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October 12th, 2015 – Sister Mary Stella Gampher speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.

Abbreviations

SMSG: Sister Mary Stella Gampher

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana on October 12, 2015. I have the pleasure of being with Sister Mary Stella Gampher. Thank you for being here Sister. Would you like to introduce yourself?

SMSG: Yes, I'm now called Sister Stella most often. I'm a Sister of Saint Francis of Oldenburg, Indiana and my discovery of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg happened when I was quite young. I hadn't started kindergarten yet, but that was that was coming up. Our family had just moved and so it would be new schools and new parish and so on, but we happen to be in the parish of where the Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters taught and this encounter had actually nothing to do directly with me, but it introduced me to the very first Sister of Saint Francis of Oldenburg. My brother was to be repeating first grade and so this this was an interview about making arrangements for that. Before the move my mother had spent eighteen minutes, pardon me eighteen months in a TB hospital and this the move came after her release from the hospital so we were just getting our mother back. My brother during the last year of that period had been in first grade and had all of his - all of his childish your childhood illnesses so to speak and had had them in that year, so we miss lots of school. He brought them home to me by the way, I was the younger sister. But at any rate, so this was this was my mother now helping us in a sense heal our family from the brokenness that illness had caused and here were the Sisters of Saint Francis in the middle of this. Sister Mary Amul was the Sister who talked with my mother and my brother and me and she was young she was beautiful and she paid attention to the little sister and I that impressed me among other things she helped my family and my brother getting acclimated to a new school a new parish and at the end of that particular interview I think I had one wonderful lasting impression of Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg simply from meeting that sister.

She gave me a holy card probably the first of my collection and my dad had written her name on the back and the date, so I, that holy card preserves several beautiful reminders for me of that particular beginning. When I started school at Saint Bernard I got to meet other Sisters of Saint Francis in Oldenburg. I have to admit it was the younger ones who made the most the biggest impression on me because I happen to have them for two classes so the next big, big impression came from my second and third grade teachers. Sister Mary, she became Sister Cecilia Houlihan when she went back to her baptismal name, but she was Sister Mary Padua when I knew her. We didn't use last names in those days, we sisters, because each name was unique anyway and she was quite young. I dearly loved her. She made just a great impression and I was able to visit with her many, many times, after I returned to, when I became a Sister of Oldenburg I could reconnect with any of the Sister friends that I, that were still living at the time.

At any rate, my connection to the Sisters of Saint Francis continued even after we moved from that parish, so I, I was able to spend all eight years of my elementary education with

the Sisters of Saint Francis and I had Sisters of Saint Francis in every class. And the move at that particular time took me into a different district, so I would not have gone to the high school that the Sisters of Saint Francis had as all of my classmates would have, my girl classmates, at least, however, I still kept up to the contact. I went to Regina High School in Norwood, Ohio, Precious Blood Sisters, and actually my mother had had first cousins who were in that that particular community and one of them actually was at the convent of those sisters, but I didn't get to, I didn't see her as much as I actually continued to see the Sisters of Oldenburg. I will also say that the Sister, the Precious Blood Sister I was closest to had a sister in our community and she was from this area, so there are links all over the place. You may hear me repeating one of my favorite sayings and that is "God writes straight with crooked lines." I didn't meet that until I was teaching at Marian a number of years later, but I certainly can see that it's been all part of my life.

MEL: Would you explain the quote how, what it means to you?

SMSG: Okay, the quote means to me is that no matter what happens to us, God is, God is still part of that, I see it as an expression of the provident God, that, that God looks out for us. God loves us, he cares for us and so even through the sort of the trauma of being apart from my mother, we were able to visit her but not be in the same room with her, just on one day in a weekend and it was usually as Sunday and that was, that was hard, I'm sure it was harder for my mother, but she was a strong Catholic woman who I think made the best of, of all of these, whatever, things that make the path not so straight and I think she, this probably was the first time she was meeting the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg too, when, when she came to get something set up for my brother to start to repeat first grade and I will repeat, "God writes straight with crooked lines" there too.

