

## STEPPING STONES

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY - SISTER ROSARIA SCHAEFER, OSB

At last the day had arrived, June 20, 1934, the day that I was to enter the Benedictine convent of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. I would board the night train from my home in Hays, Kansas, the famous Union Pacific “Spirit of St. Louis” into Kansas City, then change to the Burlington railway to Armour, a little train connection, where I would ride the so-called “Puddlejumper” for the few remaining miles into Atchison.

It had been an extremely hot day, the likes of which would persist throughout the entire summer. As I packed my suitcase, I wondered how I would feel and look when I put on my postulant garments. Years later I would recall and laugh about my experiences in buying my clothes. Mercifully, my mother had chosen the lightest possible black material to make my long-sleeved dresses. Then we had to buy a few other garments. How embarrassing to buy black stockings and knit underwear in the middle of the summer! I was surprised that a store would have these items available, now. But Wiesner’s Department Store came through – as usual. Nevertheless, I was buoyed up with the excitement of entering the mysterious precincts of the monastery where my sister Rita was already a first-year novice.

The moment of departure, however, found me holding back tears as my father and mother hugged and kissed me and gave me their blessing. They told me that they were happy that I had chosen the religious life, but if I discovered that it was not my vocation, they would welcome me home. Years later I learned from Agnes that they had had some misgivings about my choice of the religious life, thinking that I was just following my sister, two years my senior and my best friend. Actually, there were some times later during that sweltering hot summer that I wondered whether I should stay. About a month after I had entered the convent, my brother Paul stopped by to say hello. It was a temptation to leave with him. I’m sure the Lord and my parents’ prayers were giving me the courage to continue.

As my mother and sister were driving me to the train station that June evening, I kept looking out of the back window, etching in my mind every detail of my home and the neighborhood, believing that I would never see it again. In those early days, the Sisters were not permitted to visit their families except for a very good reason like a terminal illness or a death. Tears were falling as I boarded the train, waving goodbye as I made my way to the Pullman car. I hoped the porter was not observing me.

Time proved me wrong about visiting my parents and family again, for which I was immensely grateful. When my father was too ill to come to Atchison for my final profession on January 1, 1939, Mother Lucy (God love her) provided that I, as well as my sister Rita now known as Sister Mary Felix, would accompany my mother back to Hays

to visit my father. She had already bought our tickets and instructed the monastery driver to take us to Kansas City to ride the afternoon train to Hays. How excited I was after four and a half years away from home. Dad was overjoyed at this unexpected visit and hugged me with tears in his eyes. That happy visit was the first of more in the following years.

That evening as I opened the closet door in my bedroom, I discovered that the clothes I had left behind were still hanging there! As I looked at my peach prom dress which I wore to my last dance, I had a moment of nostalgia. But I knew I had made the right decision and was happy to be wearing the garb of a Benedictine Sister.

My life began on a cold winter day.

I was born on Thursday, March 25, 1915, to Joseph and Agnes Magrane Schaefer at St. Anthony Hospital, Hays, Kansas, and was baptized the following Sunday at St. Joseph Church. My mother once told me that I was born at 8:15 just in time for breakfast, and I have been faithful to meal times ever since! My godparents were Dr. Jordan and Anna Ryan. I was the second last of 12 children, two of whom died at ages two and five of childhood diseases before I was born.

My father, Joseph Schaefer, was born January 6, 1861. He was a Volga German from Kamenka, having come to the United States and to Kansas at the age of 17 with his widowed mother and several brothers and sisters. His father had died in Russia. Some of the older members of the family had married and remained in Russia. Except for a few years, Dad spent the rest of his life in Hays, Kansas. Fortunately Dad had received a good education in a "seminary," in Saratov, a town on the Volga River, the equivalent of a high school education. His notebooks, which have been preserved, show that he had studied Latin, German, Russian, math, composition, art, but not English which he readily learned in the U.S. All his grades were "Highest Degree." Later as a salesman in French settlements in western Kansas, he added French to his language skills. I never heard Dad discuss his life in Russia and the elder members of the family said they too learned very little.

