

Dear Sisters and Associates,

It seems like just yesterday that S. Carolyn Bissmeyer called, asking me to come help her wash windows at our House of Prayer in Cincinnati. I had just arrived home for my first leave from PNG in '92. Little did I know that it was her ploy to get me there for a surprise: celebrating Mom's commitment as an Associate! Mom had actually been living our Franciscan charism long before I had! She once told me that if she had gone to Holy Cross School in Baden she probably would have joined our community earlier, always feeling welcomed by our Sisters.



The daughter of immigrants from Croatia, Mom told of spending many days as a child, pulling her red wagon and selling the vegetables her Dad grew on a plot of land next to the Mississippi. They raised goats, chickens, and rabbits in their small backyard. Perhaps this accounts for her affinity with the Central American immigrants who joined us for meals when we lived together. She delighted them with her ability to speak Spanish and sing "Feliz Navidad".

Mom was always a singer, harmonizing with the radio as we did dishes, and creating more peaceful rides in our crowded car by directing the back seat choir. Mother of nine, she and Dad had their hands full! As a resident at Little Sisters of the Poor she continued to provide song in the dining room after meals, singing duets with Fr. Valens Waldschmidt, OFM. Even when Alzheimer's robbed her of the ability to put words together intelligibly, she could still belt out the songs. Until recently we sang almost everyday, and when her voice failed she still mouthed the words as I sang from her favorite musicals.

Mom and Dad were both lovers of the outdoors and gardening. Our vacations were always camping trips to area parks, where we also spent many Sundays fishing and hiking. Fortunate to live on a large plot of land, we had big vegetable gardens and numerous fruit trees - all of which made for lots of canning at harvest time! - not always our favorite activity. She knew how to keep her roses in constant bloom with her expert pruning. We planted trees at the back of our yard to prevent erosion of land on the steep slope. And yes, we teased them about being the "original greenies", into composting and recycling long before it became fashionable! Love of our Earth and environmental advocacy were imbedded in us all, and have now passed to the next generation.

Mom always had a heart for those who experienced hunger, often providing a plate of food for the people who rode the rails at the end of our street, working in soup kitchens, and providing mounds of cookies and brownies for the many young people who volunteered in the inner city and lived at the Tau House (our former convent) at St. Clement. Earlier, she also enjoyed the company of Sr. Ramona as they did the spring cleaning of the convent each year.

Creativity was always encouraged in us by Mom. Hers found an outlet in sewing, making all of our clothing, including coats! But she will be remembered mostly for the many quilts she made for our family, homeless people, and to raise money for the parish and school at St. Clement and Michaela Farm. And who could forget her creative Scrabble words, most often coming out as champion!

Mom often spoke of the renewed energy and hope she experienced in her visits to Oldenburg. No doubt, she will continue to offer those same gifts to us, now embraced by our God of peace in fullness of life.

With gratitude and love,
Ann Vonder Meulen, OSF

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