He was able not only to repeat first grade, but to be taking a half day of first grade and second grade and he passed with flying colors both classes. Again thanks to the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg. I know from having been a Sister of Saint Francis almost sixty years now that we had, we were very well trained as teachers and now on a lot of other fields as well and I think that's where I think the whole notion of my making a choice after you know of what would happen to me of where I would go after I graduated from high school and I had three options. Our dear friend the doctor who had employed my mother all that well probably she knew, he knew my mother long before I was born, long before my brother was born, but my, my mother's doctor had made plans if I would want to do that, to give me, to get me a scholarship in the field of nursing. So that was one option. I could have had a teaching scholarship to what was then Villa Madonna College in Kentucky and it would have been a teaching, a preparation for teaching and then there were my beloved Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg and over all of that it was Oldenburg and what they held out to me that that covered all of the things that I felt most call to be part of. To devote my life to trying to make things better for people in some cases poor people probably in many cases poor people and people who needed help with learning help how to read, how to write, how to study, how to be good citizens and so I met all of that through the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg.

I feel very, very fortunate that that was that was part of my, my journey a very important part. I had continued to keep in touch with the sisters who were still at Saint Bernard's. I would go back for visits and the last sister I had who taught me there was Sister Rose Hellen and I get her for seventh and eighth grade. And so she was still there and I would

visit with her and it was through her that I paid my first visit to Oldenburg and where I met a number of really wonderful including the sister who would be sort of a second mother to me, Sister Estelle. Who was the novice director and I didn't know until much later that my parents bonded so much with her because they were from the same generation to begin with, that would help, and she had she had recently lost her mother and I didn't I didn't know that, but I think one of the things it was part of my pathway my mother was diagnosed with cancer just before I was to enter the community here and what I remember is that what my, my dad called our pastor I had said that I think I needed to, to wait, I needed to make sure my mother was—as the only girl with two brothers at that time, an older brother and younger brother and, and I had done lots of helping in that home in the house when my mother was ill prior to the, to that diagnosis, but at any rate when my dad called, probably Sister Rose Helen first and Sister Rose Helen suggested calling Sister Estelle at Oldenburg and and dad called the the pastor and he broke into tears when he and when he told them that I had decided, I, I needed to delay my, my entry into the Sisters of Saint Francis and what I discovered is that my parents found a real a solid rock of support in Sister Estelle, you know, it's through those years of healing and she was right there and I think they were very happy to put me in the hands of a woman like this who would continue the values they had taught me as I was growing up.

So that was that was the beginning. I entered on November 21, so I still had a Mary Feast Day and I'd like to tease now since November 21 is the Presentation of Mary at age three into the temple that I was three when I entered. So as soon as I, I mentioned that the feast day of my entrance, if that comes up in a conversation I, I add the obviously not true statement that I was three.

However I my, my pathway in this the Sisters of Saint Francis also took me to higher education with the Sisters of Saint Francis of Oldenburg when all of our classes were Marian University, Marian College at that time, classes and our teachers were qualified to teach and all of the teachers whether the ones that I had here in Oldenburg in my first several years or the teachers that I met in my senior year when I actually was on campus at Marian College all of those sisters just, just you know totally supported this, the notion that divine providence, God had led me in a direction that would that would help me realize how important making those choices and having the right guides in making those choices so I've never, I've never, it hasn't always been the easiest trick in the world if you would well if you would call it that.

Because when I was it when I was going to Marian that was the first time that I knew I had two pathways open to me for a choice of what I would teach so I could have finished my, my degree in math I had some gifts in math I wasn't always aware of those but they were observed and my mother had been a bit of a math genius I believe and I think she is a carpenter's daughter, probably was responsible for the genes that I inherited in terms of being able to see spatial relationships and in design and in mathematical skills and my dad was a little bit more gifted in the arts, but they balanced each other perfectly with that and so I made the choice of English at that particular time and only when I've had two feet tall stacks of papers have I ever thought that maybe math would have been an easier path, but we weren't going for easy. I felt comfortable and challenged in many cases, but really enjoyed it all of my preparation to be an English teacher and—

MEL: Sister do you remember any of the books that you read in college?