My mother, Agnes Clare Magrane, was born August 13, 1873, in Mitchell, (Sheboygan Co) Wisconsin. Her father, Patrick Magrane, was born in Ireland and her mother, Alice Murphy, in Seneca Falls, New York. Her parents were married in Romulus, N.Y. They eventually came to Kansas from Wisconsin after many previous moves. Their first move had been to California by way of the Panama Canal where the first few children were born. My mother was just five years old when they came to Kansas. Patrick

was advised that his health would improve in the dry climate. However he died within months of that last move, leaving Alice to brave the rigors of and hardships of early Kansas. Fortunately, older members of the family were able to help support the family. After finishing her early schooling which included piano lessons, my mother attended Normal School where she received her teaching certificate. She taught school only a few years until her marriage.

In 1893 Dad and mother were married at St. Joseph Church. Dad was still a traveling salesman but when he was elected county treasurer, he resigned from his salesmanship. Mother was glad that he would be home full time now. Dad established a loan and abstract company and for a number of years sold insurance, too. After her high school education, my oldest sister Mary helped him in his office. After her marriage, my next sister Margaret took her place until her marriage. Dad didn't retire until he was almost 80 years old. On May 8, 1947, he died in St Anthony Hospital after many months of suffering.

Mother died unexpectedly the evening of June 18, 1958, just a few hours after we had returned from a ride in the countryside following the evening meal. Happily, Sister Mary Felix and I were home for our summer visit and could be with our mother in her last hours. I am sure that it was an answer to prayer that my sister and I chose this time for our summer visit and so we could be with Mother. Mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage. For our sister Agnes, the loss of our mother was most painful as she was the one who had cared for her and our father in their aging years.

My earliest recollection was the occasion of my youngest brother George's birth when I was three years old. I recall the endless flight of steps to the hospital door and visiting my mother. I do not recall seeing the baby. A more vivid recollection was the wedding day of my eldest sister Mary when I was four. I was awed by the dining table which stretched into the living room. (But I ate elsewhere.) Later in the afternoon I was distressed by the shouting and chasing through the house and yard. I learned later that my brothers were teasing Mary's husband, Dr. B.A. Brungardt, by stealing Mary's slippers so they could not leave for their honeymoon. Finally, the slippers were restored and Mary threw her bridal bouquet from the top of the staircase to the young ladies waiting below to catch it. Soon the couple was on their way.

Mary and her husband settled in Salina, Kansas, where "Doc" as we fondly called him, had set up his medical practice. Occasionally on a Sunday, they visited us in Hays with the children, first Mary and then in succession, Bernard, Tom, and Agnes. Rita and I were always so proud to show off our first nieces and nephews to our friends. The first sorrow came into my life when I was ten years old when Mary died in childbirth. Despite all the efforts of the doctors, Mary could not fight off uremia. She died July 2, 1925, a day after her baby died. When Dr. Brungardt married again, the four children found in his wife a loving stepmother and eventually there were many more brothers and sisters.

My childhood was happy and carefree as I recall it. That doesn't mean that I was never punished. I vividly remember times when I was not the model child! My older sister Rita and younger brother George were the family members I knew best as I was growing up. Older members of the family, Leo, Joseph, were away at medical school and soon married and living elsewhere. Victor and Paul were home only in the summer until their marriage. Margaret was married and living in Hays. Agnes was living at home after graduating from the Academy in Atchison. (I was the fifth girl to attend the Academy.) We three young ones always seemed to find plenty of amusements. Our indoor games were mostly card games of authors or history and we had a variety of board games of skill. We loved to play Mass and Benediction. My brother was an altar server so the Brother at the monastery who cut the hosts for the parish Masses would give him pieces from the cuttings, presumably to use for fish food. These pieces were perfect for our "mass." My sister or I was the priest more often than not and we dressed in towels and aprons to approximate the priestly vestments. I guess we "women priests" were ahead of the times as our feminine sex in the priesthood caused no controversy in our household.

We enjoyed the outdoor games that all children played at that time. Sometimes our schoolmates would join us in our games for a short time after school. Our double swing in the backyard stirred our imaginations and it could take us to far away lands in a minute. Croquet was another game handed down from the eldest of the family including our parents. As we grew older we tried tennis. We had inherited that equipment, too, and our empty lot was our court. Since the hospital adjoined our property, we frequently had curious onlookers much to our embarrassment.

