breath seemed to sing out a desire to do the will of God.

“After high school I was employed for a year and a half as a secretary and bookkeeper for the Catholic Welfare Agency of the Superior Diocese. The office was located at St. Joseph Orphanage, where the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi cared for the children. After months of struggle with my vocation, and, influenced by these Sisters of St. Francis, I finally said yes to what I was hearing as God’s will for me. Like my mother, I had come to believe that responding to God’s will is of utmost importance in life, and so I formally entered the Franciscan way of life in February of 1952.”

Arriving early Saturday morning at St. Francis Convent, the bell was ringing for the Angelus. She and Sr. Rose went to the chapel for Mass and Rose Mary was given a place in the front of the chapel. After Mass she ate breakfast alone in the visitors’ dining room. Mother Bartholomew Frederick stopped in the dining room and instructed her to take a shower and go to bed to get some sleep. When she awoke, clothes were laid out for her, so she dressed and joined the other postulants. Convent life had begun!

Sister Rosalynn says the funniest thing that happened to her that first week was going to confession on Friday. She told the confessor she “wasn’t sure what kind of sins sisters committed because she had just arrived.”

Rose Mary’s secretarial skills were put to good use at Cardinal Stritch University as secretary in the dean’s office. As a second year novice and after her profession of pows in 1954, she would return to Stritch and work there until 1966 when she received a new assignment to
help the administration with the secretarial work at the Motherhouse for the congregation’s renewal Chapter in 1967. She was also asked to learn how to drive and helped out with transportation needs. Following the work of the Chapter, Sister Rosalynn was appointed the congregation Secretary and held this position until 1981.

A secretary’s position doesn’t allow for much interaction with people and Sister Rosalynn wanted to be more involved with others on a personal basis. In addition to her secretarial duties, she had been actively involved with the Vocation Team and in directing retreats. “Loving, listening, believing relationships” is how Sister Rosalynn describes these two involvements. These experiences of connecting with others led her to St. Louis University in 1981 for a year of studies which culminated in being certified as a pastoral minister. Before she even left St. Louis, she was hired by St. Mary’s Hospital in Milwaukee (now Columbia St. Mary’s) and worked there until her retirement in 2010.

She was assigned to the cancer floor and, at that time, patients receiving chemo therapy had their appointments at the hospital. Regularly Sister Rosalynn would meet patients and families which gave her a chance to develop relationships. With some she could rejoice when the chemo treatment ended and the person was in remission. For others, it was a journey with the person and family as cancer took hold and ended in death.

One time, Sister Rosalynn said, there were three patients dying and she was attending to them and their families in addition to others on the floor. The sadness was too much and she had to go off to a staff room where she just cried. So much grief cannot just be bottled up and a healthy pastoral care minister knows this. Later on, chemo treatments were scheduled in facilities apart from the hospital which changed some dynamics of patient interaction, but not the whole-hearted care and concern that Sister Rosalynn brought to her ministry. Over time, she was assigned to other floors as well, which gave other patients the opportunity to benefit from her pastoral skills. There came the time when Sister Rosalynn herself became a cancer patient. She said her experience on the cancer floor with the patients gave her knowledge and a perspective she could use in asking questions and choosing what course she would take in dealing with her diagnosis.
Looking back at some surprising times in her life, there was one very extraordinary event. Sister Rosalynn won a grocery store shopping spree in 1994. On October 29, she appeared at noon at Cub Foods on Milwaukee’s south side, received instructions, and began her three minute shopping spree.

Two sisters had come with her, but they were not able to push the cart or help out. What they did do was cheer her on and help clear the aisles of customers to make it easier for Sister Rosalynn to get to her product destinations. She had planned ahead and knew what she wanted and where it was in the store.

Arriving back at the checkout counter with a few seconds to spare, the grand total in the cart came to $250.14. What was in the cart? A 21-pound turkey, a large ham, choice meats, chicken, fish, coffee and a few other special items. These three minutes of shopping sparked a lot of laughter among all the customers and added to the excitement.

Now in retirement, Sister Rosalynn continues to engage with others through a variety of volunteer activities. When you are in her presence, there is a sense of connection because of her undivided attention. She lives her life from deep in her heart.

Sister Rosalynn is one of the many sisters at St. Francis Convent who prays daily for you, our benefactors. Those prayers all come from the heart because the sisters know that their life in retirement is blessed with financial help from persons like you.

No one likes to feel that they are a burden because they can no longer do what they used to do. We count on our sisters to BE all they can be at this time of their life. That being includes praying as they can best pray. May you know that whatever you can give to help continue supporting our retired sisters is acknowledged before God in prayers of gratitude.

May you be blessed generously by our God because of your generosity to us.

Gratefully in the name of all of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi,

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF

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