SMSG: Okay books that I read in college. Actually other than you know the great books that were part of my, part of my class and part of my preparation for my major and the achievement of my bachelor's degree, I, I remember Sister Rosemary Schroeder, her name was Sister Margaret Ann at the time. She was, she was chair of the English Department that senior year and it was through her that I think I, I developed a love for Shakespeare and so on. She taught the Shakespeare course until my senior year and then at that particular time there was a new teacher, a man who was from Lebanon in the Middle East, Dr. Gilbert Tutungi who had a lot to do with the establishing of Marian's Honor's Program, by the way, along with our Sister Adele, but it that senior year I got to meet so many other Sisters of Saint Francis and we would all eat at the same table together in the same cafeteria because we were all sisters I wasn't, there wasn't a separation between the two of us sisters who were in classes at that time the other sister my classmate was in math, chose the math and she probably had the same choices that I had. We both had our plates full by the way. We had really heavy schedules to finish all of the major courses that we needed to do but to answer your question about reading, certainly any of the classics I would have, that I hadn't already met in my other classes I learned to appreciate just because the sisters I was living with, you know, could answer any question I might have and could encourage me and this kind of thing and I and I was still supported in my appreciation of Shakespeare by Sister Rosemary because Sister Margaret Ann at the time, and I remember at some point she even typed one of my papers for me. I had it handwritten, but it would have been one of the Shakespeare papers and I happen to be one that had very great comments by Dr. Tutungi on it. I still have it (laughs). I actually could tell you all about that paper because I've used it and when I taught the Shakespeare class at Marian eventually, when I came back to Marian as a teacher.

I'm trying to think her name Mary Stewart was at that time when I was a senior in college Mary Stewart was just new and she had a she had a novel called *Nine Coaches Waiting* and Sister Rosemary had read that book, recommended it to me. It was being passed around to many, many people, but I followed that author to even the present day. I don't know if she's still alive, but I know through Amazon I reordered some books that I once learned from, read by her. They were all about the Arthurian Legend, a series of three books that began with Merlin telling the story, telling the beginning story and so on and so I think every time I see that name Mary Stewart and she wrote many wonderful novels, one called by the way, now I just lost it, it's built, it's all built on *The Tempest*, *The Tempest* play and what she did was to give a modern-day reading of that. She began every chapter with a passage from *The Tempest*, *This Rough Magic* is the name of the book and one of the, I guess Shakespeare's farewell to the to the stage came in that play and it was made in a, it was verbalized, his farewell with the words "this rough magic" to talk about everything that has happened in his writing of work that come to life on the stage. It's it just—they were, those were just early memories for me that came to me directly through Sisters of Saint Francis at Oldenburg.

I may have discovered them in another way, but at any rate, my, all of my years of teaching have been enriched by those beginnings, even when I went to, I had a newspaper fund fellowship to Marquette University because I had, through the sisters, had an excellent journalism class at Marian. One of my first classes. I have something rather humorous about that. Sister Gertrude Marie who was kind of our little Mother Teresa of Calcutta Sister. She was one of the early founders of Marian College and she was still teaching when I was

there. I had her for more than that class, but the journalism class I walked in and this would have been probably a freshman class even though I was a senior and I had the full long habit on and the class stood up thinking I was the teacher (laughs) and then when dear Sister Gertrude Marie walked in and she was, she was a little bent and quite small and obviously quite a bit older, but just absolutely, just absolutely wonderful and that was the beginning of something that built on my journalism class and the (unintelligible) that I did in high school at Regina and eventually it was through my work with the high school when I was teaching high school, the journalism class in high school that I was able to apply and it was through, probably Sister Laverne who was in in charge of kind of continuing education for us that I had all of the qualifications to apply for that and I had it, it was wonderful. I earned some very beautiful one graduate degrees, my first graduate degrees there.

I was I was able to see Julius Caesar performed in an inn-yard in much the way it would have been performed when Shakespeare was putting on his plays and began in an inn-yard with his and then his stage being you know continuing to be developed out with that what the people knew and how they could be reached by just the design of this stage and so on and that was that was pretty much all, that, those roots went straight into the way that I would teach any of the drama connected courses that I taught and in addition to the Shakespeare, I was doing 20th century poetry and drama and so I had I had just a great opportunity. Some additional input into what I would teach at Marian came with the opportunities that I had to see live Shakespearean drama when I was teaching at Rex Mundi High School, another Sisters of Saint Francis High School.

That was my first assignment after I graduated from Marian and again I'm surrounded by wonderful Sisters of Saint Francis. We lived in the school (laughs). It was it was a fairly new school, this was maybe the fourth year. I think that year we were having the first graduation class and it was just it was an amazing experience. But in those years, I was there six years, Evansville College at the time, now Evansville University, was Sam Smiley still connected to theater, now at Indiana University, brought a Shakespeare play to each of the high schools in the city, I think that was six or seven, brought the preparation, had, had handouts and whatever and we saw the live plays in our own building, so and then we also were near enough to Saint Meinrad and Saint Meinrad's did plays and we actually got to see King Lear with an all-male cast as it would have been and not all male characters but all male cast at Saint Meinrad's and it was it was just a wonderful experience that that as I said as I taught at Marian and then I continued, one of the last classes that I taught would have been "Written Analysis of Literature," which took all of the genres of literature into consideration and and one of my favorites would have been drama and that I still could do that.