I always looked forward to my birthday because I remember a cake on the dining room table when I came home at noon for dinner. And often Dad would have some goodie to add to it. My big day always came in Lent! It was not customary to have a party with schoolmates. We children always came home for dinner as we lived so close to school. Dad also came home from the office for the noon meal, at twelve always! It was the custom in our family to eat meals together. At times I envied those who brought their lunches to school because they got a head start at playing ball during the noon hour.

We three children took turns each day after school, sometimes reluctantly, for a half hour of piano practice. When the Etude music magazine arrived each month, we eagerly skimmed the pages looking for duets or trios that we could play together or solo pieces within our capability. Everyone in the family had practiced on the same piano. It was a Chickering make, an ornate mahogany instrument that Dad had surprised Mother with on their first wedding anniversary. Mother kept up a bit on the piano through the years and, as long as she was able, accompanied Agnes in a piano-harp duet.

Actually everyone in the family had practiced on that piano with varying skills and most all learned an instrument, too. Dad had taught himself the fiddle at sometime,

and Mother had been a church organist a few years. Mary and Margaret were fine pianists and Margaret went on to learn the cello. Leo played the violin and Joseph, the flute and piccolo. Agnes played the harp which dad had given her when she graduated from the academy, and Victor played the clarinet and organ. Victor was also an excellent pianist. He and I played many a duet during his vacation visits to Hays when we were the two surviving members of the family. Paul was church organist and had accompanied the glee club when he was a student at St. Benedict's College. George added the flute and piccolo to piano. He was probably the most accomplished pianist of all of us, graduating from St. Benedict's College with a double major in piano and math. Rita and I had not taken up an instrument until we learned organ in the convent. I remember as a child the rare but eventful Christmas when family members came home and together they played the Christmas carols.

I started school when I was six years old. My teachers were the Agnesian Sisters from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I loved going to school and that love never left me. Each fall before school opened Mother would take us shopping for all our needs, especially shoes which would have to last us for the year. We were not required to wear uniforms in those days. I especially looked forward to going to the bookstore for school supplies. When I was in the upper grades, like a typical teen, I looked for tablets with covers that pictured current movies stars like Janet Gaynor or Norma Shearer and other popular stars. I was so proud of my bag of "goodies" that I would be taking to school.

From our earliest days, Mother taught us our prayers. At bedtime we said our prayers at our little altar with the statue of Mary. During May we dressed it up with ribbons and fresh flowers. Also during May and October the family would say the Rosary after supper. Preparations for my first Holy Communion were important and exciting. In school the Sisters duly instructed us about fasting from food and water after midnight and about the manner in which we were to receive the host. Mother made my white dress and veil and assembled the rest of the white outfit. I still have my First Communion prayer book, the tattered pages showing years of use. It was the only prayer book I had until I got my missal when I started high school.

Both of my parents were devout Catholics and attended daily Mass until age and sickness prevented it. If there were simple evening devotions we all went together. I didn't always want to change from my play clothes to go but Dad had the last word. Our pew (those were the days of pew rental) was up front off the left side aisle. I can still hear the "thump" as my father hit the floor genuflecting. On Sundays we children went to the special Children's Mass.

Grade school seemed to pass in a hurry. I remember the endless hours of practicing the Palmer method of writing in the upper grades. I especially liked the music classes where we did a lot of sight reading from music charts, the Ward method I think, and learned many songs. I looked forward to my turn at the black board where we did

aces in arithmetic problems. We vied with each other to get to make the “Valentine box” for the classroom distribution of Valentines. Recess was fun time when we played the usual kids games such as jump rope, tag, crack the whip, Red Rover, dodge ball, Mother May I, all kinds of ball games and hopscotch and jacks. We town kids enjoyed the occasional very deep snows which made it impossible for the country pupils to get to town. In their absence we did a lot of fun things so we wouldn’t get too far ahead of them in our studies. It was so much fun trudging through snow up to our arms.

Although ours was a parochial school, we eighth grade students had to take county exams, presided over by the county superintendent of schools. We had to pass these exams in order to graduate. I still have some printed copies of these exams and their difficulty makes me marvel that we were able to pass them. The following are a few examples that were asked: (Kansas History) Name four state governors of Kansas and give an important event under each administration; (US History) Who or what are the following? Foch? Pershing? Haig? Hindenberg? (Civics) Discuss the government of our territorial possessions. The arithmetic problems were unbelievably difficult I think. I would certainly have to use the Web in order to answer those questions today.

