

Kathryn L. Sawicki – Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart Sawicki, O.P.

After graduating from Cathedral in June, I entered the Dominican Nuns in West Springfield on September 12, 1964. Sr. Richard Francis, S.S.J., and Sr. Martin Patrick, S.S.J., were there. I received the habit on July 4, 1965, made first profession of vows on January 8, 1967 and final vows on May 24, 1970.



I was assigned to work in the art department, and struggled to learn the calligraphy (penmanship was not a favorite of mine), but succeeded sufficiently to carry out the task. I think God has a sense of humor and can do the impossible. My art talents prior to entering were pretty nil; my trees were slightly above the lollipop type. However, in the monastery my talent blossomed to the point that I was able to design some of our prayer cards, and even to paint them. In the art department I coordinated ordering supplies and assisting in the general operation. I was involved in computerizing the card department, developing our own LAN (local area network), and upgrading our programs for better data processing.

In the late 1980s, I was made monastery bursar. That department was not yet computerized. I developed a spreadsheet type format for recordkeeping, and eventually adopted the Quicken program.

I served one term as treasurer of the Conference of U.S. Dominican Nuns and was involved in grant writing and fund raising while continuing my regular duties in our West Springfield Monastery.

I was involved with our Monastery mailings. (In the early days, the sisters all addressed envelopes either by hand or with the use of non-electric typewriters. They then sorted the mail pieces by hand in zip code order for bulk mailing.) After some research, and trial and error, I found that the Envelope Manager software served us well for years. We were able to maintain our database mailing, as well as print the labels in zip code order for automated bulk mail discounts. With new mailing regulations and software company merges, I researched other possibilities for mailing. So now I oversee maintenance of our database, and have the address printing and mail preparation done by an outside company.

While I was bursar, I began to be involved in learning about our heating system, as well as other maintenance issues, because the previous sister was unable to continue. Maintenance coordinator was added to my duties. With employees in maintenance, kitchen, office and infirmary, I developed an employee handbook and program, with help from a very qualified gentleman.

For many years I designed our 12 page calendar. This included taking most of the photos, selecting a theme, and coordinating the printing. I also was directly involved in preparing them for bulk mailing. The final calendar was produced in 2006, when I was asked by the U.S. Nuns to do a calendar for our 800th anniversary of the Nuns founding by St. Dominic. It involved a lot of research and communication with other monasteries, and in the end each US monastery had its own unique page. In addition, the calendar included the history and photos of monasteries throughout the world: Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, Canada. It is a real collector's item.

Fascinated by the incredible stories I discovered in my research, I wrote my first book: Celebration With Surprises. It includes recent history, things that you are familiar with, like the destruction of the Space Shuttle on reentry. (We have a monastery in Texas.) Also 911 and our monastery in the Bronx. This is all tied in to our life of prayer. We nuns are cloistered, but our prayers have no limits, and even though you may not have known me personally as a student (our class was so big that I never got to know many of you), nevertheless, I often pray for my fellow alumni.

In 1982, nuns from all over the country came to our monastery for a General Assembly as did the Master of the Order. It was a great experience, and I made some new friends. As a matter of fact, Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart Decuir, op, who came from the Texas monastery, used some free moments to give me some guitar lessons. Afterwards, she continued giving me lessons via cassette tape; and thus began my guitar playing. I learned to play the soprano recorder, the flute, the alto recorder, and tone chimes. Those of you who recall my attempts to sing will be surprised to know that I am one of the chantresses in choir!

Our life is pretty full. The rising bell rings at 4:40 a.m. (but I am up earlier). Morning prayer is at 5:15 a.m., midmorning prayer at 7:30 a.m., midday prayer at 11:00 a.m., midafternoon prayer at 3:00 p.m., rosary and evening prayer at 4:45 p.m. and night prayer at 7:45 p.m. Throughout the day, we also take turns relieving one another at various hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

We also have study time programmed into our schedule. Over the years, I have taken some correspondence courses, including Biblical Hebrew I, Biblical Greek I and II, and Biblical Greek Exegesis. For three years, I participated in the Theological Formation Program held at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. (which included two weeks of classes with assignments to be completed back at the monastery.) One year, Bill Danoff chauffeured us Sister Students from the airport, and drove us to the House of Studies!

So what do I do in my free time? Years ago, I put together some slide shows on Dominican saints, and eventually did some Power Point presentations on St. Dominic and the history of the Order.



As for crafts, I learned how to crochet. I began by making blessed rose badges, and got creative in making hats for youngsters -- dozens in some years -- which were donated to the Hospitality Program at the prison in Elmira, NY. In other years, crocheted items were given to the poor locally.



I've made hand tooled leather crafted lectionary covers, and a few breviary covers for sister jubilarians. I've also made liturgical banners large and small for feasts and celebrations at the monastery. I enjoy quilt making, and have made over 20 "turn me over" quilts.



My mother was a great gardener and I enjoy working in the garden too. It's great to learn new things, and I've learned how to prune grapevines and fruit trees.

I've also taken cuttings from rose bushes to propagate a whole new plant. I was given a gift bouquet of flowers by Sr. Eleanor Dooley, S.S.J., on the publication of one of my books. It had a lovely bicolor rose in it. It was so beautiful that I decided that I would try to use it to make a bush of my own. I had never done that before, but I had the joy of succeeding in my endeavor, and then I named the new plant: "The Sister Eleanor Rose Bush".



Our life is very much down to earth, and I've had to combat all kinds of garden varmints: mice, moles and voles to name a few. On the positive side, we were given a humming bird feeder, and tips to attract them to the garden. What a joy to see one up close for the first time! That first year caused me to reflect on the hummingbird and I compared it to our relationship with God. The fruit of those reflections materialized in a full color book: The Hummer and the Hummed. It was translated into Spanish (El Susurrador Y El Susurrado) by one of our Dominican Fraternity members and is now available at the monastery and in bookstores.

This publication ties in with our Dominican Spirituality, i.e., "to give to others the fruits of our contemplation." Another item that has been published is a "Litany of God the Father". I made slight revisions to the original work, and it was approved by Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell. I hope that someday an indulgence will be attached to it. There are probably things I've forgotten to mention but it seems that this is more than sufficient.

Let me conclude by mentioning that on September 13, 2014, I will celebrate my golden jubilee as a cloistered Dominican Nun. Fifty years ago there were some who said, "You'll never make it". Actually, I wondered how I would live that kind of life, when the Lord first called me. I wondered how I could ever keep my mouth shut. It is all God's doing. His grace is there for us, otherwise I would never have made it. But I am grateful for the call, and for his grace. I was just a teenager, who was good in math and who loved sports. But just think of all you've read, and realize what God did with someone who wasn't a good singer, and who was just average in English, languages and history! She thought she wouldn't have to study any more after graduation, only to find herself in an Order where study is important! My vocation story is in the collection of essays in the book, Vocation in Black and White, published by the nuns for the jubilee year. There are a lot more stories in the book, much more interesting than mine.

I'm very grateful for the quality education I received at Cathedral, and for all the dedicated teachers I had. It is all a part of who I am today. Pro Deo et Pro Patria. Do you remember that our class motto was Veritas et Caritas? God bless you all. You are in my prayers and will remain so.