I think part of that that calling then expressed itself in the ability to then even move into other experiences of Shakespeare that we could provide for our students and faculty and alums and so on and that was, um, in building on something that had very small beginnings, but taking a fall break trip to Stratford, Ontario Canada so that the students could have an international experience and then in first class actors and stages and costumes and props and whatever all made on-site at Stratford for I, I went each year for 26 years. This would have been the 27th year. This particular year, but just the connections that I made not only to the field, but to the people that we traveled with, to the students in the van or in the cars, or the alums, or the teachers, the other teachers who could get in and because we had such a history with that program we were given very good rates, not only student rates, but

group rates. So another part of just, you know, wonderful notion of how again "God writes straight with crooked lines" because those experiences and those relationships that I made just in conversation with people before, during, after an experience like those plays and that place, simply were, were wonderful beginnings of relationships that have continued to the present and prayer was always part of that. Before Father Leopold went along I, it was usually I who was asked to have a prayer and I would use our traditional journey prayer.

MEL: Would you say the prayer, Sister?

SMSG: Yes. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph be with us on our way. Angels of God, guide and protect us that we may reach our destination in peace and safety." So we would usually follow with a Hail Mary here but since we have more and more people who were not necessarily Catholic who were travelling we, we followed with the Lord's Prayer. But it, it's just that I just have been so fortunate in that I had a very holy mother who has now been dead for a long time she died when I was a first-year novice, but I had the support of Sister Estelle who had lost her mother just previous to that, I didn't know that I had learned that later and all of my classmates and my teachers here at Oldenburg and then gradually my teachers in other places, at schools I taught at and then all Oldenburg Franciscan Schools to some degree and, um—

MEL: I'm interested, Sister, your mother was very happy that you became a nun.

SMSG: She was. She was. I didn't, my parents did not put any pressure on me to be a sister, but I had had such a good upbringing you know with our prayer within the household. My mother when she was at her sickest still prayed the mass prayers every day from her daily missal. I mean that was the image that I saw growing up of my mother and so and my dad, my dad as well. A very strong you know. It wasn't, there was no pressure put on us. There are much was handled with kindness. My mother was a disciplinarian, but dad would not have laid a hand on us, ever. I can tell you a funny story with that. I don't know what it was that I had done that made my mother say something like the equivalent, "Wait till your dad gets home." But at any rate, when my dad came in, he must have been told that you know I needed disciplining and he took me into a room and closed the door and he went (Sister makes noise) with his hands, an interesting kind of spanking and said, "now cry." My dad a bit of a thespian it sounds like, huh? Anyway, I think I, I cried and cheered, maybe joy, relief. I would not ever have wanted to disappoint my dad and, and that he handled it that way, was wonderful. I learned all the lessons I needed to know about discipline in that experience by the way.

My parents also chose, especially in, the lady I think who was who took care of us and the last part of that that 18 months absence, we called her grandma, we didn't, we didn't know any of our grandparents. Only one grandpa and who died when I was in the second grade, my mother's father, Joseph, the carpenter of Maria Stein, Ohio. But grandma Staley had as her mission to place the little prayer cards and pamphlets in the back of churches all over Cincinnati and she would, well, Charlie would have been in, in school, so I was usually her partner and she taught me little prayers that my mother continued to teach us after we got mom back, but we, all, kind of all of our individual, personal prayer, relationship with God, how important the church was and reverence in the church and so on I learned that firsthand from this dear lady who by the way I learned, I learned it from passing when the chaplain here and I was probably a young sister at the time of her death and I was here at

Oldenburg and our provincial, the man who would become a provincial of the Oldenburg, not the Oldenburg although they, their beginnings were also in Oldenburg, but the Cincinnati province of Friars Minor so Father Vincent Kroger was our chaplain at that time and I'm guessing that he had her funeral and when he came back, in a homily he, he mentioned to us that he had just had the funeral of a lady he considered a saint he said her name and that was, that was my beloved grandma Staley that he talked about.