One person who made an impression on me in the upper grades was our pastor, Father Gregory. I loved his weekly catechism instructions since he had such a good sense of humor and made religion class interesting with stories. Years later I wondered whether he may have had a strong influence on my vocation although I never gave religious life a thought until many years later.

An historic event happened in 1927 when I was in the seventh grade. The first “talking” movie came to town. The theater owner invited the school children for an afternoon showing of that early “talkie” featuring Al Jolson in “The Singing Fool.” We lined up eagerly in school with a dime in our hands and marched over to the theater just a few blocks away. What a thrilling experience. The next talkie I remember was “Broadway Melodies.” I feel these were just the beginning of marvelous inventions which I witnessed in my lifetime. Listening to a radio was the next big event though we never had a radio because Dad was afraid we would stop practicing piano. I think 1927 was also the year that my dad bought the new electric Frigidaire making the “icebox” obsolete. We kids, however, missed picking ice chips off the truck on hot summer days.

Sometime during these upper grade school years, I had my first serious thoughts about God. It made a deep impression. One evening in late summer or early fall I was lying on my back on the lawn looking up at the sky. It was all very quiet except for a melancholy, sighing sound in the distance. It sounded so mysterious and I wondered where it came from. Was that God? The catechism said that God was a spirit and was everywhere. What was God like? I had also learned that God always was and always will be? How could that be? I was still trying to sort it all out when my mother called me in for supper. I relived this experience over and over as the years went by.

All my brothers and sisters were taught by the Sisters of St. Agnes from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. They also operated the hospital which adjoined our property. In the late 1920's when the Sisters needed to build a wing to their hospital because of overcrowded conditions, they approached my father about selling them some of our adjoining property. Dad was reluctant to sell since he had lived all his life in the same house that he had bought just before his marriage. The home, of course, had undergone numerous renovations as the birth of children necessitated changes. In addition, neither of my parents wanted to be hemmed in by a hospital annex. Finally Mother relented and persuaded Dad to sell. Moving at this time of their lives when most of the children were already gone from the home was not going to be easy. Finally my parents built a comfortable four-bedroom room home at 1602 Elm Street in 1929. They were very happy there and in a short time the home was beautified by a lovely lawn with underground sprinklers, with trees and flowers. Dad let no dandelion stick its head up in the lawn for long. This home remained in the family until 1986 when my sister Agnes, the last owner after Mother's death in 1958, moved to Cray Manor nursing home in Atchison. (I will say more about Agnes later in the story.)

In the fall of 1929 I went to Atchison to begin my high school at Mount St. Scholastica Academy. All my sisters, Mary, Margaret, Agnes, and Rita had preceded me. It was so exciting to step into that beautiful new building which had been so recently dedicated in 1924. For that occasion, Agnes who had graduated from the Mount in 1920, had been invited to join Professor Russo, her Mount harp teacher, in a harp duo. Today as I am writing these memoirs, we Sisters are planning to demolish this building when we receive a permit to do so. The city has denied the permit currently and we are waiting the court's decision. Aging Sisters and fewer young Sisters in ministry make it financially impossible for us to maintain a building no longer in use. It saddened us to have had to make this decision. (At this time of editing, the building has been demolished.)

I shall always remember Sisters Marcella and Aquina standing at the top of the stairs of the administration building, waiting to greet my sister and me on my arrival there. I was soon introduced to my place in the dormitory which consisted of a bed, chair, and washstand of three drawers, all enclosed within curtains which were to be opened at night. These and a locker held all my immediate possessions. Everything else we boarders kept in our trunks in the trunk room. We didn't need many clothes as we wore Peter Thompson black uniforms. In order to add some color, we wore colorful scarves and tucked in pretty handkerchiefs.

Meals were plain and caloric. I remember the shock on my mother's face when I came home at Christmas time of my freshman year with an additional 20 pounds on me. Boarding school had its ups and downs but basically I had many good days there. Above all I made many new friends. The rules by today's standards were quite strict but our prefects were kind and overlooked a great deal. We often thought we "got away" with

breaking the rules. Our recreations were simple. We listened to the radio to learn the popular songs, some of which come back in memory as I hear them on radio occasionally. We danced in the gym whenever we were permitted to do so, sometimes with the college boarders who came to join us. Otherwise there was no association with the college students who had their own areas in the building as we had ours.

My favorite subjects were Latin and English, four years of each. I always looked forward to gym class mainly because Miss Mayme Everhardy, our instructor, also taught tap dancing and ballet and I loved to dance. The Charleston dance was beginning to catch on and we gave it our best. Basketball was entirely intramural but still fun, except for the funny looking gym suits. I loved to read but our library held very few recreational books. Exemption from taking tests was a challenge to study hard. If we got a certain cumulative grade average in some subject at the end of a quarter, we would be exempt from exams in that subject. When the exemption list went up, I rushed to the bulletin board, hoping my name would be listed. I studied diligently and usually got exempted.

I also continued my piano lessons and that meant hours of practice weekly. My teacher, Sister Edith, was unhappy with me if I showed up for a piano lesson wearing nail polish. Sometimes I had forgotten to remove it to forestall a scolding. The piano students never knew when Sister Edith would decide that we should give a recital on a Sunday afternoon for the rest of the boarders. Needless to say, neither group was very happy with her decision.

When graduation time came in May 1933, many tears were shed, for we knew that we would probably seldom or never see some of our classmates again. This became ever so true. Most of my dearest friends have now died but I keep in touch with two, one of whom is Sister Serena Stein in Glendora, California. (And Sister died the past year.)

College life began in the fall of the same year and in the same building that I had attended in the Academy. There were many new faces and a chance to make new friends. I looked forward to the new freedoms of college life, managing my own study and recreation time, going to town as I wished, having opportunities for social life off the premises, especially with the St. Benedict's boys, for an occasional evening of dancing in their gym or elsewhere on the campus. Of course there were campuses for infringement of rules like missing curfew, smoking in rooms, and others I have forgotten. I had not yet decided on a major but I was giving thought to being a dietician. I was influenced by my sister-in-law, Irma Schaefer, who had been a successful dietician before her marriage. So I enrolled in prerequisite courses like 10 hours of chemistry. I must admit that I shed tears over some chemistry experiments gone wrong. Other classes, especially 10 hours of German which I really enjoyed, were comparatively easy. All in all I loved studying and made good grades.



During that freshman year of college I was giving serious thoughts to the possibility of entering the convent. I was not what I would call pious but still I felt called to the religious life. I liked the Benedictine Sisters, and what I saw of them interacting made me think that I would like to live a life like theirs. I did not know much about their spiritual life, but occasionally I heard them singing the psalms. Also, we students attended Mass with them in their chapel and observed them at prayer in their prayer stalls. Since all the Sisters I knew were teachers, and I was not interested in teaching, I found myself in a dilemma. But I felt I ought to give it a try. One day I mentioned to Sister Jerome that I was considering entering the convent but that I had a problem with being a teacher. To my surprise, Sister Jerome almost immediately arranged an interview with Mother Lucy, the prioress. Since I was unsure whether I had a true vocation, I gave the prioress all the reasons why I thought I might not be fitted for the religious life. Mother Lucy listened kindly, while my heart was beating rapidly, half-way wishing her to tell me that I probably did not have a vocation or that I should wait. Instead, she looked at me with those steely blue eyes and told me straight out that I could enter the community in June. I considered that Mother Lucy's acceptance of me was God's will. I was "in" without further testing or counseling as was required of postulants in later years. I had not yet talked this over with Sister Mary Felix. But she knew.

How and when would I tell my parents of my decision to enter the convent in Atchison? I resolved to do so when I went home for the Easter vacation. But I couldn't get up the courage to do so when I was home. Instead, I talked about everything but vocation, rather I talked family, school, things like the prom and the new gown I would need. A few weeks later, after returning to school, I finally wrote to my parents. They were completely surprised as I knew they would be, but happy with my decision. So was Sister Mary Felix when I told her. Now I looked forward to the close of school so I could spend time with my family. I found the last month at home a mixture of eagerness to begin my new life yet sadness at leaving my family and my home. I found myself saying things like "This is the last time I'll ever do this," or "see this," or "go there." Little did I know.