So I had, he also brought me a prayer card from her funeral and so all, the connections just and just marvelous ways have been there. My, my parents as I said were, were good, they were solid Catholics, but they did not, they were active in the church to the degree that they could be with their, my dad with probably more than one job most of the time just because early hospitalizations had been probably very expensive, but, all, you know everything that has led me here to this point has, I can see the tracks of, from very early, years, and I think they helped developed me as a potential teacher and certainly as a potential Franciscan and even at the—when I decided to go to Oldenburg, my best friend was going to the Sisters of Charity at the same time those were the sisters in the parish that we moved into after, in the middle of the 8th grade and just a little interesting thing about that I don't know if Esther made it to have numbers sewn in her clothes that she was bringing to Mount Saint Joseph, but I needed to have numbers sewn in, in my clothes and it was the Sisters of Charity in our parish who's sewed the numbers, my number 187 in my clothes and I still some things that I have still have those little numbers on them, but I remember the number and again that was just that whole image of all things working together for good and the whole notion, all the different parts coming together and even when they were unhappy pieces at a time could grow into a lesson that you know helped, help support me all along my pathways so God has written straight with crooked lines and it probably continues, no probably, no probably, I know continues to do.

MEL: Sister, thank you so much. Um, would you would you like to talk about your friendship with Sister Joel and you, you created a life together here in the community of women and if you want to.

SMSG: I, I would because that's something that has called, colored my recent move to Oldenburg. Very, very strongly. I had, I had lived at Marian College then University. By the time I had moved to Oldenburg, I had lived there more than 40 years and so a good part of my life and 32 of those years Sister Joel have been part of the family, a large family of sisters to begin with and in the last year before I came back to Oldenburg the, the sisters had moved into housing in the neighborhood in the near neighborhood in a way again in a big way God writing straight with crooked lines because it was a neighborhood that was going down and by Marian buying houses and giving fair market price to the people who were selling those houses had houses nearby to campus that could be used for senior students and then for some of the faculty and staff and Sister Joel and I and Abby, our dog, moved just a block away from the school and then that, the whole neighborhood then had the benefit of the of observation and security of our, our police officers who were part of, were our security on campus.

MEL: When did you meet Sister Joel?

SMSG: I met Sister Joel first when I was a young sister. She was two classes ahead of me and we would have made vows together, when I was when I became a novice. So my first

temporary vow would have been made, pardon me. My temporary, excuse me. My first my, my promises that led to the vows the same year. Pardon me. The same year that I was making those promises and it was like a wedding ceremony. We had, we had wedding dresses that one of the sisters here at Marian, at Oldenburg had made for all of the sisters and they'd adjust them to fit the class and then they were, we were into recycling for a long time. It's a Franciscan quality. I think it's part of what Francis valued. And the values that we learned from him.

And Sister Joel would have made first vows at the, in the same ceremony that I made first promises as a sister. So I got to know her then because we had classes together and recreations together and so on and then eventually we had gatherings at Oldenburg quite frequently so, but eventually by the time I was at Marian about nine years, Sister Joel came to be to work in the business office to work as a treasurer and, pardon me, and to live in the house with us and one of the interesting things there is that she went back to earn a degree in accounting to support the work that she was doing in the business office. She had been, she had been a principal before that and taught, she didn't teach high school, but she she taught upper grades of elementary school and one of the classes that that she taught in getting the second degree, one of the classes that she took in order to get the second degree at that time, the, the Humanities Program that hadn't been in process when both of us got our first Marian degree. It was, but not as a course in itself, but Joel took my Shakespeare class, so I was able to teach her. It was wonderful. It was, I loved having her in, in, in class and I think she rather enjoyed the experience too because that was a different kind of course from the courses that she was taking to, you know, to support the accounting class or the accounting degree that she was building.

So she was already in the house part of the, would have been among the younger sisters within the house. So obviously I got to, knew her a little better than some of the other sisters and what was then a very large house, but at any rate it was through Sister Joel that we first had a dog in the house. She had had dogs when she lived on other missions, but it was, there was a little, a stray that was found on the campus and somebody picked it up and cleaned it up and took it to the business office, asking, you know, what, what can we do? It seems to me that it was maybe that the we had a Quaker group that we're using one of our buildings for a program that was probably in the summer and, and they were the ones that found the little dog and then brought it to, brought it to the business office and Sister Joel said, "We can, we can take, we can take her." And we did. So she was the first of, from that time on we were not without a dog for very long and that was, that was a very nice part of the Franciscan Charism that I was able to, I'd always liked animals, but we had always lived in apartments before I entered the convent, so we, we could have box turtles or fish, but you know, not, I liked animals and our cousins had, had pets and I was around those, but my brothers once they grew up had, had dogs in their family and in my, my dad's second family after my mother died, and eventually my, my dad married again.