I arrived at the monastery in the afternoon of June 20, 1934. After a brief visit with Sister Mary Felix, I prepared for the big moment of "officially" entering the novitiate. I put on my black outfit and looked in vain for a mirror to see how I really looked. I had never modeled my complete outfit at home. With another companion, Lillian Harrington, I entered the dining room at supper time where all the Sisters were gathered to formally ask the prioress for permission to enter the novitiate. About that same time a violent storm broke out. I thought the lightning, thunder, and rain were a fitting metaphor for what was going on inside of me. Interestingly enough, not another drop of rain fell the entire summer. These were the drought years, the years of the big dust storms, and it seemed as though we postulants were continually on our knees, more for dusting and cleaning than for praying. Laundry days were especially exhausting but our mistakes offered us inept postulants a great deal of laughter. At prayers we sat snugly

in the pews in the center aisle at a time when air-conditioning wasn't even an option. By the end of the first week in the novitiate, we were eight young women beginning our postulancy. Five of us persevered through final profession and today there are only two of us living, the same two of us that entered together. One, Sister Mary Peter, had died suddenly in the chapel sacristy on June 5, 1956, as she was preparing to light the candles for Benediction at the conclusion of the election of our new prioress, Mother Alfred. Another, Sister Quentin died at the age of 99.

The day I made my temporary vows, January 1, 1936, a year and a half after I had entered, Mother Lucy informed that Sister Bertilla, principal at St Peter's in Council Bluffs, Iowa, had an overload of piano students and I was to give her some relief by teaching some of them. Then she also told me that I should teach some subjects in a few classrooms to gain some experience in teaching. What a surprise that was! I was going to teach!

The next six years I happily taught fifth and sixth graders at Guardian Angels school in Kansas City, Missouri. I was also organist and choir director and gave music lessons after school. Then I spent the next two years at the Mount College, completing my studies for a BA degree where I graduated "magna cum laude" with a major in English and minors in music and history. I had also done some practice teaching during this same period and soon I was certified to teach. Now I was back in the classroom.

I was soon teaching in high school. It would take many pages to describe each and every school in which I taught. Some were for a longer period of time or more pleasantly memorable than others such as Lillis High School in Kansas City, Panama, Iowa, and Salisbury, Missouri. My schedules in high school were for the most part in English and chorus. A full load of "extracurriculars" was always the norm. These included being moderator of the school paper, directing plays and musicals, small group musical ensembles, and giving music lessons. I was also the principal in Salisbury, Iowa, and Baileyville, Kansas. When I was assigned to Donnelly Junior College in K.C., I found teaching on that level to be enjoyable and challenging. But after two years there, I was to begin yet another new assignment.

It is too difficult to try to describe all the happening of those teaching years. They were a collage of hard work, worry about students' progress, proud of their accomplishments, satisfaction after their successful undertakings, excitement watching sports events while cheering the teams on to victory, even some aches when special homeroom groups graduated. When years later, some groups invited me to their reunions, I found it a joy to hear of their accomplishments and stories about their children, and even their grandchildren, sadness to learn of the deaths of some of their classmates, and gratitude to God for their Christian lives.

I had a most painful experience during the year that I was teaching at Lillis High School in Kansas City, Mo. in 1967. In the same year Sister Mary Felix was teaching at Joseph High in Shawnee, Kansas. In the early evening of November 11, I received a telephone call that Sister had been in an automobile accident. She had been out shopping for materials for her home economics class. The car was struck by a trailer truck on the passenger side of the car where Sister was seated. She was unconscious when she was brought to K.U. Medical Center. She never regained consciousness and died a few hours later. My nephew, Dr Joseph Schaefer, who was practicing in K.C. Mo. at that time, proved to be my comfort during those few hours as I waited to hear the doctors' report. It took me a long time to realize that things were never going to be the same. Often I look back with gratitude for the years we did enjoy together, especially that same summer together at Pittsburg State where we had so much fun and laughed a lot despite the fact that both of us had demanding classes. We had been looking forward to visiting with Agnes who had made plans to come to K.C. to spend Thanksgiving with us. Instead she came to a funeral. At this writing it has been almost 42 years since that sad event.