And he married a lady who was a graduate of Our Lady of Angels of Cincinnati and I was subbing at Our Lady of Angels when my dad, I'll show you a little bit of this gospel life here, my dad called me on the Feast of the Annunciation to tell me that he had had a date on the Feast of Saint Joseph and he, he married a lady who was twenty years his junior who had never been married and they eventually had two, two boys and my dad was six feet six and my older brother was six feet five, but since my mother was more my size, now I was taller than she was, when she was living. However, like my stepmother Henrietta was six feet one

and she and my dad had two boys who are now seven feet tall so, I always I called them my baby brothers so both my baby brother's by the extension plan are six feet or seven feet tall so more fun I suspect some of the connection with them also made a connection with Sister Joel who love sports and so on and through my brothers all of them there were sporting interest.

My mother, one of the Reds on a quite famous Red's team at the time that that before I went to the convent, one of them was a man by the name of Wally Post who was from Saint Henry, Ohio, which was a Precious Blood parish, town but he was a distant cousin of my mother's and so we were, we were big Reds fans at home and that would have been our, to begin with, our big connection to sports. Well Sister Joel who grew up in Ohio at least and Cincinnati toward the end, big big Reds fan and I would know if she were watching a Reds game or listening to a Reds game and I would be working somewhere else if I would hear some of the same claps such as my dad gave me when he was giving me the pretended spanking. I would know something good had happened to the team and I'd look in and she'd hold up fingers to show me the score. Something else that we enjoyed together and that continued to be part of our, of what we had going for the last year.

A little more than the last year of her life Sister Joel and I were the only ones in the house with our dog Abby. We were close enough to the football field that we could hear cheers even if we weren't at the game if it was a home game we were usually there, but where Abby lives now, she can hear announcements and cheers from the from the football field. So my Dear Sister Joel was diagnosed with cancer just a short time ago toward the end of our year stay and that the house with the big fenced-in backyard, so that Abby could live with us and we could enjoy her presence but and Sister Joel got to Oldenburg before I did because the chemotherapy could be administered from a facility nearby and through our, our infirmary and I called her every day, it to give her whatever news I had and see how she was and whatever else so that we had you know we, it was while she was in the hospital in Indianapolis she and sister Jean Marie and Sister Norma, excuse me, Sister Christa whoever was home we would we'd go together to, to visit her in the hospital and so on. Unfortunately, Sister Joel who had never been in the hospital for herself as an adult until this time passed away after a valiant effort to, to get over the cancer.

But she never complained she was she was such a private. She was very private and she honored everybody else's privacy. That's such a wonderful kind of respect, that I, that I learned from her that I would have learned from my parents as well. Excuse me. Give a drink to—. Thank you for the corporal work of mercy (laughs).

At any rate, Sister, Sister Joel died at the end of August and I was here, I was able to spend many wonderful hours with her in the vigil, the around-the-clock vigil that her classmates and other friends and other sisters shared with me but her friend Sister Ruthann and I who had been her friends at Marian over many years were told that we didn't even have to sign up for the hour we could come and go and stay as long as we wished with her and that was it was beautiful. It was a beautiful experience. I had spent two hours with her previous to the day that she that she died and two more hours in the morning with her. I had brought her a rosary, a rosary to begin with that have been her gift to me that was A Way of the Cross Rosary. It had fifteen decades and where the mystery, The Our Father mysteries were pictures of each of the Stations of the Cross and then the Resurrection, the fifteenth station and on the back a roman numeral that said and it gave which mystery it was, which

station and because I noticed that she did not have a rosary with her, I, and I was so impressed by the very beautiful crucifix on that rosary she had given me because the whole, the Trinity was represented there, Jesus on the cross, I saw the Father and the figure of who stood behind her, behind Jesus in a robe that, with his hands out and welcomed beyond Jesus's hands on the cross and then the Holy Spirit also on the same crucifix and I thought this, you know, what better blessing can I wish for her that then to show her that her generous gift already showed me this wonderful welcoming Trinity so I she was still conscious when I gave that to her and she thanked me and she held that in her hand in her hands. This was several days before she passed away that I actually that I brought that rosary to her just a couple of days.