After a few years of teaching, I attended Notre Dame University in the summers where in 1954 I received my Master of Arts degree in Educational Administration. Opportunities to study at various universities in the summers, netted me an additional 30 hours of graduate credit. These studies included a grant to study Cinema at Rockhurst College, an NDEA grant at Pittsburg University, and a Media grant at Arizona State. Further studies were at Creighton U in Omaha and at St Louis University, as well as an additional year at Notre Dame. Wonder why I am such a fan of Notre Dame? A bonus during a few years I was studying at Notre Dame was the opportunity to visit with my brother Victor and his wife since he was appointed the Director of Libraries at the University.

In 1972, a year after the merger of Mount St. Scholastica College and Saint Benedict's College to become Benedictine College, Fr. Gerard Senecal, president of the college, recruited me to become the registrar of the college following the resignation of the current registrar. I accepted with considerable trepidation. Those early years after the merger meant hard work for all engaged in administration and certainly for me in a totally new educational field. However, I soon enjoyed the challenge of a new endeavor. At that time there were no computers in our offices, and all work like registration was done by human calculation. We used a St Louis Company to do the final grade averages by computer. I liked the people I worked with and the entire educational atmosphere. In 1979 after seven years as registrar of the college, I felt the need of a Sabbatical and so resigned from that office.

I took my Sabbatical (1979-80) at St. Louis University in a Corporate Ministry program. I put my training to use when I began a new ministry the next year as a pastoral assistant in Hanover Ks. The following two years I was the pastoral assistant in the St Mary's -St Anthony's parish in KC Kansas, where I ministered to the homebound and the

hospitalized of the parish. Occasionally, I was persuaded to fill in as organist and choir director! My work ended there when my sister Agnes, who had been suffering from Parkinson's, suffered a stroke in 1982, and after hospitalization she needed to go to a nursing home. I had commuted from K.C. to care for her personal and business needs. When that arrangement became unsatisfactory to both of us, I gave up pastoral ministry. With permission from the prioress, Sr. Noreen, I went to Hays in the summer of 1983 and for the next three years until 1986, I lived in the family home, spending a great deal of time with Agnes at the nursing home and taking care of her business affairs - a whole new learning experience for me. My nephew, Greg Herrman, a Hays attorney, was my salvation when I needed answers to questions of business and legal affairs. At times I would go to Hays for a visit or for a community meeting. That was a great way to renew my own spirit.

I was happy to care for Agnes, remembering how dedicated she was in caring for our parents in their declining years. How could I forget how generous she was to me in the late 60's and into the 70's when she invited me to be her companion on her various trips to foreign countries? The first trip was to Bogata, Columbia, in 1968 for the Eucharistic Congress. On that three weeks tour we visited the majority of South American capitals. It was my first extensive airplane trip and it was very exciting. In following years we went to the British Isles, to the Scandinavian countries, to Hawaii, and to Mexico. What great cultural experiences these trips afforded me!

I was still in Hays on January 1, 1986, when I observed the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my profession as a Benedictine Sister. On the eve of January 1, Hank and Carolyn Herrman arranged for a Mass and a party at their home to celebrate the occasion. Greg and Karen Herrman and children were invited and we had a beautifully decorated cake to enjoy. On June 14, I invited my relatives to Hays for a family reunion and a second celebration of my jubilee. I had yet another reason to invite them. I intended to sell Agnes' home and properties and then to move us both to Atchison. But first I wanted my relatives to revisit the home they had often visited in their youth. I also wanted to offer them the contents of the home that would be available before we moved. About 50 relatives came to Hays, and the occasion was both happy and sad as stories were told about visits to their grandparents' home. We had a special Mass in the afternoon at which family members were liturgical ministers. Then we went to the home for snacks and visiting. In the evening we went to the Holiday Inn for a beautiful dinner and more visiting. Everyone agreed that we should have a reunion soon again.

The official community celebration of my group's Jubilee took place on Saint Benedict's Day, July 11, 1986. For that occasion I came back to Atchison where my group celebrated our beautiful Jubilee with the community. I felt lucky and happy to have celebrated my anniversary three times.

On November 11, having sold Agnes' home and properties, I closed the home and brought Agnes to Cray Manor nursing home in Atchison. Having Agnes here gave me the opportunity both to care for Agnes and also to work at the monastery. This I did until Agnes' death which came on November 30, 1991. She died two months short of her ninetieth birthday and was buried in the family plot in St Joseph cemetery. There are buried my parents, dad's mother, infants Richard and Theodore, and Paul and George. Two remaining plots were reserved for Hank and Carolyn Herrman. Hank has been buried there as well as his grandson, Judy's baby Sashiel, in the same grave.