And then on that, the morning that, that I went in for the last two hours with her she still was, she was still conscious, her eyes were closed through much of the time, but I saw that, she had asked me for the case for it, so I, I brought that to her, too, later on and I think she probably gave that away to her niece maybe because I know that she had been very close to her niece who really thought of Sister Joel as a mother almost after her own mother had been a mother to Sister Joel and she and her two sisters were orphaned at quite young, quite a young age as Sister Joel was ten and she had a sister two years younger than that and then her older sister was a teenager I suspect at the time aunts and uncles took care of them to begin with and then when Margaret the older sister was, could legally adopt the other two she did that.

So Sister Joel (unintelligible) had a beautiful, different but certainly a gospel understanding of family and her family support in her family, so I really think that she probably passed that rosary on to Kathy and Kathy was the one she always had me call by the way to update her, her condition and so on, so I found another, another friend in Kathy and then on that last morning when I noticed she didn't have a rosary and I couldn't see, see it I had my dad's rosary in my purse with me and I put it in her hand and I said, "Sister Joel, this is, this is my dad's rosary and he comes with it. He had passed away in 1979 and in Joel, Joel would have known him from when we were sharing, we shared you know preparation days, formation days at Oldenburg, would have been able to meet him then. I think he probably had passed away before she got back to Marian. But I told her that my dad comes with this, he's busy gathering all your loved ones including the furry loved ones who are going to be there to welcome you. And I could just, I could tell she understood. She didn't open her eyes, but she held on to the, to the rosary and I knew, I knew she was hearing, I knew she understood what that was like. And I just, I, it felt so good, giving her another kind of support. I was able to get the rosary back and then one of her own was replaced, replaced it.

But then the other, the sports area of Sister Joel's life also were there in the room with her. The, our coach had had all of the players sign a football and they sent it to her. So it was there in the room where she died along with some roses that other people from Marian had brought in the name of the whole school wishing her, showing her, their support of her and then a football was in the coffin with her so the football was buried with her. So part of her connection to Marian and to those students and to some growth for them to know even that that was some of the, even faith-filled connections that she had with the school and so on so. I, because she was here, because I could be here when she died and because I could recognize some of her relatives even the ones from long distance you know when we

walked into the room just after she had had passed away I felt very, very supported and could give them my support as well. Excuse me.

So, so much of, you know, and Joel in that relationship because it was the two of us praying together and we did that every day and eating together that was a whole new chapter in my life too because I had not lived in a house with just one other person except for six weeks when I did some subbing in a two-room school and that was a beautiful experience too, except I was homesick for the, the novices that I, that I left behind, but we were, we were nearby. I was, I wasn't there very long, but they, the connection by the way, I was subbing for a sister who went to Montana to take the place of the older sister of my favorite teacher from Regina High School, the Precious Blood Sister so that sister had had a heart attack. She was teaching out on the, our Indian Missions, one of the Indian Missions in Montana and a, a younger sister who was teaching the first four grades at Enochsburg went to take her place there and then I took her place. So I had, again a wonderful faith-filled last six weeks of a school year learning a lot about how children develop truly, truly firsthand. That was a gift and my dad was part of that picture too as well.

This was shortly after my mother had died and my dad came to visit me there and the pastor there that property has a lake on it or a big pond and so on and my dad became close friends with the pastor because they became fishing buddies having met when dad would come to visit me. The children got involved with that a little bit and Sister Harriet brought a package over and set it on my desk, something that had just come in the mail from my dad and I, I don't know what the pedagogy was exactly on this, but I sent it, my four classes of students: "Can you open it Sister? Open it sister." I said, "Well, we'll open it at the end of the day and whichever class has has worked—" I said, "We'll have a contest, whichever class has, has to then best the work that you're doing when I'm working with other classes that class will get to help me open, open the package." At recess the first graders came to me and said, "Sister, we don't know what a contest is." So I had to do a little more explaining, but it was it did the trick and amazingly what was in the package was a statue of Saint Joseph the Worker. This was right after the, the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker had been established and my dad sent me a picture of Saint Joseph the Worker. So his middle name was Saint Joseph's as well, was Joseph, and a big, a big part of our family. So here, here he is after my mother's my mother's gone, but he's still there continuing on and that's, you know, that's what got nourished. It began in my home and it was nourished through my teachers and then continued and now as, as, in my work in formation and then in teaching and my sisters who were surrounding me but—

MEL: Sister you were describing what it was like to live with Sister Joel, did you want to finish that thought.