Another career change came in 1987 after I had returned to the Mount with Agnes when I became the liturgy director until 1991. I assisted there for several more years. Then from 1993 until 1998 I worked half-days as a volunteer in the Mount Academy Alumnae office. Working where there were young people plus a caring faculty was a great opportunity for rejuvenation. Then I went to the Development office in the Ad building where I assisted Sister Noreen in various jobs until that office closed in 2000. It was later reorganized in the monastery with Sister Anne as director.

Because the earlier family reunions had been so successful and no one had taken up the challenge to host another one, I decided to start the ball rolling in 1995. On July 14-15 we had a great gathering at the Mount Conference Center with new members answering the roll call but sadly missing others who had died since our last reunion, Greg Herrman and Leo Schaefer, jr. who died just months previous to this occasion. About 75 of us from all parts of the country enjoyed our time together, getting acquainted with relatives we had not met and visiting again with those we knew so well. Everyone agreed we should not wait so long for the next one.

In 2005, nephew Michael Schaefer decided that after ten years, it was high time for another reunion and that Atchison and the Mount would again be an ideal place. After much e-mailing, the date was set for July 30-31. Michael also chose the occasion to celebrate my ninetieth birthday which was on the past March 25. Again we had about 50 attendees. Work or previous plans made it impossible for some families to attend. Joe David Schaefer helped greatly with organizing the event. He brought his equipment to capture each family on tape, with someone in the family telling us about themselves. Joe later sent a beautifully done DVD to each family who was taped. Joe with the wonderful help of Charlene did a great job capturing the spirit of this event.

All these reunions were happy times for me as my relatives, for the most part, live at great distances and make frequent visits impossible. I am so grateful to my relatives who have managed to make stopovers on their trips elsewhere. Each visit made my day.

In the past five years I have enjoyed a variety of work as needed in the monastery such as assisting in the gift shop. I have been able to keep in touch with relatives, especially through e-mail and occasional telephone calls. I've relished the time for

reading and listening to wonderful music and doing some hand embroidery for the gift shop. I have used the computer to fill in my family genealogy material and keep up its history. There are still many holes in the history and I would like to verify some of it. Much seems to be available on the web but it takes time to follow up on it. I enjoy checking various webs which offer a lot of interesting information. The “lunch room” in the monastery is always a good place to visit if I want to hear something new or commentaries on a lot of topics. In my living area here in Dooley, afternoon tea or a social hour gets us out of our rooms and into a visiting mode.

In reflecting on the past 94 years as I conclude this autobiography, I am deeply aware of and grateful for the blessings that have been mine to have been born into a family of solid Christian faith. Those values which my parents exhibited and taught me in my growing years most certainly guided my entire life. My Sisters in community, especially those with whom I have worked or lived with so closely, have always been a source of support and love. Most of all, I am profoundly grateful to God who called me to the religious life and supported me daily in my religious life. In this year of 2009, I realize that I have been in community for 75 years, 1934-2009. God willing, in two years, I will celebrate 75 years of vowed life

I have entitled my autobiography STEPPING STONES for I wanted to relate significant steps of my life from birth through childhood, then through my grade and high school years, my beginning college education, then my entrance into the monastery and the years following there, my work in the educational field and in my various careers, as well as the years spent in ministry to Agnes in Hays.

Each giant step, as I look back, was a mixture of joys, sorrows, disappointments, happy surprises. I know that death will be my final stepping stone into eternity where I will be in everlasting embrace with the God Who called me into being and into the life I have lived. I will happily be with family and the Sisters of my community who have gone ahead of me.

Until that day comes, I will continue to celebrate life. My retirement years are giving me the opportunity for spiritual growth; they invite me to find new things to do and old ideas to develop. Even now, I have done a new thing, writing this autobiography which I have found a wonderful way to stir up so many events in my life. I could not tell them all. I pray to God that I will be open to accepting life’s diminishments “gracefully.”

I pray with the psalmist a favorite verse from Psalm 90:

Teach me to make use of my days.  
and bring wisdom to my heart.