SMSG: Well, right after Sister Joel died, a neighbor of ours who had, we had known from Marian to begin with, who used to teach, who was in the Registrar's Office and then I was able to teach her when she went back to finish an English degree and I was her advisor at any rate she was there to welcome us when we moved to Winfield Avenue and she was, there was a connection between her and our present dog in that she was the one who suggested Sheltie Rescue for us after our sheltie had passed away and she had, she herself had a sheltie who just prior to Sister Joel's illness, her, her sheltie had passed away and she called and asked if she could just come and sit with us for a while and as soon as she sat down our Abby came right over to her and she's, she's petting her and she's

cheering up a little bit and she said, "It's almost as though" and Sister Joel and I answered in chorus, "She knows" and I truly do think that's so. So here was a dog and that's what Francis saw in natural life and in nature that they had things to teach us about living and about showing concern and so on and well certainly Abby was mirroring that, not that we didn't have that and wouldn't feel it, but it echoed for all of us, all three of us at that time and then after Joel and I were going to come here to Oldenburg, Deirdre offer to take care of Abby since we wouldn't be able to bring Abby with us and she at the meantime had got another bi black sheltie, a black and white sheltie from Sheltie Rescue and, and Abbey and Bella got to meet each other and that was Deirdre's next visit with Abby and Sister Joel and me when she, rather quickly had bi black sheltie, which is the description of our Abby. So Bella is a smaller version of sheltie as our, our Cricket had been the one who had died before, before we got Abby, but, and Abby was the larger version of this Sheltie that Laddie had been for Deirdre, but here are the two dogs together. Instantly, not growl no fuss, no bother, instantly bonding, playing in our fenced in backyard together, that was the beginning of their friendship and I think that, among other things inspired Deirdre who's a Third Order Franciscan, Third Order Secular Franciscan to offer to take Abby and, and so you know our connection to Marian and our connection to people that we met through Marian continues, but it's, it's also some more, support for our spirituality as well in part for Deirdre whose husband had Alzheimer's and then had a stroke and who was in a facility.

So one of the ways I thought, I felt called as another "God writing straight with crooked lines" that we would get a house that was just houses away from Deirdre and that and maybe part of the plan was that we could be some support for Deirdre, you know, in this very heavy burden she was, she was married, her children were grown and had children of their own and had, were living at some distance, but we were right there on the same street so that continued it and then when Deirdre offered to take Abby and Abby met her the first cat that we knew, she was meeting, that she would live with there, a couple of the conversations that happened between Deirdre and me after Sister, right after Sister, right after Sister Joel had died and as we're talking Deirdre said, or I heard a bark and Deirdre said, "That's Abbey responding to the cheers coming from the football field." This was, this was our first home game and had I lived there, had we lived there, Joel and I would have been there, so and then there was another bark and it was the same, the same response and I couldn't help but smile I didn't share it with Deirdre just yet, but as soon as I got off the phone I almost broke into tears along with the laughter, but all's I could think was here's Sister Joel communicating with me through Abby, telling me what the football team is doing

And I don't think heaven gets involved in the internal workings of football players and football teams and football fans, but I think God is very involved in the spiritual formation of his people, so I learned that evening in fact the late news showed the two touchdowns and that Marian had won that game, so I, I just since Sister Joel's birthday was going to be on the following Monday just a couple of days after this game, I, I just was so filled with our closeness and so on.

And I guess one other connection with Deirdre and with and I think with Joel as well I had walked Abby down to meet Deirdre house and that was the first time she was meeting Sonny, one of two cats that Deirdre had. The female cat was, was very shy so I had never seen her so she pretty much hides out when anybody strange to her is around, but Sonny, the adopted cat, first took to Bella, would curl up next to her, had never interacted with any of Deirdre's pets before that, but had connected to Bella and I think on the strength of that,

as soon as Abby walked into the room there was already a, there was already a bridge and there were as I told other people there were three black noses instantly together so the two dogs and the cat meeting without a growl or a bark or you know any dismay that it was– and Abby walked around as though she had always lived there. So it was you know, I was seeing another, I was remembering those as Sister Joel's miracles because at that point Sister Joel was in heaven.

Then the first time that I'd called Deirdre to see how the dogs were doing, and to let them know how I was doing, she told me that it was Sonny the cat after Abby had kind of been sort of draggy and sad for a couple of days it was the cat that nudged her to play. That got her out of her sadness. So here we are. That was another Joel miracle, I decided.

MEL: Oh, Sister, thank you, I know it's time for Mass now, so I will shut it off, but thank you so much for this today.

SMSG: You're welcome.